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# Opinion

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## Our View

# Have the place cards be set at the table?

Where are the farmers in the Biden transition? The Biden transition review team for the Department of Agriculture has 23 members. As is common in transition teams, many of these people have held key positions at the USDA in previous administrations.

Many of them have experience with the USDA's nutrition programs. That makes sense, because the lion's share of USDA's budget goes toward school nutrition and other food welfare programs.

Policy wonks abound. What you will be hard pressed to find is anyone who makes a living producing food.

Two come close.

Jonathan Coppess teaches farm policy at the University of Illinois.

He's a former Farm Service Agency administrator and has experience as a grain merchandiser. He grew up on the family farm, and reportedly has an interest in the corn and soybean operation still worked by his father and brother in Ohio.

Debra Eschmeyer grew up on a farm. She was a nutrition policy adviser to First Lady Michelle Obama and is co-founder of Food-Corps, a nonprofit that connects school kids to healthy foods. She and her husband operated a 22-acre organic fruit and vegetable farm in Ohio as they pursued other policy work.

According to the Center for Presidential Transition, the transition teams "lay the groundwork for governing well in advance of Election Day by building a policy agenda for

the new administration, gathering information about federal agencies, vetting potential political appointees and developing a management agenda."

What's the agenda?

Leaders from national farm groups met via Zoom with the transition team on Dec. 4. Participants described the discussion as "productive."

"This administration has promised to do something to fix our labor problems in the first 100 days. We want to make sure they don't forget. Finding an adequate workforce for our farms is probably the biggest problem we have," said American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall.

That must be why there's a representative of the United Farm Workers Foundation and another from the

United Food and Commercial Workers International Union on the transition team. But no farmers.

The group's also expressed concerns about rural infrastructure — roads, bridges and the internet. The transition team has the appropriate experts on those subjects. But no farmers.

We've been talking with farmers about what they'd like from the incoming Biden administration. A common theme that has emerged is the desire to be heard, to "have a seat at the table."

It's probably too early to tell, but if the transition team is any indication, farmers and ranchers should ensure that the place cards have not already been set and that they are indeed on the list.

## Our View

# Uncle Sam can't tell Americans what to eat

Every new iteration of the USDA Dietary Guidelines spawns the same debate over sugar, alcohol and other foods that, when ingested in excess, can be bad for you.

Come to think of it, too much of almost anything will have a negative impact on a person's health.

Just look around.

According to Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 40% of Americans are obese. That's about 131 million men, women and children.

Also, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control, 34.2 million Americans are diabetic. That's a little more than 10% of the U.S. population.

Though certain genetic factors come into play, the vast majority of Americans got that way by eating too much and exercising too little. A 10-minute consultation with a doctor or nutritionist would most likely reach that conclusion.

But the USDA cannot be held responsible for what, or how much, food people eat.

Here's an example. The latest edition of the guidelines states that kids under 2 years shouldn't have cake or candy.

It's insulting to tell a parent that baking Junior a birthday cake will in some way hurt his health. If a toddler were to eat only cake and candy, that would be a problem, but every parent already knows that.

The guidelines also suggest that men limit their alcohol intake to no more than two drinks a day and that women should stop at one. That's if they choose to drink at all.

Critics say the USDA should have clamped

down and told people not to drink, and that it's the government's responsibility to make all 328 million Americans healthier.

The problem for the critics — and the government, for that matter — is very few Americans care what Uncle Sam says about sugar, alcohol or food in general.

Ultimately, any decisions about what to eat or drink come down to the man — or woman — in the mirror. Each individual decides what to ingest.

Each person is also smart enough to look in the mirror and determine whether he or she is packing extra pounds, which in turn impacts their

health and how they feel and look.

A person may eat a healthful salad during one meal — and at the next meal splurge on something a little more "calorie-dense."

Either way, it's up to that person, not Uncle Sam.

Health advocates say schools should serve only the healthiest of meals. That's fine, but try making kids eat foods they don't like. Ultimately, much of that "healthy" food goes into the garbage, which benefits no one.

A couple of decades ago, Congress and the Food and Drug Administration thought they had the key to making Americans healthier. If they labeled every food product with the ingredients, calories, serving size and other information, people would know what to eat — and how much.

Since then, Americans have only gotten more overweight and unhealthy.

If a person wants to improve his or her diet, there's plenty of help available from professionals.

But Uncle Sam isn't one of them.



## Bipartisan support for Growing Climate Solutions Act

Farmers, ranchers and foresters know very well the value of soil carbon for the health and water holding capacity of their soil. But economic barriers limit adoption of practices that build soil carbon. No-till equipment is costly, and cover crops don't generate revenue.

