

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint

A crop of criticism

From The Hutchinson News

Kansas farmers, who are watching springs crops wither in the continuing summer drought, have reason to take issue with President George W. Bush's threatened veto of \$4 billion in emergency farm aid.

At least that's the view of Sen. Jim Talent, R-Mo.

Talent, speaking recently to members of the Missouri Farm Bureau Federation's political action committee in Jefferson City, Mo., criticized the Bush administration. ...

The first-term senator noted that the Senate-passed emergency aid bill would help offset farmers' higher energy expenses. But the president's threatened veto has stalled action on the measure in the House.

But that's not all. Talent also criticized:

- An administration proposal made last year to close 713 of the nation's 2,351 Farm Service Agency offices. The offices have served for decades as a connection for farmers to secure loans and payments from various agricultural programs. Talent sponsored a measure to block the closings. The administration scrapped the original plan but continues to pursue consolidation through a round of public hearings and congressional involvement.
- Administration proposals to reduce farm subsidies as part of a prospective world trade agreement, which ended up collapsing.
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers management of the Missouri River, which is the subject of a long battle between upstream and downstream states over the water levels.

That a Republican senator would criticize a Republican president might raise some eyebrows. But Talent faces a tough re-election challenge from Democrat Claire McCaskill. Despite his comments, he rejects any suggestion that he wants to distance himself from Bush. Since Republicans took control of Congress in 1994, offering emergency farm aid has become an election-year tradition for the Grand Ol' Party of Free Spenders.

This year, however, high energy prices and the drought have squeezed even the most efficient operators. Farm Bureau and other farm lobbying groups have a convincing story to tell.

Unless the Bush White House wants to create more divisions in the Republican ranks, it might do well to drop the veto threat. In any event, given the president's feeble use of veto power — only one veto in six years — Congress nearly regards it as an empty threat.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvanostrand@nwkskans.com or pdecker@nwkskans.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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To each its own

I don't know who was more surprised, Patty and Tisha or me.

In preparation for our coverage of the Thomas County Fair, and our upcoming special section with all the fair results, I asked Patty and Tisha how many entries and pictures there could be of each animal category.

"Oh, we at least try and get the grand champion and reserve champion," she said.

"That's it," I replied.

I'm sure the shock in my voice surprised Patty. "Yeah, the extension office helps us with that too," she said.

"So there is no pen of three, cow-calf, seedstock, rate of gain for cattle, or anything like that," I said.

I'm sure she could hear the desperation in my voice. There was a moment of silence.

"Oh, I've heard of that," Tisha interrupted. "Being from Lakin, I heard there are some of those categories at Garden (City)."

But Tisha did not know of anyplace else in western Kansas that had the number of categories like I was used to in Iowa.

Where I worked at in Iowa, the county fairs there were similar to what Thomas County has to offer, but the number of 4-H animal entries and categories were apparently much larger than here.



John Van Nostrand

• Line in the Dust

There are several categories for hogs, sheep and horses too.

Not that what Thomas County does is bad. I was just so used to seeing up to 20 or so different categories for each animal, I assumed that was a common practice among county fairs and 4-H especially in a heavy agricultural area.

That was my problem - I assumed.

Maybe the beauty of county fairs is there is no pattern to follow. Each county has their own strengths and traditions that separate them from the others. Maybe Thomas County does not have the numbers, either kids or livestock, to do what is done at the county fairs in Iowa. Then again, there are county fairs that don't do what Thomas County Kansas does.

My first Thomas County Fair annual free barbecue dinner was fabulous. I'm always cautious of events with free food, for fear the food will

be a lower quality. Thomas County Fair is on the other extreme. That beef was fantastic. It was too good to get free. The lines were long, but the food was worth the wait. Organizers said this year's barbecue had hundreds more people than last year.

Saturday night of fair, wife Jennifer and I volunteered at the game sponsored by Heartland Christian School. It was not bad work at all, in fact, it was fun. Now I know what it is like to run a game stand - take the tickets, make sure the people follow the rules and the put the game back together again for the next person.

I quickly learned to appreciate and respect the organization behind the rides and games. If Thomas County wants a fair, people need to contribute, and they do. The rides were in excellent condition.

