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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Perdue offers help for farmers caught up in trade wars

Farmers who are anxious over growing trade disputes between the United States and some of its major trading partners got some encouraging words last week from Ag Secretary Sonny Perdue.

Last week the Trump administration applied tariffs on Chinese goods in an attempt to reduce the number of finished goods coming into the country. China promptly made good on its threat to retaliate, placing tariffs on pork, poultry, beef, fruits and vegetables, dairy products, soybeans and grains.

The administration placed tariffs on Mexican aluminum and steel. Mexico is retaliating with duties on apples, cranberries and other farm products.

Separately, the U.S. is in the process of renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement with Canada and Mexico — our



E.J. Harris/EO Media Group

Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue talks with Alan Von Borstel, vice president of the Oregon Wheat Growers League, and Clint Carlson, secretary-treasurer of the League, last week. Perdue promised to offset farmers' losses caused by trade wars.

second- and third-largest trading partners. NAFTA is vital to U.S. agriculture.

Making good on his promise to drop out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, President Trump has not yet negotiated a bilateral deal with Japan, an important market for farmers in the Pacific

Northwest.

Agriculture has been generally supportive of Trump. He's earned high praise for rolling back regulations — particularly Waters of the U.S. — and for generally more ag-friendly forest policies.

But, farmers and ranchers export \$135 billion in products

each year. They have a lot riding on trade and are feeling more than a little nervous.

So Perdue got an earful when he toured farms in Washington and Oregon last week.

Perdue says he's pushing for government help for farmers hurt by the spreading trade wars.

"The president says he won't allow ag producers to bear the brunt of trade disputes," he said last week on a tour in Washington state. "I'm laying down a marker that we need to resolve it by Labor Day or we need some sort of mitigation."

That's all encouraging, even though it's short on specifics.

While they'll take the help, farmers would rather sell to trading partners than receive cash assistance checks. And we would be remiss if we did not again remind the administration that this is not what was promised

during the campaign.

But, unfolding events can be complicated and rarely conspire with sitting presidents. The plans that come together so well in a stump speech don't always survive their first contact with real world politics, foreign or domestic.

As the president works to fulfill his promise to negotiate better trade deals with our partners, we are at least encouraged that the administration says it's not going to hang farmers and ranchers out to dry. We look forward to seeing the details of the "mitigation" Perdue alluded to during his tour.

We hope it doesn't become necessary. It certainly isn't a long-term solution for producers in the Northwest. Without trade and the money it generates, many of them will quickly be doing something else for a living.

OUR VIEW



The two Scott Pruitts

The first Scott Pruitt was doing a pretty good job of reining in an out-of-control federal agency

The second Scott Pruitt was deaf to warnings everything he did was put under a microscope

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency leaders have a well-earned reputation for their unique and sometimes bizarre interpretations of how a federal agency should operate.

There was the professed "spy" who didn't show up at his EPA job for more than a year. When his boss finally got around to asking him about his absenteeism, he said he worked for the Central Intelligence Agency. (He didn't.)

Then there was the regional EPA administrator who told a public meeting in Texas that he planned to operate like the Romans. He would crucify the first companies that crossed his path to convince the others to stay in line.

And then there was the EPA administrator who authorized federal money to go to a website attacking Washington state farmers. The website, which still exists, alleges farmers are "degrading our water, destroying vital habitat and endangering our fish" without offering any proof.

The EPA originally became involved in the website as part of a letter-writing campaign to lobby the state legislature to clamp down on farmers.

Through the past several

administrations, the EPA has been out of control.

When Scott Pruitt arrived in Washington, D.C., as the new EPA administrator, he promised to "refocus the agency back to its core mission of protecting the environment." He rescinded the Waters of the U.S. rule that would have put the EPA and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in charge of nearly every body of water in the nation. He ended the EPA's "sue and settle" deals with environmental groups that allowed them to write regulations. He also promised to work with the states and stakeholder groups and collaborate with them instead of attacking them.

It was no surprise that this common-sense agenda upset the hard-core environmental groups that had previously enjoyed cozy relationships with the EPA's rank-and-file and top administrators. With that in mind, Pruitt should have known that the environmental elites and the Beltway bullies would be out to get him. Any false steps he made would be blown out of proportion.

