



Other Viewpoints

Child labor laws address wrong issue

It's hard to argue against any effort to make children safer. That's especially true in agriculture, a dangerous occupation even for adults.

Thus the Department of Labor regulations that would impose new limits on what children under age 16 are able to do while working anywhere but their parents' farm.

That includes anything to do with growing tobacco, using electronic equipment while operating power-driven equipment almost all of which they would be prohibited from operating, anyway – as well as preventing children under 18 from being employed in the storing, marketing and transporting of farm product raw materials.

They would be prohibited from working at country grain elevators, grain bins, silos, feedlots, stockyards, livestock exchanges and livestock auctions.

The problem is, the regulations won't work.

According to a new study published in the journal *Pediatrics*, about 84 children die each year in accidents on farms, and 26,570 are injured – at a medical cost of about \$1.4 billion.

The rub? The vast majority of the cases, 86 percent of the deaths and 71 percent of the injuries, were not work-related. And, many were not even farm-related, such as accidents with all-terrain vehicles.

Many involve kids who are just visiting the farm, aren't familiar with the dangers, and fall off grandpa's tractor.

All of us have been touched by farm accidents involving children in one way or another, and we all want to do what we can to prevent any further tragedies.

But heavy-handed federal regulations can have unintended consequences galore. Sadly, those of us who learned responsibility by driving tractors, milking cows and tending chickens are becoming more and more rare, and the new labor laws threaten to thin our ranks even further.

The Nebraska Farm Bureau is but one organization working to stem the tide, launching a "Let me Get My Hands Dirty" campaign to raise concern over the proposed regulations.

Nebraska Farm Bureau President Steve Nelson was set to enlist members of the Nebraska FFA in March, saying the department's proposed rule "is written so broadly that it would prevent children who are working on a farm that isn't owned by their parents from doing such basic tasks such as climbing on a ladder over 6 feet tall, working with livestock or even operating a battery-powered flashlight or screwdriver."

"The safety of children working in agriculture is always our first priority," Nelson said, "However, it simply does not make sense for the department to limit or restrict what children have historically been allowed to do ... to gain agricultural experience or make money for college," Nelson said.

The organization is asking 4-H and FFA students, detasslers and anyone with an interest in agriculture to sign a paper handprint. The prints will be collected and sent to the DOL to illustrate how many people, both young and old, are opposed to the proposed rule, according to a news release.

You can find out more by visiting www.nefb.org and clicking on the "Let Me Get My Hands Dirty" logo.

Agriculture is one of the bright spots in our current sluggish economy, although it faces numerous threats from changing policies and rising prices for fuel and agriculture. If it is to continue to survive and thrive, we must do everything possible to train and encourage the generation that will take it into the future. – *McCook Daily Gazette, via the Associated Press*

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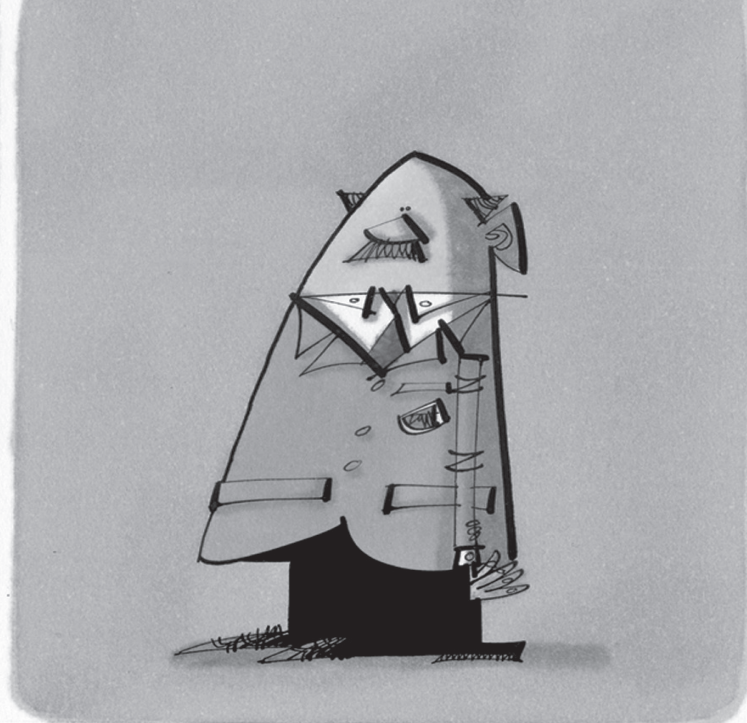
A DINOSAUR COVERED IN FEATHERS IS FOUND IN NORTHEASTERN CHINA...

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WHILE A FOSSIL COVERED IN GREEN CLOTH IS FOUND IN AUGUSTA, GEORGIA.

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Baseball move brings flashbacks

Ted stopped by and shared the news.