Organizers also asked people running the games if anything was needed every hour. It's a wonderful setup.

I've known people who have either worked or lived on the east coast and county fairs there are getting lost because there is a decline in the rural or agricultural atmosphere.

Fortunately, the fair is alive and well in Thomas County.

John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

On the hunt for deer

By John Schlageck

Kansas Farm Bureau

Farmers will tell you deer can and will devour a bottomland field of beans overnight. Sometimes referred to as a nuisance or a downright destructive intruder, deer view a farmer's field as a super-sized snack bar.

Motorists will tell you it is terrifying to drive the roads where they live. Many encounter these so-called, "crop feeders" driving to work each morning and evening. Most of us know someone who's hit a deer while traveling our state's roadways. It's frightening, dangerous and costly.

It's also aggravating. Many complain that not only do they have to watch for other motorists - now they have to keep a sharp eye peeled for these highway loiterers.

Farmers, motorists, homeowners, even the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks all acknowledge that the deer population explosion in Kansas has caused some concerns. Each year the Kansas Department of Transportation records thousands of deer-vehicle accidents. In 1999 the number was 10,312. Last year's total was 8,819. These figures might be even higher if every accident were reported.

Deer management is one of the most controversial issues the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks deals with. This problem is not confined to Kansas. Michigan, Iowa, Wisconsin and other grain producing states in the Midwest are experiencing the same problem.

While no hard figures are available on this state's deer population, estimates range from 186,000 to 336,000 depending on time of year. And while there are no exact figures on damage to crops by these creatures, information from different agencies, farmers and landowners would indicate the number to be in the millions of dollars.

Talk to hunters, farmers and wildlife specialists, and they generally agree hunting is the one of the most effective ways to curb this state's deer herd. The disagreement begins when deciding which hunters should be allowed to do the hunting - resident or non-resident hunters.

Another major issue is that approximately 97 percent of the land in Kansas remains in private hands or private ownership. This means landowners, farmers and ranchers have the say-so in who can hunt their land. These landowners "room and board" the state's deer population and most of them believe they have the final word in who hunts their property.

There's been a slow, gradual change in the hunting culture in Kansas. Used to be landowners, farmers and ranchers allowed hunters who asked to hunt their land.

Today, access to hunting is looked upon as a commodity - something landowners expected to be paid for. This has all happened in the last five to seven years.

With the advent of non-resident permits in Kansas, more and more landowners are seeing hunters from metropolitan areas, Houston, Denver, Minneapolis, Orlando and other cities have plenty of hunters who are willing to pay handsomely for the opportunity to bag big bucks with beautiful trophy racks. There are plenty of people willing to spend plenty of money to hunt trophy whitetails in Kansas. This type of hunting has become more and more popular for hunters with Kansas being the destination choice for such deer.

This relatively new influx of out-of-state hunters doesn't sit well with longtime hunters who now face the reality of competing with those willing to pay to hunt.

This group also believes this practice may hurt the Kansas deer numbers - especially when it comes to bucks with big racks.

Acknowledging there are challenges with deer hunting in Kansas, the state's wildlife department made recommendations on this subject to the legislature last February - particularly on deer permitting, hunting regulations and hunter preference. Beginning in '05, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks started looking at deer-related statutes in an attempt to simplify things, according to Mike Miller, with the department.

There was a lot of dissatisfaction with the transferable permit program.

Some folks wanted more permits available for non residents, some people worried about too many deer and some about too many hunters concerns run the gamut, Miller said.

The Wildlife and Parks Department began holding a series of meetings in 14 locations across Kansas throughout August to gather input from the public on the deer question. Sixty eight people attended the first meeting in Medicine Lodge on August 1.

Nearly every person there expressed an opinion on deer hunting, permitting and hunter preference.

Landowners, farmers and ranchers expressed their concern for additional permits and their insistence on their right as caretakers of the Kansas deer population to manage this resource and allow hunting in places that need them.

Let's hope these meetings result in policy with a common-sense approach that brings compromise and agreement among all interested parties. Final regulations will go to the legislature in January 2007, Miller said. More than likely these changes won't be binding until 2008. Stay tuned.

Editor's note: John Schlageck has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for more than 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

