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Opinion

Our View

USDA offers help to farmers victimized by trade wars

Last week Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue released more details about the Trump administration's plan to help farmers hurt by ongoing trade disputes.

While we appreciate the administration's offer of $12 billion in aid to farmers and ranchers, it is a poor substitute for the fair trade deals the president promised during his 2016 campaign.

President Trump likes to talk about how America is being taken advantage of by our trading partners. There are a lot of people, many farmers and ranchers included, who agree that they aren't getting a fair shake.

Farmers and ranchers — who largely supported Trump's election — export $135 billion in products each year. It is unfortunate that they are paying the tab for making America great again.

To help U.S. manufacturers, 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 — vital markets for 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.

And then there's China. China sells the U.S. more than it buys in return, but it is a growing market for fruit, beef, hazelnuts and other goods from the Pacific Northwest.

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 steps taken thus far have created more in the way of immediate pain than hope for longterm gain.

In the absence of success, the USDA will administer three programs to help producers meet the cost of disrupted trade markets.

The first, named the Market Facilitation Program, will receive the bulk of the funding and provide direct payments for soybeans, corn, wheat, cotton, sorghum, dairy and pork producers.

The second is the Food Purchase and Distribution Program, which will buy surplus fruit, nuts, beef, pork and milk to distribute to U.S. food banks and nutrition programs.

Finally, the Trade Promotion Program will assist in developing new export markets on behalf of growers.

Assistance checks are not a replacement for stable export markets. We urge the administration to make good on its campaign promises.

Farmers and ranchers would rather sell to trading partners than receive cash assistance checks.

Our View

Christmas trees need a boost

"Got Milk?"

"Beef: It's what's for dinner."

"Pork. The other white meat."

"The incredible, edible egg."

These and other slogans have long been part of popular marketing efforts to promote agricultural products. Funded by USDA-sponsored checkoffs in which producers pay into a fund for promotion and research, they have helped keep dairy products, beef, pork and eggs top-of-mind for consumers.

The checkoffs — there are 21 of them for commodities ranging from honey to popcorn — help growers put their best foot forward. The advertising campaigns allow them to speak directly to consumers about their crops and commodities.

Time was, the marketplace wasn't as crowded as it is today. Thousands of products, many of which didn't even exist a few years ago, are filling the shelves of brick-and-mortar and online stores. Any single product or commodity can easily be crowded out of the marketplace. That's why companies large and small rely on advertising and marketing to stand apart from the crowd.

No ag industry is under greater threat than Christmas tree growers. Fake trees have established a beach head in the marketplace, as more consumers are "going plastic" and buying Chinese-made artificial trees in a box. Or they are skipping the tradition altogether.

The challenges cannot be ignored.

That's why we were surprised that a recent checkoff vote by Christmas tree growers was so close. Fifty-one percent of growers supported continuing the industry checkoff, while 49 percent opposed it.

If opponents have a problem with the current ad and marketing campaign they need to fix it, not abandon it and leave the industry defenseless.

With aggressive foreign competition chipping away at the market, U.S. tree growers have no choice but to tell their story and remind consumers of a classic and classy Christmas tradition. They need to talk about tradition, about family, and about memories that for many people represent the most precious time of the year.

No one is going to do it for them.

For 15 cents a tree, it's a painless and effective way to give their crop a much-needed boost.

EO Media Group File

Christmas tree growers must promote their crop and the precious tradition it represents.

Readers' views

Hammond case demonstrates injustice

I usually agree with the editorials of the editorial board in the Capital Press, but the last sentence of their view in the July 20, 2018, article where in their opinion, justice has been served on the Hammond Case, missed the mark by a mile. To say justice was served by President Trump's pardon is to forget what good people suffered through.

A pardon does not take away the years in prison, a place to punish bad people for crimes they committed, not a place for a government to put good people to show them who is boss. The pardon did not give back the $400,000 penalty or what I am sure was a huge legal bill to try and defend themselves. We should also never forget a good man died trying to expose the injustice being imposed on good people.

This injustice by our government is the perfect example of what our founding fathers knew was possible and gave us the ability to limit provided we have the wisdom and the will to do it.

This was not justice in my United States of America that I grew up in. You can take an aspirin to get over a migraine but you still had the headache.

Sincerely,

Phil Davis
Rancher
Cascade, Idaho

What about the grizzly's impact on Bigfoot?

My wife and I recently returned from touring farming areas in northern Washington. While there, discussion got around to grizzly bear reintroduction.

Folks can't understand why another alpha predator would even be considered. I doubt if the bicyclist run down by a mountain lion or the lady run up a tree by wolves would recommend it.

