

Editorials are written by or approved by members of the Capital Press Editorial Board.

All other commentary pieces are the opinions of the authors but not necessarily this newspaper.

Opinion

Editor & Publisher
Joe Beach
Managing Editor
Carl Sampson
opinions@capitalpress.com | CapitalPress.com/opinion

Our View

Feeding world will take land, and lots of it

A prodigious amount of U.S. farmland continues to be converted to other uses. The American Farmland Trust estimates that between 2001 and 2016 more than 11 million acres were taken out of ag production.

While in the overall scheme of things this is a proverbial drop in the bucket — the total farm acreage is 915 million — development continues to chip away at the land that feeds us all.

Ultimately, as more land is turned into housing developments or hobby farms, and as the U.S. population continues to grow — 328 million people eat a lot — we will run headlong into the limitations of how much food farmers can grow.

Add to that the growing global population — 7 billion and counting — and sooner or later we will find out whether farmers can keep everyone fed.

Which brings us back to the land — farms, ranches and national for-



Brad Carlson/Capital Press

Development on former farmland in southeast Meridian, Idaho.

est and Bureau of Land Management allotments.

So often the arguments offered by critics of agriculture lean on the “logic” that some farms — large ones, primarily — are too efficient.

Now that’s a statement. It’s kind of like being accused of being too handsome or too beautiful.

Yet that’s the rub. Critics say that large farms use more water than small farms and large dairies produce more manure than small dairies.

Sure enough, that is true. But,

assuming that the same amount of food, or more, will be needed by a growing population, it will have to come from an increasing number of animals and crops raised on ranches and farms. Whether they are raised on one 10,000-acre farm or 1,000 10-acre farms won’t make much difference.

Except for one thing. Any economies of scale will disappear, and the cost of production will increase. Whether the prices paid to those farmers will also increase to cover those costs is an unknown.

In the meantime, efficiency is the friend of the farmer — and the consumer. After all, if prices increase too much, it will directly impact consumers, particularly those who are low income.

So there is the conundrum. Taking agricultural land out of production is not just bad for farmers and ranchers. It’s bad for consumers and the rest of the world.

That’s why we need to keep close

tabs on developers and others who see farmland and little more than shovel-ready for the next housing subdivision.

The protection of farmland must be taken seriously. Some states, such as Oregon, have worked to identify high-value farmland and protect it.

Land trusts and other organizations have also come up with means of protecting farmland by purchasing the development rights. This allows farmers and ranchers to continue, and even provides money to improve their operations.

All of which needs to be balanced against property owners’ rights.

Again, what’s really at stake is not only farms and ranches. Ultimately, what’s a stake is our nation’s ability to feed itself — and help feed the rest of the world.

Without debate, that is the most important value of agriculture. And doing it depends on land, efficiency, technology, research and plain old know-how.

Our View

Time will tell if OT bill benefits farmworkers

The best that can be said about farmworker overtime legislation passed by the Washington Legislature is that it gives producers time to adjust and protects them from backpay lawsuits set in motion by a recent state supreme court ruling.

Otherwise, the bill — and similar legislation working its way through the Oregon Legislature — is sure to prompt dramatic changes in farm labor in the Pacific Northwest.

Congress in 1938 established a federal minimum wage and provided for overtime pay for work over 40 hours. The act provided a host of job classifications, including farmworkers, that are exempt from the overtime rule.

Washington lawmakers in 1959 adopted a similar provision into state law.

In a case filed by two former milkers from Yakima County, the Washington Supreme Court struck down the exemption Nov. 5 in a 5-4 deci-



Capital Press File

Washington legislators have come up with a bill that will eventually provide overtime pay to farm workers.

sion. Left unclear by the ruling was whether it applied just to dairies or all farms, or whether those impacted could collect three years in back wages as made possible under a separate state law.

A bill originally was introduced

to protect farmers from having to retroactively pay overtime. It was amended instead to require all farmers to pay overtime.

After much wrangling and negotiation, a bill was finally hammered out that will require Washington

farmworkers be paid time-and-a-half pay after 40 hours in a week beginning in 2024. It also protects farmers from those retroactive pay lawsuits.

Much has changed since 1938. If fairness were the only consideration, it’s hard to argue against paying farmworkers overtime.

But the economics of agriculture have not changed since 1938. Farmers are still price takers, not price makers, who cannot simply pass along higher labor costs to consumers the way retailers and manufacturers, though limited by the impacts of competition, do.

So, farmers will do whatever they can to cut down on labor by adopting more automation, different cropping systems or by choosing to produce less labor-intensive crops.

No doubt some farmworkers will receive overtime. But, in the end, there will be fewer farmworkers receiving a paycheck.

