

from our viewpoint...

## Vote may signal end to 'direct payments'

A Senate vote last month may signal an end to the so-called "direct payment" farm subsidies growers have depended on for many years.

While both Kansas senators voted against the amendment, it passed 84-15. The amendment would limit direct payments to farmers reporting less than \$1 million a year in adjusted gross income.

And while the immediate effect may be slight – the current limit is \$1.2 million, with exceptions, and the next farm bill won't be written until next year – the mood of the Senate seems pretty clear. These payments will be limited more to farmers who might really need them.

And down the road, as Congress struggles to fit the Farm Bill into the debt limit process, there's talk of eliminating direct payments altogether. House and Senate Ag Committee members of both parties have agreed to cut \$23 billion from the program over 10 years, nearly half the \$50 billion total.

The alternative may be even deeper cuts in the bill as the "supercommittee" formulates its plan to chop the federal budget. Republican Sen. Tom Coburn sponsored the amendment last month; opposition came mostly from Agriculture Committee members and other farm-state members, who pleaded for time to work out a budget agreement.

But the future seems pretty clear, and it probably won't include direct payments.

With farm states having less and less influence in Congress, in fact, farmers may struggle to hang onto other programs they depend on more. These include crop insurance and disaster payments, including coverage for "uninsurable" crops.

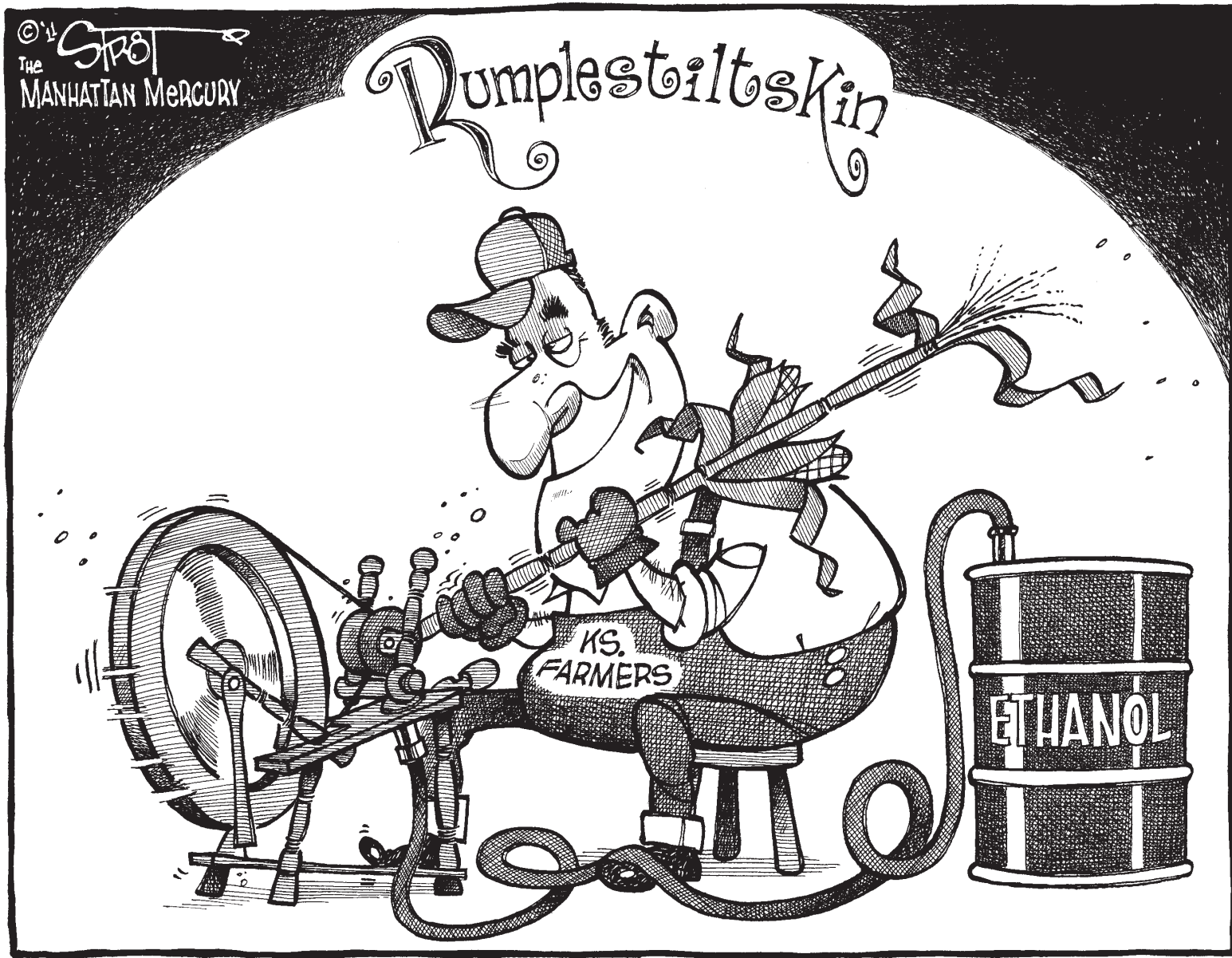
In an era when the influence of rural America is fading and the farm vote means less to national politicians, farmers and farm groups need to step back and consider just what counts the most. Already, the so-called Farm Bill is mostly a welfare package, the result of deals made over the years to secure city support for rural issues.