Before a final decision is made the agencies involved are required to prepare an environmental impact statement. Grizzly behavior is a known, but what about the unknown? The same area is widely rumored and believed to be habitat of the Sasquatch (a.k.a. Bigfoot). Could the grizzly be detrimental to the Bigfoot family?

We just don't know! The potential exists for conflict and until it's proven otherwise a final decision must be put on hold.

Michael F. Hanley IV
Jordan Valley, Ore.

President doesn't understand trade

As a farm boy now living and working in the city, I love reading the Capital Press and appreciate its perspectives, even if I don't agree with each one. But, I have to call out the excuses you make for the president in your editorial "Perdue offers help for farmers caught up in trade wars" — because, in this instance, you are undermining farmers' interests.

Indeed, as you say, "unfolding events can be complicated and rarely conspire with sitting presidents." But the tariffs now hitting American farmers did not come from "unfolding events;" they are the direct result of the president's poor decisions. Donald Trump pulled us out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and started these trade wars, no one else.

We need a NAFTA update. We need to continue to find ways to combat unfair Chinese trade practices. We need to look for ways to aid American workers and farmers hit hard by globalization. But, the Capital Press would better serve its readers by calling a spade a spade: Donald Trump does not understand trade, does not have a strategy for improving it, and has made the trade situation much, much worse.

Thank you,

Paul Mortimer
Portland, Ore.

Balancing road safety with realities of ag production

By MIKE CRAPO
For the Capital Press

Guest comment
Sen. Mike Crapo

Holding town meetings in all of Idaho's communities enables me to hear clearly some of the most pressing issues on the minds of Idahoans.

Oftentimes those concerns are echoed by their neighbors and in other communities.

At town meetings held earlier this year in Idaho's unincorporated communities, Idahoans shared concerns about the impacts of the Electronic Logging Device (ELD) mandate on safely hauling Idaho agricultural goods, including livestock and perishable commodities such as milk and fresh produce.

I then called U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Elaine Chao to discuss these concerns and possible remedies.

The DOT agreed to work with Congress to address the problems with the regulation and implement policies to ensure road safety while also enabling farmers and ranchers to continue to safely transport livestock and produce. Since that discussion, I have been taking additional steps to help maintain that balance.

In 2015, the DOT's Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) published a final rule to implement a 2012 federal highway law provision requiring the agency to issue a rule mandating the use of Electronic Logging Devices, rather than relying on paper logbooks, to ensure commercial carriers meet limitations on the hours drivers are allowed to operate their trucks.

The problem is the requirements pose considerable complications for many in the agricultural community, particularly those involved in transporting livestock (including cows, live fish and honeybees).

Hauling livestock is different than hauling other commodities.

Extensive preparation and care go into ensuring the safety of the animals, particularly during summer months.

Livestock haulers who reach driving-time limits while hauling livestock will face difficult decisions: compliance with animal welfare laws and guidelines or compliance with federal Hours of Service regulations.

Concerns with this no-win situation contributed to the Administration and Congress delaying the implementation of the rule for agricultural haulers multiple times.

Currently, the enforcement of the ELD rule is delayed until Sept. 30, 2018, through a law Congress passed and the president signed.

Other steps are being taken to address the problems with this rule:

In May, I joined a bipartisan group of 30 senators, including fellow Idaho Sen. Jim Risch, in sending a letter to FMCSA Administrator Raymond Martinez encouraging the agency to look into improving the regulation to ensure drivers across differing operations can safely and efficiently comply with the requirements.

In June, I co-sponsored S. 2938, the Transporting Livestock Across America Safely Act.

This bipartisan legislation would provide carriers with greater flexibility in administering operating hours when hauling livestock and insects.

I also co-sponsored this and similar legislation as amendments to the Senate's 2018 Farm Bill, but they were not adopted.

In June, I co-sponsored S. 3051, the Modernizing Agriculture Transportation Act.

This bipartisan legislation would suspend the ELD mandate until the Transportation Secretary proposes regulatory changes based on the recommendations of a working group (made up of federal government officials, highway safety experts, transportation industries and agricultural shippers) that would be established to review the regulations, with a particular focus on identifying obstacles to the safe and humane transport of livestock, insects and agricultural commodities.

The bill includes deadlines for the recommendations.

While more work remains, these efforts are beginning to yield results.

On May 31, 2018, FMCSA released additional guidance outlining exemptions and clarifications addressing agricultural concerns.

We must keep up with advanced technology while ensuring federal regulation increases safety on our roads and bridges without unduly impacting those who safely and reliably move goods and services throughout our country.

I will continue to work to ensure this policy properly balances public safety with the safe and humane transport of livestock and agricultural goods.

Mike Crapo represents Idaho in the U.S. Senate.