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Opinion

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

Our View

Saving the world one meal at a time

It is in a farmer's DNA to grow crops, to bring forth new life from the soil. They include everything from the golden waves of grain rolling across the plains, to the billowing clouds of blossoming fruit trees urged on by battalions of pollinators, to the hundreds of other crops that burst forth from the land each year in what can only be described as the miracle of life.

That is what agriculture is.

But another part of a farmer's genetic code includes a mission: To feed people. In the U.S., Europe, China, India — and thousands of other places you would struggle to find on a map — all people depend on farmers. Every one of them. Whether it's their own patch of land or a large-scale farm in the Ukraine,

U.S. or Brazil, the goal remains singular — feeding people.

You may not have heard of the World Food Prize Foundation, but in a very real sense it is one of the reasons you were able to eat today. The founder of the Food Prize, Norman Borlaugh, is a legend in agriculture. For decades he worked in the laboratories and fields of Mexico and other countries. His goal: feeding people.

In the 1960s, chatter among those "in the know" was the world population was growing so fast and so large that within a few years it would be impossible to feed everyone. It was described as a population "bomb" and was one of a procession of sky-is-falling scenarios that the popular media latch onto occasionally

to scare people and sell magazines, books and points of view.

Borlaugh proved them all wrong. He developed hybrids of wheat and other food crops that multiplied their yields. The result was the Green Revolution, a renaissance of agricultural productivity that continues today.

For his efforts, Borlaugh received the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize.

Over time, the population bomb fizzled. The impossible has been made possible. The planet's 3 billion people in 1960 not only survived but thrived. Today, the population is nearly 8 billion.

Each year the Food Prize Foundation honors a leading scientist or other person who has increased the

quantity, quality or availability of food.

This year, the Food Prize went to Shakuntala Haraksingh Thilsted. As a researcher in Bangladesh, she led the way in developing the farming of nutrient-rich small fish to feed mothers and young children. Ponds became fish farms producing tons of nutrient-rich foods that filled the void left by shortages of other foods.

She has demonstrated in a very real way the proverb: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish (and to raise fish) and you feed him for a lifetime."

That is the legacy of the newest World Food prize recipient. Hundreds of millions of people around the globe will eat today as a direct result of her work.



Shakuntala Haraksingh Thilsted

Our View



Ryan Brennecke/EO Media Group

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have loosened COVID-19 regulations ahead of Washington and Oregon officials.

Will state regulators get behind the CDC?

It took almost 14 months, but Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and Washington Gov. Jay Inslee have finally set an objective standard for returning their states to some level of pre-COVID normalcy.

Then the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention pulled the rug out from under them. Will state regulators follow suit?

Last week Brown announced that once 70% of eligible Oregonians were fully vaccinated she would lift "most" of the restrictions that have been in place over these many months.

The CDC considers a person fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving the final dose of the course they've chosen.

Brown said her actions were possible because data showing the most recent spike in cases over the past month has begun to fade. Brown said she was confident the statewide vaccination goal to reopen the entire state by mid-June was in reach if residents stepped up to get vaccinated and help others get their shots, too.

A few days later, Inslee followed suit, saying most restrictions would be lifted by June 30, or sooner if the 70% vaccination rate were met.

But also that day the CDC advised that fully vaccinated people can resume prepandemic activities without a mask or socially distancing if allowed to by state laws. Though not a full-scale retraction of COVID restrictions, the new guidance put a big hole in the justification of many state regulations.

So, both Brown and Inslee announced that their states would immediately follow the CDC

mask guidance. But each warned that it might be days, if not longer, before state agencies could, or would, alter their workplace rules to reflect the newly acknowledged science that the vaccines work.

Last March, Inslee and Brown were able to shut down businesses, school districts, colleges and cultural and religious institutions by fiat. But, even the chief executives are powerless to dictate terms to their bureaucracies. Perhaps that's really not surprising.

The bureaucracy has its timetable, the public has another. Our initial observations show that many businesses and their patrons are moving forward without official sanction, relaxing their guidelines or eliminating them altogether.

The actual authority of the bureaucracy, however, remains intact. Producers, processors and businesses disregard official regulations at their peril.