Today, the bill covers everything from Food Stamps to the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program. But the time is coming, if it's not already here, when urban interests will figure out that they don't need to make deals to pass their programs. They have the votes; we don't.

The Senate, which remains more rural than the House, may be the last bastion of farm support, but ag groups will have to figure out what really counts. Direct payments, along with subsidies for alcohol fuel production, may be left on the chopping block.

Both have helped contribute to recent farm prosperity. And it's still vital to the country to have a dependable, low-cost food supply. But in the future, the "farm bloc" will have a lot fewer votes than we are used to.

Get used to it.  
This Senate vote may be only a taste of things to come. – Steve Haynes



## Electronic age just 150 years old

Imagine this: the age of electronic communication is just 150 years old.

In all of human time, maybe 8,000 years of recorded history, thousands of years of prehistoric civilization, perhaps millions of development, in all the eons since creation, men have been able to communicate instantly with the next county or state for only 150 years.

Oct. 24, 1861, marks the completion of the transcontinental telegraph line, linking the East Coast with California just months after the start of the Civil War. Most immediately, the line bound California and the West to the Union, but the implications were far greater.

An era had begun. Soon, the invention of the telephone, radio, the teletype and other electronic devices would snowball connectivity. Within a few years of each invention, a device would become commonplace, and the world would change. Again and again.

It's likely no one alive 150 years ago could have envisioned the impact of this revolution. Talking to someone across the continent, or in Europe, and hearing their voice might have seemed too much.

But the tide had begun to come in. Television and computers would push it higher. The Internet and satellites would bind the world as it had never before been connected. Instead of weeks to get a letter across the continent or across the sea, messages would fly in seconds.

The change is striking: Much of it has oc-



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curred in the 65 years since World War II, a watershed time for invention. Then, soliders had to wait weeks or months for letters from home, despite the priority the military put on mail. Today, you can pick up a phone and call your friends or family on station in the war zone.

Things we accept as normal today, from joint replacement to cancer therapy, would have seemed impossible just a few decades ago. Men imagined space travel and intercity flight a century and a half ago, but these were mere dreams, science fiction.

In our lifetimes, my generation has seen these things come to pass. We remember a world without cell phones, computers, vaccines for childhood illnesses, easy, accessible travel, transistors and miniature electronics.

We can tell our grandchildren about phones with no dials, wired to the wall. Our good ol' days include two-lane roads and streamliners, propeller airliners and black-and-white television.

And, compared to all who went before, we grew up in a world of luxury and wealth, in a

time of peace and prosperity unequalled in all of history.

Where is all this leading us? To wreck and ruin? Will we exhaust the Earth's resources, foul her air and water, overcrowd her continents and bring ourselves and society full cycle? Will poverty and decline become the norm?

Or will progress continue unabated, humanity solving our problems even as new ones appear?

Will we travel to other galaxies, or be bound to our terrestrial home? Will we imagine a great frontier and dominate the old one?

Who's to say? But history tells us the human condition has, in fact, improved throughout time. We are more civilized today, we have more, we have the ability to create more than ever before.

And, despite all evidence to the contrary, war and pestilence are fading away. Social scientists and statisticians find that we live in the most peaceable era in time. We certainly live with the most technology.

