

'Undies' demonstrate a fun way to learn science

GUEST EDITORIAL

From the Capital Press

Who says soil science can't be fun?

That appears to be at least part of the thinking behind an exercise the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service organized earlier this year. In the "Soil Your Undies" Challenge, six Eastern Oregon farmers and ranchers "planted" in their fields cotton underwear, which they left in place about four months.

When they dug up the underwear, not much remained. In fact, nearly everything was gone except the elastic bands.

That's exactly what they wanted to see.

The point of the challenge was simple, if not highly entertaining. The reason the cotton deteriorated into almost nothing was that tiny microbes had dined on it. The more active microbes there were, the less cotton remained.

Massive numbers of microbes live in healthy soil — billions of them per teaspoon. They thrive on carbon — which can be found in organic matter such as cotton underwear. If adequate



Joe McElligott, who farms dryland wheat in Morrow County, Ore., participated in the "Soil Your Undies" challenge through NRCS Oregon, burying 100 percent cotton underwear in his field to test the presence of microbes in healthy soil.

amounts of organic matter are not available, the microbes go dormant. In no-till soil, microbes tend to be more active than when the soil is tilled.

Because microbial activity is an indicator of healthy soil, the challenge highlighted the fact that the microbes are doing their jobs.

Though it certainly won't replace soil tests as a way to monitor soil health, the challenge opens the door to an in-depth discussion about how farmers and ranchers can put microbes to work for them. Now that Joe McElligott and Corey Miller of Morrow County and Woody Wolfe, Joe Dawson, Alan Klages and Mark Butterfield of Wallowa County have taken the challenge, NRCS Oregon soil scientist Corey Owens hopes other farmers around the state will plant their underwear, too.

"... It's a fun way to start thinking about what's going on in the soil," Owens said.

He is "challenging" farmers and ranchers to plant their own underwear for at least 60 days, taking "before" and "after" photos. The photos and information about the farm and growing practices should then be sent via email to orinfo@nrcs.usda.gov or taken in person to any NRCS office.

But participants should be aware of a stumbling block one of the previous participants encountered. When he went back to retrieve the underwear, Butterfield couldn't find where he had planted it. The reason: one of his cows had made off with the marker.

Give guidance for end-of-life decisions

Imagine you are lying in a hospital bed unable to communicate and your loved ones are tasked with the decision in the next step of your medical care. Do they know your wishes in these possible final moments? Will you have the chance to fight for your life? Or will you be hooked to a machine to keep you alive when you would rather pass on?

Too often, the discussion about end of life care is postponed until the patient is unable to participate. Especially in unplanned, emergency situations, the decisions that need to be made

Advance Directive is a legal form that can be completed in advance to illness, injury, or unexpected decline in health. This provides direction to family, friends and health care professionals in the case of life-sustaining treatments when you are not able to communicate or decide for yourself. Unlike the POLST, this document can be both extensively detailed and also



MOUNTAIN MEDICINE

Dr. Kelsey Allen

may happen faster than we are prepared to handle. Possessing a document that explains the patient's desires in various scenarios can remove unnecessary anxiety and guilt to an already traumatizing event. Two of these documents that assist us in dire times are the POLST (Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment) and Advance Directive forms. Both forms can be extensive in the amount of scenarios and questions asked.

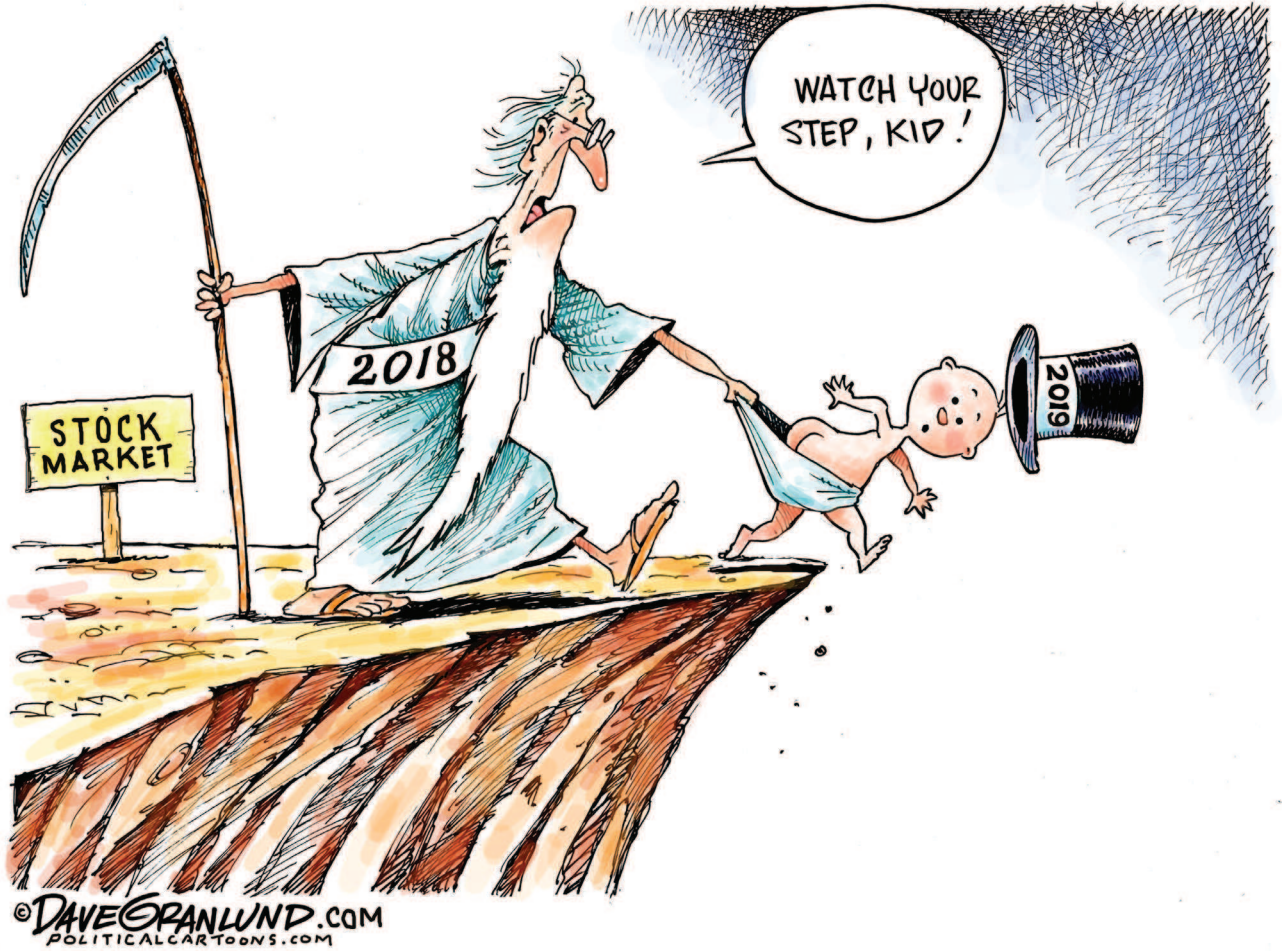
POLST forms are used by healthcare professionals to determine the type of care a patient chooses when they have been diagnosed with a serious illness that may result in death within a few years. Examples may include advanced heart, lung, liver or kidney disease or cancer, etc.... Due to the POLST being a physician order, and the complexity of your disease, a physician must assist you when completing the form. A POLST form has two main sections: CPR and medical interventions. These sections determine if you want a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) or to be placed on life support to name a few. Your physician can guide you through the vocabulary as well as help you understand completely the decisions you choose to make.

