

# Opinion



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Check out food

**By John Schlageck, Kansas Farm Bureau**

Without question, Kansas farmers and their counterparts across the United States, produce the safest, most economical food in the world. U.S. agricultural food products are synonymous with the word “affordable.”

Yes, food is affordable in our country – more so than anywhere else on the planet. It takes just 40 days for most American families to earn enough money to pay their family’s annual food bill. In contrast, it takes the same U.S. consumer nearly four months to earn enough money to pay their annual federal, state and local taxes.

Today, the role farmers and ranchers play in feeding our society is generally taken for granted. This is a success story worth knowing about and worthy of celebration.

There are fewer than 2 million farmers and ranchers working the American landscape. American agricultural producers increasingly are looked upon to help feed, clothe and shelter the world.

To celebrate the vital role agriculture plays today, Farm Bureau in Kansas is celebrating Feb. 6 as Food Check-Out Day. Food Check-Out week is Feb. 4-10.

Food Check-Out Day originated with Kansas Farm Bureau in 1997. Neosho County Farm Bureau member Linda Reinhardt, former chair of the Kansas Committee of Farm Bureau Women and current chair of the American Farm Bureau Women’s Committee championed the event and promoted it throughout the country.

To commemorate Food Check-Out Day, county Farm Bureau associations in Kansas will participate with various events. Some will give away food items. Others will display educational information about the Kansas farmer and rancher. There also will be collections for food pantries and agricultural educational programs for school children.

Food still remains a real bargain in the United States – especially when compared to expenses paid by U.S. families for non-food items. The average American spends less than 10 percent of his/her disposable income on food.

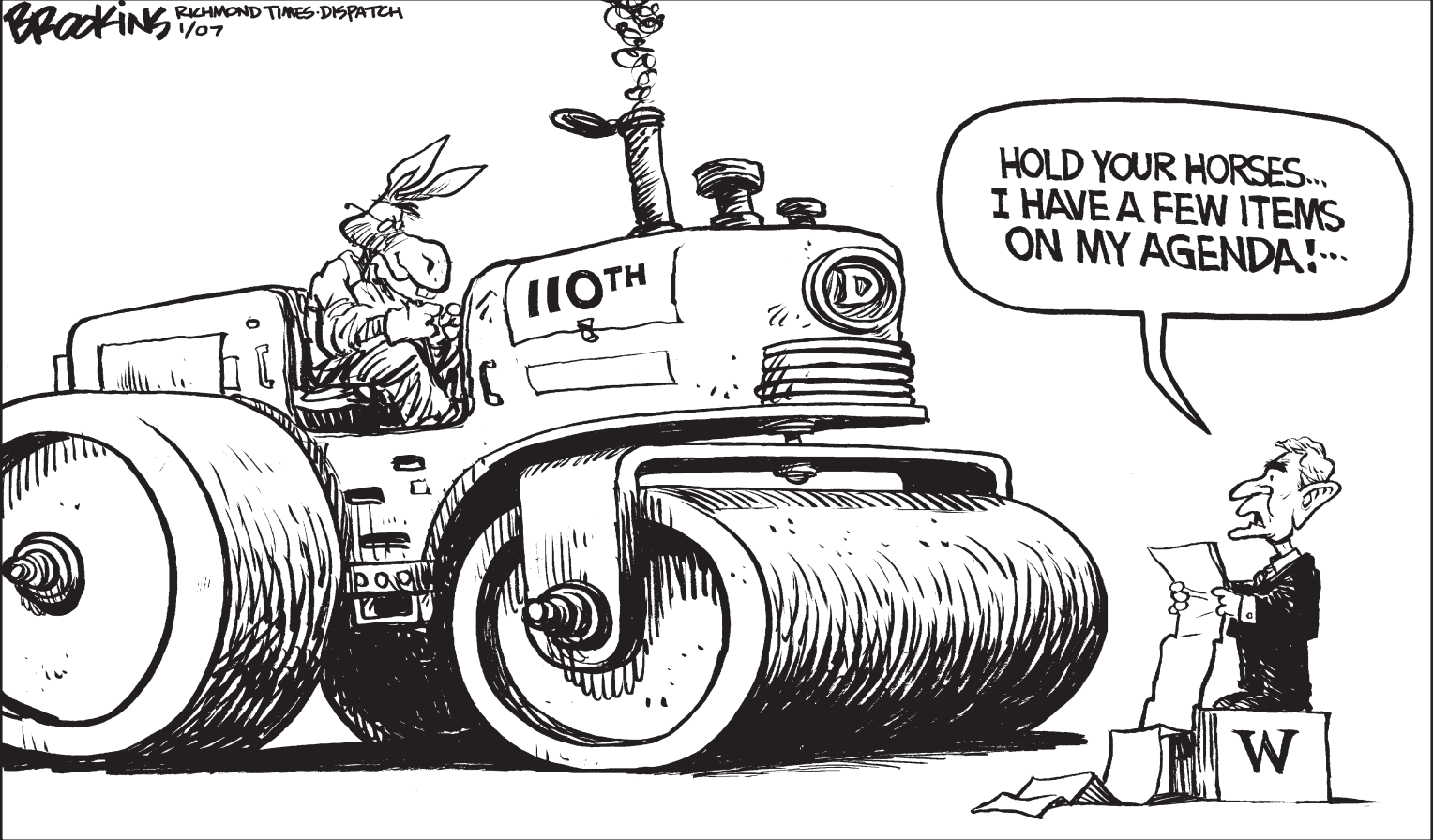
This figure is remarkably low when compared to other countries around the world. The average consumer in Japan spends 14 percent of his/her disposable income on food. The figure rises to 20 percent in Israel, 26 percent in China, 38 percent in the Philippines and a whopping 55 percent in Indonesia.

