

Water shortages: Ag gets unfair burden of blame

While well-heeled urban residents fret about dead lawns, the bill for California's fourth year of drought is already being paid in the largely rural Central Valley.

Researchers from University of California-Davis' Center for Watershed Sciences say the drought will cost California's ag economy \$2.7 billion this year and cost as many as 18,600 workers their job.

Farmers will have 2.7 million acre-feet less surface water than they would in a normal water year — about a 33 percent loss of supply on average.

Growers are expected to fallow 564,000 acres, suffer a crop revenue loss of \$844 million and incur \$558 million in additional groundwater pumping costs. Packers, processors, truckers, suppliers and retailers — and their employees — will lose more than a billion dollars.

Lost jobs, lost businesses — and the cost ripples out in the prices we all pay for food.

Still, some in California would have ag water cut further. After all, the theory goes, agriculture takes 80 percent of California's fresh water — an undeserved boon to wealthy growers.

In a recent op-ed in the Los Angeles Times, journalist Nathanael Johnson put that often-repeated figure into perspective.

Farmers, he says, actually take 40 percent of the fresh

water, while non-farm human uses account for another 10 percent.

Half of California's water flows to the sea. It keeps saltwater out of the Delta, fish alive and river habitat viable. This half doesn't enter into the debate.

"We devalue the environment if we leave it out of the equation," he wrote. "And we can't judge the arguments for and against such uses if we don't acknowledge that they exist."

Forty percent is a lot, but it's half the amount so often cited in the press. And not nearly the amount held sacrosanct by environmentalists and politicians.

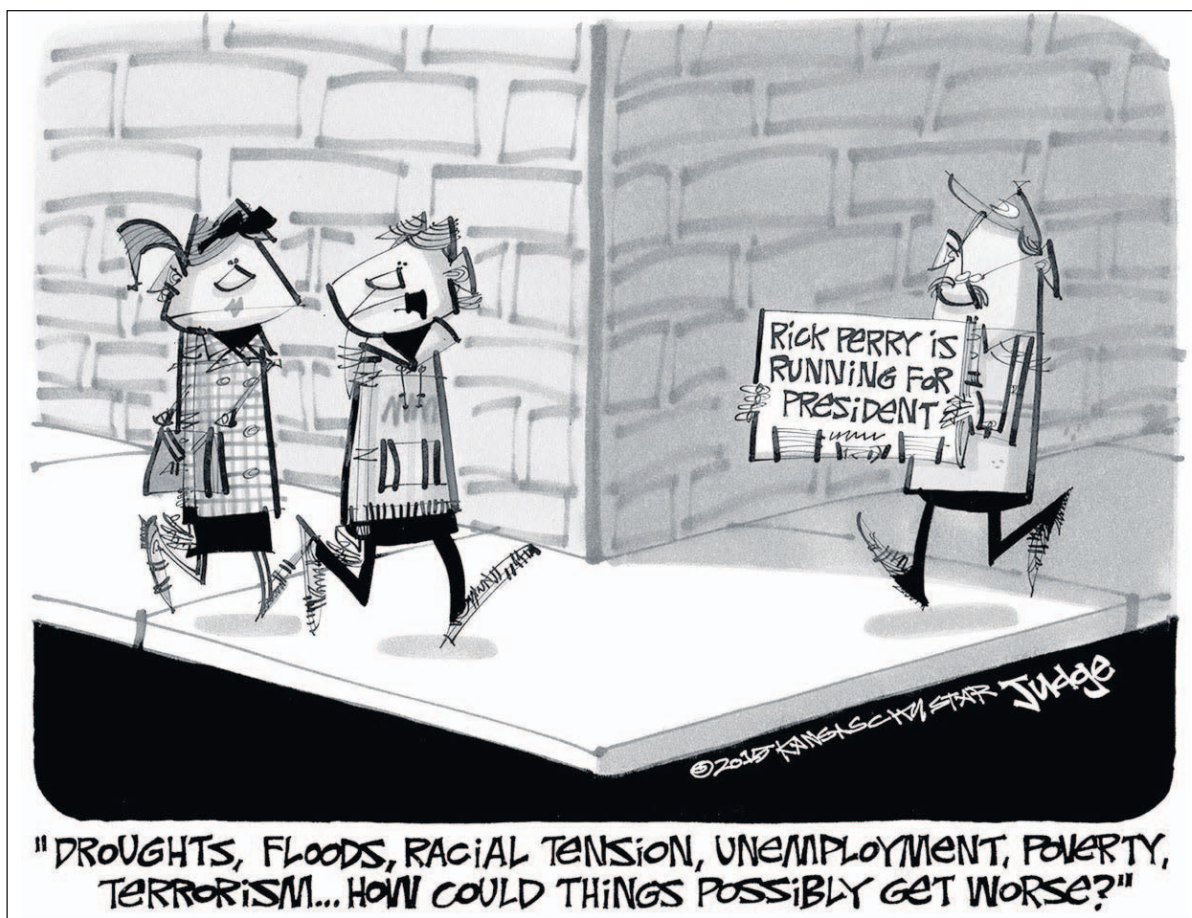
Drought always impacts farmers first, followed shortly by workers and businesses in rural areas who depend on the food and fiber produced. All of this takes place out of sight and mind of California's liberal elite and popular culture trend-setters.

