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OUR VIEW

The most important niche

Ten years ago, the word “niche” occasionally came up in conversations — usually those about foreign words no one could define.

Today, niche is a common term. It describes how businesses carve out a small portion of a market as a specialty. Especially in agriculture, farmers, ranchers, processors and retailers all seem to be looking for just the right niche. Especially for small-scale operations, a niche is an important part of any business plan. No small farm or processor could ever produce the same crop or product as a large one and hope to compete. The economies of scale are always on the side of the big guys.

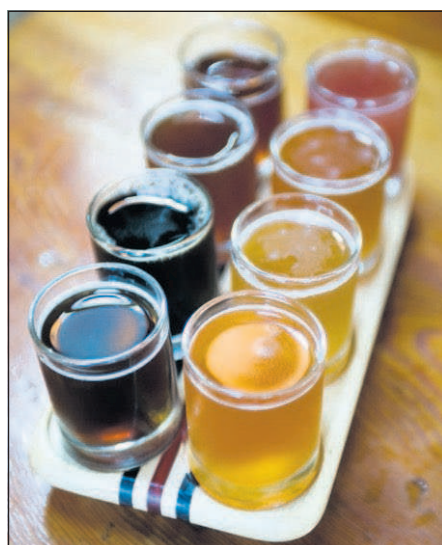
But if the right niche can be carved out, size doesn't matter. In fact, in the case of many niches, small is better.

Microbreweries are a perfect example of how niches work. Every consumer knows the large players among breweries. They produce such international brands as Budweiser, Miller and Coors, which they sell by the truckload.

A microbrewery, however, is selling more than good beer in large quantities. It's selling a much smaller amount of many unique beers. Beers can have unusual flavors such as berries, honey, chocolate and vanilla. These and others are added to styles such as pale ales, pilsners, porters, stouts, lagers and hefeweizens.

A recent stroll through a neighborhood supermarket found 142 distinct types and styles of microbrews for sale in addition to the mainstream brands.

This creates the triple benefits of allowing small breweries to survive — and even thrive — in a world of brewing goliaths. At the same time, the added niches generate demand for different types of ingredients such as hops and barley, benefiting farmers. And finally, the proliferation of microbreweries benefits large brewers, too, as consumers will also try their many types of beers.



EO Media Group File

When it comes to micro-breweries, the more choices, the better. The proliferation of niches allows small and large farmers, ranchers and processors to flourish.

That same principle is being applied to nearly every sector of agriculture. Whether it's meats, vegetables, nursery stock or even Christmas trees, growers, marketers and retailers are carving out niches for their crops.

One type of niche is certifications such as organic, biodynamic and salmon safe. Other niches are kosher, halal, local, artisan and hand-made. Others are gluten-free, vegan, GMO-free, grass-fed and everyone's favorite, sustainable. How crops are sold is also a niche. CSAs, U-pick, roadside stands, niche grocery stores and even meals-in-a-box are all gaining popularity.

All of which is good, and provides consumers with many choices, depending on their preferences and how much they can afford to spend.

Which brings us to another niche, the largest of all. It's the niche filled by the vast majority of farmers and ranchers, who provide Americans — and much of the world — with healthy, plentiful and affordable food.

It is a niche that none of us could do without.

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.

OTHER VIEWS

Modernize flood insurance

The Times and Democrat of Orangeburg, South Carolina

Two years ago, a tropical system was in part responsible for record flooding in region that followed more than 20 inches of rain in some localities. In 2016, the early autumn brought Hurricane Matthew, and while damage here was more from wind than rain, flooding was still a factor.

As is being shown again with Hurricane Harvey in Texas, flooding is a huge threat to people and property. And every time there is flooding, there is the painful outcry from some that they did not know their homes and property were not covered by insurance for flood losses.

Flood insurance is separate from a homeowner's policy and varies in cost by the location. The more flood-prone a place, the higher the cost.

But this hurricane season, flood insurance itself is at risk.

