



Provision to farm bill may or may not be good

It's a legislative horror story, really. Last year, Senate and House conferees inserted a provision in the new Farm Bill closing records of most business between the Department of Agriculture and farmers.

About the only thing you can find out now about a farmer's relationship with the government is how much federal money he or she got last year. This means that farmers will continue to show up on those embarrassing lists put out by environmental groups.

But a lot of information that used to be public will be behind a screen of secrecy, thanks to this bill.

That may or may not be a good idea. Our view is that farmers have nothing to hide, and the details of their interaction with the government — while of little interest to most of us — might as well be out in the open. That's how public business ought to be done.

Closing records, however, is keeping county tax assessors from finding out whether farm land qualifies for lower assessment rates. Assessors say that makes their job more difficult and forces them sometimes to just use the higher rate until a landowner protests. So the change is causing some problems for farmers, too.

Otherwise, the issue is open to debate, and we'd like to report that Congress had one. It didn't, though.

The secrecy provision never went through hearings. Citizens had no chance to protest or complain or praise the proposal. Lobbyists for most groups never heard it was coming. It bypassed the normal legislative process.

Then when the compromise Farm Bill came back to the floor, the train was a rollin' and no

one wanted to be in the way. No floor debate. No notice, really, of this small provision in among hundreds of pages.

How did this happen when Congress has a system for handling legislation, you ask?

Well, Congress does have a system. It's full of loopholes. Many state legislatures work the same way, Kansas among them. Whole bills can be inserted into another law at the conference stage with little or no notice, no debate, no chance for opposition.

It's bad government, bad lawmaking, but it happens all the time. The system is short-circuited and the citizens are cheated.

To make matters worse, our own Rep. Jerry Moran reportedly was on this conference committee. He has yet to make any statement on the issue, that we know of.

This is the same kind of poor lawmaking that got Kansas strict requirements for carnival inspections that could put our home-owned carnivals out of business. There was no debate on that bill, either; no chance to tell why it could be a disaster for rural Kansas.

Our legislative process — state and federal — is broken. It will be flawed until legislators give up this awful loophole of theirs and pass rules that make all proposals go through the committee process, public hearings and a chance for opponents to speak.

In a democracy such as ours, where the people are supposed to be partners in government, that's just the way it should be.

We'd like to see our Congressman leading the charge. What about it, Mr. Moran?

— Steve Haynes



THE OBAMA TEAM PUTS A BRAVE FACE ON A SCARY FUTURE...

The cost of saving money

By Patrick T. Lehman, Executive Director Kansas Association of Conservation Districts

Kansas legislators have a daunting task ahead of them as they convene for the 2009 session on Jan. 12. The state budget is in a deep hole that is getting deeper. The Governor and lawmakers will seek to find cost savings wherever they can — and they should. We, their constituents, expect nothing less.

As state agencies and programs are examined for potential cost savings, the question becomes: Can we create a leaner state government and not lose essential services in the bargain? Can we do it without spending a dollar to save a dime?

A case in point is the proposed consolidation of the State Conservation Commission with the Kansas Department of Agriculture. The State Conservation Commission was statutorily established as a stand-alone agency in 1937. That action followed on the heels of one of the darkest periods in Kansas history — when the entire Great Plains region suffered a devastating drought. After several years of minimal rain, the area began to experience huge black dust storms, the most memorable of which occurred on April 14, 1935. That day, known as "Black Sunday," an estimated 300 million tons of soil blew from the land.

Just as every cloud has a silver lining, out of those dust clouds came a firm commitment to soil conservation. In a letter to the states in February 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "The nation that destroys its soil destroys itself." He urged states to set up soil conservation districts to work with the Soil Conservation Service, which had just been established as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Kansas responded rapidly; the Kansas Legislature passed a bill that created conservation districts in Kansas, which was signed into law by Governor Walter Huxman on March 25, 1937. The measure also provided for the creation of a Soil Conservation Committee as an agency of the state, whose purpose was to assist in the formation of conservation districts and to coordinate their affairs.

From its beginnings in 1937, the State Conservation Commission has treated that responsibility with diligence and the utmost care. It has administered Conservation District Law and fulfilled duties under the Watershed District Act and other statutorily established programs through long-term, beneficial relationships with local conservation and watershed districts. State Conservation Commission's 13 staff members are highly trained, competent individuals with a thorough understanding of the needs of the diverse Kansas districts they serve. In short, it's a system that works — a system that has worked efficiently and effectively for 71 years.