I never thought I would care about, let alone feel sorry for, the Milwaukee Brewers baseball team. But it seems another generation of kids, young and old, had been disillusioned.

I had flashbacks to my worst moments as a Royals' fan – the trade of hometown boy and reigning Cy Young Award winner David Cone to the Yankees, the Johnny Damon trade, the Carlos Beltran trade, etc., etc.

Oh, I almost forgot, Ted's news: The Brewers' star player, first baseman Prince Fielder, left his team and signed a \$215 million contract with the Detroit Tigers. To add insult to injury, the Tigers play in the same division as the Royals.

Ted can understand. He's a lifelong Cardinals fan. Earlier this off-season, their best player, Albert Pujols, possibly the best hitter of his generation, left the only team he had ever played for and headed to southern California for a semi-load of dollar bills.

Pujols' move came on the heels of another improbable World Series title. How does a star player turn his back on his fans after winning the World Series?

St. Louis is a so-called mid-market team. So now Cardinals' fans can relate to the small-market Royals as they watch their best player head off for a bigger paycheck elsewhere.

Pujols' wife was quoted in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* as saying that she and her husband felt "disrespected" by the Cardinals' five-year, \$135 million offer. Maybe that absurd comment will make it easier for fans to say



Alan Jilka

• A Voice of Reason

goodbye.

People almost always root for the team with whom he or she grew up. Ted grew up in Illinois near St. Louis with the likes of Stan Musial, Lou Brock and Bob Gibson as heroes. I even have a good friend here who roots for the Yankees.

How can anyone root for the Yankees? It turns out he grew up near New York, rooting for the Bronx Bombers. I understand. Other than that, he's a great guy.

I grew up with George Brett, Frank White and the Royals during their glory days. I'll stick with them no matter what.

But the Royals' long postseason drought has been particularly painful. The turning point came when Cone was traded away immediately after the 1994-95 baseball strike. Ever since, then the team has languished in or near the cellar.

To add insult to injury, Royals' fans have had to watch their one-time starting outfielder – Johnny Damon, Carlos Beltran and Jermaine Dye, all play in World Series for other teams. Damon and Beltran both came up through the Royals' farm system.

'Million dollar rain' brings spring fever

All across the Sunflower State, farmers are planting corn. With the lack of winter weather in 2012 and the summer-like temperatures, it's hard to keep the tractors from rolling across the fertile fields. Farmers like to farm, and they are especially excited about planting row crops in early spring.

Still, some of the traditional producers have resisted the urge to begin planting the first of April. Brown County farmer Keith Olsen is one of them. Olsen usually pulls his planter into the field between April 10-13.

"We've had some nice rains the end of March and early April," Olsen says. "Our ground is nice and mellow, so it won't be long now before I'm planting."

Olsen labeled the recent moisture "a million dollar" rain. He said it also greened up the grass in northeastern Kansas and the brome is already taking off in the waterways.

"Our cow crop is looking excellent too," the Brown County farmer/stockman says. "The open winter was great for my calves. We didn't have to fight scours this year."

Like other Kansas stockmen the last couple years have been good to Olsen. He's hoping the market will remain strong.

The same can be said for his row crops of corn and soybeans. Olsen has been really pleased with crop yields.

"The only thing that would make it better is if all of the crop producers across Kansas could harvest good crops including the wheat boys out west," he says.

So what does the rest of the year have in store for farmers like Olsen in northeastern Kansas?

No one can predict the weather or if it will turn off hot and dry this summer, however



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

Olsen believes this year will more than likely be an average to good year for him in Brown County. Last year his corn averaged 160-170 bushels per dry-land acre. Some growers harvested 80 bushel beans last year as well.

"The rains fell at exactly the right time," Olsen says. "Every time the corn or beans needed a drink, the good Lord provided."

Early signs point to a different second half of 2012. Producers who've farmed the same land for years and have been plugged into the weather patterns have a fairly good idea what may happen in their region.

In addition to the possibility of drier and hotter conditions, Olsen is concerned about future insect problems. Because of the mild winter weather, bugs may really challenge row crops once they begin growing.

"In this part of the world you have to grow 130 bushel corn and the price has to be at least \$5 a bushel to break even," Olsen says. "I'll be happy if I can raise that kind of crop this summer the way things are shaping up."

There's been another trend developing on northeastern Kansas farm ground in the last couple years and that's more irrigation systems going in.

While the farmers who are putting them in are hedging their bets with Mother Nature in case they experience several years of drought,

some are doing so to increase their yields as well.

Investing in irrigation is not in the cards for Olsen. He believes there are inherent risks involved with farming no matter what a producer does to ensure he raises a crop.

"We'll always face one kind of risk or another while farming," the Brown County producer believes. "I'm out here to enjoy raising crops and harvesting them. I'll rely on Mother Nature for moisture and be thankful for the rain or snow she provides."

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.

Where to write, call

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