

Harvest is a family tradition

It's harvest time in Kansas. And while most Americans associate harvest with autumn leaves and Thanksgiving, Kansans think of hot southern winds that ripen the wheat and signal it's time to get the combine ready for what they hope will be a good crop. Ever since Kansas' first settlers converted the prairie to a sea of tall grass into amber waves of grain, families have labored together during the summer months to bring in the harvest.

Capitol Views
Senator Jerry



Harvest is a time when sons and daughters work alongside their parents and grandparents. It's a time when values are passed down and life lessons are learned - not just those of hard work, but of how to manage disappointment and make the most of success. It's also a time for family gatherings and giving thanks for the special way of life we lead in Kansas.

It seems that no matter where a son or daughter lives, they find a way to come back home and help their family during harvest. There is more to this pilgrimage than just lending a hand; there is a pride that reminds us of our heritage, and draws families and generations closer together.

The family farm contributes enormously to the values and traditions Kansans hold dear, as well as to the strength and stability of our state and nation's economy. Every day, millions of Americans enjoy a safe and affordable food supply thanks to our nation's farmers, but trends show that more young adults are leaving their rural hometowns for jobs in the city. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, only 8 percent of all farmers today are age 35 or younger while more than half of U.S. farmers are between the ages of 45 and 65. Additionally, the average Kansas farmer is getting older - increasing in age from 54 to 58 over the last decade.

This trend is concerning and the only way to reverse it is to create opportunities that make it easier for sons and daughters to make the choice to return to follow in their parents' footsteps. Congress can do its part by removing regulatory obstacles that make it more difficult for families to operate their businesses. A good place to start is the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). From limiting the amount of dust that can be kicked up by a combine, to regulating every mud puddle on a farm and dictating which day ranchers can burn their pastures in the Flint Hills, EPA's overbearing regulations must be reined in.

For farmers to earn a living and remain competitive, Congress must also develop a comprehensive energy policy that allows for an ample energy supply which is both affordable and reliable. Rising fuel prices increase operating costs for farmers and ranchers - making it more expensive to purchase fertilizer, produce crops and transport them to market.

Creating a friendly environment for the family farm at home must be coupled with opening new foreign markets for agricultural commodities overseas. Delayed approval of pending trade agreements with countries like Colombia, Panama, and South Korea are costing farmers and ranchers real money, and each day that passes we risk losing more of our market share to competing nations. It is past time to create more opportunities for American farms to grow and prosper.

Finally, nothing hinders the transfer of the family farm to the next generation more than the estate tax. It is an unfair, unjust burden on our economy and it punishes Kansans who want to continue their family business. I have long sought a permanent repeal of the estate tax, but have also pursued opportunities to increase the size of estate tax exemption and lower rates. I will continue to look for commonsense ways to decrease the impact of the estate tax so farmers can make long-term plans with more certainty.

Just like the summer wheat harvest, creating an environment of economic certainty will take hard work. To keep the family farm alive, however, it is worth every bit of effort. I will continue my efforts to educate my colleagues in Congress about the vital contributions of our nation's farmers and ranchers, and will work to keep the federal government out of the way so we can preserve that special way of life for future generations of Kansans.

To subscribe to Sen. Moran's newsletter, visit his website at <<http://moran.senate.gov>>

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Never time to catch up on everything

I was beginning to think my calendar looked pretty clear this week. And, Lord knows I need to be staying home and taking care of business. We have been on a dead-run lately. Sometimes we get home just in time to run through the shower, change and head back out. We meet ourselves coming and going.

The house is out of control; weeds are running rampant and flowers need to be planted. But, just when I thought I might have a few days at home to get on top of things; life goes and gets in the way. Jim needs help setting up a shed for a customer; a committee I serve on requires a meeting; another committee needs a phone conference; a fund-raiser for the house we help operate for inmates families needs planning; and we have company coming over the Fourth of July. So, there goes the week.

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



-ob-

Saturday we went to the wedding of a young woman whom we've known since she was in junior high. What a beautiful bride she was. Brides are supposed to beam on their wedding day and Jessica had on a 100 watt smile.

She was overcome by emotion during the ceremony with tears of joy streaming down her face. Her groom, Henry, lovingly, reached out to her and wiped her tears away. It was a tender moment that

brought tears to everyone's eyes.

