

**VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN**

## What are foreign investors doing with U.S. farmland?

For decades there have been concerns that foreign investors are buying up farmland in the United States.

That this is a hot-button issue for American producers and a strategic policy concern for politicians is understandable. Wealthy foreign buyers make it harder for domestic producers to compete for available farmland. Well-heeled investors of all types always push out smaller potential buyers. The thought of some foreign actor taking control of the domestic food supply is frightening.

There's no doubt that foreign investors are interested in snapping up American farmland. We are more concerned with what foreign investors are doing with the farmland they buy than we are that they are buying it in the first place.

EO Media Group reporting of U.S. Department of Agriculture data shows that in the 40 years or so that records have been kept, foreign investors have bought more than 35 million acres of U.S. farmland worth \$62 billion. In all, that's an area larger than the state of New York.

According to USDA staff, outside investments are on the rise. Filings show foreign holdings of American farmland increased by 141% between 2004 and 2019.

In 1978, Congress passed the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act, which required foreign buyers to report their transactions.

Foreign buyers have purchased 1.2 million acres of Oregon farmland — roughly 7.5% of the state's farm acreage, according to the 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture. The total is 1.5 million acres in Washington and just 122,598 acres in Idaho.

The takeover of American farm production by foreigners is far from imminent. Their purchases in the last 40 years are equal to 3.9% of the farmland now in production.

Critics are convinced that the reported numbers are low, and contend without proof that much more land is being bought than is being reported. They concede that it would be impossible to quantify without combing through land records in 3,000 county courthouses across the country.

It is certain that the USDA's numbers are misleading. Some of the land in question has been sold by one foreign buyer to another, while others have divested altogether. Tracking those transactions through USDA data is difficult. Also, not all foreign investors who have reported a purchase have a controlling interest in the land.

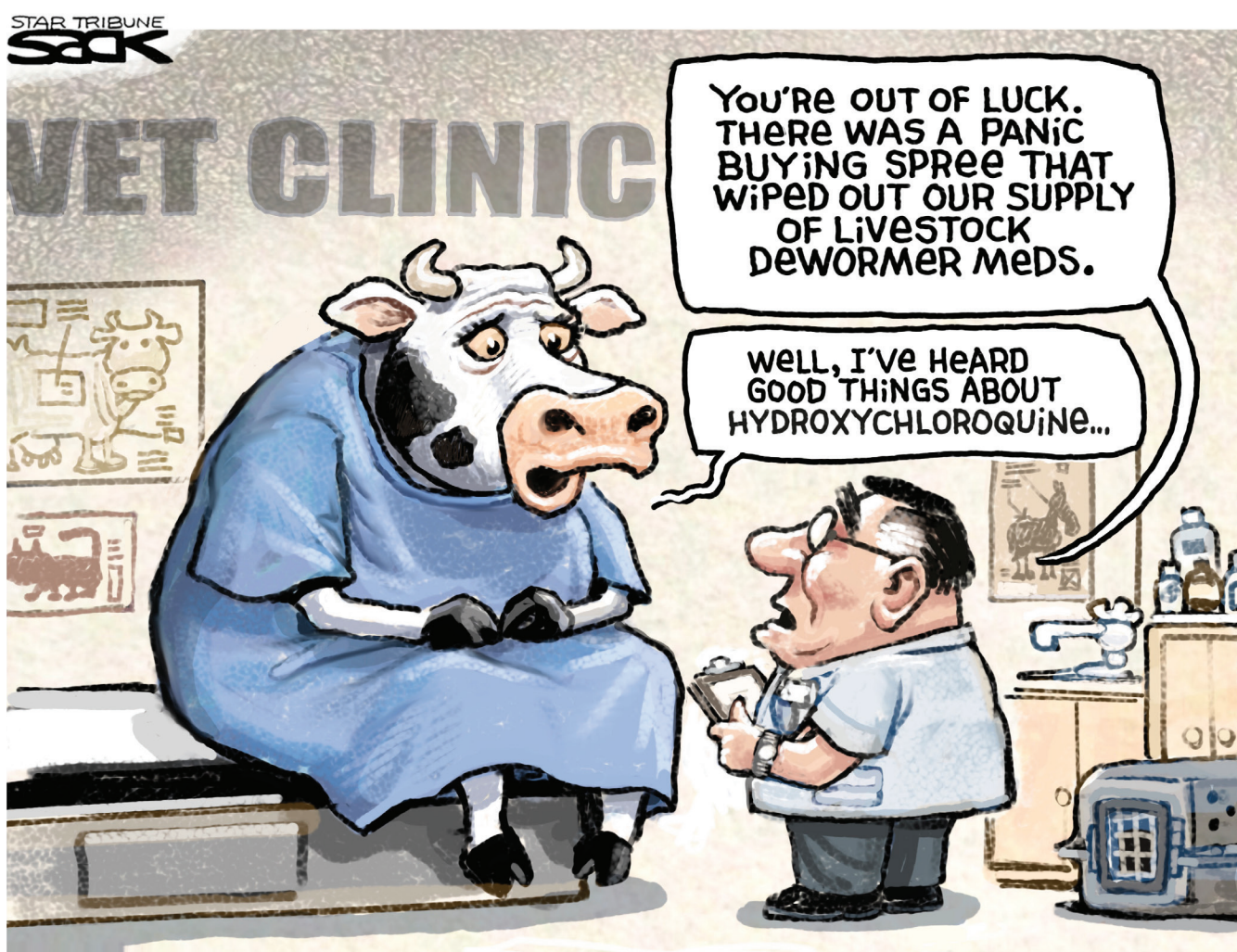
We agree that foreign purchases should be monitored. It would be a dangerous problem if foreign interests gain control of U.S. agriculture.

