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Opinion

Editor & Publisher
Joe Beach

Managing Editor
Carl Sampson

opinions@capitalpress.com | CapitalPress.com/opinion

Our View



Researchers take on gluten, celiac disease

At its roots, research is aimed at solving problems. In agriculture, those problems can range from small to large.

Among the largest problems facing wheat producers and those who use wheat in their products are celiac disease and gluten intolerance.

In a sense, solving this problem is the Holy Grail of wheat-related research.

Celiac disease prevents those who have it from digesting gluten, which is found in varying amounts in grains such as wheat, barley and rye. The disease is found in millions of Americans and causes the body's immune system to react and for sufferers to experience nausea, cramps and other health problems.

In addition to those who have been diagnosed with celiac disease, other people are sensitive to gluten. This sensitivity causes a variety of symptoms similar to those of celiac disease.

The controversy surrounding gluten and who can and cannot eat it has spread around the world. Nowadays, restaurants and grocery stores domestically and abroad offer items that are "gluten free."

To many consumers, "gluten" has become a four-letter word. To wheat farmers, it has become a cause for concern and has cut into the demand for their crop.

During the past few weeks, however, researchers have announced breakthroughs that could mean celiac patients and others may one day be able to enjoy bread, cakes, crackers or any other foods made with wheat and not have to worry about their reaction to gluten.

Sachin Rustgi, a researcher at Clemson University in South Carolina and Washington State University, has been developing wheat that changes the way peo-

ple digest gluten. Working in concert with scientists in France, China and Chile, he was able to insert DNA from barley and a bacterium into wheat so it creates enzymes that break down gluten.

The tactic is similar to the one used by many celiac sufferers, who take an enzyme pill before every meal to avoid problems.

"By packing the remedy to wheat allergies and gluten intolerance right into the grain, we're giving consumers a simpler, lower-cost therapy," he said in a WSU press release.

Using a gene-editing technique called CRISPR, he also hopes to develop wheat varieties that have no gluten at all. CRISPR technology allows researchers to edit wheat's DNA and doesn't involve adding DNA from other organisms.

Other researchers in diverse places such as Kansas and the Netherlands are also working on gluten-free wheat.

These developments are still years from the marketplace. They need to be thoroughly tested before the USDA or other agencies will approve them. Even then, they must meet the expectations of consumers, who must understand and embrace the benefits of wheat that even celiac sufferers can eat without fear of getting sick.

We have long voiced our support for all types of research. In this case, it appears researchers are on the verge of breakthroughs that will profoundly impact consumers and farmers, benefitting both.

That type of research will ultimately have a return whose value cannot be measured in dollars.

GUEST VIEW

Cory Stengel



Ag Safety Week focus: hearing protection

During Agricultural Safety Awareness Week (March 3-9), the Oregon Farm Bureau Health & Safety Committee reminds farmers and ranchers to remember the importance of hearing protection.

Noise that's common in agriculture-related jobs can affect health in many ways, in addition to hearing loss. Prolonged noise exposure can quicken the pulse rate, increase blood pressure and narrow blood vessels. Over a long period of time, this may place an added burden on the heart.

Noise can also cause abnormal secretions of hormones and tensing of muscles. People who deal with noise every day may complain of nervousness, sleeplessness and fatigue. Job performance may also suffer when people are exposed to high levels of noise.

Loud noise is the most common cause of permanent hearing loss — and the full extent of damage may not be apparent for years. Unfortunately, noise-induced hearing loss does not heal and cannot be corrected by hearing aids.

However, it can be prevented.

If you have to shout, yell, or speak loudly to talk to someone who is 3 feet away, you are working around noise levels that necessitate hearing protection because you are at risk for noise-induced hearing loss over time.

The following are signs that you may pose a risk to your hearing:

- You have to shout to make yourself heard during work.
- You have ringing in your ears after you leave work.
- You have difficulty hearing normal speech and other sounds after work.

