

OTHER VIEWS

State must end cannabis crisis it helped create

Seven years ago, Oregonians were told that by legalizing marijuana and hemp they could solve an array of problems. Pot smokers could come out of the shadows and hemp could take its place as a legitimate crop. Illegal pot growers would be put out of business — or at least forced to register under the state’s auspices.

State officials correctly estimated millions of dollars would come tumbling into the state’s coffers that would go to schools and cover the costs of regulating the crop.

By 2020, legal marijuana sales in Oregon topped \$1.1 billion a year, and state tax revenue exceeded \$150 million. According to the state Department of Revenue, 40% was earmarked for the state school fund, 20% for mental health, alcoholism and drug services, 15% for the Oregon State Police and 5% for the Oregon Health Authority for drug treatment.

The problem: No one knows how much marijuana is grown and sold illegally, since enforcement of the pot and hemp law has taken a backseat.

Illegal marijuana grows are overtaking some parts of the state. It’s gotten so bad in Jackson County that the commissioners there declared a state of emergency and sent a plea for help to Gov. Kate Brown and legislative leaders. They’ve even asked for the National Guard to be activated.

Neighboring Josephine County faces the same problems. The sheriff there estimated hundreds of illegal pot grows are spread throughout the southwestern Oregon county.

Some legal hemp farms serve as camouflage for illegal marijuana grows. Nearly 50% of the registered hemp farms in Oregon illegally grow marijuana, according to the Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission. About 25% of registered hemp farms won’t let state inspectors in.

All of which constitutes an emergency of the highest order. Once pot growers — and hemp growers who cultivate pot illegally on the side

— decide to flout the law, all bets are off. They are telling the state of Oregon they don’t care what the law says and are thumbing their noses at the authorities.

And the state is letting them get away with it. Illegal growers steal massive amounts of water and use illegal chemicals, threatening the livelihoods of legal farmers.

To her credit, the governor is making more cannabis law enforcement grants available and told the state police to increase its efforts. The Oregon Department of Agriculture is expanding its hemp program from 4 to 12 staffers.

Every little bit helps, but that’s not nearly enough.

Jackson County commissioners alone say they need six more code enforcement officers; the sheriff’s office needs 34 more staffers, including 18 detectives; and the state Water Resources Department there needs three more staffers just to handle water-theft complaints.

And that’s just one county. Other counties report similar illegal pot problems.

In Klamath County, sheriff’s deputies earlier this month discovered \$100 million worth of illegal marijuana filling a 27,000-square-foot potato storage shed. Two other illegal grows were also found.

Oregonians, including growers who follow the law, are being hurt because of the state’s lax regulation of pot and hemp.

Oregon’s leaders have failed the public. They have allowed illegal pot growers to operate at will.

It’s time for the governor and her administration to fix this crisis, which they helped create.

When Oregonians approved the legalization of marijuana and hemp, they were told the state would do a good job of regulating the crops and get rid of illegal growers.

The state at all levels has failed to live up to its part of the bargain. It’s time for the authorities to saddle up and get rid of this problem, which they have allowed to overrun our state.

Editor’s note: This editorial originally appeared in the Capitol Press.



FARMER’S FATE

Frog leg pie and other delights

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “If life were predictable it would cease to be life, and be without flavor.” At the rate our summer is going, we will never have to worry about a bland life — our home seems to be built on love, shenanigans, and unpredictability ... flavoring it up like frog leg pie.

Recently, I was planning on a day in the swather: an audiobook, snacks, and company from my 5-year-old and the dog — a pretty enjoyable way to spend a summer day. I stopped at the chicken coop to let the chicks and ducks out before I left — and that’s when unpredictable hit. One of the baby ducks, Mrs. Beakley, wasn’t walking right. She would walk a few steps then tumble forwards to the ground. Her wings and legs seemed fine, but she continued to stumble as the rest of the flock headed toward their mud pond. I called a friend who offered some advice, and 20 minutes later, I was in the field swathing — with only one small feathered change to the plan. In the dog’s place sat a duck in a box.

Every little bit I syringed water with nutritional yeast into her mouth. The first few hours were awful. The duck was getting weaker, and her head was starting to flop. Soon she was laying out flat and I regretted taking her along. With a loud crunch the swather sucked an irrigation pipe through its rollers. “Welcome to unpredictable farm life,” I grumbled as I stepped over the dying duckling and headed out to move an entire line of forgotten pipes.

Fifteen minutes later, upon opening the door of the swather, I was flabbergasted to see the baby duck sitting up — and even more surprised when she seemed to be hungry, pecking at the grass in her box. I cut up pieces of cucumber, and she greedily devoured every last one. We had a great rest of the day together. In between naps she would peck the window as the bugs swirled safely around outside



Brianna Walker

the glass. If we hit a bump or the sound of the engine changed, she would jump to her feet and quack loudly. For anyone interested, a swather duck is much more entertaining than a swather dog — but a whole lot smellier.