It's all too easy to make farmers and ranchers the bad guys.

"It's misleading to zero in on part of the picture," Johnson wrote. "If we want holistic solutions, we have to take the holistic view."

We agree.

Even in the ag community there's a recognition that things must — and will — change. But the conversation can't begin and end with more regulations on farmers and ranchers.



FARMER'S FATE

A combine, a dresser, and a lawn mower

By Brianna Walker
To the Blue Mountain Eagle



It's good to try a little role reversal in your marriage every once in a while — not just for the learning experience, but also for the revelations that always seem to come with it.

For the last 10 years I've been the keeper of the laundry: sorting, washing, folding, putting it away, and tossing out holey socks. Once after a particularly hectic period of farming, my husband noticed he didn't have many mated socks in his drawer. "Guess it's time to buy some more," he muttered as he crawled into bed.

I looked at the big stack of his dirty socks in the basket of whites. Wow, I wish I had magic drawers like he does — continuously restocking his clean clothes, folded or mated, until the time he needed to buy more. Sighing, I picked up the laundry basket and headed to the washing machine before crawling into bed beside my already snoring husband.

So recently we decided to try a little role reversal. In the evenings, I climb into bed with a book and my husband trudges downstairs with the laundry baskets. After the first load, he became frustrated as he tried putting them away in our shared chest of drawers.

"Where am I supposed to put this?" he grumbled.

I couldn't help but smirk: "Welcome to my world, why do you think I fold the laundry vertically? I can fit more in that way."

He grumbled and muttered, and soon the laundry baskets became home to the clean laundry.

After only two weeks, he came home grinning like a school

boy. He had purchased a gorgeous dresser and chest of drawers.

"If I'm gonna do laundry, there's gotta be a place to put it!"

The new bedroom furniture was beautiful, but I couldn't help but remember how he'd thought our one old dresser was satisfactory — until he had to use it. Hmm ...

Not long after that, I sat down at the computer and noticed a web page of riding mowers. Years ago, we had an old riding mower, one that needed TLC every time I started it. The tire had 4 plugs and a bottle of green goop, and still wouldn't hold air; the battery wouldn't hold a charge; the ignition didn't work; and you couldn't push the clutch and brake at the same time because of a linkage problem.

One day after 45 minutes of tinkering and a hand that was still smarting from the shock when I tried to spark across the battery with a screwdriver, I muttered "I'd get this lawn mowed faster with a push mower!"

Guess what arrived weeks later ... for Mother's Day. Yep, my very own push mower.

And if that wasn't enough, my husband hired out my mowing services to a neighbor widow to pay for my new

Mother's Day present. And now I see, that after only one time of using my push mower, he's in the market for a riding mower.

I thought about the time I was driving combine with a sprained foot; I had an air-cast and was on crutches. The combine's air conditioner was broken, and it was so hot the chickens would have laid boiled eggs. To keep the swelling down in my foot, I used a bucket of ice. The glassed cab of that combine was a sauna and I was constantly wiping the sweat (and chaff) out of my eyes.

"The season's almost done," my husband said when I complained. "I don't want to have to charge the AC, just for a few days before I park it for the winter."

The second to last day of harvest, I went on a parts run while he climbed into the combine. Imagine my surprise a few hours later when I saw the combine parked in the yard ... and the AC man working on it.

My eyes narrowed as I stared at the screen of pretty new John Deere riding mowers. Then I thought, maybe I was looking at this all wrong. I knew this role reversal wouldn't last forever, and soon I would be doing the laundry and mowing my own yard — and those neighbors have an awfully big yard that needs mowing. If I play my cards right, I can get a riding mower — and have my husband work it off.

Brianna Walker writes about the Farmer's Fate occasionally for the Blue Mountain Eagle.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

See you at market

To the Editor:
Grocery shopping need not be a chore of the day but an adventure of the senses; right here in your own town and valley. A Saturday farmers' market where you will meet friends and neighbors and just have a good time in the fresh new morning.

Your sixth annual John Day Farmers Market opens Saturday, June 20, at 8 a.m. Have you been there yet? Fresh eggs, honey and grass-fed beef from right here in your valley as well as locally grown fruits and veggies of all kinds. They are so fresh that they are still crisp and very tasty, having been lovingly raised and just picked that day, or the day before, instead of one or two or three weeks ago, at best. You also have a beautiful selection of arts and crafts, all locally made with loving hands for every taste and style.

Choosing not to go to the grocery store to buy that imported beef, salad and fruit, or to the local five and dime for a dime-a-dozen item or gift, is a path of liberation. Walking to the Farmers Market and buying those locally grown and hand-picked fruits and vegetables, eggs, honey, beef and arts and crafts is turning your back on the industries that would control us and let us forget who we are and where we come from.

