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Editor & Publisher
Joe Beach

Managing Editor
Carl Sampson

opinions@capitalpress.com | CapitalPress.com/opinion

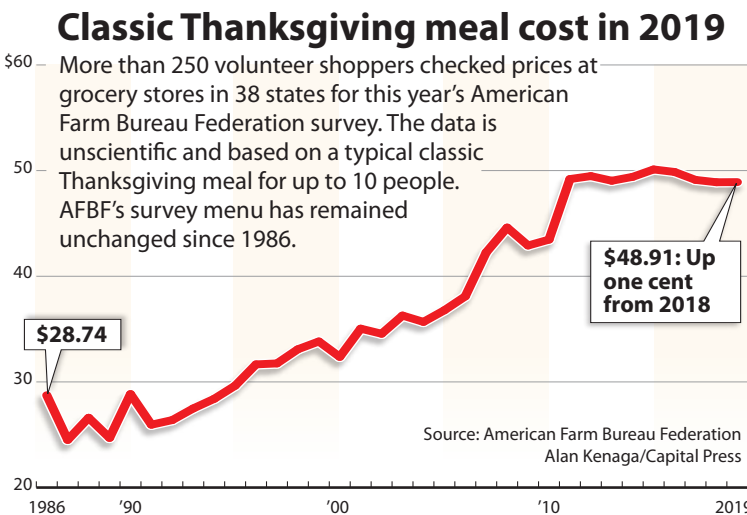
Our View

Giving thanks for the miracle of modern ag

In 1621 the Pilgrim colonists of Plymouth, Mass., celebrated their first harvest in the New World with a three-day feast, an extended dinner party that is the origin of our modern Thanksgiving observance.

Days of thanksgiving were common in early America, being held in appreciation for a community’s deliverance from drought, disease, famine and other hardships associated with life on the frontier.

The Pilgrims barely survived their first winter in New England on meager rations left from their Atlantic crossing, supplemented by what food



they could hunt themselves or borrow from their Indian neighbors. So in November they gave thanks to God that their bountiful harvest would spare them the privations of

the previous winter.

While the tradition of the feast endures, it seems sometimes that as a society we have become less thankful. In the midst of so much, we forget

the human effort and divine miracle that produces such bounty.

The American Farm Bureau Federation, which each year conducts a market survey of the retail cost of a typical Thanksgiving dinner, reports this year’s feast cost American consumers only 1 cent more than last year’s.

In a completely unscientific survey, the AFBF found dinner for 10 that includes turkey, sweet potatoes, vegetables, rolls and pie costs just \$48.91.

When the AFBF did its first Thanksgiving survey in 1986, the same meal for 10 guests cost \$28.74. According to the Bureau of Labor

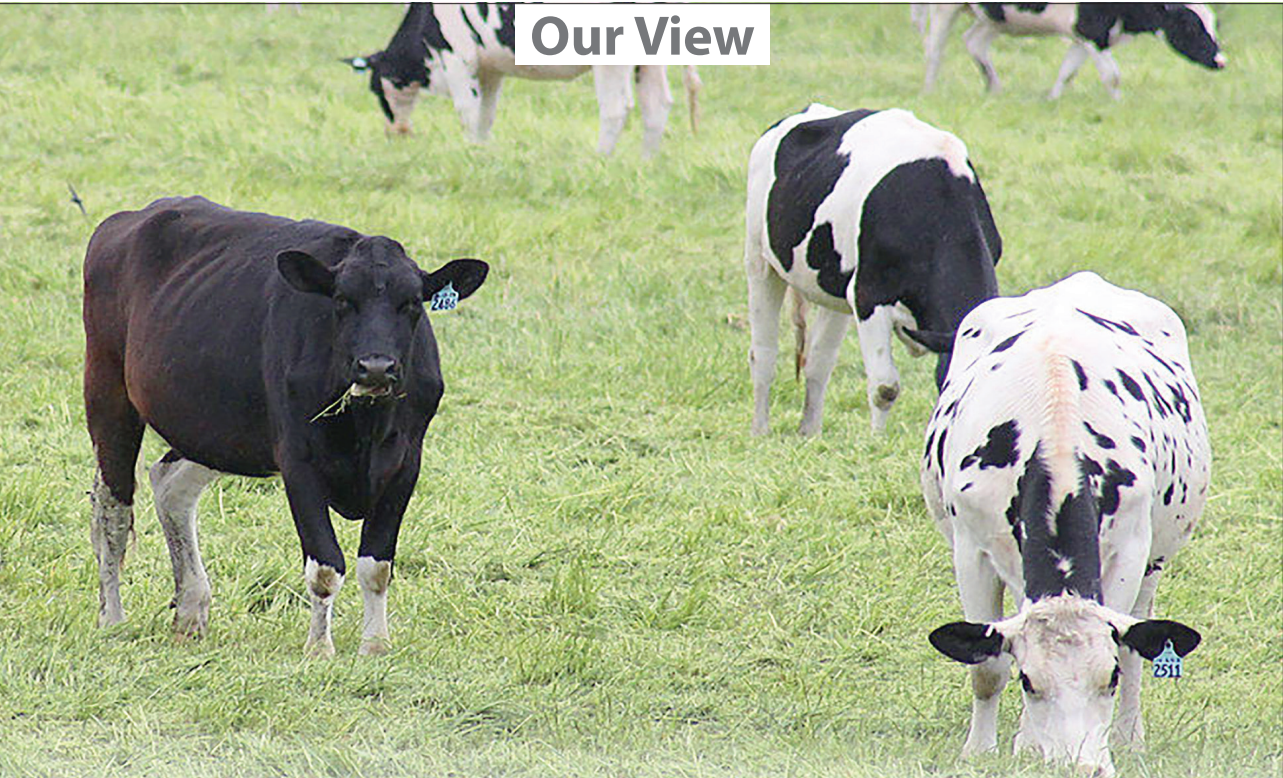
Statistics, that’s \$61.24 in today’s dollars. When adjusted for inflation, the cost of our feast has gone down.