The vaccines work. They protect the fully vaccinated from getting seriously ill, and in most cases from getting sick at all, according to the CDC. They may prevent the vaccinated from spreading the virus to the nonvaccinated.

Vaccinations are universally available throughout Oregon and Washington. A relative few people should not receive one because of preexisting medical conditions. Others freely reject getting vaccinated, also at their peril.

The regulators have said that they would relax restrictions as the science and data permit. Now it's time to put that promise into action. A more realistic set of regulations is needed.

Simpson dam proposal smart and strategic

The Simpson Plan does everything the Ag and Rural Caucus asked for: 1) puts up dollars up front to mitigate all foreseeable costs on eastern Washington residents, 2) provides time to make good on the mitigation guarantees, and 3) seals off the mainstem of the Columbia from discussion.

Fish advocates get the dams breached. Farmers are guaranteed grain transportation at the same cost as using barges. Ports are bought out of stranded assets. Power supply is assured.

What's not to like? Well, fish advocates are upset by the Plan's moratorium on litigation. They are correct. The Plan reaches too far. So, fix it. The economic stakeholders do not believe the guarantees. So, work at making the guarantees iron-clad.

It is now time to talk and deal.

And it is time to lead, and remember not everyone has been heard. I was talking to folks in Pomeroy the other day and asked them what they thought about the Simpson Plan. They wanted to talk. Even when I thought I had anticipated their questions, they returned to saying what was on their minds. This conversation is going to take time. We need to start, now. People on Main Street need to catch up and we — advocates of dam breaching and proponents of the dams alike — need to engage them in constructive conversation. We do not need to reinforce their bias. We do need to sketch out paths forward.

And we need to be honest with people. Breaching dams may not restore the salmon runs. We are grasping for something to do. Fish passage is not the question it was even five years ago. The Corps has done everything we have asked to maximize survivability of smolt going downriver. Increased spill, yes. By-pass structures, yes. Releases from Dworshak to cool the pools, yes. We now critique the increased time for smolt from Idaho to transit the slack pools to the Columbia bar. Upstream passage has not been an issue for years. Fish ladders work predictably for adult salmon. There just are not enough salmon returning. We ratepayers via the Bonneville Power Administration have spent billions restoring habitat. We thought it was effective but apparently not effective enough.

Breaching the dams is a little like looking under the street lamp for your lost keys. We can do something about the dams. We

GUEST VIEW
Don Schwerin



cannot do much about climate change and its effect on ocean conditions for the salmon. The Gulf of Alaska is getting warmer and more acidic as its surface waters absorb excess carbon dioxide. Salmon runs up and down the coast are stressed regardless of whether they are dammed. The Snake run happens to be among the most stressed.

Being honest means acknowledging that removing the dams is not sufficient to restore the salmon. Being honest also means that we are not quite sure why dam removal is necessary but it is what we can do.

Why disable perfectly good dams? Good question, but the wrong one. The question is that when the courts remove the dams — because the salmon are listed under Endangered Species Act and are not surviving — what will we have? No one will stand in line to bail us out. We will not have a functioning alternative to barging. Power security may be iffy. The Port of Lewiston walks away from its seaport investment. Ice Harbor irrigators look to the banks to finance reconfiguring their intakes. This is what the Berk Consulting group this week called the "Litigation Risk: dam removal without commensurate investment."

The same scenario plays out if shifting political winds beat the courts to it. We came close to political preemption when the survival of the orcas was laid on removal of the Lower Snake River dams. Will the next generation of statewide political leaders show the same deference to local sentiment? The future of the Lower Snake River dams rides more on the impatience of Puget Sound voters than on the stubbornness of eastern Washington politicians.

The logic of the Simpson Plan is to take the cost out of losing the dams. The Plan is not calling for our hearts and souls. It is a cool-headed proposal to use federal dollars to fund a smart strategic plan.

Don Schwerin chairs the Ag and Rural Caucus of the Washington State Democratic Party. The ARC's mission is education and advocacy. The views presented here are his, not necessarily of the Democratic Party. He lives in the Blue Mountains outside Walla Walla on his continuous crop, dryland farm.