Every time we say "NO" to consumer culture, we say "YES" to something more beautiful and sustaining.

It has amazed me for the last five years that every weekend we meet local John Day folks who have not been aware there is a local farmers' market every Saturday morning, all summer and fall. And of course, all those who are aware of it who "just have not made it there yet," as if it is a one-day, once a year thing that is only a novelty to be enjoyed perchance, if one has the time to be bothered. Is this town so big and diverse that one's own farmers market is so easily overlooked?

So, it is time to get there and

indulge in the luxury of this gift of bounty, beauty and community right in the middle of John Day, from 8-12 every Saturday, June 20 through October 17.

See you there!

Jim & Sandy Bay
John Day Farmers Market
John Day

the Department of Interior and let each state manage the federal land within its boundaries" ... "they'll do a much better job at managing your land than your departments have been doing."

Need I say more?

Judy Kerr
Canyon City

Gohmert on the FS

To the Editor:

We are being inundated in the news media today with matters of such astronomical importance as the recuperating comedian who wrapped his limousine around a Walmart truck or an aging Bruce Jenner with his clip and tuck challenging the Kardashians for female supremacy.

The endeavors of such groups as the Citizens for Public Access, Forest Access for All, Western Alliance of Rural America and others are going unremarked and unheeded by the people who should be the most concerned.

Hidden in the main media news June 1, U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert, Republican from Texas and member of the House Natural Resource Committee, in a joint legislative hearing told two federal land officials (Deputy Director of Operations for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Steve Ellis and Deputy Chief of the U.S. Forest Service Leslie Weldon), "I come bearing good news. I think if your employees keep up the land, then very soon we'll be able to dramatically cut your employees back and start turning those powers over to the states."

"Today, I wanted to take advantage of your presence here by letting you know I've been hearing about the arrogance of people on U.S. Forest Service land and (Department of) Interior land — national forests — even from law enforcement, they say it's just gotten tougher and tougher to deal with arrogant people on the national forests."

"Some of us have been pushing for a while — let's just dramatically cut back the U.S. Forest Service, the BLM,

Sweat with us

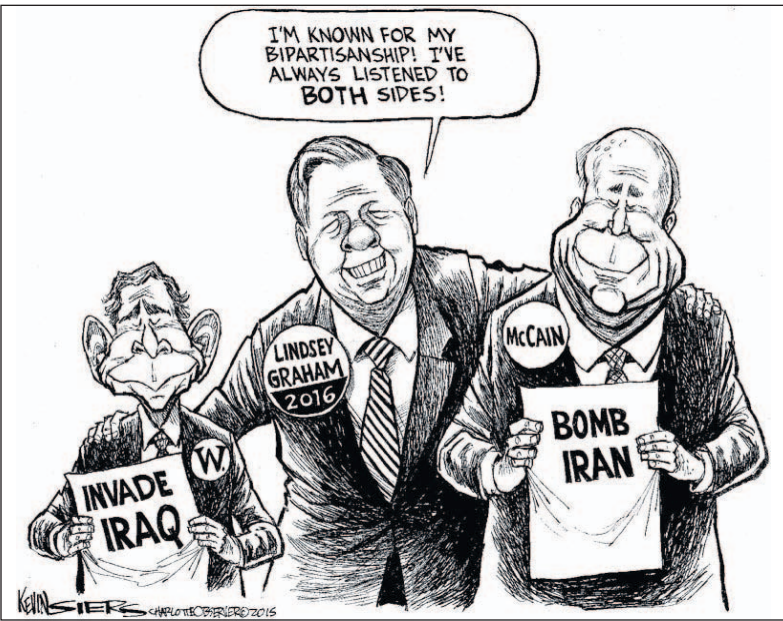
To The Editor:


I didn't attend graduation so I can't comment specifically on the "poor" choice of attire that Mr. Thomsen from Aurora takes issue with in last week's letters. But I know well the person that he was criticizing and would suggest that if his appearance wasn't on par with the occasion that there was probably good reason. Why do I believe that? Because this person's contributions to our county have at least earned him the benefit of the doubt if not the deference to wear whatever he wants.

I don't know Mr. Thomsen to sit on any boards or commissions here, volunteer for neighborhood activities, coach youth sports, donate money to local causes, have kids in our schools, or anything else that I would consider to warrant my respect as a contributor to our community. He may be a great guy but he also could have just come to Grant County to "ranch" our way of life and, like so many others resembling him, wants to change the very characteristics of our area that attracted him here in the first place.

We may be a little rough around the edges sometimes but remember — you made the choice to move here, we didn't ask. Besides, we built this community and we are generally the ones who struggle daily to sustain it. You want to criticize; put a little skin in the game, collect some scars and sweat a little bit with us — then you can lecture us poor mountain folk on how we should live our lives.

Shaun W Robertson
John Day





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