Flood insurance for millions will soon dry up if Congress fails to fix the federal program responsible for paying their claims, writes Joshua Saks, legislative director of the National Wildlife Federation.

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), which serves as the first line of defense against flood damage for more than 5 million policyholders nationwide, is \$25 billion in debt and struggling to remain viable. The program is in need of reform, and the deadline is rapidly approaching for Congress to renew the program before it expires at the end of September.

Repairing the NFIP is imperative for the policyholders it serves, especially since severe floods are becoming increasingly unpredictable, dangerous and deadly. Thankfully, there are several steps that lawmakers can take to cement the program's long-term viability and benefit policyholders and taxpayers alike. Saks cites the steps:

- Create an opportunity for more private flood insurers to enter the marketplace. Currently, the flood

insurance program does not do enough to bolster competition. Doing so would result in lower rates and better coverage for consumers, making rebuilding easier.

- The House Financial Services Committee recently took an important step toward achieving this goal by passing a series of bills to reauthorize and reform the program, including bipartisan legislation aimed at providing private insurers an opportunity to enter the flood insurance marketplace. The Flood Insurance Market Parity Act will encourage the development of a private flood insurance market while giving states the right to regulate flood insurance.

- Make other reforms that will help solidify the NFIP's long-term success. One of these is to ensure that the most accurate risk-assessment tools, as well as modern technology, are being used to update flood maps. This will help lift the burden off of property owners for determining their own flood risks, and will give more flexibility to the NFIP and private insurers to offer rates that reflect the risk that a property faces.

- Enhance storm-mitigation efforts. This will go a long way toward making communities more resilient and better able to withstand major storms. Financial assistance should be made available to low-income property owners to assist them with strengthening their property. Offering incentives, such as reduced insurance rates, will also encourage proactive measures that will prevent damage and save lives while reducing recovery costs.

- Strengthen infrastructure and update building codes. Studies show that every \$1 spent on mitigation efforts leads to \$4 in reduced future disaster costs. Taking proactive mitigation efforts would not only save lives, but would prevent costly property damage in the future.

Congress is taking steps to make many of these reforms, but as Saks points out, time is running to pass comprehensive legislation. Without action, Americans may be unable to recover following the next disaster.



OTHER VIEWS

Trump vs. the filibuster

President Trump brings an outsider's perspective to the long debate over the Senate filibuster. An overwhelming majority of the Senate disagrees with his desire to kill the filibuster, which means he doesn't have a prayer of winning. But he's not entirely wrong, either.

Set aside Trump's sledgehammer tweets directed at Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. In private conversations, Trump has made a reasonable and sophisticated case against the filibuster. Not only has the filibuster been eliminated for appointments, Trump has noted, it has also been eliminated (through the process of reconciliation) for some of the most important things the Senate does — that is, for the budget and related bills it passes each year. So now, after all those changes, what remains of the filibuster is somehow supposed to be sacred and can never be changed again?

Trump's question not only recognizes the reality of former Majority Leader's Harry Reid's nuclear-option destruction of the filibuster for appointments, and McConnell's extension of that to Supreme Court nominations. It also takes into account the reality of reconciliation, by which, a generation ago, the Senate killed the filibuster for budget-related bills, allowing those measures to pass on a simple majority vote. In other words, the filibuster has been steadily whittled down — by the Senate itself, of course, and not by a headstrong president — so why can't the Senate do it again?

Trump doesn't have the slightest chance, of course. In May, when the president called for an end to the filibuster, McConnell said, “There is an overwhelming majority on a bipartisan basis not interested in changing the way the Senate operates on the legislative calendar. And that will not happen.”

In return, Trump has railed against McConnell and Senate tradition. Recently the president tweeted, “If Senate Republicans don't get rid of the Filibuster Rule and go to a 51 percent majority, few bills will be passed. 8 Dems control the Senate!” A month ago, Trump tweeted, “The very outdated filibuster rule must go. Budget reconciliation is killing Rs in the Senate. Mitch M, go to 51 votes NOW and WIN. IT'S TIME!”

