

Other Viewpoints

Young labor needs safer work practices

Youngsters have pitched in on farms for generations. The age-old tradition is nothing new in Kansas, an agriculture state.

So it was no surprise when backlash from farmers and ranchers stifled a pitch led by the U.S. Labor Department to ban children younger than 16 from using most power-driven farm equipment, including tractors, and keep those younger than 18 from working in feedlots, grain silos and stockyards.

Even though the proposal only would have applied to youngsters working on farms not owned by their parents, critics said such rules would dramatically alter farm life.

It's easy to see how farmers would resist such change. After all, many grew up on farms and learned the ropes as children. Farm chores became a way of life from the day they were deemed old enough to help.

On the other hand, federal officials seeking the stricter rules believed such a move would reduce deaths and accidents related to farm work.

Studies have shown the injury rate on the farm highest among adults older than 65 (slower reaction time), and children age 15 and younger (they're less experienced). According to the Child Labor Coalition, three-quarters of working children younger than 16 who died of work-related injuries in 2010 were in agriculture.

Even those who opposed the proposed rules for young farm workers have to acknowledge a need to improve on those statistics.

Continued education as a way to reduce accidents and promote safer agricultural working practices remains a given, along with a need for stepped-up safety measures.

Requiring rollover protective structures for all tractors used for farming would be one such initiative. While newer tractors have that safety feature, many older machines still in use don't.

Accidents that occur when operating machinery – tractors, in particular – remain a leading cause of farm-related deaths for all ages.

As with any business hoping to improve work practices and stay viable, farm operations must continue to evolve.

Enacting new ways to make farm work safer for all ages – from children on up – has to be the top priority, regardless of how such moves would change tradition on the farm.

– *The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press*

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May basket tradition deserves to stay

It really bothers me that one of my favorite traditions might be going by the wayside: handing out May baskets. That's something that I really enjoyed as a child.

These were small baskets about the size of a cup, generally made by children out of pastel colored construction paper. The sides were stuck together with some sort of Elmer's-type glue. My mom made us paste out of flour and water. The baskets always had handles, also made of construction paper. Small pieces of candy and a few spring flowers were placed inside.

The children would then put the baskets by the door of a friend or relation and ring the door bell or knock and quickly run away. If the person receiving the basket happened to see the child while they were delivering the basket, they would run out the door and chase them. If they caught them, they would give the child a kiss.

My granddaughter, Holly Lynn, and her three children, Braiden, Brayclen and Brielle, usually bring Jim and me a May basket every May.

Since I now have an artificial knee and have had surgery on both of my feet, I no longer run down the steps and try to catch them, but I do hurry to open the door and yell at them saying, "I'm gonna give you a kiss." They scream and rush to the car laughing.



Marj Brown

• Marj's Snippets

I was so pleased a couple of years ago when I received May baskets from two Colby College girls who lived in the house across from my garage. I made sure to thank them and tell them how happy I was they were carrying on the tradition.

Traditions are so important to families as the children grow up; it gives them a sense of being a part of a family that they can pass on to their children.

We had a tradition for several years when our three children were young. We would hire Verney Keer, Colby's Santa, to come over to the house on Christmas Eve just before we were ready to open our presents. Jim would sneak out the back door with the sack of items we wanted the children to think came from Santa. He would place it on the front porch for Verney to pick up.

When the door bell rang, Verney would appear with the sack of gifts. I still think about how amazed our little ones were when they

saw Santa Claus come into our living room. We have a lot of great photographs of our children with Verney on Christmas Eve.

Another tradition was the backyard Easter-egg hunt and having the children color Easter eggs a few days before. For years, I invited all of the grandchildren who still lived in town to come over and color eggs. We generally came up with a lot of brown Easter eggs because they had been dipped in all of the different colors.

One year, when our granddaughter Valerie (Brown) Maris was young, she got so excited with her egg coloring that she tipped her chair over backwards and took a tumble. She did a backwards summersault down three stairs to the back door landing and didn't even get a bruise. We still talk about that when she's home. She now lives in Tucson, Ariz. My daughter Linda still carries on the egg-hunt tradition with her grandchildren.

I just hope that some of my readers made May Day baskets this year. I would really hate to see that tradition fade away. What are your family traditions? I would love to hear about them.

Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do. Marj's email address is marj-jimbrown@st-tel.net.

Veto session faces sticky problems

We returned to Topeka for the veto session last week. Veto sessions traditionally are dedicated to addressing bills vetoed by the governor, however this year a number of issues still need our attention.

We still need to pass redistricting maps, finalize the budget along with the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System and possibly a tax bill.

