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Opinion

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Our View

The two languages of climate change

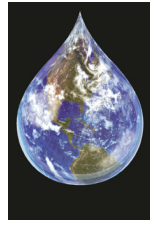
The latest update by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change contained few surprises. The average worldwide temperature will continue to creep upward. However, it will increase more slowly as the production of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane is reduced.

What is notable is not the contents of the report so much as the reactions to it. Scientists agreed that there wasn't much new in it and said so. A few pointed out the need to plan for ways to offset the impacts of a warmer planet.

Politicians, however, seemed to be leaping for the panic button. They wanted drastic action now or the end of the world was we know it would soon be at hand.

It was as though they had read two different reports and responded in two different languages.

For example, Cliff Mass, an atmospheric scientist at the University of Washington, pointed out that as the average temperature rises the snowpack in the mountains will likely decrease even as precipitation increases. The key for irrigated agriculture, he said, is to increase the amount of water storage.



"We can deal with it with more reservoir capacity," he told Capital Press reporter Don Jenkins. "We've been lazy. We've used the snowpack as a reservoir."

Such an analysis seems reasonable. We have long advocated more water storage across the West in the form of reservoirs and aquifer recharge. With smaller snowpacks likely, that only seems prudent.

"The world isn't going to end,"

he said. "The report's really quite underwhelming. It's not as hyped as the headlines."

Politicians, on the other hand, seemed to read much more into the report and responded in a different language.

"This groundbreaking report makes it clear that the extreme weather now being felt around the globe and across Washington state will look mild compared to what's ahead if we don't act," Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., said in a press release. "The next generation deserves to be able to enjoy the bliss of a Puget Sound summer day, not be trapped inside by triple-digit temperatures and smoky skies."

To their credit, scientists such as Mass are most interested in the facts and initiating a discussion of what we all can do to minimize the impact of climate change on everyone, including the farmers and ranchers

who produce our food.

And the politicians? Well, they have their reasons to go to their grab bag of hyperbole to promote drastic measures and push through political agendas.

Instead of addressing the major causes of climate change — such as China, which produces 28% of the world's carbon dioxide — and seeking out the best ways to cope with climate change, they want to drop everything to pursue paths that at best will only slow climate change, not stop it.

The U.S. produces 15% of the carbon dioxide and its carbon footprint is shrinking, while China's is growing.

Providing constituents with a Chicken Little version of science will not solve the problem. It will only cause more confusion, mostly among the politicians.

Our View



Holly Dillemoth/For the Capital Press

Donnie Wagner left Philomath in the Willamette Valley early Saturday morning to haul hay to Malin, Ore., where it was distributed to farmers. He was part of a #TimberUnity effort to help Klamath Basin farmers who had their water cut off in the midst of a drought.

Farm people help their neighbors

Farmers and ranchers have a long history of helping neighbors in need, so it wasn't surprising last weekend to see a convoy of trucks roll into Oregon's Klamath County loaded with hay for stockmen whose own feed supplies have withered for lack of water.

No better tradition exists in rural America, and all those involved in the effort deserve a hand.

Farmers in the Klamath Basin have been hit by a double whammy this season. Already suffering from severe drought, their situation became dire when the Bureau of Reclamation shut off water to the Klamath Project, a sprawling irrigation system that serves 200,000 acres of farmland in Southern Oregon and Northern California.

The effort was organized by #TimberUnity. The trucks carried more than 170 tons of feed. Another convoy on July 24 delivered nearly 2 tons of feed.

"These are our farmers, and they need help," said Tasha Webb, #TimberUnity secretary and chair of the group's disaster relief committee. "The donations have just been amazing."

Along with hay for ranchers, Webb said #TimberUnity began collecting donations for victims of the Bootleg Fire on July 24.

The group distributed 78 Blue Barrels in 40 communities, where people could drop off things like camping equipment, rubber boots, generators and batteries.

Webb said they have teamed up with the Cascade Relief Team to collect the barrels and bring donations to the Bly Fire Department, where a resource center was established for victims.

Last year, farmers in the Klamath Basin sent 170 tons of hay north to help Willamette Valley producers who were scrambling to house and feed animals displaced by massive wildfires.