Fortunately, soil carbon also has an economic value beyond its impact on crop productivity. A ton of carbon added to the soil is a ton of carbon pulled out of the atmosphere, where it acts as a greenhouse gas, warming the planet and causing economic disruption.

For carbon emitters concerned about or required to mitigate climate change, it costs less to pay another party to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it than to invest in reducing the carbon they emit. The demand for such carbon credits from companies and individuals is growing rapidly as they pledge to become "net-zero" emitters and reduce their carbon footprint. Globally, the number of carbon credits produced by forestry and land use activities increased by 264% between 2016 and 2018.

However, the market for carbon credits is hindered by several significant obstacles. Farmers, ranchers and foresters aren't sure how to implement carbon credit projects or navigate carbon credit markets. They don't know who to trust in the marketplace. And professionals who work with carbon credits don't have expertise in agriculture or forestry.

Companies such as Nori and IndigoAg are building a market for carbon credits by connecting farmers with the carbon credits market and the verification necessary to ensure carbon is being stored. Farmers are paid in dollars per ton of carbon stored. With Nori, farmers provide historical data on their practices (planting and harvesting, tillage intensity, fertilizer use, organic matter additions, irrigation, liming, and burning) and the area farmed.

IndigoAg takes soil samples, and also rewards farmers for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Nori supports farmers operating on rented as well as owned land.

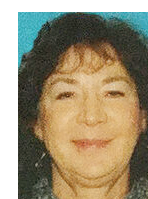
Nori and IndigoAg are playing important roles in overcoming the barriers

### GUEST VIEW

Steve Ghan



Kathleen Walker



in the carbon credit market. However, there is a need for more transparency, legitimacy, and certification of third-party verifiers and technical service providers who pay agricultural and forest land managers for carbon credits generated by sustainably sequestering carbon in soil or in trees. The U.S. Department of Agriculture can fill this role through a Greenhouse Gas Technical Assistance Provider and Third-Party Verifier Certification Program as part of the pending Growing Climate Solutions Act (GCSA).

The GCSA was introduced in the 116th Congress with bipartisan support. Senate sponsors and co-sponsors are Mike Braun, R-Ind.; Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich.; Lindsey Graham, R-S.C.; and Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I.

The House bill, sponsored by Rep. Abigail Spanberger, D-Va.; has nine Republican and eleven Democratic co-sponsors.

The GCSA has diverse support outside Congress: the U.S. Cattlemen's Association, Society for Range Management, American Farmland Trust, National Farmers Union, National Council of Farm Cooperatives, National Milk Producers Federation, American Soybean Association, Sustainable Food Policy Alliance, American Foresters, National Woodland Owners Association and Cargill.

Since the GCSA has not yet passed Congress, additional expressions of support will definitely aid in getting it enacted. Call your Congressional representatives today.

Steve Ghan is a highly cited climate scientist and leads the Tri-Cities Chapter of the Citizens Climate Lobby. He meets with mid-Columbia farmers to discuss agriculture and climate change. Kathleen Walker was raised by a hard-working Washington state farmer.

## Congratulations to EPA on 50 years

On Dec. 2, the Environmental Protection Agency celebrated its 50th anniversary. Created by President Nixon in 1970, EPA consolidated the environmental responsibilities of the federal government into one agency to more effectively address environmental concerns.

Over the past 50 years, the agency has set a worldwide standard for using scientific consensus as the foundation for regulations.

As the head of the pesticide industry representing the pesticide industry, I know all too well how complex and divisive regulatory decisions can be, yet I cannot overstate the importance of the work that EPA scientists have done to improve our environment.

### GUEST VIEW

Chris Novak



No matter which party holds the White House, the foundation of EPA is these career-scientists. These individuals bring decades of experience and expertise to the review of chemicals that are designed to protect our health, safety and sustainability while protecting our water and air. Career-scientists provide consistency and integrity to our regulatory process, no matter which party is in charge. Their work should not only be acknowledged but commended on this historic day.

At a time when science seems to be under attack, agencies like EPA continue to do the important work of regulating our products, ensuring environmental quality, and protecting public health. The system is not perfect, but the gains our nation has made in environmental quality are a testament to a 50-year legacy of continuous improvement.

So the next time you get in your car, shop at a grocery store, or work in a garden, think about and be thankful for the work of EPA's scientists, who have made our lives safer through their work and dedication.

Chris Novak is president and CEO of CropLife America, the national trade association that represents the manufacturers, formulators and distributors of pesticides.