To avoid those attacks, he should have realized he needed to make sure all of his actions were above reproach.

But he didn't. The problem wasn't with how Pruitt steered the

EPA back toward the center. The problem was his ethical judgment.

He stayed in a cut-rate apartment that belonged to the wife of an energy lobbyist. He installed a \$43,000 sound-proof phone booth in his office. He flew first class. He tried to procure a fast-food franchise for his wife. He ordered full-time security for himself. And he demoted or fired EPA officials who questioned such actions.

At one time 13 ethics investigations involving Pruitt were underway.

One has to wonder whether there were two Scott Pruitts.

The first Scott Pruitt was doing a pretty good job of reining in an out-of-control federal agency. But a second Scott Pruitt was completely deaf to warnings that everything he did would be put under a microscope.

Pruitt resigned last week, saying, "... unrelenting attacks on me personally, my family, are unprecedented and have taken a sizable toll on all of us."

We're confident President Trump will find a replacement for Pruitt who can do the whole job at EPA — continuing to get the agency back under control and at the same time keep himself, or herself, out of the ethical tall grass.

Collaborating on agricultural and natural resource research

By **CHUCK STABEN**
For the Capital Press

Guest comment
Chuck Staben



Recently in Idaho we celebrated a number of important anniversaries, among them the Fourth of July, of course, and Idaho Day, on July 3, which commemorated the anniversary of statehood. A lesser-known anniversary, though, occurred on July 2. That day in 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act, creating the land-grant university system and presaging the 1889 birth of U of I and our statewide research enterprise.

Land-grant universities like the University of Idaho have a special mission to work toward "the benefit of agriculture and the mechanic arts." Through the years, a collaborative relationship between land-grant schools and the U.S. Department of Agriculture has helped seed our nation's robust agricultural economy with the innovation and discovery that occurs at institutions like U of I. So, it was a meaningful and gratifying privilege to have U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue visit the Palouse on July 2 and learn more about U of I's research mission.

Accompanied by Governor Otter, Lieutenant Governor Little and Idaho Secretary of Agriculture Gould, I was proud to show Secretary Perdue a university deeply engaged in impactful research that helps build a better future for our state and world. We appreciated the chance to show him our Moscow campus and engage in discussions about university projects and current work. We specifically highlighted our proposed Idaho Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment, as well as our Idaho Central Credit Union Arena project.

In the Idaho CAFE project, U of I intends to build the nation's largest research dairy. Dairy and food businesses are booming in Idaho and increasingly in the West — Idaho is now No. 3 nationwide in milk production, and processors like Glanbia and Chobani, recruited to our state, have significant presences. In a western landscape with some natural resource constraints, that growth presents opportunities and

challenges. The University of Idaho is well-positioned to do what land-grant institutions do best: Take on proactive research projects at scale where industries and other stakeholders cannot, and share those findings with partners to promote sustainable economic development. The governor and the legislature have supported this project with an initial \$10 million commitment, and we are continuing to make strong fundraising progress, with welcome support from key groups and individuals.

We also shared with Secretary Perdue our plans for the Idaho Central Credit Union Arena, a stand-alone basketball arena and events space on a campus that last built such a facility in the 1920s. The arena we envision is built with mass-timber construction, on a scale and quality unseen so far in the United States. This arena will be a home for Vandal excellence and a proudly "Idaho" building — a showcase for the potential of mass-timber construction that makes responsible use of our sustainable natural resources. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's purview includes the U.S. Forest Service, and we were encouraged to have the interest of Forest Service Chief Vicki Christianen when she learned about the project during a recent trip to Moscow. There is great potential for collaboration.

A land-grant research university depends on collaboration — with state and federal agencies, with industries, and with communities. We have common goals for promoting the best possible life and health of our economy and citizenry. We appreciate the opportunity to demonstrate to Secretary Perdue how a land-grant institution delivers results on such partnerships. There is a proud research heritage at land-grant schools, but at the University of Idaho, we're just as interested in cultivating a bright future.

Chuck Staben is president of the University of Idaho.

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