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OUR VIEW

Onion growers face another food safety law challenge

Onion growers in Eastern Oregon have had quite a time trying to deal with the mandates of the Food Safety Modernization Act.

Having found a solution to one regulation that would have all but put them out of business, they now face another that could cost the industry \$200 million to implement and puts its survival in question.

The law was passed by Congress late in 2010 with the goal of mandating best safety practices for producers and processors while making it easier for regulators to trace foodborne illnesses back to their source.

To enforce the act, the Food and Drug Administration wrote 1,200 pages of proposed rules to address food safety controls for the growing, harvesting, packing and holding of produce for human consumption.

Many of the proposals were impractical and too costly. Others just weren't necessary.

For example, ag water provisions in the rules originally proposed a standard that would have been impossible for onion growers who irrigate from open ditches to meet. No approved treatment method existed, nor would it be economical if it did exist.

It would have required produce growers whose irrigation water exceeded certain thresholds for bacteria to immediately stop using it. That would have made it impossible for most people in the Treasure Valley around Ontario to grow onions.

Following an outcry, the FDA relented. Rather than limiting growers to fixing the water, the revised rules allow other mitigation options. The final rule allows growers whose water exceeds the standards to comply if they can show that bacteria dies off at a certain rate in the field.

And Oregon State University was able to show that very thing.

Now comes the issue of crates.

The FDA's rules require growers to store onions in plastic crates. The industry now uses wooden boxes — about a million of them in the Treasure Valley.

The plastic crates are smaller, holding about 900 pounds as opposed to the 1,600 pounds the boxes hold. The wooden boxes cost \$60 each, the plastic crates cost \$150. Growers say it would cost \$200 million to buy enough plastic crates to hold the crop, plus storage facilities would have to be altered to accommodate the different sized containers.

OSU has found that the change wouldn't reduce the level of contamination found in stored onions.

In a test of 10 wooden boxes of onions and 10 plastic crates of onions stored for six weeks, researchers found no difference. Because disease-causing bacteria die off on onions left in the field to cure, the common practice in the region, the onions stored in either container weren't contaminated to begin with.

We hope FDA takes note, as it did in the earlier case.

No one can argue that food shouldn't be safe, or that reasonable precautions shouldn't be taken. But Congress didn't intend to put whole segments of the food production and distribution chain out of business when it passed the act.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

Culture Corner

If Zac Brown Band's recent Pendleton visit has piqued your interest in country music that's not afraid to incorporate styles and instruments from other genres, Sturgill Simpson's third full-length album "A Sailor's Guide to Earth" could blow open your world.

Be warned, though: Simpson isn't fascinated by beer, trucks, romantic dusty roads or "girls." In this effort he uses his extraordinary talents as a singer and songwriter to prepare advice for when his "pollywog" son is ready to head out into the world.

What makes the album exceptional is Simpson's wide base of influences. It is no doubt a country album, but delivered by an artist well-versed in genres from psychedelic to soul to funk to grunge. The horn section on several of the songs elevates the energy of the album, while the slower tracks, including a cover of Nirvana's "In Bloom," show Simpson's ability to draw a listener in with more

subtle musicality.

Speaking of production, fans of music from the 1960s and '70s will find much to enjoy in Simpson's fearless sound. While some shy away from big production, Simpson embraces it to make an album with a wide variety of sound and moods. The layers reveal themselves on repeated listens, a welcome break from much of the one-trick country radio hits of today.

And right in the middle of it all is his voice, often compared to George Jones or Waylon Jennings, that delivers his stories and loving words of advice.

The album was released a week after Merle Haggard's death (Haggard was an unabashed fan of Simpson's), and in a year where we've lost so many legends it's heartening to find a classic and singular artist putting out great work.

— Daniel Wattenburger, managing editor



OTHER VIEWS

The Turkish coup that wasn't

As coups go, the Turkish effort was a study in ineptitude: No serious attempt to capture or muzzle the existing political leadership, no leader ready to step in, no communication strategy (or even awareness of social media), no ability to mobilize a critical mass within either the armed forces or society. In their place a platoon of hapless soldiers on a bridge over the Bosphorus in Istanbul and the apparently uncoordinated targeting of a few government buildings in Ankara.

It was enough for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, speaking on his cellphone's FaceTime app, to call supporters into the streets for the insurrection to fold. That Erdogan will no doubt be the chief beneficiary of this turmoil, using it to further his push for an autocratic Islamist Turkey, does not mean that he staged it. The Turkish army remains isolated from society. It is entirely plausible that a coterie of officers believed a polarized and disgruntled society would rise up once given a cue. If so, they were wrong — and the error has cost more than 260 lives.

But in Erdogan's Turkey, mystery and instability have become the coin of the realm. It is no wonder that conspiracy theories abound. Since an electoral setback in June 2015, the president has overseen a Turkey that is ever more violent. This dangerous lurch has enabled him to bounce back in a second election in November and portray himself as the anointed one averting mayhem. His attempt to blame, without any evidence, the attempted coup on Fethullah Gulen, a Muslim cleric and erstwhile ally living in Pennsylvania, forms part of a pattern of murkiness and intrigue.

