

from our viewpoint...

Drug violence begins in the U.S.

Everyone decries the growing drug-gang violence in Mexico, especially when it starts affecting U.S. interests.

American media made a big deal out of the murder, apparently by drug gangs, of an American woman who worked at the U.S. consulate in Juarez and the husbands of two State Department employees after a child's birthday party.

Shoot-outs between Mexican troops and the gangs garner attention, but in the U.S. we shake our heads, then cry out for better security at the border. No one bothers to ask why the violence is rampant in nearby Mexico, as it has been for years in far-away Columbia.

But if you want to know who's to blame, it's us.

American drug laws, founded on the fallacy that the failed and discredited policy of prohibition will somehow work a century later, have nearly ruined the peace, democracy and civil stability of Columbia. Now they threaten our neighbor to the south, Mexico.

Why? It's simple. What people want is what people want. Making it illegal does not change that, but it changes the economics of the business. Criminal gangs will latch on to supplying anything the government makes illegal, because if people want it bad enough, they'll pay any price for it.

That's what made the Mafia and other immigrant gangs of the early 20th century so rich and powerful: prohibition of alcohol gave them a perfect opening to supply demand for a substance that many people saw as relatively harmless.

As a nation, we recognized this mistake and moved on. We abandoned the idea of prohibition, except for our own kids. We figure it didn't work for us, but it would work on children.

About the same time in our history, society began to recoil from the supposed threat of marijuana and other drugs, largely unregulated until the prohibition era. Even after repeal, the U.S. kept its drug laws despite a lack of proof most of the substances weren't any more harmful than tobacco and alcohol.

Scare tactics by early drug-enforcement types, aimed at building up the drug-police bureaucracy as much as anything, and lurid movies from Hollywood fed public hysteria. Because drugs and drug users were still viewed as weird, it was easy to outlaw them.

Fast forward to the 1960s, when a questioning generation defied their parents' advice and started trying the old drugs and some brand new ones. Since then, the anti-drug laws have grown apace, along with the number of Americans in prison.

The growing popularity of cocaine through the 1980s has made once-quiet Columbia a hotbed of radical violence, where assassination of judges and legislators became commonplace. Government officials were kidnapped, offices bombed. Our response: give the police and Army more weapons to pursue the fight.

Now, we have exported our home-grown methamphetamine and marijuana business to Mexico, with disastrous results. We made it much harder to make meth or grow marijuana here, so the Mexican gangs long a minor cog in the cocaine distribution trade saw an opportunity to make big money.

We backed the Mexican government in trying to suppress these gangs, but law enforcement alone just cannot end the drug "problem." That can only come from curbing demand, and only treatment programs can do that.

We still haven't learned prohibition does not work. Because we still haven't learned to treat the problem rather than the product.

We spend billions each year to perpetuate the "War on Drugs," while each year the problem gets worse. The only ones who benefit are the drug-police bureaucracy and the gangs.

Whole nations lose their lifestyle in this game. When will we learn? — *Steve Haynes*

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I am trying to get my garden organized

I've had a bad case of garden envy, so this year I'm going to do something about it.

My sister has the neatest garden. Her asparagus crop is enormous. Her tomatoes stand like sentinels, all neatly staked. Her zucchini don't even run all over the yard. They are neat, obedient plants that stay where they are supposed to.

Her worst sin, however, is she can plant a straight row.

I'm a crooked person.

I can't draw a straight line with a ruler. The part in my hair is never straight. I use the whole lane when driving. And, worst of all, my furrows wander all over the garden.

Last year in disgust, I just planted my lettuce and spinach by broadcasting the seeds in the general area where I wanted to grow them.

That worked fairly well until it was time to put in the tomatoes and pepper plants.

My general philosophy is to get as much to grow in a square inch as possible, so I marry the lettuce and spinach to the tomatoes, peppers with the cucumbers — well that analogy isn't going very well. Just say I plant the smaller ones in the spaces between the big ones.

That works well with rows. The plants go in between rows of lettuce and spinach. It doesn't go well if there are no rows and no in-between spaces.

I think I had decided that I would just pull out enough lettuce and spinach plants to accommodate the latecomers.

That didn't happen. I couldn't do it. I couldn't pull out healthy, productive members of my garden. I ended up putting the tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers in the odd holes. This made for a very messy garden. The vegetables were not lined up in neat rows. They were scattered around wherever there was an open spot.

The odd spacing was especially noticeable in the late summer after the lettuce and spinach



cynthia haynes
• open season

was all gone.

This year, though, I have a plan.

I went out with stakes and twine and laid out my rows for lettuce, spinach and radishes. Then I carefully dug my furrows and put my seeds in.

When it's time to put in the bedding plants, there will be space for them.

Now, if I could only figure out what to do about that odd patch of fall spinach that has come up in the middle of the garden. No matter what I plant around it, it's going to be in the way.

Logic says pull it. By the time I'm planting the larger part of the garden with corn and squash, my newly planted greens will be coming up, and we can eat off of them.

But, I know in my heart of hearts that won't happen. I won't be able to mow down the lovely little plants that have provided me with salads in March and April.

I'll just have to figure out how to plant around them.

Maybe, I'll call my sister for some advice. Her garden is always so darned neat.

Say it loud, say it proud

A successful farmer said it best when he talked to me recently about his obligation to give the public an understanding of his profession.

This western Kansas producer has always known how important it is to help consumers understand agriculture. He believes if the people who buy his products have a better appreciation for the food produced on his farm, the future of his business will remain bright while he continues to provide high quality, low cost food we Americans all enjoy.

How do farmers help consumers understand their profession?

It begins with the commitment to tell your side of the story whenever and wherever the opportunity presents itself. Whether farmers talk to grade-schoolers, members of service clubs or state legislators, they should practice the art of relationship building between rural and urban, between agricultural producers and consumers of agricultural products.

Today, most consumers are at least two, three or four generations removed from the farm. But just about everyone has a lawn, garden, flowers, plants or shrubbery. These same consumers enjoy, and most cherish, their ties to a father, grandfather or great grandfather who tilled the soil.

It's easy to find a common denominator with your urban cousins. You can begin by noting that the fertilizer they buy for their garden or lawn is no different from what you use — as a farmer — to put on your wheat, corn or milo.

The rose dust, herbicide or insecticide used to control scab, dandelions or mosquitoes is similar to the plant protection chemicals you use to prevent damage and disease on your crops.

Sometimes the common ground revolves around nutrition. A good analogy could be the parallel between a person's need for healthy food and a cow's need for a well-balanced diet.

It's easy to move from nutrition to some of the more difficult challenges facing agriculture today. Topics like access, availability and conservation of water, groundwater contamination, food safety, animal care and even health care affordability.



Insight this week
• john schlageck

Take the groundwater contamination issue for example; begin by telling them your shared concerns for chemical run off into lakes and streams. As a farmer, you cannot afford to overuse these expensive products. You can also explain to them that with minimum and no till farming practices the residue helps keep the herbicides and insecticides in the field where it controls weeds and pests.

Let them know that you, more than anyone else, are concerned about the land where you and your family live and work. Public understanding of how today's farmer runs his/her operation is only half the challenge. Perhaps equally important is the need to be sensitive to the concerns of the community.

Remember that people, most of them living in towns or cities, are the ones who call for regulations and new laws. It is the public who will suffer if these laws have a negative effect on this nation's food producers and our food system.

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