Unpredictability at our house isn’t just relegated to the things that happen outside our control — we currently have a cousin living with us who has a fetish for blackberries. Lucky for him, many of our fields are lined with those accursed brambles — and he brought home gallons of the tasty berries each week.

But what does one do with so many blackberries? We made blackberry pies and blackberry cobbler, blackberry smoothies and blackberry oatmeal — and one evening I made a savory blackberry and basil pizza. Everyone seemed a bit hesitant — but once you got over the fact that it was purple, it was quite unpredictably delicious. The success in such a bizarre recipe emboldened me to try a recipe I had read years ago in a Great Depression cookbook: green tomato pie.

Here is where the shenanigans come in. My husband loathes tomatoes. Put a diced tomato in his salad and he gags and chokes and says, “Tomatoes cause cancer. My mom ate tomatoes and she died of cancer.” His idea of a good tomato is one that is puréed and seasoned and smeared on a garlic crust under pounds of melted cheese and olives. So I smiled devilishly to myself as I rolled out the dough for a tomato pie.

It smells delicious, but, if I was to be totally honest, the green goo oozing out of the pie slits was more than a little off-putting.

“What is that?” everyone asked, sniffing the delicious aroma which seemed incongruous to the green,

goopy glop setting in front of them. “Dessert!” I declared proudly, “because I love you all from my head tomatoes.” I slipped a knife into the pie — and nearly lost my appetite. I had followed the recipe exactly, which directed that the tomatoes be cut in thick quarter-inch slices. Those big green tomatoes oozed like cooked frog’s legs out from under the pie crust. I snuck a glance up at everyone’s faces. They looked just like mine — a little nauseous at the ghastly sight.

“You’re eating that first,” my husband said definitively.

“I’m going to tell you it’s amazing,” I said, with more bravado than I felt. “Because if it’s good I’m going to be soooo proud of myself — and if it’s bad, well, misery loves company.”

I took a glob of oozy green tomatoes and watched in horror as they made slime trails across my plate. Everyone watched as I took a slow, apprehensive bite. It tasted surprisingly like a cross between apples and pears. It was delicious. Everyone finally took a piece — and it was the consensus that if only one could eat it blindfolded, the pie could be considered a success. The next time I modified the recipe, dicing the pieces and adding a bit of red food coloring. It looked better, but everyone still referred to it as frog leg pie.

“It’s just backwards to have blackberry pizza and tomato pie,” my husband said, shaking his head. What can I say? It’s an unpredictable household — overflowing with shenanigans. I think my kitchen needs a sign warning our guests of our unpredictable menu: Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad. Philosophy is wondering if ketchup classifies as a smoothie ... and shenanigans is serving frog leg pie for dessert.

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

COMMENTARY

Medical providers discuss vaccines

As your local medical providers, we have been hearing many questions about the COVID vaccines. We thought it would be helpful to provide some information for our community regarding vaccination. Our first priority as medical professionals is to prevent illness and death, and this letter comes from our desire to keep our patients, friends and neighbors healthy. We also acknowledge that vaccination is a personal choice, and we hope that this information helps in your decision making process.

First, a common question is about vaccine effectiveness. Data from September show that Moderna is 93% effective at preventing hospitalization from COVID, while Pfizer is 88% effective, and J&J is 71% effective. Since the delta variant has become the dominant strain, unvaccinated people are more than 10 times more likely to be hospitalized or die from COVID and five times more likely to get the disease.

Another common question about the vaccines is their safety. Many have heard stories about vaccine reactions. However, serious reac-

tions are very rare. Risks for each vaccine vary by age and gender, and the CDC website has the most up-to-date information. You can also talk to your primary care doctor about which vaccine would be best for you.

Another common question: Why do I need the vaccine if I am low-risk for serious COVID infection? Your vaccination helps to slow the spread of COVID in the community and protects those around you. Less spread of COVID also means fewer chances for mutations and new variants of the disease.

Others ask: How did they develop the vaccines so quickly? Previous research on vaccines for similar viruses (SARS-CoV-2 and MERS-CoV) gave scientists a jumpstart on COVID-19 vaccine development. Once developed, all vaccines undergo three phases of clinical trials to establish safety and efficacy, and some of the phases were combined given the urgency of the situation.

Again, we acknowledge that vaccination is a personal choice. And while we think that vaccination is

a good way to protect yourself and those in our community, we are also committed to serving all patients equally and with the most current treatments available, whether you are vaccinated or not. And in addition to vaccines, we always encourage good lifestyle choices (healthy eating, staying active, washing hands, etc.) to keep you as healthy as possible. Even now, COVID is still affecting many in our community, and tertiary hospitals may be full. This affects patients at BMH because we may have limited places to send patients who need ICU or specialty care.

Our clinic has all three vaccines available during clinic hours without an appointment.

And we encourage you to discuss any questions you have with your primary care provider. We consider it an honor to serve the people of Grant County.

This commentary was submitted by Dr. Emily Lieuallen, Dr. Zac Bailey, Dr. Robyn Jennings, Dr. Brian Jennings, Dr. Caitlin Maccoun, Erika Adams FNP and James Cook FNP.



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