

Opinion

Cows: Feed them grass

By Dr. Margaret Mellon

When we reach for a package of rib eye steaks and a gallon of milk in the grocery store, few of us think twice about how a steer became the steak in our hands or how a milk cow produced the goods in our milk cartons.

Perhaps we should, because the way the vast majority of beef and dairy cattle are raised in the United States poses big problems for the environment, human health, and animal health.

The bucolic ideal of cattle lazily grazing on pasture is an aberration in today's beef and dairy industry. The reality is very different. U.S. Department of Agriculture data show that the overwhelming majority of dairy cattle in the United States do not have access to pasture. Instead, they spend their days confined in large feedlots, eating a grain-based diet designed to make them produce large quantities of milk. Beef cattle spend the last four to six months of their lives in similar feedlots being fattened for slaughter.

But a growing number of innovative farmers have found a better way to produce meat and milk. These farmers raise beef and dairy cattle in small herds on pastures where they eat grass and other forages their entire lives.

From a nutrition standpoint, it matters how our beef and dairy cattle are raised. A new study by the Union of Concerned Scientists confirms that grass-fed beef and milk tend to contain higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids, the so-called beneficial fats, that reduce the risk of heart disease and protect the immune system. Both grass-fed ground beef and milk are also higher in conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), a fatty acid shown in animal studies to protect against cancer. Though the amounts of fatty acids in grass-fed beef and milk are relatively small, they may be beneficial and merit further research.

Environmentally, there are stark differences between feedlot operations and grass-fed farms. Cattle raised on pasture fertilize the land with their manure in amounts that the soil can safely absorb. In contrast, the beef cattle crammed in industrial feedlot operations generate many tons of manure that are stored in lagoons where breaches or leaks can harm local water supplies and fish populations. Confined cattle are also prone to disease, which leads most feedlot operators to routinely administer antibiotics to prevent illness and accelerate growth. Overuse of these antibiotics in animals makes bacteria resistant to the same antibiotics doctors prescribe to people.

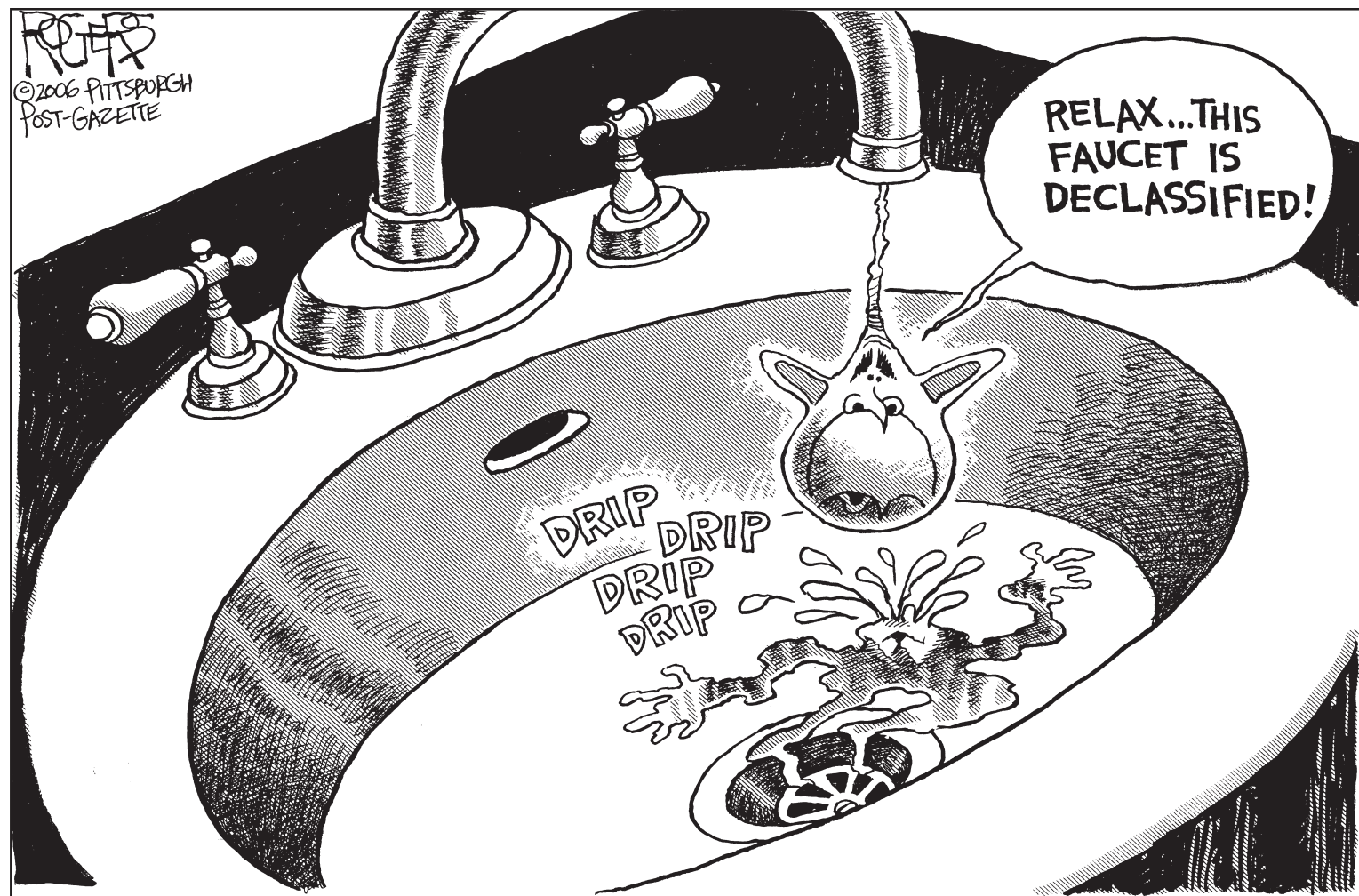
So, what's good for the cattle is also good for us. Grass-fed farming offers a way to keep small farmers on their land. A recent USDA resource survey found that pasture-raised dairy cows yielded a 5 percent higher profit per cow than dairy cows not raised on pasture.