Times change. Time will tell if this legislation will produce the benefits its sponsors intend.

‘New normal’ looks like ‘old crazy’

I enjoyed reading your opinion piece in the April 2 Capital Press about hard truths that need to be said/echoed.

As a West Point grad, Army veteran, clean energy executive and dad of four amazing kids, we need to bring some sanity back to government/politics — “people must be heard?” no elected official should be allowed to rule indefinitely be decree.”

My electeds including Congressman Kurt Schrader seem out of touch/lost when it comes to what is important to the working/middle-class bearing the tax brunt and getting little in return. With the administrative state, legislatures are avoiding their responsibility and have delegated their power in representing us.

At the tip of the spear are public schools opening full-time. Currently, 6 hours a week is a far cry from over 30 hours that was normal before the pandemic and that is already at the bottom of the list nationally. Then there is trillions in spending, freedoms taken away/government takeover of our lives without debate/discourse/laws, businesses closed. “New normal” looks like “old crazy” to me.

Anyhow, keep it up; good to read. Hopefully it helps educate and motivate oblivious people to get off the sidelines and get involved to push back on teachers’ unions and overwhelming liberal Democrats monopolizing power in Oregon, unresponsive to what matters at the grassroots level as our state and nation continue to decline.

*Nate Sandvig
Neskowin, Ore.*

A better fish passage option for dams

This letter regards Idaho Congressman Mike Simpson’s proposal to remove four of the Snake River dams. His proposal may or may not save the salmon, and would greatly negatively impact the Northwest’s economy.

I have an idea, and am writing with a solution which your readers may wish to learn about.

Discussion and negotiations of dam removal will take a decade. The salmon don’t have that long — their end-time is nearing. If we want to get the salmon past the dams in a hurry, the company WHOOSHH Innovations Inc. has a proven design, a “fish tube” that efficiently and harmlessly trans-

ports salmon of all sizes over the dams. I spoke with Steve Dearden, vice president of sales at WHOOSHH. He verified that:

- 1) WHOOSHH passage products can be both a short- or long-term solution for salmon passage at the 4 Snake River dams.
- 2) WHOOSHH fish passage systems could be in place and operating by the end of 2022.
- 3) Their technology not only counts and images each fish, but can be used to sort out non-native fish species so that those fish species do not get past the dam.

This is efficient and economical, and is a win-win solution for the salmon and the dams:

1. Provide the salmon upstream passage to their spawning grounds without the delays and stress of having to climb so many ladders.
2. Save billions of taxpayer dollars in the removal of the dams, loss of jobs, increased transportation costs of farm products and damage to roads.
3. Save consumers billions in electric rates over the course of the next innumerable years.
4. Begin immediately (without a 10 year delay) and track the result.

WHOOSHH fish tubes are being successfully used in North America, Europe and Asia. Once installed they are long-lived and require little maintenance.

To see how the system works, the company has three videos on YouTube, or you can check out their website: whoosh.com

The leadership and engineers at WHOOSHH should be consulted about how they can save our salmon, our dams — and us — billions of dollars.

Thank you very much.

*Robin Wylie
Wylie Farms LLC
Nampa, Idaho*

There are no shades of sustainability

In Carol Ryan Dumas’ article, livestock pharmaceutical corporation Elanco’s Animal Health Chief Sustainability Officer Sara Place presents a creative interpretation of the word “sustainable” where industrial dairies can be zero carbon emission entities.

In her view, “shades of sustainability” exist depending on the size and resources of an agricultural operation. But in the case of industrial dairies, which produce massive amounts of manure and climate warming methane emissions, there are no shades of sustainability.

Many industrial dairy narratives greenwash fossil fuel infra-

structure and cloak biogas in the language of renewable energy. But digesters only capture a fraction of methane emissions from industrial-scale dairies, releasing carbon dioxide and contaminants like ammonia, nitrogen oxide and other gases that induce smog and cause sickness. Children are particularly susceptible to this pollution as their lungs are still developing.

Instead of relying on false solutions that only bandage a wound in need of serious triage, we need to focus on practices that actually prevent methane emissions and provide healthier alternatives for people and animals. Getting cows off of factory farms and back into pastures is a start. Managed grazing restores cropland and avoids the methane production that results from factory farms’ anaerobic waste management, preventing soil contamination and drastically reducing greenhouse emissions.

There are no shades of sustainability. There are only practices that will save our planet, protect our people and safeguard our natural resources. Factory farms, like mega-dairies, are not a sustainable practice.

*Tarah Heinzen
Legal Director,
Food & Water Watch
Portland, Ore.*

READERS’ VIEW