

commentary

from our viewpoint...

Getting a plan ready for hoof-and-mouth

American stockmen and U.S. officials have been watching as Europe tears apart its livestock industry in a failing attempt to stop the spread of hoof-and-mouth disease.

It is a frightening prospect, but some experts say odds are better than even that the infection will spread to the U.S. While so far it has been confined to Europe, it has spread to the continent from Britain despite strict quarantine regulations.

While there are vaccines which could prevent the disease, they present a dilemma to the livestock industry. Tests used to screen animals moving to market or for breeding cannot distinguish between animals which are infected, and must be destroyed, and those which have been vaccinated, but are healthy.

As a result, most countries ban use of the vaccine. It is expensive and in short supply, anyway, and it's likely that manufacturers could not produce enough to stop the spread of the epidemic.

What will we do when the disease hits our shores?

It's likely, that as in Europe, our livestock industry will be widely disrupted by quarantines and destruction of thousands of head of infected or suspicious stock. Livestock operators could face being unable to move animals to market — and even the complete destruction of their herds.

While the federal government has an overall plan to handle an epidemic should one break out here, only about half the states have a plan according to published reports. Officials in those which don't have a plan will have some fast thinking to do.

While quarantine regulations are supposed to stop livestock diseases from entering this country, foot-and-mouth disease spreads so quickly and easily that an innocent traveler could bring it home from Europe without knowing. Foot baths and the like set up at foreign airports may or may not help prevent this kind of spread.

We need to be ready. If the disease does not make it here this time, it will the next. Or some other dread livestock virus, maybe one yet unknown, will appear here. We could even be the victim of a biological terrorist attack.

Whatever the cause, an outbreak could ruin the livestock business, and the packing house and food business, in this country for years. Unchecked, such an event could produce both high food prices and even a depression. It's no minor matter.

We just cannot afford to drift along. We have to be ready. — *Steve Haynes*

where to write

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- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521
- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 1217 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 225-2715
- State Rep. Jim Morrison**, State Capitol Building Rm. 174-W, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7676
- State Sen. Stan Clark**, State Capitol Building Rm. 128-S, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7399
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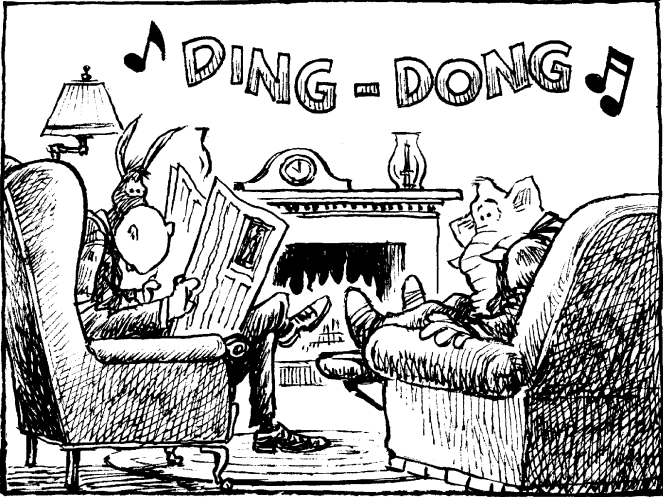
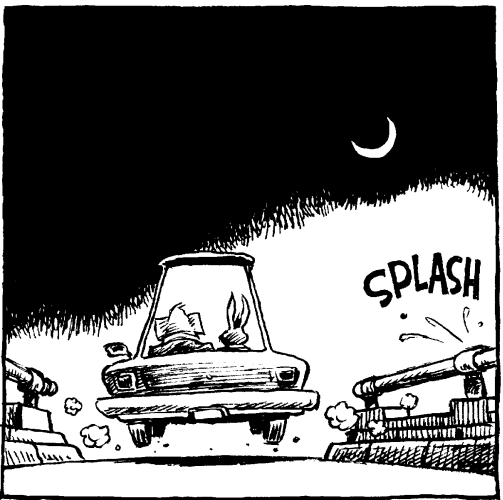
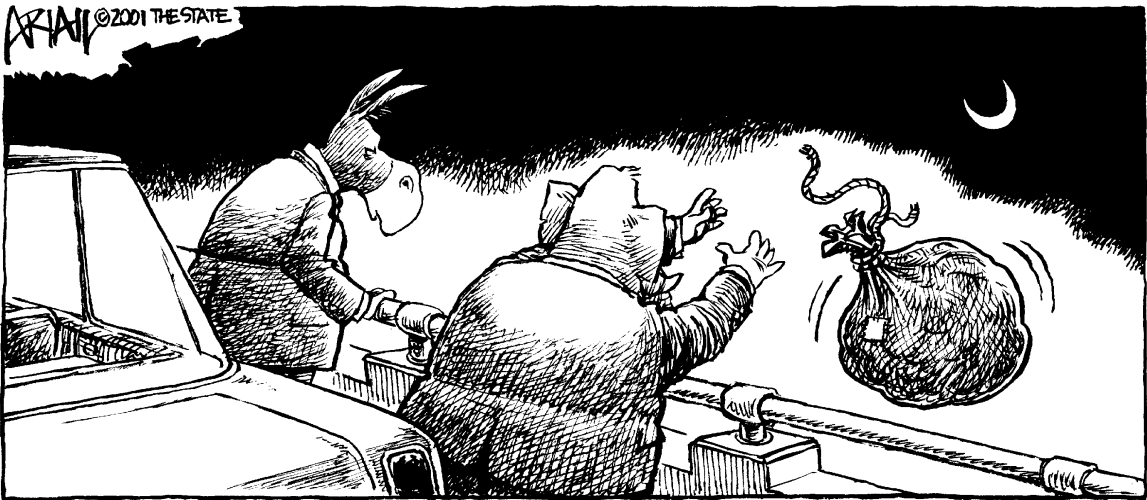
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Alfala field reminds me of special bunny

