

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

FDA head travels to farm country

It must have been the first time a head of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration ever visited a feedlot in Central Oregon — or anywhere else, for that matter.

But there Scott Gottlieb was, at the Barley Beef feedlot near Bend, talking about the Food Safety Modernization Act with farmers, ranchers and others. His message: Implementing the easy part of FSMA is done. “The issues we’re grappling now are hard.”

FSMA represents a sea-change in how the FDA handles food safety. Formerly, the agency concentrated on figuring out what went wrong when someone became ill from food. Seven years ago, Congress changed that role to preventing food-borne illnesses.

As FDA considered how to do that, the agency’s regulation writers got creative. Among the issues they looked at was treating irrigation water for onions, though there had never been problems in the past. Ultimately, Oregon State University researchers showed that irrigation water did not cause any bacterial contamination problems in onions. In fact, no *E. coli* was found in onions even after they were irrigated with bacteria-laden water. Researchers also found that switching from wooden to plastic onion bins would have no food safety benefit. The FDA wanted to require the change, which would have



Mateusz Perkowski/EO Media Group
Scott Gottlieb, head of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, speaks with farmers about the implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act during a recent stop at a feedlot near Bend.

cost millions of dollars and, apparently, accomplish nothing.

The issues reached a head, so to speak, when FDA regulators turned their pens to spent grains from breweries. For centuries, leftover grain from making beer has been fed to cattle with no problems. The fact the grain had been steeped in 170-degree water

apparently didn’t impress the FDA, which wanted spent grains handled the same as all animal feed, including drying and packaging them. The added cost of doing that meant the spent grains would go to landfills instead.

After brewers in Oregon and around the U.S. pointed out those senseless

requirements to members of Congress, including Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., the rules were dropped.

And all that was the easy part of FSMA? The FDA doesn’t want to saddle the fresh produce industry with burdensome unintended consequences, Gottlieb told the group at the feedlot. That sounds good.

We can only hope FDA regulation writers stick to science and not extrapolations of their imaginations as they come up with ways to keep the U.S. fresh food supply safe. They should not get extra credit for creating solutions to problems that don’t exist.

Gottlieb, who is a doctor and has worked at FDA even before becoming its top administrator last year, also faces a pile of other agriculture-related issues, including the insistence of some food manufacturers on using the term “milk” on their concoctions made from soybeans, nuts, rice and other commodities. Another issue is whether the FDA or USDA should oversee the production of meat grown in petri dishes. Ranchers favor USDA for that job.

We’re rooting for the good doctor to continue to simplify FSMA regulations and make sure they prevent food safety problems without preventing farmers, ranchers — and even brewers — from doing their jobs safely and efficiently.

YOUR VIEWS

RV parking area a downside to new fairgrounds facilities

Another county fair is in the books. The nostalgia of animal barns, Ferris wheels, elephant ears, and camping at the fair often lingers in my mind. I was nervous about the change to the new fairgrounds, but sometimes change is necessary. I see great potential in the new location. My kids love the fair, and had a great time as always.

I was quite disappointed in the camping area, though. The first year of camping at the new fairgrounds was challenging, but we understood because everything was new, and still being worked on. This year, we really thought that things would be improved. Instead, it was worse. Having no electricity or sewer is very difficult, especially in the heat. Our desire to be a part of the fair is strong enough to endure those difficult conditions, nonetheless.

However, the weed infestation covering the camping area was just too much. The weeds left thorns (goatheads) everywhere. It was impossible to take a step anywhere outside the campers without getting a shoe full of thorns. Several pairs of shoes, our new RV hose, and camper carpet will never be the same. Instead of the usual fond memories of the fair, we have flashbacks of needles and tweezers, pulling out painful thorns.

It was sad to me that more concern for the general people camping at the fair was not shown. I certainly hope that the county fair I take pride in attending will have an improved facility for camping by next year.

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OTHER VIEWS

The coming green wave

If emotions were water, and you took all the heartbreak felt by the millions who followed the plight of a starving orca whale grieving over her dead calf, you’d have a river the size of the mighty Columbia.