This story should be a tonic to readers who are regular consumers of the nation's media and who feel that they have been bombarded by little else but bad news in recent months. But again, this kind of effort is nothing out of the ordinary in the ag community.

It's what farm people do.

Lawmakers take break, but key dairy issues await their return

It's that time of year for members of Congress to head home to their districts, take tours and talk to constituents. It gives lawmakers a chance to take the pulse of what is happening back home after being in the D.C. bubble nearly every week since January.

While lawmakers will be busy crisscrossing their districts this month — including visits to farms, hopefully — a number of dairy-related items will be waiting for their return to Washington.

First and foremost, Congress must pass an appropriations bill by Sept. 30 to fund the government for the 2022 fiscal year, which begins on Oct. 1. This is always a contentious battle over the price tag and what "policy riders," or unrelated provisions that change policy, should be included. These funding bills are generally split into 12 smaller subcommittee bills and eventually packaged together when they go to a full House vote.

While the Senate has just begun considering funding bills, the House has finished a package of seven subcommittee bills and passed two others separately, completing the majority of the appropriations bills.

The "Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies" funding bill was part of the package that passed the House. The bill would boost the funding for USDA, the Food and Drug Administration and related agencies by around 10% from fiscal year 2021. Also included in the bill report is language directing FDA "to provide clarity around the labeling of plant-based foods that use traditional meat, dairy, and egg terminology." Edge supports this language and hopes to see the Biden administration address the issue of rampant mislabeling of dairy imitation products that would never be tolerated in other

GUEST VIEW
Mykel Wedig



food sectors.

With workforce top of mind for most of our members, Edge was happy to see a provision included in another House appropriations bill that would allow year-round employees to access H-2A visas. It was included in the bill that funds the Department of Homeland Security. The provision was added as an amendment in committee and was included in the final House version.

Many members of Congress oppose making any changes to the H-2A program without also addressing employment conditions for visa holders. Regardless, it is positive to see movement on the H-2A issue while the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, a bill Edge strongly supports, is halted for further discussions in the Senate.

To end with some even better news, a recently implemented FDA rule would amend yogurt's standard of identity — something the yogurt industry has been seeking for more than two decades. The new legal definition states that cream, milk, partially skimmed milk, skim milk and the reconstituted versions of these ingredients may be used alone or in combination as the basic dairy ingredients in yogurt.

It goes on to specify which other additives and levels of cultures are acceptable. Edge applauds this move and looks forward to FDA continuing the process of updating the standards of identity of other dairy products.

Mykel Wedig is associate director of government affairs at the Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative, based in Green Bay, Wis. It is one of the top cooperatives in the country based on milk volume.

Vaccine skepticism isn't a rural/urban issue

Last week, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown reinstated the mandate that Oregonians must wear masks in public spaces to halt the spread of the COVID Delta variant that threatens to overwhelm hospitals in some areas.

In announcing the mandate, Brown singled out rural elected officials for not taking steps to curb the spread of the virus.

"I expected local elected officials to step up and do the right

thing," Brown said. "What is clear is they are not taking action. That is why we are moving forward."

Brown has misjudged many local officials who have refused to institute their own mask mandates. They did take action in the interest of their constituents — just not in the way preferred by the governor. Whether they made the right choice will never be known because Brown has

made the opposite decision for them.

It is also wrong to suggest that vaccination resistance is found mostly in rural areas, or that it is the result of misinformation or misguided ideology.

It is true when measured as a percentage, the rates of COVID vaccination are lower in Oregon's rural counties than the urban counties. It is also true that many rural communities, particularly in the east, are more

openly resistant to Salem's mandates. But, by sheer numbers, the bulk of the state's unvaccinated adults live in more urban areas.

Our combing of state data shows that more than half of unvaccinated adults — 56% — live in the state's five most populous, and most liberal, counties. That suggests to us that deciding not to get a COVID shot is more of a matter of personal choice than an ideological statement.

We have said at the outset that people who are able should get vaccinated. While we respect the right of informed adults to weigh their own options and decide what is right for themselves, we think the vaccine is the best option.

Turning COVID vaccinations into a right/left, rural/urban battle is a mistake — one that will only harden the resolve of many who are yet to be vaccinated.