For less than \$5 a head, we can stuff ourselves and have leftovers to boot.

Who do we thank?

Our thoughts turn to the farmers and ranchers, who year after year work harder and longer to produce more food on less ground to feed an ever growing population.

But those who tend the land know that there is more at work. They provide the sweat and the tears, the miracle comes from somewhere else.



Our View

Ecology report misses key points

The folks at Washington’s Department of Ecology like to write reports. It’s as though they are always looking to point a finger somewhere for causing one sort of problem or the other.

Most recently, they put together another report on how much greenhouse gas the state produces. Greenhouse gases such carbon dioxide and methane help trap heat in the Earth’s atmosphere, thus raising the overall temperature and contributing to climate change.

For the record, Washington produces 97.4 million metric tons of greenhouse gases each year. That’s about 1.5% of the U.S. total of 6.45 billion metric tons, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

In other words, Washington state could unplug and turn off every car, truck, appliance, plane, factory and other gadget and still have only a minimal effect on the U.S. total.

It’s no secret that climate change is a concern, particularly for those who live along the Puget Sound and the Pacific Ocean. Higher temperatures ultimately could mean higher sea levels and more intense weather.

Likewise, farmers and ranchers are closely monitoring issues related to climate change. More than any other industry, agriculture could be impacted by a changing climate.

But along with the report-writing the folks at Ecology also like to choose climate winners and losers.

They particularly like to pick on animal agriculture. This comes from a long line of reports by United Nations agencies, environmental groups, vegetarians and others who maintain that cows and the methane gas they produce in some way overshadow the heavyweights in climate change such as transportation.

We were particularly interested in the most recent report because Washington state’s highways — particularly the stretch of Interstate 5 between Tacoma and Seattle — may be the worst in the nation. It alone probably contributes as much to climate change as any other

stretch of highway in the state.

Time was, a drive from downtown Seattle to the Sea-Tac Airport took a few minutes. Nowadays, I-5 often resembles a parking lot, with idling cars and trucks inching their way to their destination.

The poor job Washington has done on its highways comes at a steep cost to climate change. According to the Ecology report, most of the carbon dioxide produced in the state — about 44% — comes out the tailpipes of cars and trucks, many of which are getting only slightly more than zero miles per gallon as they crawl along the region’s clogged highways. A suggestion: send a note to the state Department of Transportation and suggest that it get with the program.

On the flip side, the report writers at Ecology blame your food — beef, milk and dairy in particular — for contributing to climate change. What they left out of the report is the amount of methane produced by livestock in Washington and the rest of the U.S. is static. According to Frank Mitloehner, a University of California-Davis expert on animal agriculture and how it impacts the atmosphere, methane dissipates after about 10 years.

Carbon dioxide, which is produced by cars and trucks, lasts about 1,000 years in the atmosphere. That means Washington’s perpetually jammed highways are causing far more problems for the climate than cows ever will.

