

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Bet your livelihood

By John Schlageck

The stereotypical image of the family farm complete with red barn, a few layer hens scratching in the yard, some pigs wallowing in the mud and contented cows chewing their cuds in the field isn't commonplace anymore. Neither is the farm as a sterile, mechanized emotionless "food factory" an accurate picture.

Today, raising livestock on the farm or ranch is a dynamic, specialized profession that has proven one of the most successful in the world. Only in the United States can less than 2 percent of the population feed 100 percent of our population — and other people around the world — as efficiently as we do.

Because our livestock are the best cared for we can provide such efficiency. Today's animal husbandry is no accident. Improvements in housing, handling and animal nutrition are the result of billions of dollars of private and government research.

Many consumers are unaware of a farmer's relationship with his/her animals and how meat, milk, eggs and other food products wind up on the dinner table. Farmers have always enjoyed sweeping public support for their efforts to provide abundant, nutritious food.

Some people do not agree. They are working to convince the public that farmers and ranchers no longer tend their animals but treat them only as food machines. Some people believe that not only are animals confined but most are held in crates and cages and not allowed to move at all.

Animal behavior varies just like human behavior. In some cases livestock are restricted to avoid injuring themselves, other animals or the farmer. All forms of restraint are designed for the welfare of the animal as well as efficiency of production.

As an example, beef cattle in herds or feedlots are restrained generally when being doctored. In cow/calf operations, housing allows for protection from predators and the elements, disease control and ease of handling.

Farmers and ranchers are neither cruel nor naïve. A farmer would compromise his or her own welfare if animals were mistreated.

Agriculture is extremely competitive in this country. Farmers and ranchers receive slim margins on the animals they care for. It is in the farmer's best interest to ensure the animals in his care are treated humanely, guaranteeing a healthy, high-quality animal, a greater return on his investment and a wholesome food product. Farmers continuously look for new methods to improve their farming operations to make sure animals are well cared for.

Today as a general rule, farm animals are housed in barns or other buildings with the exception of beef cattle. This is to protect the health and welfare of the animal. Housing protects livestock from predators, disease and bad weather or extreme climate. Housing also makes breeding and birth less stressful, protects young animals and makes it easier for farmers to care for both healthy and sick animals.

Modern animal housing is well ventilated, warm, well lit, clean and scientifically designed for the specific needs of the animal. Inside these facilities, livestock receive plenty of fresh water and nutritionally balanced feed.

As U.S. livestock production grows and changes, farmers' methods for ensuring welfare of their cattle, hogs, sheep and other animals also progresses. Farmers and ranchers are dedicated to providing the highest quality and safest food in the world — their livelihood depends on it.

Schlageck is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

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Exploring the unexplainable

Every now and then, I tend to go off the beaten path. (Although, family and friends seem to think I tend to go where there is no path.)

Anyway, a recent conversation where Death Valley somehow ended up getting thrown in, prompted me to throw out a mention on the mysterious moving rocks at the national park.

Race-track Playa, an ancient, dried out lakebed, has rocks that will, move. No one has ever actually seen the rocks move, but they do.

On some days, a lot, some days, not at all. Proof is the track of the rock's movement, without visible signs of human intervention or anything else. And it's a phenomenon documented by park rangers and other reputable witnesses, if you can call them that.

All of that got me to thinking about strange, or at least interesting places to visit. There aren't a lot of places in northwest Kansas that are unexplained, but there are a few that fall into the strange category.

Down the road, there is the giant prairie dog in Oakley, which has the reputation of being the world's largest. Goodland also has what is known as the world's largest easel with its giant version of Van Gogh's "Sunflowers."

Both are listed on the Roadside America Web site, www.roadsideamerica.com.

There are things further out, but no less strange.

Kansas also has the largest ball of twine, in Cawker City.

There's also a place my sister, Chris, told me about — the "Garden of Eden" in Lucas, which is northeast of Hays.

According to the Web site, the garden began



Tisha Cox

• Off The Beaten Path

in 1905 with a house built by 64-year-old Samuel Dinsmore. The home is made of limestone, and it was cut to look like logs.

It has sculptures, and more, such as Dinsmore's mausoleum, which has a glass-sided coffin where visitors can view Dinsmore's body.

Even further afield, Colorado has its share of strange sights for bored souls.

One of my favorites, and jointly recommended by my sister is Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve near Alamosa, Colo.

It's exactly what it sounds like — sand dunes. But it's sand dunes piled up against the Western Slope of the Rocky Mountains, lying between the mountains on the east and the San Luis Valley on to the west.

The sand has been deposited by wind and a creek over thousands of years, and covers 30 square miles.

One can roll down the dunes, or snowboard, or just take a walk around and enjoy.

I can attest to the fact the dunes are an amazing sight, and one that won't soon be forgotten. Plus there's plenty of wildlife around to view, and Alamosa isn't an expensive place to stay.

In the neighborhood near Alamosa is Cano's Castle, made entirely of beer cans. It's in Antonito, and looks interesting. I haven't been there, but have heard it's a sight to behold.

