

Quick takes

Farmers Market comes home

As a retailer for 35 years on Main, I believe the farmers market should be moved to the large parking lot at the end of Main. Don't close off our customer parking.

— Sam Loftus

I think having the farmers market on Main Street is a good thing. As a business owner, the community needs this activity.

— Kathy McClure

Depot handover in 2017

Just lucky if you don't live in Irrigon and have to listen to the National Guard night and day when they are out there. Whoever thought it was a good idea to put them as close to a town as they could is a fool. Windows literally rattle!

— Linda Cole

Plute packs up

This is not a good thing, money leaving a town is never good. That kind of money is very hard to replace.

— Sam Smith

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

Farmers Market happy to be back on Main

The Pendleton Farmers Market board is happy to announce that the market will return to the 300 block of Main Street when the season opens May 6.

The board would like to thank the city for listening to our concerns and working with us to reach an agreement for the Market to remain in the heart of the city, where it has operated the past 13 years. The city has graciously offered use of the 400 block as needed for overflow during the busiest weeks of the season.

The board also appreciates the Main Street store owners for accepting a little disruption on Friday evenings so market patrons can enjoy locally grown vegetables and fruit, homemade crafts, music and community camaraderie in a wonderful environment.

The market will work hard to be good neighbors, and we hope our patrons will show their appreciation to the Main Street businesses as well.

During the last few tumultuous days as the Market

considered its future, one thing became clear: Most vendors, market patrons and downtown store owners believe downtown is the best place for the Farmers Market.

Our board wholeheartedly agrees. We received many suggestions on other potential locations and on how to change the market layout downtown. The board appreciates the concern and input, and I want to explain why the market will look much the same, with a few modifications.

The 300 block of Main is ideal for the market because it provides good shade, especially on the west side. That's important to our vendors who want to provide the freshest produce possible.

That's also why we work to accommodate our vendors as much as possible who want to keep their produce protected in their trucks and restock their tables as needed.

Asking our larger produce vendors to unload their entire stock would take more time (the street would need to close

earlier), cause a hardship for many vendors, and on particularly hot days degrade their product.

The market will work to keep large trucks away from storefronts that are open during the market while taking advantage of spots where buildings are empty, closed or the owners have provided permission.

Another common suggestion is to use a so-called "Round-Up layout," where the vendors are all in the center of the street and patrons walk on both sides. This is impractical.

First, it would require at least two blocks to string all our vendors from both sides of the street in one long center row. It would hinder access in case of an emergency.

It also would negate the shade provided on the west side

of the street — in the height of the summer the center and east side of the street are in the sun much of the market.

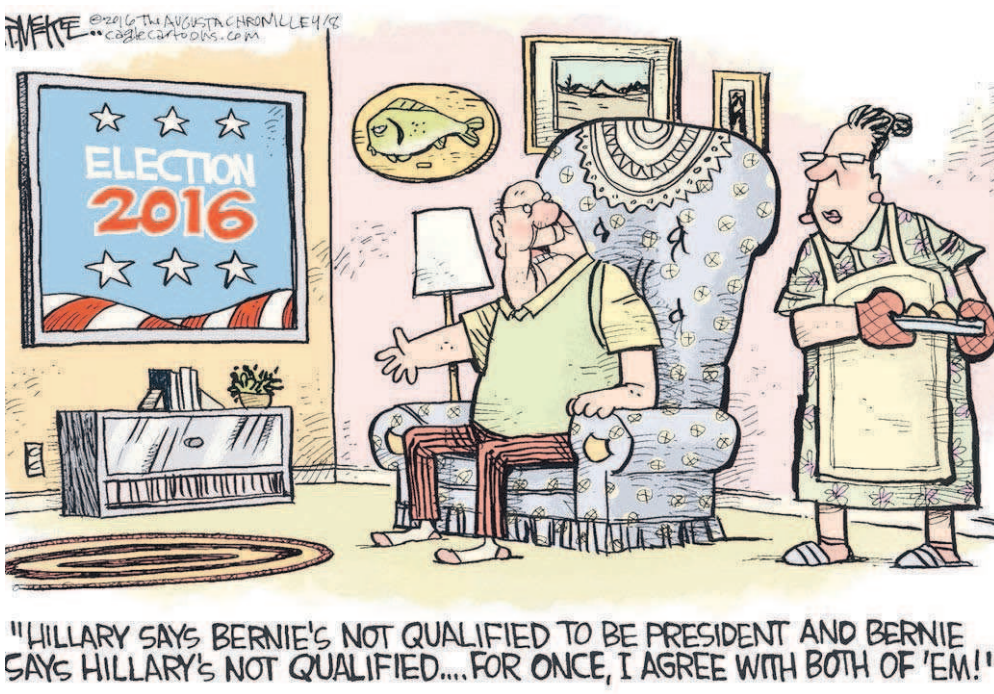
More importantly, it would detract from the open-market atmosphere that allows patrons to see all the offerings in one trip down the block, and have the space to visit with friends and neighbors.