Through Erdogan's fog this much seems clear: More than 35 years after the last coup, and almost two decades after the 1997 military intervention, Turks do not want a return to the seesawing military and civilian rule that characterized the country between 1960 and 1980. On the contrary, they are attached to their democratic institutions and the constitutional order. The army, a pillar of Kemal Ataturk's secular order, is weaker. Every major political party condemned the attempted coup. Whatever their growing anger against the president, Turks do not want to go backward.

A successful coup would have been a disaster. Erdogan has massive support in the Anatolian heartland, particularly among religious conservatives. Mosques all over the country were lit through the night as imams echoed the president's call for people to pour into the street. There can be little doubt that any military-controlled administration would have faced a Syria-like insurgency of Islamists and others. The blow to what is left in the Middle East of democratic institutions and the rule of law would have been devastating.

No wonder President Barack Obama and

Secretary of State John Kerry "agreed that all parties in Turkey should support the democratically elected government of Turkey, show restraint, and avoid any violence or bloodshed."

The problem is that "restraint" is not part of Erdogan's vocabulary. As Philip Gordon, a former special assistant to Obama on the Middle East, told me: "Rather than use this as an opportunity to heal divisions, Erdogan may well do the opposite: go after adversaries, limit press and other freedoms further, and accumulate even more power." Within hours, more than 2,800 military personnel had been detained and 2,745 judges removed from duty.

A prolonged crackdown on so-called "Gülenists," whoever Erdogan deems them to be, and the Kemalist "deep state" (supporters of the old secular order) is likely. An already divided society will grow more fissured. Secular Turkey will not quickly forget the cries of "Allahu akbar" echoing last night from some mosques and from crowds in the streets.

A rapid push by Erdogan to reform the constitution through a referendum and create a presidency with sweeping executive powers is possible. He now has a case to say only such powers will keep enemies at bay.

"It may well be that democracy has triumphed in Turkey only to be strangled at a slower pace," Jonathan Eyal, the international director at Britain's Royal United Services Institute, told me. There can be little doubt the expressions of support for Erdogan from western capitals came through gritted teeth.


For the Obama administration, the dilemmas of the Middle East could scarcely have been more vividly illustrated. When an Egyptian general, Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, led a coup three years ago against the democratically elected president, Mohammed Morsi, Obama did not support the democratic government, as he has now in Turkey. The administration even avoided use of the word "coup" in Egypt. In effect, the president sided with the generals in the name of order.

True, Morsi was deeply unpopular. The Egyptian coup had massive support. It was a fait accompli by the time Obama weighed in. Still, principles in the Middle East are worth little. Policy often amounts to choosing the least bad option.

In Turkey, the least bad — Erdogan's survival — has prevailed. That does not mean much worse will not follow. A failed coup does not mean democracy is the winner. In fact, the worst of this prickly autocrat may now be unleashed upon Turkey, with America and its allies able to do little about it.

■

Roger Cohen joined The New York Times in 1990. He was a foreign correspondent for more than a decade before becoming foreign editor in 2002.



ROGER COHEN
Comment

YOUR VIEWS

Local government can better oversee public land

After reading "Anti-Government Militias Threaten Us At Home" (July 2), I felt compelled to write. I suppose the label "extremist" could be considered a matter of definition. But to apply the label "violent"? The only violence during the recent standoff came from government law enforcement, resulting in the death of Robert "LaVoy" Finnicum.

Some who find the Bundys' activism extreme blame hatred of Obama for their actions. In no way does the "Sagebrush Rebellion" stem from a hatred of President Barack Obama. The movement began before his entry into politics. Certain anti-government extremists have latched onto the sagebrush movement. That does not diminish the legitimate grievance behind the movement, nor the patriotic activism of most involved. Those anti-government extremists are not unlike the "professional protesters" that show up at so many liberal protests. This is not an anti-government movement. We just want to pull in the reins a bit.

As to the U.S. Forest Service and BLM needing federal law enforcement authority, local police and county sheriffs have closer ties to the land and a better understanding of its needs, as well as the needs of local communities. They

can be given additional training if needed.

It's true western states never owned the lands in question. It was stolen from them at statehood. I trust Oregon's state government to care for public lands. Look at our ocean beaches. Nearly all are public beaches. I believe Oregon will keep public land public. At the same time, responsible management can make use of the natural resources available. Revenue from these resources can help pay for managing the land. Jobs would be created for local communities. The added income would increase the tax base in those communities, further supporting the cost of land management. And visitors can still recreate as they always have.

Nobody is suggesting a wide-scale handover to the private sector. That is just not going to happen. Many involved in the cause have strong feelings on the matter. Emotions run high. They do so because many have been living in a climate of fear brought on by harassment from government agencies. Government agencies overstepping their bounds. Agencies that shouldn't even exist. Run by agents "just doing their jobs." Jobs that aren't even legit!

Edward Abbey, American anarchist, environmentalist and novelist, said, "A patriot must always be ready to defend his country against his government."

Randy Piper
Arlington

LETTERS POLICY

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