It would be an understatement to say McConnell is not convinced, and he has essentially ended the discussion with his over-my-dead-body pronouncements.

One of the problems in the Trump-McConnell relationship is that Trump tends to treat leaders in Congress as if they are his



BYRON YORK
Comment

Stonewalled by McConnell, Trump might look for a compromise that moves him closer to his goal.

employees instead of leaders elected on their own and not beholden to the president. Plus, Congress is not only a separate branch of government, it is the first branch of government; a united Congress can remove the president, while it doesn't work the other way around. Nevertheless, Trump whacks away at some of the lawmakers he will need to pass his agenda.

One point heard often in the debate is that Trump can rail all he wants about the filibuster, but the real problem is that he couldn't get 50 Republicans to vote with him on Obamacare, and changing the filibuster rules wouldn't

change the result. That's probably not entirely accurate. The House had to craft its bill specifically to accommodate the Senate's reconciliation requirements — meaning it was shaped by the filibuster. The Senate had to craft its bill with the same considerations. Senate drafters had to leave provisions that might have gotten 50-plus votes out of the bill in order to stay within reconciliation rules. In short, the House and Senate bills were fundamentally shaped by the filibuster, and the filibuster was very much a part of Obamacare reform's defeat in the Senate.

Now, stonewalled by McConnell, Trump might look for a compromise that moves him closer to his goal. Indeed, short of fully eliminating the filibuster, Trump could propose getting rid of the 60-vote standard on motions to proceed, streamlining voting on procedural matters, and other initiatives. Those might not succeed either, but at least the president would have tried.

Hypocrisy is often at play when it comes to the filibuster; senators in the majority oppose the practice, while senators in the majority support it. But there is also a principled, consistent position on the filibuster. Veteran senators like McConnell know that while they might be in the majority now, they could be in the minority next year. They know a lot of bad bills might have become law had the filibuster not existed. So many of them protect the filibuster whether they're in charge or not.

The president is an outsider who shares none of those concerns. But that doesn't mean he doesn't have a point. The Senate has changed its rules, including those on supermajorities, many times over the years. And in the future, it might change them again — in Trump's direction.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

YOUR VIEWS

Walden has wasted his years in office — should be replaced

Oregon's mighty District 2 is the seventh largest in the nation, and makes up more than two-thirds of our entire state. Congressman Greg Walden was first elected to represent us in 1998 following 10 years in the Oregon Legislature and six years as Representative Denny Smith's chief of staff in the United States Congress.

With that kind of resume and political experience one might expect District 2 to get some kind of a return on our investment — as in a tangible benefit for us, the people whom actually live, work and raise families in the district.

I am sorry, but I don't see it. Greg Walden represents the interests of the telecommunications, pharmaceutical, insurance and fossil fuel industries.

His salary paid by us, the taxpayers, is nothing compared to the millions he has collected from out of state corporations and Washington insiders, and his voting record shows it.

Greg Walden has essentially run away from his own health care bill — which threw thousands of kids, grandparents and young mothers off the Oregon Health Plan and rewarded the super rich with massive tax cuts. But wait, there is more.

As chairman of the powerful Energy & Commerce committee he is pushing fossil

fuels infrastructure while dismissing solar and wind. At the risk of overstating the obvious, “sun and wind” is what we have.

Net neutrality is next, with hearings scheduled in September. Greg Walden's biggest donors are lined up to cash in. We will pay for content, delivery and access. No one in this district is going to benefit.

Congressman Walden, you have wasted 20 years in Washington, D.C., enriching yourself at our expense. Your tired phrase “growing the economy” actually originated with Bill Clinton in 1992. Lack of imagination and leadership are not particularly valued in the rural west — where heart and competence actually matter.

Michael Byrne
Democratic candidate,
Oregon Congressional District 2
Parkdale

Some county residents stand with George Anderson

I want to thank you, George Anderson, for your letter to the “Your Views” section of the *East Oregonian*.

You stated that the *EO* wrote an editorial having no praise for the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center or its existence.

I, like many others, am here with you, George.

Tom Harper
Hermiston

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.