

Where agriculture and sci-fi meet

In 1977, when the first “Star Wars” movie premiered, few — if any — viewers thought it would predict the future of agriculture.

We should explain. In the movie, Luke Skywalker — “Our Hero” — first appeared as he was working on his uncle’s “moisture farm” on a desert planet. This farm captured its water directly from the atmosphere, which was unique enough, but only Luke and his aunt and uncle ran the whole operation. The rest of the “workers” were autonomous droids, or robots. As you will recall, they did all of the work on the farm, and Luke’s job was to repair them. He was going to town to get a spare part when he encountered Sand People and was rescued by Obi-Wan Kenobi, the Jedi knight.

While the rest of the story is well known, most people dismissed the idea of an automated farm as nothing more than the product of a fertile imagination and science fiction.

Fast forward 40 years, and the vision of a farm where robots and drones do much of the work no longer seems so far-fetched.

At a recent conference in Pendleton, researchers, inventors and farmers got together to contemplate the future of farming. The ideas they have developed make “Star Wars” seem old-fashioned. In the not-too-distant future, they see robotic workers harvesting fruits and vegetables and driverless tractors and combines planting and harvesting crops. Drones and

sensors will identify portions of fields needing irrigation or applications of fertilizer or pesticide and call in other drones to do the job.

Ranchers will use drones to monitor the location and health of their cattle on the range and, when needed, to chase off predators such as wolves or coyotes.

Combine that with other advances in agriculture, from genetic editing of crops to use less water, fertilizer and pesticide to orchards, vineyards and berry farms that are designed for efficient mechanical harvesting, and you have a hint of what the future of agriculture holds.

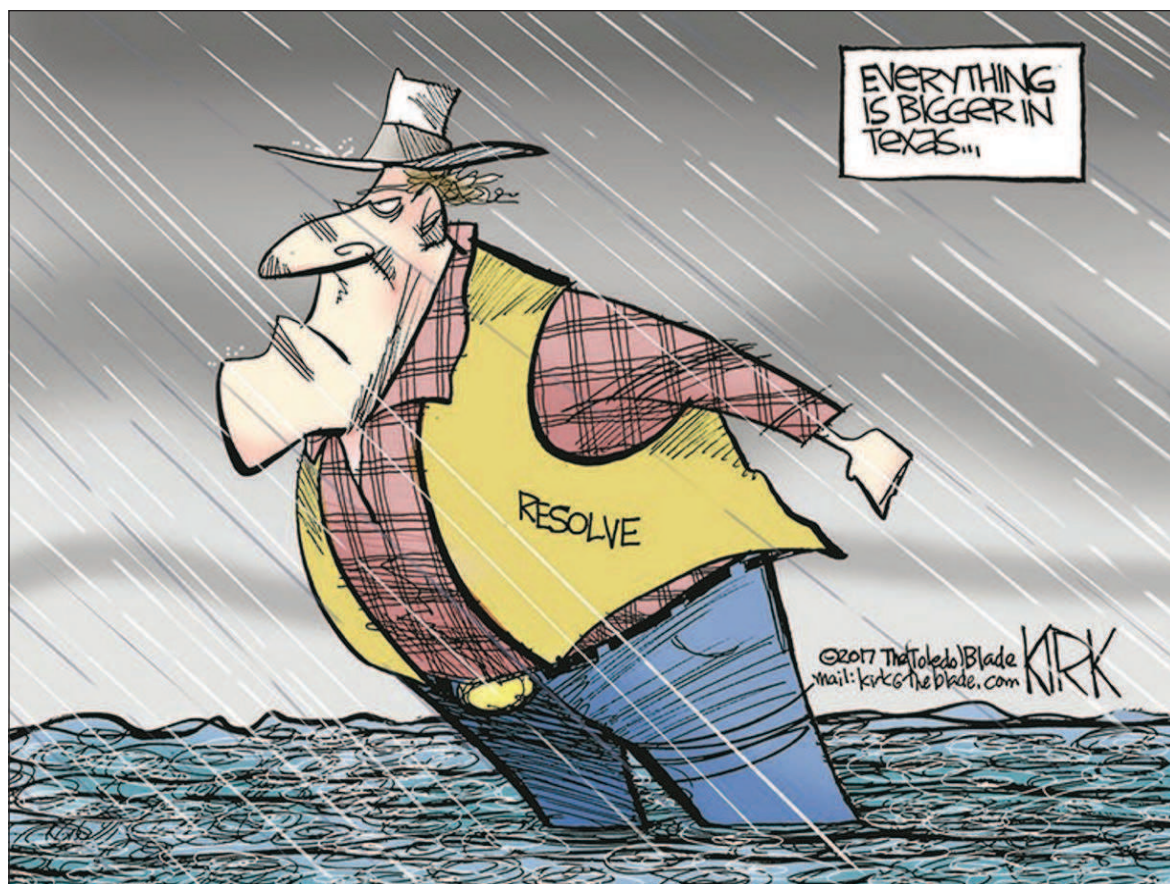
These advances will not happen solely because they represent “progress.” They will address problems that farmers and ranchers face. Among those problems are a shortage of labor, the need for the more precise use of resources and, most importantly, the need to feed 7.5 billion people on the planet today and more in the future.

The possibilities are endless. They are limited only by the imaginations of agriculture’s best and brightest innovators.

“There’s a clear path toward completely automated farming,” Jake Joraanstad of Myriad Mobile Solutions, a Fargo, North Dakota, tech company, told the Pendleton gathering. “To solve the hunger problem, we have to be going there, that has to be the future.”

As technology develops in every arena of agriculture, we will see farmers and ranchers adopt it as a way to grow the food a hungry planet needs.