For the record, methane is a potent greenhouse gas. But in places like Washington state and the rest of U.S., where livestock production is highly efficient, the overall amount of methane produced will not increase in the years to come. It will continue to dissipate as quickly as it is produced.

On the other hand, cars on Interstate 5 will continue to pump out carbon dioxide, which will continue to accumulate for 1,000 years or more.

That, no doubt, is something you won’t read in Ecology’s report.

The heart of leadership

By **ROBIN KINNEY**
American Farm Bureau Federation

GUEST VIEW

Robin Kinney

At this time of Thanksgiving, I pause to reflect on the past year and the blessings that have come my way. This year it includes some wonderful memories of Farm Bureau members I have known through nearly 25 years with state Farm Bureaus and the national organization, which just celebrated the start of its second century of service.

As a member and Farm Bureau staffer I have met members on their farms, in their homes, at their county offices or during any number of agricultural meetings. I have optimism, dedication, volunteerism and passion, and I find friends on both sides of the political spectrum.

Last week I found myself reflecting on the founders of Farm Bureau who provided our grassroots policy organization with such a solid foundation.

One of my favorite stories was about a county Farm Bureau board member who had been born in February 1912 and began farming at the age of 12 after the death of his father. He would often share memories of early Farm Bureau township meetings that were a social occasion for the entire section or neighborhood and involved the entire family. Meetings were hosted in the home of a member. Children would head upstairs or outside to play, the women would gather in the kitchen or dining room in the “homemakers circle” to share recipes and visit about family matters, and the men would talk farming and politics in the living room with the local Extension agent. This member recalled that the only way to purchase dynamite for clearing fields of trees and stumps was through an organized county Farm Bureau. He recalled interviewing agriculture school graduates for the important position of Extension director and how the county Farm Bureau paid the salary and travel expenses for this position.

Just last week during the resolution session in one of the New England states I heard the same conversation about the need for those with experience and understanding of agriculture to be involved in positions serving today’s farming needs. The Farm Bureau director who led this discussion was active in other leadership roles in his community, as so many are. He was a “can-do” director that we depend on and an eternal optimist in his view of our world and life itself.

Another longtime leader of a different county Farm Bureau taught me more about the corn plant that I thought I would ever need to know.

Who knew that every continent grows corn except Antarctica, that an ear of corn has 16 rows and about 800 kernels, that one pound of corn has 1,300 kernels and one bushel has about

72,800 kernels? Or that a bushel of corn can sweeten 400 cans of soda? One bushel of corn can also provide 33 pounds of sweetener or 32 pounds of starch for batteries, cardboard, crayons, antibiotics and chewing gum, or 1.6 pounds of corn oil or 2.7 gallons of ethanol along with 18 pounds of animal feed.

This member was as passionate about corn as he was his county fair. No doubt he shared much of his corn knowledge as he spent hours visiting with anyone and everyone about it.

Both of these county leaders also served their country proudly and were active in the local veteran community. They looked at “problems” as opportunities — and Farm Bureau as the solution seeker. They knew through years of experience that working together and finding a united voice would make them stronger. These two dedicated volunteer leaders followed in the footsteps of our forefathers and they believed in the future. They followed their beliefs through challenges and adversity. They lived through the Great Depression, two World Wars, the Dust Bowl and a society without many of the comforts and conveniences we have today.

Our farm and ranch families today are facing adversity and challenges as they pursue their vocation. I am hopeful that as we gather at the Thanksgiving table with family and friends, we will take a moment to consider all who play a part in getting the bounty of wholesome food to our tables.

We have much to be thankful for, and we’re grateful that those who are called to agriculture — whether through their heritage, vocation or entrepreneurial spirit — are pursuing the American dream of nurturing a crop and caring for their livestock for a greater purpose. It is a marvelous thing when one feels called. It is a matter of doing something you believe you are meant to do. It is finding satisfaction in providing for others when you follow your calling, your passion and your beliefs. One day each of us runs out of the time we have been given. That is why at this Thanksgiving, I hope you will join me in a sense of wonder and gratitude for those who serve agriculture and volunteer in positions of leadership. And let me say thank you — because we don’t say it often enough. Thank you to those who farm the land, till the soil and care for the livestock. You are heroes to be celebrated for feeding and fueling the world!

Robin Kinney is senior director of member engagement at the American Farm Bureau Federation.