Most hearing specialists agree: You can damage your hearing if you are continually exposed to noise greater than 85 decibels over eight hours. As noise levels rise above 85 decibels, the safe exposure time for unprotected ears falls dramatically. For example, 110-decibel noise can impair hearing after just 15 minutes of exposure. For most farmers and ranchers, the work day goes way beyond 9 to 5. The longer the exposure to noise is, the lower the number of decibels needed to induce hearing loss.

If you can't eliminate or control the noise, then look to personal protective equipment, such as earmuffs, earplugs and canal caps. These can all reduce the amount of noise exposure from common farm sounds like tractor idling, barn cleaners, conveyers, and grain elevators — all of which are in the decibel danger zone.

Following are some general guidelines for farmers and ranchers to help safeguard their hearing, courtesy of University of Maine Cooperation Extension.

- Use hearing protection on all noisy jobs, the minute the activity begins.

- Regard quiet operation as a "plus" value when shopping for tractors, machinery, or other equipment (this includes household appliances).

- Keep machinery and equipment well-lubricated and maintained. Regularly tighten all components.

- Replace defective mufflers and exhaust system parts. Do not use a "straight pipe" exhaust for tractors or other engines. This type of exhaust does not increase power very much and often emits sound levels that can damage hearing.

- Consider enclosing noisy components or building acoustic barriers or heavy partitions for stationary equipment.

- Stay away from noisy equipment when you don't need to control or tend it.

- Limit the duration of noise exposure if you are without hearing protection. Put yourself and your ears as far away from a noise source as possible.

No one is ever too young or too old to suffer from the effects of hearing loss from noise. Take steps today to safeguard your hearing, and your employees' hearing, on the farm or ranch.

Cory Stengel is chair of the Oregon Farm Bureau Health & Safety Committee, a fourth-generation farmer, and member of Deschutes County Farm Bureau.

READERS' VIEW

Give wolves their own island

You have done a magnificent job of presenting every aspect of roaming wolves vs. established cattle herds.

Your new editorial says ranchers must learn methods and manage cattle around wolves — that is backwards. The four environmental groups involved in the initial release and non-control of expanding wolfpacks must learn to keep all wolves at least 10 miles away from any and all sheep and cattle. If they do not do this, they are guilty of animal cruelty — killing of cattle and hazing of wildlife.

We all know about the existing perfect packs, which are in wilderness without any access to cattle. They are the only ones worthy of tourist observation. CBS' "60 Minutes" suggested falsely that wolves are wonderful in all their existence and are serving to attract many tourists for observation. These comments come at the same

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Letters policy: Please limit letters to 300 words and include your home address and a daytime telephone number with your submission. Longer pieces, 500-750 words, may be considered as guest commentary pieces for use on the opinion pages. Guest commentary submissions should also include a photograph of the author.

Send letters via email to opinions@capitalpress.com. Emailed letters are preferred and require less time to process, which could result in quicker publication. Letters also may be sent to P.O. Box 2048, Salem, OR 97308.

moment wolves were eating sheep and cattle alive!

One legislator suggests moving wolves to an island off Seattle. That is one perfect solution. If a lot of wolves are humanely confined, they could be fed the many elk from herds which you correctly report are menacing farmlands and towns.

Wolves are not deserving of "endangered" status because they are multiplying at frightening rates, partly due to alphas being shot so that subordinates, which otherwise would not be

breeding, are doing so.

So much of this is caught up in the courts that it will never be solved. The alternative I chose to initiate as a solution was to alert Deputy Solicitor of the Interior Department Karen Budd-Falen, as introduced to me via your Oct. 28 issue.

It was after I wrote her that you presented the intelligent plan of letting wolves live on their own island, complete with natural borders to enclose them. This is the most excellent idea

presented so far.

Vivian Thompson
Morro Bay, Calif.

'More' forest access not requested

I appreciate the article y'all wrote about the exemption request from the 2005 Travel Management Rule for the Wallowa Whitman & Malheur National Forests. The title of the article, however, is misleading and I think it deserves a correction.

Nowhere in the exemption do the commissioners ask for "more" access. They very clearly state they want to protect access as it currently exists. The title of the article allows environmental groups to fan the flames of discord over motorized access when they see the word "more" when no such request is being made.

John George
Bates, Ore.