In the United States food should never be considered an economic burden. Instead food remains a bargain in the marketplace. Food Check-Out Week is significant for all Americans. As food producers, American farmers and ranchers are concerned some Americans cannot afford the food they need. At the same time agricultural producers are proud of the part they play in making our food supply more affordable to all.

As we celebrate the efficiency and productivity of Kansas and American farmers and ranchers, don’t overlook the fact that some producers in this segment of our economy are experiencing difficult times. Prices at the supermarket certainly don’t reflect the historically low commodity prices producers receive every day.

As Food Check-Out Week approaches, be appreciative of Kansas farmers and ranchers. They deserve recognition and celebration on more than just one day a year. Remember the Kansas farmer every day you buy and eat food.

*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.*



### Car crazy

The annual North American International Auto Show started yesterday. I, like many other people, eagerly awaited the first news from the show.

The headlines and pictures have been nothing short of intriguing, the first of which was the news about GM’s electric car concept.

Called the Volt, the car is all electric, and could allegedly go 40 to 45 miles on one six-hour charge. The batteries could be charged from a regular household plug-in.

The concept also has a one-liter gas engine that replenishes the batteries, and could be used to help run the car on long trips.

And not just an “economy” car, it has room for up to five people.

I’m glad somebody finally ponied up with a design that is feasible and innovative.

Even better is the fact the car could be on the market in three to five years. How’s that for American imagination?

That’s not the only cool concept coming out of Detroit.

Near and dear to my heart, the new Camaro, had a new concept debut this year — a convertible version of the car that debuted last January. The car is a homage to the 1969 Camaro, and is done in one of the classic colors from that year, “hugger orange” with black rally stripes.

This concept comes on the heels of the announcement in August 2006, the Camaro is undergoing a revival next year. I understand the convertible will hit the road in 2010.

Muscle cars and concepts aren’t the only vehicles at the auto show, but they are usually the cars that get all the attention and create the most buzz.

And some could ask why bring back the muscle car in the era of possibly \$3 gas, but with advances in technology, almost anything is possible.

New materials, or just new ways at looking at old materials, such as steel and plastic, can mean lighter steel or stronger plastic. A smaller engine with more power, that goes on less fuel, or not just one fuel.

GM isn’t the only company with concepts, or eye-catching design. Ford has redesigned its popular Focus and there is news about using Microsoft products in future Fords to sync cell phones and mp3 players to the cars.

This weekend also saw the debut of the Ford Interceptor, a large four-door sedan. I’ve seen the pictures, and for this type of car, it looks



**Tisha Cox**

● Off The Beaten Path

impressive.

Speaking of fuel-efficient cars, there is a rumor that Mercedes-Benz is bringing its so-called “smart cars” to the United States this year.