The American Grass-fed Association, a membership organization established to promote the industry, estimates that 500 ranchers are already raising beef cattle on grass, and the USDA reports that roughly 7,000 dairy farmers are intensively grazing cows on pasture. Currently, the demand for the meat and milk they produce greatly exceeds their supply, but supply will catch up if consumers keep asking for the product.

To help keep this fledgling industry growing, consumers should ask their local grocery stores to stock grass-fed beef and dairy products. Producers employing conventional methods of raising beef and dairy should embrace the healthier practices that grass-fed production affords. And, the USDA should fund research into the benefits of omega-3 fatty acids and CLAs and the production practices that can increase their levels in milk and meat.

There are no losers in raising cattle on pasture: consumers win, farmers win, the environment wins, and even the cattle win.

Dr. Margaret Mellon is Director of the Food and Environment Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists. UCS is an independent nonprofit alliance of 50,000 concerned citizens and scientists across the country. UCS augments rigorous scientific analysis with innovative thinking and committed citizen advocacy to build a cleaner, healthier environment and a safer world. www.ucsusa.org



The reason for the season

I sit here on this Maundy Thursday in a world filled with war and rumors of war. I hear about people protesting and screaming for rights which many, including myself, question the validity of those rights having been earned. And despite all the doom and gloom, I'm filled with hope, joy and peace on the fifth of seven days of the most holy weeks of the year.

For many people, Friday, Saturday and Sunday means only a three-day weekend. It will offer them time for golfing, fishing, doing yard work and a sundry of other things on their "to-do" list.

But for millions of people around the world, particularly Christians like myself, we look toward tomorrow, Good Friday, and see the day as one to remember the crucifixion of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

At the same time I, like millions of others, eagerly await Easter Sunday, the most glorious day of celebration of Christ's resurrection, and know it will start as any other day. The sun will come up in the east, but as it rises I'll be filled with joy and peace that my life is much better because of Christ's death.

Better in the fact that I know God loves me enough to have given me his only son to die in my place for my sins. Oh yes, I'll still be judged



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

for my actions done in this old world, but I have the assurance that I will live forever in heaven.

My hope is based on Scripture which never changes and which makes getting up each morning a joy. A joy to face the doom and gloom of this world and know that no matter how many wars are waged, I'll come out on top.

It's hope based on Scripture which makes life peaceful despite the muck and mire of one protest after another, rightfully lead or not.

As the decades roll by, it's hope in a risen Lord which offers me a peace which passes all understanding. As I watch the world unfold before me year after year, I reflect on things my late mom used to say, like "Come Lord Jesus quickly."

A woman who lived such a devoted life serving a risen Lord, my mom now rests in the joy, peace and love offered to each and every one of

us through faith in Jesus Christ. As each day of my life passes and as each Easter season rolls by, I more earnestly treasure the many phrases Mom used to say.

Like, "God promised you a rose garden, He just didn't say they'd be thornless."

Or, "This too shall pass."

Or better yet, "There but by the grace of God I trod."

As holy week draws to its end, I ponder on the precious life of a woman God allowed me to share and the woman I called Mom.

