

Feeding the world will take lots of land

A prodigious amount of U.S. farmland continues to be converted to other uses. The American Farmland Trust estimates that between 2001 and 2016 more than 11 million acres were taken out of ag production. While in the overall scheme of things this is a proverbial drop in the bucket — the total farm acreage is 915 million — development continues to chip away at the land that feeds us all.

Ultimately, as more land is turned into housing developments or hobby farms, and as the U.S. population continues to grow — 328 million people eat a lot — we will run headlong into the limitations of how much food farmers can grow.

Add to that the growing global population — 7 billion and counting — and sooner or later we will find out whether farmers can keep everyone fed.

Which brings us back to the land — farms, ranches and national forest and Bureau of Land Management allotments.

So often the arguments offered by critics of agriculture lean on the “logic” that some farms — large ones, primarily — are too efficient.

Now that’s a statement. It’s kind of like being accused of being too handsome or too beautiful.

Yet that’s the rub. Critics say that large farms use more water than small farms and large dairies produce more manure than small dairies.

Sure enough, that is true. But, assuming that the same amount of food, or more, will be needed by a growing population, it will have to come from an increasing number of animals and crops raised on ranches and farms. Whether they are raised on one 10,000-

acre farm or 1,000 10-acre farms won’t make much difference.

Except for one thing. Any economies of scale will disappear, and the cost of production will increase. Whether the prices paid to those farmers will also increase to cover those costs is an unknown.

In the meantime, efficiency is the friend of the farmer — and the consumer. After all, if prices increase too much, it will directly impact consumers, particularly those who are low income.

So there is the conundrum. Taking agricultural land out of production is not just bad for farmers and ranchers. It’s bad for consumers and the rest of the world.

That’s why we need to keep close tabs on developers and others who see farmland and little more than shovel-ready for the next housing subdivision.

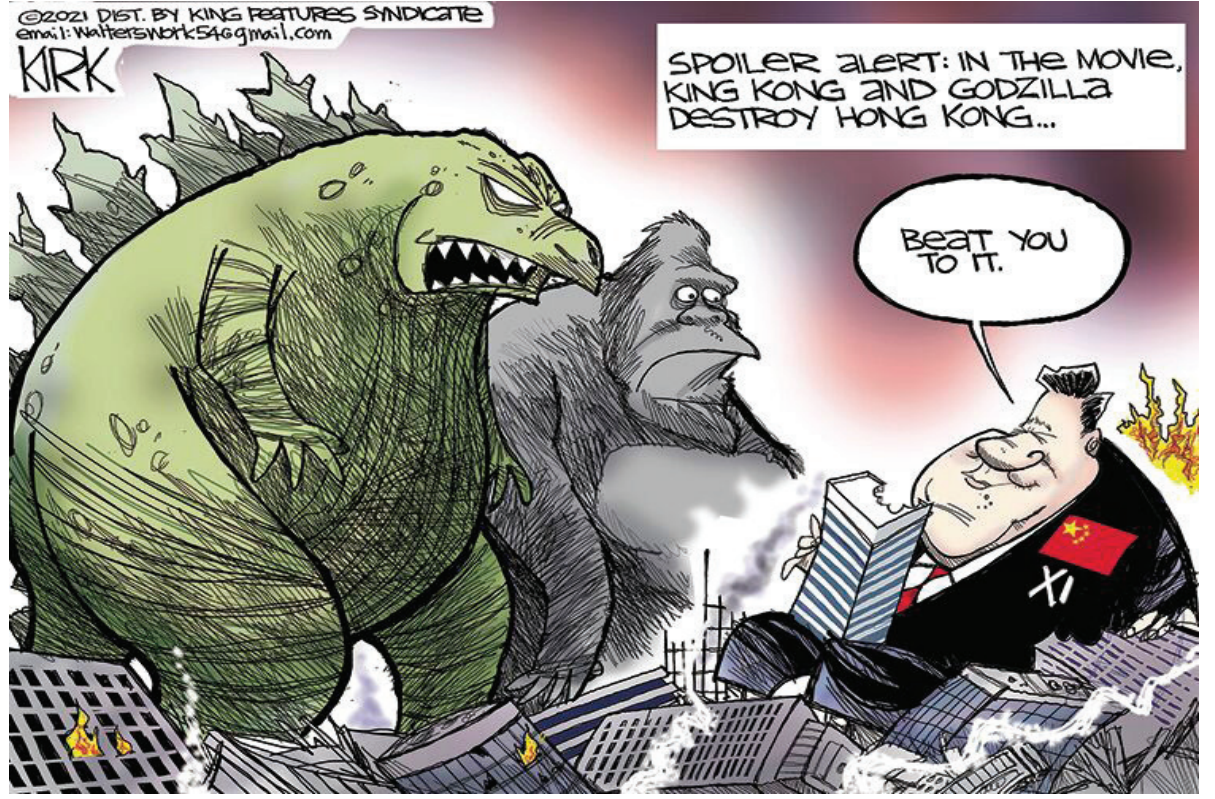
The protection of farmland must be taken seriously. Some states, such as Oregon, have worked to identify high-value farmland and protect it.