I thought of Bunsky the other day while watching some kids fly their kites.

It wasn't the children or the kites that made me think of the white rabbit that entered our lives almost as if he had hopped out of Lewis Carroll tale. It was the alfalfa.

The children had gotten permission to fly their kites in a field of fresh spring alfalfa — bunny food, we still call it around our house.

We were living the Monte Vista, Colo., across the street from a family of Mexican nationals. They were nice folks. However, except for the oldest boy, who led my daughter's class in high school, I couldn't understand a word they said. The problem was mutual.

They spoke Spanish and I spoke English. We communicated with a friendly wave on our way to work and school each day.

One summer day, I returned home at dusk to what appeared, seen in the twilight, to be plastic trash bags hopping all over the neighbors' lawn. Closer inspection showed that there had been a major bunny break.

They raised rabbits, you see. It took several



cynthia haynes

• open season

hours and a lot of running around by both families to herd the rabbits back to where they belonged.

Rabbits are fast and sneaky. They double back between your legs as you grab for them. It was an exciting evening, but we thought we had rounded up all the stray hoppers.

Except for one.

Youngest daughter found a tiny, bundle of fuzz hiding in the back of our shed.

She took it across the street but the neighbors refused to accept the errant rabbit, handing it back with a smile and a wave of their hands.

That's how Bunsky came to live with us. He came to be a very old rabbit, moving to Kansas and living in Oberlin for several years.

Back when he was younger, he would recall his

youth and skip out on us occasionally. We would usually find him nibbling the fresh green alfalfa in the field behind our house.

I say he when I refer to Bunsky. We never did determine whether our pet was male or female, but since a young rabbit's fancy turned to bunny breaks each spring, and we never had more than one rabbit appear in the cage after these interludes, I came to the conclusion that Bunsky was a boy.

I tried to determine what he was when he was young — just like my Daddy taught me.

Daddy always said that he determined whether our kittens were boys or girls by checking the bottoms of their feet. He dutifully turned each pet over and inspected their bottoms and delivered a verdict.

He was right almost half the time.

All I saw on Bunsky when I turned him over was white fur. White fur on his paws, white fur on his tummy. White fur on his ... well you get the idea.

We enjoyed Bunsky and we miss him, but we're not planning to replace him.

I've got Daddy's method down pat and so far I've got a 100 percent perfect record. I'm not about to try again.

More fun with Snowwhite and the Seven Dwarfs

The flow of e-mails with attachments including the Snowwhite and Seven Dwarfs virus has slowed down, but the problem continues to exist.

A couple of the recent e-mails have come with error messages on top of the "hahaha@sexyfun.net" address, and have led to some detective work to try to identify where they originated.

One such message had an "authentication warning" followed by an address and even a numbered IP address. On a hunch, we typed "bluevalley.net" on the address line in our Internet browser.

What popped up was the home page for the Blue Valley Telephone Co. in Home, Kan. Looking down the page, we found that they were also an Internet service provider.

Calling their office, I was referred to their technical support guy, who was more than happy to help me. He said he gets several of these messages a month, and that if they have the information on the top of the message that I found, it can help identify where the virus is hiding.

"I tell people to e-mail me just the top part of the message," he said. "I can take the information and by tracking backwards, try to find out who was on line at that time and then contact them about the problem."