The House Committee on Taxation heard our carnival bill, which was finally sent over from the Senate. The original proposal from the Department of Labor was home-owned carnivals would be required to have an annual inspection of the rides. The bill was passed out of committee with one no vote. The bill will require each carnival to annually provide the Department of Labor with proof of insurance. Even the no vote was supporting our stand; he did not think we should be required to send insurance to the state.

I had a chance to visit with Sen. Jerry Moran, Friday at the Capitol. He informed me the U.S. Department of Labor finally withdrew the youth farm labor rules. If the department had enforced this policy, our youth would not have been able to work on the family farms or any farm until the age of 18.

Budget

Gov. Brownback released his governor's budget amendment, which includes \$43.8 million from the state's general fund to fully finance expected Medicaid caseload cost increases for the fiscal year starting July 1. Brownback also proposed an additional \$1.9 million from the state general fund for pay raises and staffing at Larned State Hospital, where inadequate staff levels threaten the accreditation of the hospital. The governor has proposed to add \$440,000 from the state general funds to hire more staff at the Topeka correctional facility. Both chambers have agreed on most of the budget line items, however, the



Rick Billinger

• This week in Topeka

final budget will not be voted on until the redistricting maps are settled.

Tax bill

There has been a lot of discussion about the proposed tax bill. It includes sales tax, individual and corporate income tax and property taxes. The numbers are not available at this time even though some of the news articles are quoting possible ending balances. There are many moving parts to the tax bill and without accurate numbers, it is hard to predict what will transpire.

Developmental disabled

Throughout the session, legislators have been contacted, in impressive numbers, by stakeholders and members of the developmentally disabled community to express concerns on the inclusion of developmentally disabled long-term care services in the new state-managed care system, known as KanCare. Many have requested more time to evaluate the proposal and understand how changes will be incorporated before full implementation.

As a result, the House Appropriations Committee, with the support of the administration, moved to postpone the inclusion of waiver services for individuals with developmental disabilities into KanCare until Jan. 1, 2014, and to allow voluntary pilot programs. The pilot programs would allow service providers to voluntarily participate in the developmentally disabled waiver service program under KanCare during the 2013 calendar year. This one-year delay provides members of the de-

velopmentally disabled community, the legislature and the administration additional time to discuss concerns regarding services under KanCare.

Court furlough

The House Appropriations committee met last week, and members – Republicans and Democrats – were eager to hear from the courts their reasoning behind furloughs. A representative of the courts said remaining furlough days might be rescinded, which was great news. The question is why, since nothing had changed? The reason was the judicial branch had funds to cash flow.

Thank you for the honor of serving you in the House. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me at (785) 899-4700 or e-mail me at rick.billinger@house.ks.gov.

Rick Billinger is the state representative from the 121st District. He currently serves on the Commerce and Economic Development, Education Funding, Insurance and Local Government committees.

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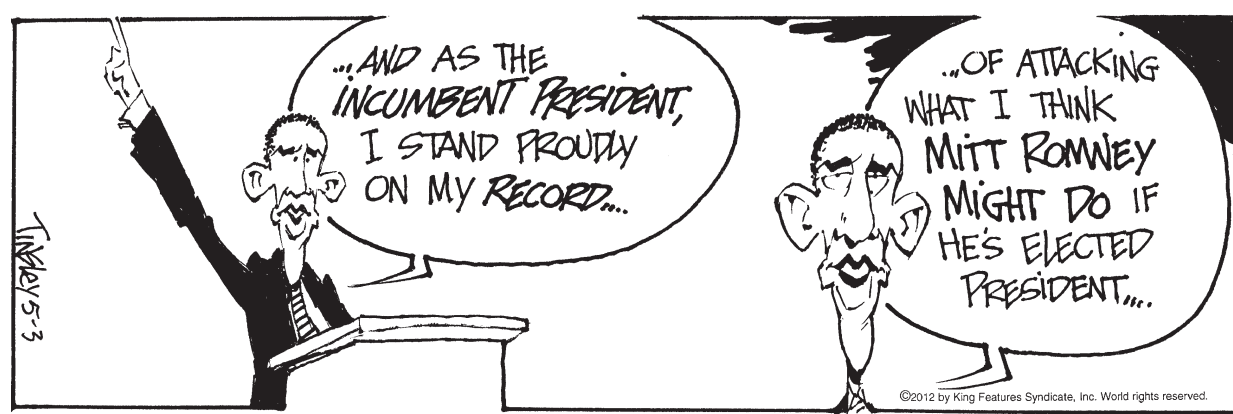
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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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