To be clear, we would prefer that U.S. farmland stay in the hands, or at least the control, of U.S. entities. But, the more pressing concern is keeping farmland productive.

Foreign investors are joining domestic companies that are interested in building alternative energy facilities or other real estate developments on farmland.

Turning cropland into windfarms, shopping malls and subdivisions is a greater danger to agriculture, and in turn the country, than a French company buying vineyards here to make wine.

Once farmland is built over, it's gone for good. No farmer, foreign or domestic, will ever farm it again.



## LETTERS to the EDITOR

### Masking up protects our children

Last September, when there were 28,000 daily infections, schools closed to stop the spread and classes were moved online. Today there are 150,000 daily cases and children are back in the classroom.

Unfortunately, children account for 26% of new infections, totaling 250,000 in the past week; 2,500 are in the hospital and tens of thousands are being sent home to quarantine — with fewer online options for learning.

And still, there are anti-mask protests across the nation. Recently, Wallowa County protesters were pictured front page in this newspaper encouraging parents to send their kids to school unmasked in violation of the governor's mandate. "Don't be sheep!" one speaker said.

Delta has created another dangerous surge in the pandemic and 100,000 more people may die before this terrible year ends. I am reminded of the parable shared by pastors and priests about the dying man who wonders why God has abandoned him. When he reaches the pearly gates he asks why his faith did not save him.

God replies (and I paraphrase): I created science to help you evolve beyond suffering but you were focused on fear. I inspired doctors to help you stay safe but you were filled with disdain. I even sent a new vaccine but you turned away, demanding personal freedom. So yes, you are here of your own free will, which is also a gift ... but faith in my plan could have saved you.

We are sheep. We mask up to protect the lambs.

**Janet Graham**  
Enterprise

### A minority of people ignore data on masks, vaccines

Wallowa County protesters are angry. That is not surprising. What is surprising, is the anti-vaxxers and the unmaskers are angry at the governor for trying to make them safe. One has only to check the data to realize there are

hospitals with no beds for patients with kidney stones, most elective surgeries, cancer, etc. They are full of a pandemic of anti-vaxxers and the un-masked.

We all want to get back to a normal life and put this pandemic behind us. So long as this pandemic rages, it creates a petri dish to generate new variants of the COVID-19 virus. Most people have taken the vaccination to protect themselves and their families. A mask is still required because this pandemic is still a fact of life and will be while a minority of people ignore the data and insist on listening to and responding to misinformation.

President Biden and Gov. Brown have taken steps to end this pandemic by requiring additional vaccinations and masking.

Can we get past the posturing and sabotaging the health and well-being of our nation?

**David Ebbert**  
Enterprise

### 'Am I my brother's keeper?' 'Yes'

The recent article, "Anger in Wallowa County: Protesters Reject Mandate," has me thinking of the question, "How are we going to live together?" When I was boy of 10 our family took in an 8-year-old whose mother was hospitalized with polio. It was a new disease so we didn't realize how transmissible it was. It didn't take long for my lungs to become infected. I was gasping for air about 70 times a minute. I was to be put in an iron lung the next day. But the disease broke its hold. I healed completely.

Many diseases require quarantine, isolation from those around us. Mask wearing is a modest form of quarantine. Polio, like many diseases, has virtually been wiped out around the world.

How can we take positions of self-assertion and independence that put others at risk?

My 76-year-old cousin went to the ER in Enterprise four weeks ago with a serious heart condition. The hospital needed to refer him. They found only one bed in this whole region — Boise,

Idaho. All other beds were filled with COVID-19 patients who resisted taking the vaccine.

Is our freedom the only thing that matters? Freedom is not only for the purpose of self. It is for the purpose of building our community, of caring for one another. Some whole cultures have worn masks for decades with good results.

Someone from the article was quoted as saying vaccines and masks don't work. That simply is not true. Vaccinated people do not need hospitalization, intubation, or other extreme measures when they are infected.

In the ancient story of Cain who killed his brother Abel he was asked, "Where is your brother?" He responded with, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The resounding answer was, Yes, you are your brother's keeper. In the New Testament the stories and teachings attributed to Jesus clearly say that we are to love others as we love ourselves. Love and care is a community issue.

Wallowa is my favorite place on this earth and has been for 65 years. Even though I have been fully vaccinated I will wear a mask around others to do my part in being my brother's keeper. The people here are helpful in many ways to one another. Why not protect one another from the devastation of COVID-19?

**Don Scully**  
Joseph

### We must treat each other with thoughtfulness

Thank you, Jeff and Stephen, for your recent letters to the editor.

I share your feelings. We are in this pandemic together. We will defeat this pandemic together only if we treat each other with thoughtfulness, respect and genuine concern for each other's well-being. We are free to do this. We have the right and the responsibility to do this.

To be healthy is a noble goal. It is a gift to ourselves and also to our family and our friends.

**Gail M. Swart**  
Enterprise

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**SEND LETTERS TO:** [editor@wallowa.com](mailto:editor@wallowa.com), or via mail to Wallowa County Chieftain, 209 NW 1st St. Enterprise, OR 97828