Land trusts and other organizations have also come up with means of protecting farmland by purchasing the development rights. This allows farmers and ranchers to continue, and even provides money to improve their operations.

All of which needs to be balanced against property owners’ rights.

Again, what’s really at stake is not only farms and ranches. Ultimately, what’s a stake is our nation’s ability to feed itself — and help feed the rest of the world.

Without debate, that is the most important value of agriculture. And doing it depends on land, efficiency, technology, research and plain old know-how.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

‘A dog’s phobia of flies’

To the Editor:
Regarding the question asked by Mya Ennis in an April 7, 2021, letter, a dog’s phobia of flies may be due to a problem in the natal home — a fly swatter was used on flies and puppies, ergo flies equal swats with the same weapon.
Happy walking.

Jenni Roller
John Day

‘Address this critical national security threat’

To the Editor:
“As greenhouse gases increase, sea levels are rising, average global temperatures are increasing, and severe weather patterns are accelerating. These changes, coupled with other global dynamics, . . . will devastate homes, land and infrastructure.” — 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review, U.S. Department of Defense.

President Joe Biden’s proposal to upgrade our nation’s infrastructure, the American Jobs Plan, has a strong climate focus. The proposal aims to make our infrastructure more resilient to climate impacts, and it includes initiatives to reduce emissions in order to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

The president’s plan would provide not only funding for roads and bridges, but also for sustainable housing and buildings, electric vehicles and research and development for clean energy technology.

A 2020 report on managing climate risk by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission validates President Biden’s climate goals. This document details the threat that climate change poses to America’s energy, water, transportation and communication infrastructure. For example, it asserts that extreme precipitation, inundation from sea level rise, extreme heat and forest fires “challenge nearly every element of transportation systems, from bridges and airports to pipelines and ports.”

Regarding climate solutions, the report concludes that “it is essential that the United States establish a price on carbon. This is the single most important step to manage climate risk. . . . In the absence of such a price . . . capital will continue to flow in the wrong direction, rather than toward accelerating the transition to a net-zero emissions economy.”

That’s why I’m encouraged that the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act has been introduced in the House of Representatives. This bill puts a steadily rising fee on carbon dioxide emissions and returns the money to the American people.

Let’s urge our members of Congress to take action to address this critical national security threat.

Terry Hansen
Hales Corners, Wisconsin

‘We have turned our back on God’

To the Editor:
I am writing this letter with a very heavy heart. There are things going on, not just in our country, but worldwide that are causing me great concern. I know that our Lord

and Savior is in ultimate control and that nothing surprises him, but I also feel that we have a moral obligation to stand up for what is right and to speak out against what is wrong. I will be very curious to see if you even publish this letter as a big part of my concern is the censorship of free speech that is going on. But also, the erosion of our rights under the pretext of a pandemic. The edicts that have been handed down to our small businesses and even to us as individuals are absolutely ridiculous, and it only takes about 30 minutes of honest, open-minded research to see that very plainly. If anyone has a personal conviction that they feel better with a mask on, I have no problem with that, but to demand, under penalty of law, that we all wear masks is a flagrant violation of our basic rights as Americans. I cannot help but feel that it is about nothing other than control and submission and the only way that will change is if we all, as individuals, stand up and say: No more!