Don’t know what one looks like? A few movies in 2006 featured the little cars, and they’ve also been in the Nintendo Wii commercial the past few months.

It’s hard to describe what one looks like, but imagine a Mini Cooper well, stuck in a vice.

The smart car is popular in Europe, but how well the cars will go over here has yet to be seen. For a city, the little cars might be ideal, but out here where there is more highway driving than anything else, maybe not.

So many cars though, so little time.

The Detroit auto event is just the first of the annual shows, which truly show there is almost anything one can imagine when it comes to transportation.

It’s an opportunity to show off what is possible. Sometimes fantastic and impractical, sometimes innovative and not so improbable.

With each possibility, it brings things one step closer to an environmentally friendly, non-Middle East dependent vehicle.

And that is something to celebrate.

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### Your turn

## Work and dedication is appreciated

**Leilani Thomas, Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau**

**Holly Stephens, Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce**

On behalf of the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce and the Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau we would like to thank everyone who has helped Thomas County work through the storm, and are continuing to work to restore power, clear roads, and return things to normal.

We realize that many of you have been working around the clock and we thank you for your service and dedication.

The residents of Thomas County have pulled together to combat the effects of the storm and

our doing so quite well. It brings us great joy to see everyone coming together during our state of emergency.

A big thank you goes out to our small town heroes and to everyone working hard to return normality to the frenzied lives of Thomas County citizens. Your hard work and dedication is greatly appreciated.

## Allowing democracy to happen

If we are to maintain our democracy, politics (social relations involving authority or power) must be an integral part of our daily lives. If we don’t study and discuss the issues and our positions, our democracy will crumble. We don’t all have to agree, but we must share our aspirations and come to a consensus that protects the rights of all our citizens. All branches of our government must be open and honest with the people.

Our constitution, as amended, guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press. Those guarantees allow us to openly state and discuss our ideas and priorities. We are guaranteed equal voice in religious opinions and equal right of practicing our religious convictions, so long as they do not infringe on the rights of others. Our constitution does not recognize Christianity as our national religion. And, it does not place any restrictions upon any religious identity for those seeking or holding public office. That does not preclude any individual from depending upon their religious convictions to determine how they will support or vote on any issue. It does protect the minorities, the weak, or the poor from being squelched by the majorities, the powerful, or the wealthy.

Democracy will not work in countries that don’t allow freedom of speech and choice of religious convictions, whether those convictions are Christian, Muslim or other. Neither will democracy work if the people are not educated and well informed. Freedom of speech, religion, and education is the only means of making democracy secure. Neither military nor raw political power will guarantee any of those three requirements. Recorded history, from the very beginning, tells us that the unchecked combination of military, political, and religious power has unleashed the most oppressive and cruel nature of mankind.

The Middle East, for the most part, has never been allowed those freedoms. They have been ruled by combinations of political and religious oligarchies or foreign powers that have suppressed the common people. Individual expression has been carefully monitored, by those in power, in such a way that the individuals are afraid to question that power. Religious intolerance is deeply imbedded in that society.

Having lived in that environment and culture

**Ken Poland**

● Ken’s World

for centuries has taught them that obeisance to those perceived to be in power is the safest and only way to protect themselves. The present conditions in Iraq do not show who is in power, or more to the point, who is going to prevail. The truth is that no one is in control. An outside force will never succeed in establishing a democracy until the people are educated in how a democracy works and are able to trust one another to honor individual convictions that may not match their own.

Our president can talk all he wants to about establishing democracy in nations that don’t know what democracy is or will not submit themselves to a democracy. But, he will not succeed unless he can convince our nation that we should maintain a military force capable of virtually dictating social and religious changes that will allow democracy to survive. (Democratic Dictatorship? Now that’s an oxymoron for sure!) That may take several generations before trust and tolerance can replace the bitter hatred that is demanding revenge between the religious and political factions in Iraq. Can we maintain a disciplined occupation force that can overcome the bitter hatred and distrust those people have for each other and fear of us?

*Ken Poland lives in Gem and occasionally contributes to the Colby Free Press.*

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 [jvannostrand@nwkansan.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkansan.com) or [pdecker@nwkansan.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansan.com). Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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