broad. This document also allows for the selection of a surrogate decision-maker (naming someone to help make decisions not listed in the document). Unlike a POLST form, this document can be completed at home so long as a witness is present and signs demonstrating that you are of sound mind. However, some of the vocabulary or scenarios may be overwhelming, so it would be wise to consult a healthcare professional for assistance.

More information, as well as the actual forms, can be found online at www.oregonpolst.org or at your healthcare professional's office.

As healthcare professionals, we understand that death can be traumatic and unexpected. We wish to provide all the support each patient and family member needs to hopefully make the experience less difficult. These forms allow us and others involved to feel some comfort in knowing that we are honoring the final wishes of loved ones who pass on.

— Mountain Medicine is a collaboration between Ron Polk and Kelsey Allen, DO, and clinical practitioners in Wallowa County. Dr. Allen is the author of today's column.



Welcoming that new year smell

One thing I sure enjoy about a new year is this new year smell. Take a whiff. Isn't that nice? So clean. Come February or early March it starts smelling like any other old year, by then we've spilled things on the upholstery and warning lights start popping up about needing service or a new head of the executive branch or whatever. But, for now, it seems OK to just hang the fresh Wallowa County Barn Tour calendar on the wall and revel in the tranquility of all those unfilled squares. So, Happy New Year.

My New Year's resolution is to not change a thing. I'm just killin' it over here. Nah, that's a holdover from last year's resolution to be overly-confident and unrealistically optimistic. More of a survival tactic than a resolution, really, but I need a coping strategy to even glance at a headline involving national or international news these days. News items involving any mention of tweets continue to rile my sense of decorum, never mind the subject. Call me old-fashioned, but I'd prefer hefty decisions or an impending global crisis to be instigated or announced by virtually any form of communication other than tweeting. Yeah, I'm old. I get it. Still working on the resolution from years ago to learn how to operate this VCR so I can watch my programs.



AND FURTHERMORE

Jon Rombach

My real resolution for 2019 is to be less frugal. Right now my favorite pair of pants don't fit. The waist is too big by a couple inches and the cuffs have to be folded up quite a ways. On the plus side, I got them at the Soroptomist thrift store, so they were a wonderful bargain. Belts were invented for a reason and, as far as I'm concerned, that reason is to hold up my cheap pants that are much too big but otherwise in great condition. Plus, all that room makes them super comfy.

I made it over to visit Rombach family headquarters for Christmas and was sporting my new favorite Soroptomist pants. My mom politely inquired what the deal was with me wearing denim clown pants, or words to that effect, so I explained all about what a great bargain they were. She nodded, then commented that I had certainly learned to appreciate the value of a dollar. Now, my mom is a very nice lady and not inclined toward being critical, but I couldn't help but suspect this compliment was a bit... strained, shall we say. And

she's probably got a point. I'm still gonna wear the pants, but maybe I'll hold off on buying more clothes in the future that don't, you know, fit or whatever.

Check this out, though. Just a couple weeks ago I experienced another Soroptomist miracle. I've been working on a house remodeling project and the bathroom fan with built-in light fixture wasn't working so good. Fiddled around for a while trying to diagnose the problem, then decided to just replace the whole thing and be done with it. Extravagant, I know. Made a note on my to-do list to buy a new fan-light combo and then went to Soroptomist to drop off some old books. Yeah, you guessed it. Twenty minutes after setting my sights on a bathroom fan with incorporated light fixture, there in the Soroptomist Home and Garden aisle — still in the box, if you can believe it — was that very item. I guess my bar for miracles might be a tad low, but it sure seemed like the ceiling tiles parted and a ray of sunlight shone down upon that fixture. Phew. Gives me chills just thinking about it.

Happy 2019. May your pants fit just right and your bathroom lights turn on when they're supposed to.

— Jon Rombach is a local columnist for the Chieftain and avid bargain hunter.

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