May the force be with us.



GUEST COMMENT

Permittees did not partner on project

By Ken and Cici Brooks
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

We, as the private landowners and permittees affected by the “fish habitat restoration” work on the East Fork of Beech Creek, disagree with the propaganda article that was published in the Aug. 9 Blue Mountain Eagle. The article misrepresented our involvement in the second paragraph. We didn’t partner on this project! We openly expressed to the forest supervisor, district ranger, the range and aquatic staff that we were not in favor of the large woody-coarse woody debris projects until we had proof that it actually benefited steelhead recovery.

The double standards associated with this project are appalling, and certainly not mentioned in this article. The permitted cattle for this critical habitat were not allowed to graze it in 2017 because the Malheur National Forest staff didn’t do their job of completing consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service prior to May 15. They knew that deadline for five years and couldn’t meet it; yet the same consultation for this project was completed ahead of schedule. This certainly makes sense to the Forest Service: to stop a beneficial activity (grazing), which provides an economic benefit to the local community, and allow a destruction project to be completed by an out-of-county contractor.

The logging for this project should offend everyone with an ounce of common sense. Pushing large trees over with an excavator and dragging them by their tops in an effort to de-limb them is equivalent to plowing, and all done within a stone’s throw of critical habitat. Why didn’t they just dump dirt in the creek with a dump truck? the vegetation and fences would still be standing instead of torn out by excavators. There isn’t a logging operation anywhere that could get away with these practices.

The fish habitat in the East Fork Beech Creek had improved greatly with the improved grazing management, and we have before-project photos to document the shading, gravel deposits, meanders and braiding, woody debris, log jams and beaver that were already present. If it isn’t broken, throw money at it. Taxpayer money was wasted on destroying this habitat recovery because the biologists believe recovery will be faster.

We are in favor of recovering steelhead and in water storage in the basin, but placing log jams in areas where there is no potential for floodplain storage is ludicrous (see first log jam on Magone Lake Road upstream from junction with Highway 395). Alder trees were mowed down by track vehicles, banks were exposed, stream sediment delivery is far greater than anything a massive herd of cows

could do and, incidentally, permittees have exceeded grazing standards when there are more than 60 hoof prints on the greenline in 110 meters in a designated monitoring area. Clogging small streams with coarse woody material prevents fish passage for fry that need to migrate to rearing habitat upstream in late season (see Malheur National Forest 2016 Year End Grazing Report, pg. 266: “It is acknowledged that the limiting factor for MCR Steelhead in the John Day Basin is oversummer rearing habitat, not spawning habitat availability or success.”).

There were a lot of “mays” and “ifs” in the article that guarantee nothing regarding recovery. East Fork Beech Creek is a flash system, and this wood is going to move; the question is where will it stop. The taxpayers paid for putting it in the creek and will probably pay for cleaning up the real mess later.

Ken and Cici Brooks own the CS (Sproul) Ranch just west of Mt. Vernon, which has three Forest Service grazing permits, the Mt. Vernon, the John Day and the Beech Creek On-Off permits, and the Brooks Ranch in Fox Valley, which has the Fox permit. They have private land interspersed in these permits. Ken is the third-generation permittee, and Cici is a retired range conservationist from the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

GUEST COMMENT

High school activities bring communities together

By Bob Gardner and Peter Weber
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

Tailgates. Pep rallies. Friday night lights. The new school year is here! And that’s exciting news for student-athletes and high school sports fans alike.

Research shows that being a student-athlete is about a lot more than fun and games. It teaches important life lessons, too. In fact, high school athletes not only have higher grade point averages and fewer school absences than non-athletes, they also develop the kind of work habits and self-discipline skills that help them become more responsible and productive community members.

Attending high school sporting events teaches important life lessons, too.

Among them, it teaches that we can live in different communities, come from different backgrounds,

faiths and cultures, cheer for different teams and still have a common bond.

That’s why attending the activities hosted by your high school this fall is so important. It’s not only an opportunity to cheer for your hometown team, it is also an opportunity to celebrate our commonality. And that’s something our country needs right now.

The bond we share is mutually supporting the teenagers in our respective communities. We applaud their persistence, tenacity, preparation and hard work, regardless of the color of the uniform they wear. We acknowledge that education-based, high school sports are enhancing their lives, and ours, in ways that few other activities could. And we agree that, regardless of what side of the field we sit on, attending a high school sporting event is an uplifting, enriching, family-friendly experience for all of us.

Many of the high schools in our state lie at the heart of the communities they serve. They not only are educating our next generation of leaders, they also are a place where we congregate, where people from every corner of town and all walks of life come together as one. And at no time is this unity more evident than during a high school athletic event.

This is the beginning of a new school year. Opportunities abound in the classroom and outside it. Let’s make the most of them by attending as many athletic events at the high school in our community as possible.

Turn on the lights, and let the games begin!

Bob Gardner is executive director of the National Federation of State High School Associations, and Peter Weber is the executive director of the Oregon School Activities Association.

Letters policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for Blue Mountain Eagle readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters will be asked to be contained to 350 words. No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. No thank-you letters. Submissions to this page become property of the Eagle. The Eagle reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content. Letters must be original and signed by the writer. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. We must limit all contributors to one letter per person per month. Deadline is 5 p.m. Friday. Send letters to editor@bmeagle.com, or Blue Mountain Eagle, 195 N. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845; or fax to 541-575-1244.



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Grant County’s Weekly Newspaper

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 Subscriptions must be paid prior to delivery

Periodicals Postage Paid at John Day and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER
 send address changes to:
 Blue Mountain Eagle
 195 N. Canyon Blvd.
 John Day, OR 97845-1187

USPS 226-340

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