

OUR VIEW

Public health officials deserve praise, thanks

When the pandemic is over — and one day it will recede — there will be a plethora of stories for future historians to delve through.

One story we hope is not overlooked now, and won't be discarded in the future, is the dedicated and determined work conducted by the members of the Umatilla County Health Department.

For more than a year, the people who work at the health department — medical workers, employees, contact tracers — sat on the frontline of one of the greatest, and most dangerous, events of our history.

Led by director Joe Fiumara, the health department took center stage when the pandemic descended. Their job has not been — and will not be — an easy one. They are charged with protecting the health of the public, a public that is diverse and complicated and, at times, utterly unwilling to listen.

The pandemic has most likely changed the role of public health forever. Once a little-known piece of our government bureaucracy, the



A nurse gives a shot through a driver's window during a rainy drive-thru vaccination clinic on Jan. 8, 2021, at the Pendleton Convention Center.

Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald, File

local health department was shoved to the front lines of the pandemic war and the price has been high. Long hours.

Seven-day-a-week work schedules. Little thanks. Health department personnel faced criticism and oppo-

sition regarding testing, contact tracing and vaccinations. They, like public schools, are and will continue to be caught in a bewildering

crossfire between those who follow science and those who disregard commonsense measures that will stop the COVID-19 virus.

All agencies, like the health department, can do is what they've been doing — work hard, keep their focus and continue to care about the public.

The employees at the health department have completed their work under the most difficult circumstances and they've received little or no recognition. Granted, they're not in their jobs to be recognized. They are there for a variety of reasons, including the fact they feel compelled to help their fellow citizens.

When the COVID-19 war is over, there will be lots of accolades thrown about. There will be a palatable sense of relief. Yet, we want to make sure that, in the end, the people who stood in the firing line day after day were singled out for their outstanding work. The Umatilla County Health Department deserves all our praise.

COLUMN

Mega-dairies and our mega-drought

Oregon, like the rest of the West, is staring down a dry summer. In an executive order, Gov. Kate Brown instructed state agencies to trim water use in preparation for what can only be called a mega-drought.

Across the West, residents hunker down in anticipation of water restrictions and in some regions farmers have started reevaluating the viability of water-intensive crops. In the Klamath Basin in southern Oregon, indigenous communities are facing the potential demise of sacred and federally protected endangered fish, and irrigation water has been shut off due to the lowest levels the river has ever seen.

Yet, in Oregon's northeastern Morrow County, the state may welcome one of the largest and most notorious guzzlers of water — a mega-dairy. Easterday Dairy would bring 28,000 cows to the same land as the former Lost Valley Farm in Boardman, joining four other mega-dairies in Morrow County.

The Easterdays' multimillion dollar fraud case involving hundreds of thousands of imaginary cattle and subsequent bankrupt-

cies put a pause on the permitting process for the dairy until Oregon's Department of Agriculture found that Cody Easterday found that Cody Easterday — listed as the owner of Easterday Dairy on the permit — passed on ownership to his son, Cole.

The original application was withdrawn per ODA's July 15 deadline, but a decision on the subsequent permit submission from Cole is still pending. Although the financial troubles affecting the Easterdays' various companies call their ability to responsibly manage a mega-dairy into question, clearly warranting denial of the dairy's permit, yet another pressing case for denial stares us in the face — our persistent drought. Easterday Dairy's permit application estimates its water usage would average approximately 20 million gallons per day.

Twenty-two of Oregon's 36 counties have requested drought declarations from Brown this year. Morrow was granted its request and is currently under a drought declaration. As crops and pastures wither, the threat of devastating wildfires grows. According to the National Drought Mitigation Center, county residents will likely have a "significantly shortened" window for water access this year. These conditions represent a "new normal" for the area, and

will undoubtedly worsen in time if the proposed Easterday mega-dairy is granted a permit.

Morrow's mega-dairies source their water from local groundwater and the Columbia River, but both are finite resources. Migrating fish depend on the river's flow, and experts have said these fish need as much water from the Columbia as it has left from April until September.

As we wade further into a summer that only promises to get drier and hotter, this water will become infinitely more precious and quite possibly scarcer than ever before. Several parts of Morrow County are already designated as critical groundwater areas in response to serious groundwater decline.

Mega-dairies routinely use untold gallons of water in water-stressed regions. Despite the drought, Oregon agencies continue to elevate the interests of industrial agriculture over the basic needs of communities and ecosystems to access clean water.

ODA must deny the proposed Easterday Dairy's permit. Our water is too limited and too precious to waste it on mega-dairies in a drought.

Kristina Beggen is an organizer with Food & Water Watch and the Stand Up to Factory Farms Coalition. She works at the nexus of environmental and social justice.



Kristina Beggen

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Let's not reward bad behavior

Inmates outside the walls of Two Rivers Correctional Institution for a family play date — what? Forthcoming is a date to have inmates, also known as adults in custody, to be allowed at Hermiston Spray Park. Reportedly the inmates will be allowed time with their families at the park. So who approved this reward for bad behavior? Was it the Department of Corrections? Citizens of Hermiston? Good questions, but what I do know is this citizen doesn't approve of this recipe for complete disaster.

I found out by accident of this event and was stunned that someone thought of this as a wonderful idea! Perhaps someone has an agenda for promotion at the prison. Maybe this isn't the first such event where Joe Public didn't need told. Why be secretive if this is so great? To say that I'm unhappy about this is an understatement.

Inmates were sentenced for offenses by a judge, after a fair trial, so now it's okay to thumb your nose at the judicial system? Rewarding for misconduct is never a win. It teaches people that accountability doesn't matter. While this is my thoughts, I have a hard time believing other citizens know about the event or think this is a positive thing for Hermiston. We are a community of doers and movers. Let's move this out of the possibility of being a reality Hermiston.

Karen Primmer
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No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

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