It's been gratifying to see in recent weeks how passionate people are about their Farmers Market. While controversy can be unpleasant, it does help clarify what's important. Thanks to all involved in securing the Farmers Market Main Street home for another season. See you May 6!

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Mary Ann McCune is president of the Pendleton Farmers Market.

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Meet Eusebio, my best friend

Being a horseman — here defined as anyone who likes to sit with a horse and drink a beer — the other day a Scientific American article got my attention, "The secret lives of horses: Why they're more like humans than you'd ever imagine. New research reveals how sophisticated equines really are." Which, of course, got me tearing and comparing.

Eusebio is a registered Spanish mustang, more accurately described as a Spanish barb, horses that are genetically proven direct descendants of the horses brought to the New World by the early Spaniards. These horses are not to be confused with the feral horses of unknown mixed breeding managed by the Bureau of Land Management, horses that are vastly different in appearance, ancestry and behavior. Or the loose grade horses on the slopes of the Blue Mountains here on the Umatilla Indian reservation, the original home of the Cayuse Indians, America's leading Indian horsemasters.

Referring to the strength of Indian ponies, in 1867 a U.S. cavalry commander in the Dakotas wrote: "The movement of Indian horseman is lighter, swifter, and longer range than that of our cavalry, which means that they always get away from us."

Later, for well over a century, in Western America horses like Eusebio were called a "Cayuse."

But beyond the study of feral horses in the article mentioned above, there's research about human/horse interactions. A 2015 British study of equine communicative behavior revealed that horses have a highly evolved facial musculature with 17 expressions, similar to our 27, that convey a wide range of emotions and information. Meaning, horses can read us like a dime novel.

Another similarity: Just like dogs and us, horses simply like to work, to learn a new skill, and be appreciated as essential to getting the job done.

For example, for several years Eusebio (or Himself, as he's known) was a traditional participant at Umatilla tribal picnics where he gave hundreds of pony rides. And as he grew older, he became the Dutch uncle some children occasionally needed. Because he knew that it was his work to walk those kids out and back, safely.

A true story: At an Indian church picnic up in the Blue Mountains a young girl got crazy happy after her ride and began to run in circles around us. After a couple of rounds Eusebio calmly reached out to her head and shook it with his lips and mouth. I said, "Young lady,



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Comment



Submitted photo by Tom Hebert
Eusebio gets an up-close inspection from an admirer.

you understand you don't run around horses?" The chastened child: yes, yes!

Then, at a later CTUIR community picnic, when it was time for my hamburger I dropped reins and left to eat. Returning, at about 100 feet away I saw three young girls sitting almost underneath him. And they, amidst an acre of grass, were all feeding him leaves of grass, one at a time! As I got closer, I watched as one young thing placed a handful of grass on her head for him to eat. Which, of course, he did. In his work, children come first.

At yet another community picnic, a young boy was frightened upon meeting his first horse up close and personal. So, with his mother working to soothe him, I lifted the child onto the saddle, still crying. Whereupon Himself reached around and with his lips, took the boy's leg and softly held it until the boy realized that all was well, that an adult was in charge.

There's more. Being a male, he likes some women more than others. He is also a party animal, totally different from the sour Winnie-the-Pooh's donkey Eeyore we know around the ranch. At any outdoor gathering he wanders around, stopping to eat grass between folks' legs, just chillin' out.

Another instance of interspecies communication: After several years as guests at an annual competition in Waitsburg for cast iron cooks, he and the hostess became chums. One Sunday afternoon he walked up behind a seated Lynn and with his lips lightly squeezed the very top of her head. And then walked away to see if he could grab a potted flower before I got there. As an annual event at following cook-offs, Lynn would sit herself down in the middle of the yard and, slightly cringing, wait for him to pay his respects, take ownership of her or whatever, while the rest of us cheered.

Again, beyond the research above, there is not much of a "secret life" about Eusebio. He's just Himself — he simply likes to hang with us humans. Why? Because we're all mammals, more alike than different.