"I have found several this way, and the people usually don't even know their system has been



tom betz

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infected."

A couple of days later a second one showed up with a similar message, but this one was tied to a server at "BrownRice.com." Using the same technique, I found that the Internet provider was in Taos, N.M.

When I called their support number, the technician told me that he had received numerous calls on that e-mail. It seems an Indian tribe had bought a CD with thousands of e-mail addresses and was attempting to send out news releases to them. It appears either the CD had the virus on it or the computer they put the CD in was infected, as it sent the virus everywhere.

"I shut down their connection after I got about a dozen calls," he said. "I think they told me they were trying to send out 30,000 messages. I have heard from dozens of people who got the news release in a garbled manner."

He told me I was the first caller he had who said the "hahaha" virus was also being sent out with the

news releases.

I told him I had followed his name back to his web site based on the error message on the top of the sexyfun.net address. When I told him that, he said he would contact the tribe and tell them not only not to use the CD, but to see if their computer had been infected.

There is now a group out to combat this virus, and they have actually created a web site at sexyfun.net where people can get help or information about stopping this from spreading.

Our best advice is when you get e-mails that have attachments — be very careful. Unless you know for sure who sent the message, and that it was coming, do not open it. This is true especially if it has an ".exe" or ".scr" at the end of the filename.

These are executable programs that can damage your system.

If you think you have been attacked by a virus, contact Norton at symantec.com or McAfee at mcafee.com. Both of these firms sell good anti-virus programs, and have programs to clean out many viruses once they have infected a computer.

If you receive one of these "hahaha" messages that has something other than sexyfun.net as the originating address, copy the top of the message and e-mail it to nbetz@nwkansas.com so we can continue to help fight this obnoxious little virus.

Reforming education isn't a pipe dream

We are on the brink of a revolution in education. Everywhere I see the unrest; the thrashing about for something that can light our path. I see it in parents and teachers, at universities, and on Capitol Hill. Too many of our schools are failing to produce the kinds of human beings that meet a civilized society's most basic definition of an educated person. Instead of scholarship and excitement, there is often pessimism, defeatism, indifference, violence and ignorance.

Every revolution needs a visionary — someone with the clarity and intelligence to carry us toward a new way of thinking. Often visionaries are people who don't set out to be revolutionaries and in fact are quite unlikely leaders. Yet there they are, changing the world.

Such is the case with Mel Levine.

He is a quirky, soft-spoken pediatrician who lives on a farm near Chapel Hill, N.C. Any parent or teacher deeply interested in learning disabilities probably already knows about Mel Levine. But his ideas about education encompass all kinds of learners. In fact, that broad interest is at the core of his vision.

Schools must celebrate the diversity of minds instead of attempting to fit all children into the same mold, a philosophy he has jokingly dubbed "neuro-developmental pluralism."

Levine's ideas and his modest, common-sense manner in presenting them have made him something of a cult hero in certain education and parenting circles. He is a Rhodes scholar, a



joan ryan

• commentary

Harvard Medical School grad and a professor of pediatrics who has devoted his life to understanding how kids learn. He has synthesized decades of brain research to come up with eight types of brain function and subcategories within each function — a sort of neurological blueprint to learning.

The beauty of this blueprint is that it allows us to go beyond such labels as Attention Deficit Disorder, which is too vague to guide a teacher or parent toward the appropriate remedy. Rather, Levine's model zeroes in on the specific deficit under the ADD umbrella. Not only does this mean the child is more likely to get the targeted help he needs, but the deficit itself gets labeled, not the kid.

Levine's nonprofit institute, All Kinds of Minds, has been attracting substantial support from such sponsors as Charles Schwab, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and Michael Eisner, as has the institute's teacher-training offshoot, Schools Attuned, which sends teachers back into the classroom with concrete and often simple tools to reach kids who struggle with attention, memory, organization, or language — any number of weaknesses that get in the way of learning.

Two weeks ago, Levine sat on a panel with Secretary of Education Rod Paige at a congressional breakfast. And though he would rather retreat to his farm and tend to his geese and donkeys, he is plunging into public life, looking at ways for his institute to help shape America's education policies. He knows he is walking a fine line in this revolution. He cannot alienate the Bush administration and indeed wants to nurture its commitment to raise educational standards. Yet Levine knows that high-stakes testing is hardly the answer.

Last week, during a one-night stop in San Francisco, Levine sat down for an interview. I wanted to know one thing: his concept of the ideal school. When we finished 90 minutes later, I felt convinced that transforming education in America isn't a pipe dream. It can happen.

Next week: The ideal school.

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her in care of this newspaper or send her e-mail at joanryan@sfgate.com.

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