



Other Viewpoints

Rules endanger kids' work ethic

While few want to return to the days when children were forced to work alongside adults in factories and textile mills, new rules under consideration by the U.S. Department of Labor to restrict the work children can do on farms is unduly burdensome.

Under the proposed rules, kids under 16 wouldn't be able to operate machinery or perform any task that could be considered potentially dangerous by the Department of Labor. The department said rules for farm work haven't been updated in 40 years, and the changes would be similar to workplace provisions that prevent children from running a meat slicer in a restaurant.

And while children of family farmers would likely be exempt from the changes, it's unclear if the laws would apply to a family farm that is structured as a corporation. Regardless, other school-aged children would be prohibited from doing many tasks around the farm.

While the Department of Labor's intentions might be based in an effort to protect children, those efforts could serve to erode a future generation's interest in farming, and undermine a key way in which children develop a strong work ethic.

Every year, kids all over the country spend some of their spare time working on a farm. They clean out the horse barn, haul hay to the cattle, fix machinery or operate a tractor. In the process, they learn how to work a full, hard day. They also learn a variety of skills that serve them well when they enter the adult work force.

Implementing such rules won't affect a farm's ability to hire adequate workers. Instead, children who could benefit from the lessons that can be learned from farm work will find another path to successful adulthood closed.

Protecting kids from danger is an admirable goal, and one that should be actively pursued. But when that protection diminishes a child's ability to learn valuable life skills, and farming as a way of life, then those regulations could end up doing more harm than good.

- The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press



Bitter cold marks 1950s story

Bitter cold marked the night the flour mill burned.

The flames, the light, the smoke and the overwhelming cold were powerful enough to etch themselves permanently into my mother's memory of that night, 20 below zero and the firemen fighting frostbite along with snow and the ice that followed in the wake of their hoses.

How much was personal memory, from standing on a porch or looking out a bedroom window of our home more than a mile away on the other side of town? How much was learned later, from newspaper accounts and the inevitable talk, hashing and rehashing the event in the days and weeks that followed?

It's almost certain that the only cameras on the scene were still cameras - the newspaper would have had a photographer there, as well as a few others, for such a dramatic event always draws bystanders, and even in the 1950s some of those would have thought to grab a camera on the way out the door. Television was distant and alien, an unlikely recorder of such vivid memories.

What is certain is that my mother was not among those drawn to stand across the street or sit in a car down the block while the drama played out.

What is even more certain is that my mother was the one who told the story, for she was always the family storyteller.

I don't remember when or why the subject first came up. It could have been a casual men-



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

tion while driving along First Street looking at the Christmas lights on homes in my home town. It could have been an association, such as "It's almost as cold as it was the night the mill burned." But the story was told and retold.

It could have happened when I was very young, or even before I was born. That wasn't a critical piece of the story, which was more about cold and ice and flames on a dark night.

As long as there have been people, families and communities, there have been storytellers. They memorized long sagas of battles and travels, hardships and triumphs. In the days when few people wrote, and fewer read, the storytellers were the history books, the genealogists, the scientists and herbalists and religious guides.

Story telling has taken a different direction in recent years. From the printing press to the public school to the spread of mass communication - beginning, I suppose, with newspapers and the telegraph - the story has shifted away from the family. Children who learned about themselves and their world through par-

ents and grandparents and the stories shared in community gatherings, do so no longer.

Children now learn through television. They don't hear bits and pieces while working beside their parents, because they don't work beside their parents. Parents get up and go to work, leaving their children with someone else. When they all get home, parents are too worn out to share much of anything. So children learn from television and from schools and from sitters.

Now there's one more threat to the story - the chance that farm kids, too, will be blocked from spending time alongside the older generation. Not only will they be deprived of learning the career of farming, they'll be blocked from learning all the bits and pieces of their personal story that get conveyed, a little at a time, while the cows are getting milked, the chickens getting fed, the fence getting fixed.

Mass production has taken over so much of our lives. Let's fight to hang on to the most unique thing we each have. Our stories. Become a storyteller for your kids and grandkids and neighbor's kids.

Christmas is a good time to start. Consider it a gift to your grandparents.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

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Fat rats get cancer

It's holiday time and while Thanksgiving has passed, Christmas and New Year's Day are just around the corner. That means all sorts of good tasting food - roast turkey, bread stuffing, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, wine and pumpkin pie.

What better time than during this festive period to give thanks for the most wholesome food supply in the world. Yes, Americans enjoy one of the best food supplies in the world not only in terms of abundance, variety and cost, but also in terms of safety.

A closer look at a typical dinner menu reveals that Mother Nature and her chemicals will be joining all of us who partake of the traditional holiday fare in this country. In a typical soup-to-nuts holiday menu, here are some of the natural chemicals which in large quantities could be hazardous to a person's health, according to the American Council on Science and Health. Such effects would occur only if the concentrated substances were consumed in excess.

Saying this is not intended to frighten some who are already chemical phobic in our country. For centuries humans have eaten potentially toxic substances that occur naturally in food.

The natural and man-made toxins, carcinogens and mutagens in the U.S. food supply remain so small that they pose no known health hazard, the council reports. A toxic dose of caffeine requires 96 cups of coffee and you would have to eat 3.8 tons of turkey this holiday season to deliver a toxic dose of malonaldehyde.

Mushroom soup, for example, contains hydrazines, which are potent animal carcinogens. A fresh vegetable tray is chalked full of nitrates. The main entrée, roast turkey with stuff-



John Schlageck

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Kansas Farm Bureau

ing and cranberry sauce, contains heterocyclic amines and malonaldehyde, eugenol and furan derivatives, according to the council.

It's way past time for the American public to stop acting on the presumption that "natural" is safe and "manmade" is always suspect. While both can be toxic in excess, present scientific knowledge indicates neither natural nor man-made food chemicals are hazardous in the quantities we consume on a daily, monthly or yearly basis.

Toxins, carcinogens and mutagens are everywhere in Mother Nature's food supply. It is unwise to panic over minute levels of man-made chemicals such as the traces of pesticide residues occasionally detected.

According to the Council on Science and Health, one mushroom has an estimated relative cancer hazard 167 times greater than the daily dietary intake of the chemicals PCB and EDB. The relative cancer hazard of alcohol in 8.45 ounces of wine is 78 times that of saccharin in diet cola and 1175 times the hazard from trichloroethylene in one liter of water from the most contaminated well in Silicon Valley California.

If there is a health problem we should be concerned about during this upcoming holiday season, it may be overeating. If you don't watch yourself you can gobble down more

than 2,000 calories easily at one sitting. It doesn't take a food scientist from the Council on Science and Health to tell you you'll wind up stuffed like a turkey if you eat like that during the holiday season.

As most of us know, excessive eating has been called the "most striking" carcinogen ever discovered in rodent carcinogenicity studies. In other words, "fat rats get cancer."

Remember, when you sit down at the holiday table this season, leave that last leg of turkey or piece of pie for someone else. You don't have to eat every last roll on the plate, and yes, Fido, the family dog, might enjoy those last three or four spoons of gravy.

Eat moderate quantities of a wide variety of foods this holiday season and throughout the entire year. Despite the presence of Mother Nature's toxins, they are not dangerous when consumed in moderation as part of a balanced, varied diet.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

