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Our View

Food Prize winner creates better understanding of climate change

When Cynthia Rosenzweig first started studying climate change in the 1980s, few people outside the academic and research communities had ever heard of it. While the global climate has always changed, greenhouse gases emitted by human activities were accelerating it.

But she took a unique tack in her studies of the climate. Not only did she and others want to learn about climate change's causes, she also wanted to know: How will it impact agriculture?

The answer: It's complicated. As regional temperatures and precipitation change, farmers must adapt. Crops that might have thrived in one region 100 years ago may no longer be viable there.

In more than three decades of putting together the puzzle pieces, Rosenzweig, a scientist at NASA, has also found warning signs and, interestingly, encouragement.

"I refuse to be pessimistic about climate change," she told an interviewer from the Small Planet Insti-



Cynthia Rosenzweig

holds a Ph.D. in agronomy, has been working to understand how agriculture can adapt to a changing climate — and how it can reduce greenhouse gases.

"Trees store large amounts of carbon above ground, whereas crops can help to restore carbon to the soil through practices such as no-till and cover cropping," she said in the interview. "...So let's reward farmers for storing carbon, because it helps to reduce soil erosion and to reduce the effects of climate extremes..."

Devising a system that pays farmers for soil carbon sequestration would represent a quantum leap in the right direction, she said in the interview.

For her work, Rosenzweig received the World Food Prize last

tute in 2008. "It is simultaneously the significant environmental challenge of our time and future generations, and it is the issue that is leading us into sustainability."

week. For those who are not familiar with it, in agriculture, the prize is comparable to the Oscar, Emmy, Pulitzer and Nobel prizes all in one package.

The founder of the prize was Norman Borlaug. He was a 1970 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for his work to spark the "Green Revolution" and dramatically increase the yields of wheat, corn and other crops during a time when many critics were sure the world was overpopulated.

Through her work, Rosenzweig is helping scientists — and farmers — understand climate change. While politicians and others may claim the sky is falling, farmers must find a way to feed more than 7 billion people on the planet without exacerbating climate change.

How they can increase food production and reduce their carbon footprints are two of many questions Rosenzweig is helping to answer.

But she goes at it differently. Take "climate deniers," for example. While some people dismiss any climate change questions out of hand, she welcomes skeptics.

"I'm a working scientist and there are always questions, always uncertainties. ... When we learn something new, that opens up 10 things we don't know. So, I welcome questions. I think it's important to be honest that we don't know everything about climate change, and that we have to keep learning," she said in the interview. "That being said, we certainly know enough about climate change to be sure that it is the significant environmental, planetary issue of our time, and that we have to deal with it even though we don't understand it completely."

She also goes beyond research.

Rosenzweig and the Agricultural Model Intercomparison and Improvement Project she helped start have been working with farmers around the world to decrease their carbon emissions and better withstand droughts, among other climate-related problems.

She is one of those researchers who have put their knowledge to work for the benefit of us all.

Our View

In Washington, green energy threatens sage grouse

When environmental priorities collide, advocates for wildlife and "green" energy often find themselves on opposing sides. But a proposed solar project in north-central Washington has various factions within state government arguing opposing positions.

What could be more entertaining than a clash of environmental titans?

A Spanish company plans to build a 2,390-acre solar farm on Badger Mountain in north-central Washington near East Wenatchee. That fits with Gov. Jay Inslee's climate priorities. The governor has made climate change a focus of his administration, and his policy initiatives encourage the construction of solar farms.

The proposed building site for the 200-megawatt facility is mostly unirrigated farmland, and perfect for a solar facility. The company would lease the land from private landowners and the Department of Natural Resources.

But here's the rub: Badger Mountain is in Douglas County, the greater sage grouse's "last stronghold" in the state, according to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

"It's their last stronghold, and it ain't much of one," Michael Ritter, Fish and Wildlife's lead on solar and wind projects, said. "You don't know how the disturbance will change the landscape."

The department has dug in its heels. Supported by environmental groups, it has spotlighted the threat to the greater sage grouse. The bird is not federally protected, but Fish and Wildlife lists it

as an endangered state species.

It told the state's Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council recently that no new studies performed by the company will change its mind.

Meanwhile, the state Attorney General's Office has been assigned to represent the environment — all of it. Counsel for the environment warns that not building the solar plant could

worsen climate change.

In effect, the Attorney General's Office is arguing that to save the sage grouse from the impacts of climate change, sage grouse in Washington must be imperiled by the solar facility. Washington has to destroy the sage grouse to save the sage grouse — a winning strategy every time it's been tried.