You have to believe that human ingenuity will keep us one step ahead of our mistakes, help us solve our problems and reach even higher. That's the curve of history, not even on linear, but always higher.

Just imagine what might be, 150 years from today.

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### By Nora Poullion and Susan Bass

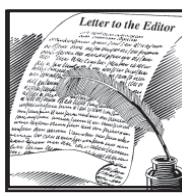
Coming from people who know the value of a day, Food Day on Monday, Oct. 24 presents an opportunity to inspire people to seek healthy, affordable food and to encourage them to rebuild their personal connection to food and its impact on their health. In this high-tech, fast- and processed-food world, people - especially young people- have become disconnected from the food they eat, where it comes from and its effect on the environment.

Today, children from all walks of life – urban and rural, wealthy and poor - spend extraordinary amounts of time in front of computers, smart phones and television screens rather than outside. It's no wonder we're hearing stories of kids who don't even know carrots are grown in the ground. Although modern technology has helped educate today's youth about the wide diversity of plant and animal species and the interconnectedness of food production with the health of our planet, an intellectual understanding is no substitute for the keen emotional attachment and sense of ownership that comes from experiencing the bounty of nature firsthand.

Even the dictionary has short-changed nature. Publishers of the Oxford Junior Dictionary decided words describing some of nature's most ubiquitous creatures and wonders – beaver, dandelion, otter, acorn, clover, ivy, nectar and willow, for example – had to be replaced by terms like blog, MP3 player, voicemail and broadband.

Imagine how appalled Walt Whitman, the author of "The First Dandelion," would be to discover America's children will soon have no way to find the meaning of the word used to describe the object of a treasured childhood experience – blowing dandelion seeds.

Further distancing the younger generation from the roots of our food supply is the popularity of fast food. Each day, one in four Americans eats in a fast-food restaurant. Forty percent of American meals are eaten outside the home. Shockingly, children often recognize



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the McDonald's logo before their own name, and 25 percent of children's total vegetables are consumed in the form of potato chips and French fries.

Farmer's markets, which are on the rise across the nation, offer a promising opportunity to help children connect the dots between food on their plate, their personal welfare and the sustainability of our planet. In selling locally grown, natural and organic produce and products, farmers have become small-scale teachers and naturalists, educating consumers about the superior quality of their products and helping children and families recognize the relationship between food production and the earth's seasons and ecosystems.

The good news is almost 7,200 farmers markets are in operation across the United States. Farmers markets are no longer restricted to high-income shoppers, as nearly 12 percent of reporting farmer's markets now accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program dollars, formerly called food stamps. Some programs, such as the Freshfarm Market at the White House and others in D.C. markets, participate in the Double Dollars program, which doubles the value of purchases made with SNAP dollars at farmers markets for up to \$20 a week.

Physical food stamps have been replaced by "electronic benefit transfer" cards, but not all farmers markets can afford the wireless card readers nor deal with the inevitable bureaucracy that attaches to participating in federal programs. Nonetheless, with sales moving toward \$4 million, SNAP sales are an increasingly important source of income for local and regional farmers and a great place to reconnect children to real food.

Goodland Farmers' Market is open from 8 to

11 a.m. Saturday mornings and 4 to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays from July through October. Located on east Business U.S. 24. Contact person is Nick Evert (785) 899-5809 or [nickevert@gmail.com](mailto:nickevert@gmail.com).

Farm-to-school programs can rebuild once-common links between young people, the food they eat and its ties to the environment. These programs bring fresh produce from local farms directly to school lunchrooms. Participating public schools and public charter schools receive an extra five cents for each lunch served containing a component made entirely from locally grown food. School garden programs connect students to real food by teaching them how to grow and cook it. Some cities have created full-time school garden specialists and are focusing on underserved students who are learning about and growing their own healthy food.

A number of important studies clearly demonstrate that children involved in garden-based education have improved test scores, particularly in math and science.

Connecting our children with healthy, real food – its vibrant colors, smells and tastes - and with farmers who bring these products to our table is an important step to righting a serious wrong and building a smarter, healthier and ready-to-compete generation.

Nora Poullion is a champion of organic, environmentally conscious cuisine and is Chef/Owner of Restaurant Nora, the first certified organic restaurant in the country. She is an Earth Day Network board member. Susan Bass is senior vice president of nonprofit organization Earth Day Network, which is a leader in the green schools, healthy lunch, and green economy campaign.

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