As far as strange sights in Colorado go, I would also recommend Boulder. A beautiful city with plenty to do and see, but many of the people are worth a look also.

One of my college professors, from Boulder, called it Berkeley East.

Boulder also has the Alferd Packer Memorial Grill, named for the infamous cannibal of the San Juans.

I know the places I name are strange, and even wacky, but it just goes to show anything goes when it comes to interesting things to do.

Even though gas prices are high, there is still plenty to do around the area, and even at home if one wishes.

Sometimes people may not think about what is already there, but considering fuel prices, a day of playing tourist in one's own backyard isn't a bad idea.

So, pack up the kids, take them to the Prairie Museum of Art and History, see the gallery there and don't forget to go through the biggest barn in Kansas.

Then, take a picnic to Fike Park, and end the trip with a visit to the palm trees at the Oasis and check out all of the tourists stopping in Colby.

After all, if Colby is a worthwhile place for travelers to check out, shouldn't the people who live here remember all it has to offer?

Tisha Cox is a reporter for the Colby Free Press.

Your turn

Plenty of questions for new doctor

Jim Smith

Colby

Concerning Dr. Saba, what happens if your patient having a total knee starts to hemorrhage?

Where will the blood supply come from? A large percentage of the Colby patients have medical problems that make them high risk for

surgery.

What happens if your patient has medical complications such as a heart attack? Where will you get the specialist that you need?

What happens if your patient has respiratory problems, is there a ventilator available?

Is there an intensive care unit available and staffed with nurses with that knowledge?

Who is going to give anesthesia, nurse anesthetist or anesthesiologist?

Is your hospital staffed with the specialist to take care of these emergencies?

What about all the specialists that have served western Kansas on an out-patient basis all these years? Are we going to ask them not to come out and serve?

All Kansans deserve similar protection

The Topeka Capital-Journal

Many, but not all, smokers strongly oppose laws to prevent smoking in public places such as bars and restaurants.

That's not surprising. What is difficult to understand, though, is the waffling position of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment on the issue.

After the strongest ever warning from the U.S. surgeon general that secondhand smoke can sicken or even kill nonsmokers, KDHE offered a very weak response.

Surgeon General Richard Carmona said recently that the dangers of secondhand cigarette

smoke were "indisputable," and nonsmoking sections in restaurants and bars weren't enough protection for consumers. Carmona calls secondhand smoke "involuntary smoking" and says it puts people at increased risk of death from lung cancer, heart disease and other illnesses. ...

KDHE's response: we encourage local communities to adopt laws banning smoking in public places, but we don't advocate a statewide or national law.

How can that be the position of an agency whose purpose is to protect and to improve the health of all the citizens of the state?

If secondhand smoke is killing people in

Lawrence restaurants (or was before Lawrence banned it), why is it not dangerous to someone eating in a restaurant in Wamego or Holton?

Citizens in 11 Kansas cities, unwilling to wait for the state to take action, have adopted smoking bans in public places: Abilene, Bel Aire, Concordia, Fairway, Hutchinson, Lawrence, Lyons, Prairie Village, Roeland Park, Salina and Walton. Twelve more cities are in the process of drafting ordinances. Topeka isn't one of them.

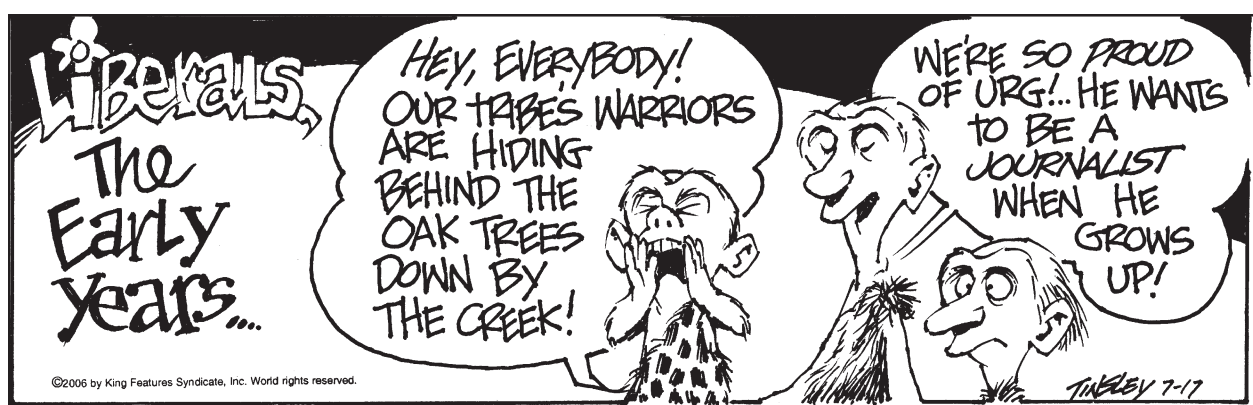
Fourteen states have statewide smoking ban laws.

Kansans — all Kansans — deserve similar protection.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce

Tinsley



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