According to the performance audit report presented to the Joint Committee on Legislative Post Audit on Dec. 19, 2008, an estimated \$320,000 in savings could be achieved by merging State Conservation Commission with the Kansas Department of Agriculture. The figures on which this estimate is based uses some assumptions that are debatable, but that argument aside, we have to ask the questions posed above: Can we create a leaner state government and not lose essential services in the bargain? Can we do it without spending a dollar to save a dime?

Yes, we can create a leaner state government, and yes, we will lose essential services in the bargain. We'll lose hands-on services to

conservation and watershed districts that they rely on to carry out key conservation practices. The losses are a certainty since the potential cost savings would be achieved through cuts in staff and space. Fewer people would be required to do more, when employees' plates are already full. By necessity, some tasks would be delayed or set aside.

What will the savings cost us in the long run? Down the road a decade, will we be forced to implement high-cost remedies to fix what didn't need fixing in the first place? Will dollars currently slated for conservation be diverted to non-conservation programs because lawmakers are faced with a serious budget deficit, just like they are this year?

As the Kansas Legislature deliberates on this proposed consolidation, they must keep in mind the full scope of their actions and what their predecessors deemed to be a key agency of state government — one that has its entire focus on the preservation of Kansas soil, water, and other natural resources. Shifting State Conservation Commission to the Ag Department means diluting that focus, possibly reducing a commitment that has served Kansas well for seven decades.

The Kansas Association of Conservation Districts urges legislators to take a pass on this consolidation. Maintain State Conservation Commission as the specialized, productive agency that it is. The cost of saving money is simply too great.

Honor Roll

New and renewed Herald subscriptions: Stacie Wenzl, Phillipsburg; Gene Mears, McDonald; J.C. Hixon, Aurora, Colo.; Joe Bohnen, Hale, Colo.; Marlene Brown, Chico, Calif.; Aimee Northrup, St. Francis.

Hangin' With Marge

Museum

By Margaret Bucholtz



margeb@cityofstfrancis.net
Ever wish you knew more about our county, or maybe more about Kansas History?

If you do, I would suggest that joining the Cheyenne County Historical Society would be beneficial to you.

I joined over 10 years ago and, until then, I thought we had nothing to offer here except for a caring community and freedom.

I knew that we also had wind every day but what I didn't know was that we are in the center of In-

dian history. Our ancestors came with a dream in their minds and left us with a promise to explore our heritage.

After spending several years as a member, an officer and also as the museum director, I am happy to announce that my jobs are over. Janet and Stan Carman will be the new directors and they will do a super job. I will still be a member and I will still do Cheyenne County research, because I love it!

What I won't be doing is going to work and being on call. My

keys are turned in and I hope that each of you will join the society and find as much enjoyment as I have.

Milton Lampe once told me that when you are young you always look into the future, but as we age, we start looking at our past. He was so right! I just wish I would have looked at the past a little earlier and I want to encourage you to start. You will be amazed at how much fun it can be.

Casey's Comments

By Casey McCormick



scmcormick@nwkansans.com
Once again Cheyenne County played host to the annual FoxPro's Midwest Coyote Calling Event.

Brent Rueb, a local business man and hunting enthusiast, organized the contest which drew outdoors men from as far away as Hayward, Minn. Liberty, Mo., and Mesa, Ariz.

Many folks will look at this competition with disgust. "How can they kill so many innocent animals?"

Considering that without man to

keep these predators in check, the effect on livestock and pets would be expensive and unfortunate. Besides, with the hunt only occurring once a year, the population is not in threat.

Some people have a funny way of looking at animals and sometimes giving them more value than they perhaps deserve. The relationship between man and beast becomes blurred.

As long as there is a livestock industry animals will be raised for

human consumption. Their purpose is to feed us. For the rancher and dairyman, these creatures are their livelihood. The bottom line is the best treatment possible means more money.

I'm sure coyotes serve a purpose and play a roll here on the plains. But, last I heard, they're not on the endangered species list and they create a fair share of damage.

Honor Roll

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GOD SAYS
But whoso committeth
adultery with a woman lacketh
understanding: he that doeth
it destroyeth his own soul.
Proverbs 6:32

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(785) 332-3162 Fax - (785) 332-3001
E-mail - sf.herald@nwkansans.com

STAFF
Karen Krien Editor/Publisher
Betty Winston Sports Editor
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P.O. Box 1050 • St. Francis
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