If anger were a volcano, and you let loose all the rage felt by people over the daily assaults on public land by the Trump administration, you’d have an eruption with the fury of Mount St. Helens.

And if just one unorganized voting segment, the 60 million bird-watchers of America, sent a unified political message this fall, you’d have a political block with more than 10 times the membership of the National Rifle Association.

A Green Wave is coming this November, the pent-up force of the most overlooked constituency in America. These independents, Teddy Roosevelt Republicans and Democrats on the sideline have been largely silent as the Trump administration has tried to destroy a century of bipartisan love of the land.

But no more. Politics, like Newton’s third law of physics, is about action and reaction. While President Donald Trump tries to prop up the dying and dirty coal industry with taxpayer subsidies, the outdoor recreation industry has been roaring along. It is a \$374-billion-a-year economy, by the government’s own calculation, and more than twice that size by private estimates.

That’s more than mining, oil, gas and logging combined. And yet, the centerpiece of a clean and growing industry is under attack by a president with a robber baron view of the natural world.

I write from the smoke-choked West, where the air quality in major cities has been worse than Beijing this month. While Trump spends his days comparing women to dogs, and tweets nonsense about rivers flowing to the sea, the biggest wildfire in California history blazes away.

After the four warmest years ever recorded, scientists have now warned that the next five will be “anomalously warm.” But Trump doesn’t even understand time zones, let alone atmospheric upheaval.

In face of these life-altering changes, Trump is drafting rules to make it easier for major polluters to drive up the earth’s temperature. While the orcas of Puget Sound are starving, Trump is trying to weaken the law that protects endangered species. And while lovers of the outdoors break visitation records at national parks and forests, Trump is removing land from protection.

This is not green goo-goo or fantasy projection. You can see and feel the energy in places ignored by the national political press.

“If D.C. comes for our public land, water or monuments



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again, they’ll have to come through me,” says Xochitl Torres Small, a Democrat with an even chance of taking a longtime Republican seat in New Mexico, in an ad showing off her political chops.

The revolt started after Trump shrunk several national monuments in the West last year — the largest rollback of public land protection in our history. Outdoor retailer Patagonia responded with a blank screen on their webpage with the words: “The President Stole Your Land.” It was the first shot in a battle that has been raging all summer.

At the big, boisterous outdoor industry’s national trade show in Denver last month, retailers who sell to the 144 million Americans who participated in an outdoor activity last year, or the 344 million overall visitors to national parks, vowed to flex some muscle in the upcoming midterm elections.

They scoffed at the absurdity of propping up coal when there are more yoga instructors in the United States than people who work to produce a filthy fuel source. They were appalled that the increasingly strange interior secretary,

Ryan Zinke, blamed everything but climate change for a summer of epic wildfires. And they promised to be heard this fall.

“We hunt and fish,” said Land Tawney, a Montanan who leads the fast-growing Backcountry Hunters and Anglers. “And we vote public lands and water.”

Only 1 in 10 voters think Americans should use more coal. And more than 80 percent of millennials, soon to

be the largest cohort of voters (if they ever turn out), believe there’s solid evidence behind these freakish manifestations of an overheated earth.

Science, a huge majority believes, is not a conspiracy. And yet, this huge majority has been ignored. These people are now ready to “put aside our differences and stand together for the places we love,” as Tawney and Yvon Chouinard, the founder of Patagonia, wrote in *The Denver Post*.

You will see it in Minnesota, where the 140,000 people who work in outdoor recreation are furious at Trump’s attempt to open a sulfide-ore copper mine near Boundary Waters Wilderness. You will see it in a half-dozen tossup congressional races in California, where the administration is mounting the biggest assault yet on public health, with its attack on emission rules.

If it’s self-interest powering the wave, such is the nature of politics. At a time of real peril for the things that most Americans love, the silent green majority has had enough.

Timothy Egan worked for 18 years as a writer for *The New York Times*, first as the *Pacific Northwest* correspondent, then as a national enterprise reporter.