There is a more deeply rooted problem in our nation that is allowing all of these things to take place. We have turned our back on God and the morality that comes along with being a God-fearing nation. If we don’t change our ways very soon, I am afraid that it will be too late. If you can’t look around and see the effects that the loss of our morality is having on our nation, then you are just being willfully blind. I feel that this is directly connected to the riots, mass shootings and the general state of our republic.

Bill Newman
Monument

And, by the way, I hear through the grapevine that Idaho is slowly shifting leftward. You just might have to move again.

Eva Harris
Canyon City

To repeat, it’s time for reasonable choices

To the Editor:
In last week’s edition, there was a response to my March 22 letter in which the writer completely missed my point that assault weapons are not appropriate for private ownership. I would say that, in fact, she made my point by stating they were originally designed for military use. I still claim that they were not designed for civilian use. The hideous shootings of innocent victims throughout America these last few weeks alone should have us all questioning what can be done to stop this slaughter. Inappropriate firearm use must be dealt with.

The writer made other defenses of people’s right to openly carry firearms, but it is still wrong to pack in such a way as to intimidate your fellow citizens — especially when exhibiting confrontational messages designed to offend others with different views. When is it bullying and offensive and when is it free speech? When I was a kid growing up here in Grant County, overuse of “free speech” could get you punched in the mouth. Today in America, it’s not that simple. Too often the first response to a conflict is to pull and use a firearm.

In response to the writer’s critique of my point about moving the border: I’m a fifth-generation Eastern Oregonian. I’ve voted both Democrat and Republican. I don’t need to be part of Idaho to make my voice heard. I am extremely offended by the group of people that I can only call the “alt-right” wanting to change the state’s border just to get their voices heard. Rural America will always have a challenge to make its voice be heard. That fight won’t be changed by moving the border. As I’ve always said, it is much simpler for you folks to just move to Idaho. However, I’m not sure that Boise and the new Treasure Valley will want you.

Terry Steele
Ritter

Vaccinations by the numbers

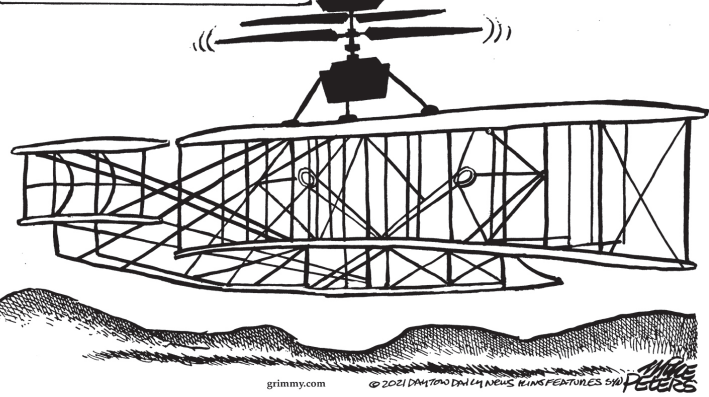
To the Editor:
Of the 66 million Americans that have completed a full course of vaccinations:

- Just .009% have become infected
- Just 5,800 cases of “break-through” infections, out of 66 million
- 40% of infections were in folks over 60
- 29% of cases (so about 1,700) were asymptomatic
- Most of the rest were mild
- Just 7% (about 406) of those infected were hospitalized
- And only 74 have died (1%)

What it means: 74 deaths is, of course, a brutal loss for 74 families, but no COVID-19 vaccine provides for 100% protection.

John H. Van Gundy
John Day

FIRST FLIGHT ON MARS, CARRYING A PIECE OF THE WRIGHT FLYER



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