Since 2001 Eusebio has been one of my best friends. During several hundred rides pushing cows, many trips to the ocean and one to Canada, backcountry trail clearing all over the region, many parades, even horse racing, he has never let me down. And on a couple occasions when other horses might have berserked, he saved my life. Anonymous said: "Show me your horse and I will tell you what you are." I wish.

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Tom Hebert is a writer and public policy consultant living on the Reservation.

Ranchers and skilled herders make a great team

By SHARON O'TOOLE
Writers on the Range

A lot of criticism is heard these days about immigrant labor. Even as agriculturalists are being exhorted to double the world's food supply to feed a projected population of more than 10 billion human beings, livestock growers — especially grazers — are blamed for everything from contributing to climate change to exploiting immigrant labor.

Yet smart natural resource management benefits soils, plants, wildlife and people. So, as someone who has spent many years as a sheepherder, I want to cast some light on the issue of foreign herders, rather than turn up the heat.

For three years, my husband and I practiced the "world's second-oldest profession" — herding our sheep ourselves. We rose before dawn, made sure the animals had access to feed and water, rode around the flock to set the day's perimeter for rotational grazing, and tried to fend off predators. We partnered with our border collies, livestock guardian dogs, and reliable horses. In the summer, we rode out on horseback at first light. When the heat of the day settled in, the ewes and lambs napped until evening brought cool, and we napped, too. In the short winter days when snow covered the ground, we'd feed corn and extra hay to the pregnant ewes.

It was, and is, a vocation that follows the seasons, the sun and the moon, and the weather. It was, and is, a satisfying life. We still produce food and fiber with sheep, though these days our responsibilities include running a complicated ranch. I tell people, "We raise sheep, cattle, horses, dogs and children."

Our livelihood depends upon skilled sheepherders. They live much as we did, in sheep wagons that are moved on a regular basis, always following the seasons and the grass. They usually lack electricity and running water, but the wagons are nicer than they were in our day. They come with solar panels, DVD players and cellphones. Still, it is mostly a solitary life.

Our sheepherders come from Peru on H-2A visas, which allow them to live and work for three consecutive years. As non-immigrant employees, they must go home for at least three months before returning to the U.S. Most of our shepherds fulfill their three-year contracts and often return for many contracts. Many have children, and choose to leave home in order to provide an education and a better life for their families. In Peru, alternative jobs mostly involve mining under dangerous conditions, or working on the road crews that build access to Peruvian ports for the Chinese.

Herding sheep is a job that virtually no American citizen wants to do. A worker shortage in almost all agricultural production jobs has been the norm since the post-World War II years. The process to acquire the H-2A visas for these non-immigrant legal workers is so Byzantine that it costs the employer around \$4,000 and the prospective employee around \$1,000 just to get started.

The employee must be experienced and skilled in livestock handling. The employer must provide room, board, basic necessities, workers' compensation insurance, and travel to and from the home country. The wages are set by the Department of Labor.

Several groups, mostly with legal backgrounds, have made sheepherder visas their "cause célèbre." They accuse ranchers like us of being slavers, and seek out disgruntled former herders, some of them now illegal, to file complaints. They cite one ranch that has been notorious for abusing employees and characterize that as the norm. But remember: Herders are in the United States legally. They work under the protection of the law.

Recently, the Department of Labor enacted broad changes to rules and regulations. It mandated higher wages that come to around \$1,200 per month before benefits. Most growers already paid wages higher than the previous minimum of \$750. Now the Labor Department is slow-tracking visas, jeopardizing livestock and crops, farms and ranches, and the workers, stuck in limbo without jobs.

Groups like "Toward Justice" have filed a steady stream of lawsuits, but ironically, those involved in the litigation industry against employers have come full circle. Their allies include extremists who wish to remove all grazers from the landscape and those on the far right who want no immigrant labor at all.

Meanwhile, it seems that every category of food production is being attacked through public-relations campaigns and lawsuits. While local food production and farmers' markets can feed some folks, every aspect of growing food involves a lot of labor — labor that most Americans have neither the time nor desire to perform.

Attacking pastoralists serves no one. The charge that it is somehow unsavory to live a remote life while doing the ancient and honorable work of tending livestock is disrespectful to those of us who have chosen this path.

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Sharon O'Toole is a contributor to Writers on the Range, an opinion service of High Country News.

For three years, my husband and I practiced the "world's second oldest profession."