Ironically, that office joined 16 other Democrat attorneys

general in a lawsuit to block a plan to ease land-use restrictions that protect sage grouse that was proposed by the Trump administration.

Does it matter to the sage grouse for what purpose they are endangered?

Farmers and ranchers may have little sympathy for the plight of sage grouse in Washington. The plucky little bird has often been used by environmentalists to restrict grazing and other farming operations.

Now, it's expendable.

Once upon a time it was important to save farmland, but that was before certain factions decided it was more important to build wind turbines and solar cells in pastures and fields. Now, the sage grouse may also have to yield to transient political objectives.

When environmental priorities collide, something has to give.



Greater sage grouse.

Jeanne Stafford/USFWS

Packers, allies urge Congress to do nothing about broken cattle markets

Large beef packers and their allies are fighting to hold Congress at bay — to prevent any meaningful reforms to the broken cattle market.

This isn't a new fight as they've successfully held Congress at bay for decades. Throughout the 2000s they blocked legislation to ban packer ownership of livestock, require minimum purchases in the negotiated cash market, ban unpriced contracts known as formula contracts or alternative marketing arrangements; and seven years ago, they spurred the repeal of mandatory country of origin labeling.

In the 2010s, they successfully blocked the finalization of rules to implement the Packers and Stockyards Act — the act passed in 1921 to protect independent livestock producers from unfair, deceptive or unjustly discriminatory buying practices.

The large beef packers' political prowess is now legendary. They've ruled with iron fists over the cattle and beef industries for decades and ensured the legal and regulatory framework within which they operate continually furthers their self-interests.

But today's political landscape is very different than in the past, largely because Congress, the executive branch, and the public now realize that the self-interests of the largest beef packers have led to the exploitation of independent cattle producers on one side of the supply chain and consumers on the other. Beef shortages at the grocery store, super-inflated beef prices, and a cattle market unresponsive to historically favorable beef demand and beef exports reveal that exploitation. Where before evidence of market failure was regarded by some as equivocal, today the evidence is undoubtably definitive.

And yet, the beef packers and their allies continue to advance the same tired arguments they used to bring the cattle and beef industries to the brink of disaster as they're using now to keep it on its destructive course.

The beef packers' trade association argued to Congress that "free market supply and demand fundamentals are at work. Let them keep working." It contends beef prices are high because of exceptional beef demand and cattle prices are low because there's an oversupply of cattle — more cattle to be slaughtered than there is packing capacity to slaughter them.

In chorus, their allied industry pundits are grabbing the microphones. Land grant universities, long the beneficiaries of beef packer endowments, are generating new studies using old data showing the cattle market is

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functioning superbly under the law of supply and demand; and are urging Congress to do nothing or risk some nondescript unintended consequence.

The Grassley-Tester bill (Senate Bill 949) requires packers to purchase at least 50% of their cattle in the negotiated cash market.

Critics, however, claim an inverse relationship between increased cash volume purchases and cattle prices.

S.949 is the beef packers' kryptonite. They fear it because it throws a barricade across the packer's road to vertical integration — it impedes their goal of substituting competitive market forces with their own corporate control over the entire supply chain.

Let's unpack the status-quo gang's major arguments. If it's true that despite strong beef demand and increasing exports, cattle prices have nevertheless remained depressed for the past seven years because of insufficient packing capacity, then whose fault is that? Who owns the shuttered plants and plants that haven't been modernized for years?

We allege in our class-action anti-trust lawsuit that the Big 4 packers conspired to depress cattle prices by agreeing to periodically reduce slaughter volumes to ensure the demand for cattle did not exceed the available supply.

And what of critics' claim of no confirming data and an inverse relationship between cash purchase volumes and cattle prices? Well, findings in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's report, "Investigation of Beef Packers' Use of Alternative Marketing Arrangements," reveal that when the cash market volume was only about 40%, the packers' use of alternative marketing arrangements already depressed fed cattle prices by as much as \$33.28 per head.

If you're a cattle producer or a beef eater, then Congress needs to hear from you that you want them to take decisive action to fix the broken cattle market. If you remain silent, the status-quo gang is certain to win again. Tell Congress to restore competitive market forces in the cattle supply chain, which it can do by enacting the mandatory country of origin labeling bill, S.2716, and the force-the-packers-to-compete bill, S.949.

Bill Bullard is the CEO of R-CALF USA, the nation's largest nonprofit trade association exclusively representing the U.S. cattle industry.