In just a couple weeks we'll celebrate Mother's Day, and while I miss my mom each and every day, I wouldn't wish her back for anything.

A cancer survivor, Mom died from the toll almost 30 years of diabetes took on her body. But despite her illness and death she gave me things which can't be taken away.

She gave me life, which I now share with my own two children, but more than that, she gave me an example by which to live my life and a standard by which I can measure it. And the best part of my life is knowing Mom rests in the bosom of a living god, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Happy Easter!

Your turn

You can help prevent child abuse

Roxy Cabral Colby

When you read or hear news reports about cases of child abuse and neglect what is your reaction?

Disgust? Disbelief? Sadness?

Now here's the hard question. What do you do about it?

Child abuse is an ugly, terrible problem in our community and across our state. During fiscal year 2005 (July 2004 - June 2005) there were 47,409 reports of child abuse and neglect in Kansas - over 3,000 more than FY 2004.

Right here in Thomas County there were 173 reports of child abuse and neglect in 2005 compared to 137 in 2004.

Child maltreatment is linked to a host of poor outcomes for children including inadequate school performance, substance abuse, and future perpetration of abuse and neglect.

It's important to know the scope of the problem and the effects on kids. But, what's even more essential is knowing what each of us can do to help prevent child abuse and neglect. Without that information, many of us resign to the notion that there really isn't anything that I can

do. Nothing is further from the truth. Following are some ideas:

Support children and families. This is the simplest, yet hardest thing to do. But, it's the most effective. Offer to baby sit for a frazzled neighbor. Donate used children's clothing, furniture, and toys. Make an effort to get to know the kids and families on your block. Be a helping hand and a listening ear. Many times families under stress simply need someone to talk to.

Address the issue. Let others know you are concerned about child abuse in your community. Encourage schools or faith communities in your area to offer classes and support groups for parents. Call or write your elected officials and let them know about the importance of funding programs and services that support healthy and safe children and families.

Educate yourself. Know where to go for help. For a listing of resources in your community call the Kansas Children's Service League's Parent Helpline (1-800-332-6378) for a list of resources in your community. Don't be afraid to report. Recently in Kansas a teenager intervened on behalf of a 3-year-old boy. If you suspect

maltreatment of a child, don't wait, call. The child abuse hotline is 1-800-922-5330. This is an anonymous call that could be an important step to protecting a child in need.

Get involved. Agencies that work with children and families always need help. Volunteer. Become a mentor, foster or even become an adoptive parent. Support their work in other ways.

Wear a Blue Ribbon. April is Child Abuse Prevention month. The blue ribbon campaign raises awareness of the positive stops that can be taken to prevent child abuse. Please wear your blue ribbon to support a standard that every child should grow up in a loving, safe, nurturing home.

Preventing child abuse and neglect is everyone's responsibility. Please do your part during April and throughout the year. For more information on programs and how you can participate in the prevention of child abuse, please contact:

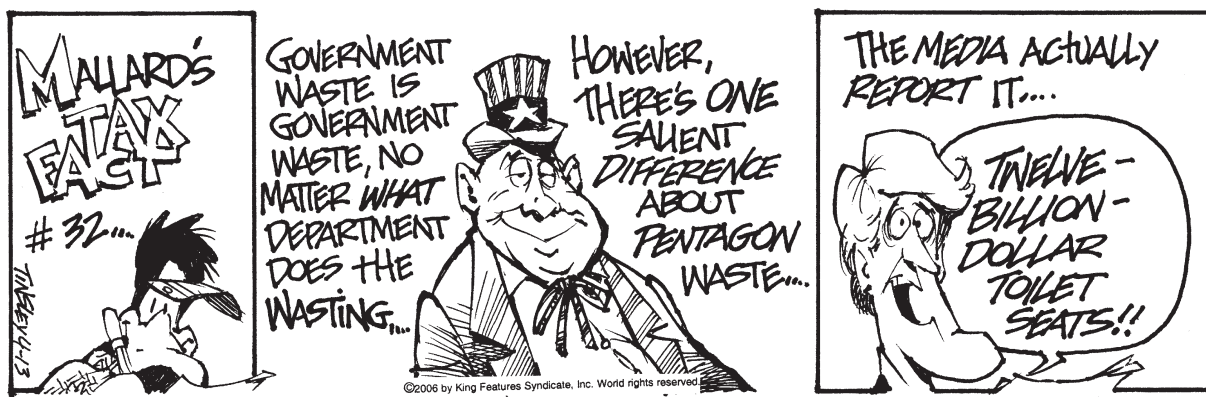
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