-ob-

Do you ever wonder what out-of-staters think when they drive through this country? Do they understand the magnitude of what a wheat harvest means? Do they appreciate the beauty of the land? Do they know what good people live and work here? I hope so. I've made a prediction that harvest will begin this week in our area. Every field looks ripe and custom cutters are starting to circle. It's close....very close.

-ob-

A young couple from our church was having Sunday lunch at a table next to ours. I asked how old the baby was. Then I asked how old their other son was. Not waiting for his mother to reply, he piped up, "I'm big and a half!"

Agency requests comments on transportation issue

Insight

John Schlageck

Just in case you've been busy cutting wheat, spraying weeds, hauling feed or water to your hungry cattle or selling some of your livestock at the sale barn and you haven't had a spare moment to hear the news - the Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration (FMCSA) recently released a 30-day request for public comment on a series of transportation issues directly related to production agriculture.

What the government is concerned about is the movement of commodities grown and raised on the farm/ranch. You know wheat, corn, beans, cattle and other livestock.

The first fly in the ointment I have already mentioned. Farmers and ranchers already have their hands full with planting fall crops, wheat harvest and caring for their livestock. Thirty days is not enough time for ag producers to review and contemplate the likely impacts on their operations and respond.

Farmers and ranchers are willing and able to weigh in on this important discussion, says Steve Baccus, Kansas Farm Bureau president who farms in Ottawa County.

"We're eager to help Washington-based regulators understand that a farm truck is not an over-the-road motor carrier," Baccus says.

Sen. Pat Roberts (Kansas) is pushing for a 90-day period to allow farm and ranch families the opportunity to fully understand the potential impacts of the issues involved and to provide thoughtful and constructive comments to the agency.

Here's the real kicker. If adopted,

regulatory guidance recently published by the feds will mean farmers/stockmen moving a single cow to the local sale barn in a 16-foot trailer will fall under the same regulatory regimen as Yellow Freight or J. B. Hunt.

There's a big difference between a farmer hauling his own grain down the road a few miles to his country elevator and a trucking company transporting appliances across several states. For-profit truckers have the capital and manpower to handle these chores, farmers don't.

"Farmers farm for a living and truckers transport products" Baccus says. "Farmers produce crops and livestock and haul them to market so people in this country and around the world have food."

Our government believes there's lack of a uniform definition of "implements of husbandry." They further note that many states exempt tractors, combines and other farm equipment from vehicle safety regulations.

At this time the agency believes implements of husbandry and off-road agricultural equipment don't meet the definition of a commercial motor vehicle, but officials are asking if they should.

Secondly, federal officials question whether a producer hauling commodities to market, part of which is his and part his landlord's, should be considered "for hire."

"In Kansas, we believe if the farmer transporting the commodity also raised

the commodity, it shouldn't matter," Baccus says. "However, if the government puts farmers in the category of 'for hire' carriers, they would be regulated like commercial truckers."

Even more alarming is the issue of interstate versus intrastate commerce. In terms of grain and livestock movement, agriculture has long operated under the belief that hauling a farmer/rancher's own commodities within 150 miles of the farm/ranch was exempt from regulation.

Long ago Congress distinguished agricultural transportation from commercial because it is typically seasonal in nature and occurs over relatively short distances.

This country became a global power because of its infrastructure and its ability to transport crops, livestock, automobiles and other goods fast and efficiently. Exporting U.S. crops to other parts of the world will do us no good if this nation can't get the grain off the farm, out of the field and ultimately onto the barges and other shipping containers for transport around the world.

Kansas agriculture, and agriculture across this nation, has its work cut out for it on this transportation issue. Farmers will rapidly lose their competitive edge if they are subjected to overzealous regulation.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.



Dear Editor,

It was very uplifting to view and read the June 24 Telegram supplemental insert regarding the many youth ball teams in our area.

A lot of credit and appreciation goes to the sponsors, coaches, and adults who spend time and effort working with our youth to provide them with wholesome summertime activities. The June 24 Telegram insert is indicative of the positive results.

John Snyder, Norton



Thumbs up, A HUGE thumbs up to Camille Cox for organizing others in the efforts to get the tornado victims, Preston David & family, situated in their new home! Emailed in.