

from our viewpoint...

Seatbelts are the law but not on buses

You have to wear a seatbelt to drive your car. The law doesn't allow you to make that choice anymore. Your kids had better be belted in, or you'll get a ticket. Heaven help you if you have a baby bouncing around in that buggy.

Airline passengers have to wear a seatbelt. They want you to keep it on even when the "fasten-seatbelt" light is out, go figure.

You need a seatbelt to drive a go-cart.

Dale Earnhardt Jr. has to wear one to drive his car, or he'll get fined.

They're even starting to put the things on ski lifts, and next, who knows, maybe Amtrak will have them in its coaches.

So why, in God's name, don't school buses have seatbelts?

It's easy to say that school buses are safe, and they are one of the safest modes of transportation, no doubt. But on average, 9,500 kids are hurt in 23,000 school bus crashes each year. Ten die.

School buses have to stop before crossing a railroad track.

School buses have a stop sign to flag drivers and stop them from whizzing by while they're loading and unloading.

School buses have to let kids out on the right these days; no crossing the highway after the bus is gone.

School buses have to be clearly marked for safety.

So why the heck don't school buses have seatbelts?

You can't tell us that kids aren't bright enough to buckle them. Or our schools are worse off than even Congress suspects.

You can't tell us that kids wouldn't be safer belted in than bouncing around the bus in a wreck.

That just defies logic.

You can't tell us the drivers and teachers are too busy to make the kids strap in.

They'd be a lot easier to manage tied down than they are loose and squirming.

No, it's not that, is it?

It's the money.

It'd cost some bucks to put 40-50 three-point harnesses in all those school busses.

It'd be hard to rig the aisle seats, too.

A couple grand per bus, anyway. More to retrofit old equipment. And there are thousands of buses across the country.

Schools probably don't have the money. It's scarce these days.

But these are our children and our grandchildren. Shouldn't we do it anyway?

— Steve Haynes

Letter Policy

The Goodland Star-News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with address and phone numbers, by e-mail to: <star-news@nwkanssas.com>.

The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association
Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association
National Newspaper Association
e-mail: star-news@nwkanssas.com

Steve Haynes, President
Tom Betz, Editor
Pat Schiefen, Copy Editor
Sharon Corcoran, Society Editor
Greg E. Stover, Sports Editor/Reporter
Kathryn Burke, Reporter
Doug Jackson, Advertising Coordinator
Robin Flax, Adv. Sales
Sheila Smith, Office Manager
Nor'west Press
Jim Bowker, General Manager
Richard Westfahl Ron VanLoenen Judy McKnight Betty Morris
Aaron Hickert Travis Jones Kris McCool Lana Westfahl
nwkanssas.com
N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services
(ntbetz@nwkanssas.com)
Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkanssas.com)

Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735. Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735. TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkanssas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkanssas.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$24; six months, \$42; 12 months, \$76. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$34; six months, \$49; 12 months, \$84. Mailed individually each day: 12 months, \$119. (All tax included.)

Incorporating:
The Goodland Daily News
1932-2003
The Sherman County Herald
Founded by Thomas McCants
1935-1989
Nor'West Newspapers
Haynes Publishing Company

THE SHERMAN COUNTY
STAR
Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey
1994-2001



I feel Thanksgiving is getting squeezed out

I don't know about you, but every year I notice more emphasis being put on Halloween And every year I see Santa Clauses, bells and holly in the stores earlier.

I know you probably enjoy Halloween and Christmas. I do too. But every year I'm becoming more alarmed that we're squeezing out Thanksgiving

I've thought about our fall and winter holidays a lot this year. I've wondered why we're crowding out Thanksgiving.

It seems to me to be a sign of our times, a not-too-flattering reflection of what America has become.

The one holiday that emphasizes humility and gratitude to God is slowly disappearing between two "give-me" celebrations. Kids can't wait to go "trick-or-treating" where they're given candy and treats — for no special reason.

They don't earn it; they may not even know their neighbors or have been particularly nice to them. Even so, they expect a handout.

Then we go right into making Christmas lists. Again getting something. We say Santa only comes to good girls and boys, but we know that's not true.

The sad part is, Christmas isn't even special because most of the kids get everything they want all year long. They don't even know what to ask for at Christmas time.

But Thanksgiving Day isn't as popular. There will probably be no gifts.

Does this alarm you at all? I see us becoming a nation of takers — emphasizing material



**lorna
gt**

● commentary

things. Thanksgiving is about recognizing the source of all our blessings. It's about counting our blessings. It's about giving thanks for those blessings. It's about realizing many are not as fortunate as we are. It's about teaching our children the value of sharing — not getting.

A magazine article I read recently said many Native American tribes give thanks and celebrate with hospitality.

Let me quote: "Where our (Native American) cultures are still intact, elements of hospitality are still there. An act of thanksgiving happens whenever native people harvest the last crops before winter. It marks a sacred shift from outdoor food production to the indoor work of strengthening the culture."

Do we use Thanksgiving as a way to strengthen our family ties and enhance our culture?

Or is gratitude being de-emphasized and lost between two holidays that are more lucrative and materialistic in the marketplace? What are we teaching our children?

A wine company advertisement in *Newsweek* magazine read, "The earth gives us wonderful grapes. The grapes give us wonderful wine. The wine wins us lots of new friends.

Consumers need to know food's true cost

Our short-term economics is driving to ruin the source of our riches, the Earth. Investors and corporate boardrooms focus myopically on the next quarterly report, ignoring the long term.

Putting a price tag on the gross domestic product or the stock market is relatively easy. But these indicators ignore our need to sustain natural resources, which are vital.

We must bring security of our planet's ecological capital into the marketplace's calculations.

We should start with agriculture, whose footprint is huge. It uses 40 percent of the world's land to make our food, feed and fiber. As agriculture goes, so goes the planet's health.

Farming and forestry prices reflect the immediate costs of labor and capital, but do not include long-run ecological costs. Paying \$1.25 per pound for supermarket chicken does not cover cleaning up rivers polluted by poultry factories. That charge goes to society at large.

Rivers can clean themselves given time. But the soil loss that results from the way we farm today is essentially irreversible.

This erosion washes about the thickness of a business card from our topsoil each year, an estimated 5 tons per acre, exceeding the soil's natural rate of formation. Large areas of the



**prairie
writers circle**

● charles francis

Midwest have lost half of their productive topsoil in just 150 years of farming.

This earthy gold mine helped build our nation. Other powers — Greece, Carthage — gutted their soils and fell. We can mask this erosion by mining other ecological capital — fossil fuels used to make fertilizer, for example — but not for the long run.

Meanwhile, also washing away are pesticides and fertilizer that poison groundwater. Taken by the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico, the fertilizer drives life from 8,000 square miles of the sea, costing millions of dollars in lost fishing.

Future generations will foot the bill for fouled water, ravaged soil, lost wildlife and global warming.

That is, unless something replaces our short-sighted, narrowly defined accounting so that we pay for the total cost of our food consumption.

And something is emerging: ecological economics. It's a field of study that does account

for long-term costs.

We can now calculate the environmental costs of different types of food production, and compare in monetary terms the long-term impact of global versus local food production.

If we can devise a way to include these ecological costs in the prices we pay at the supermarket, we can show consumers the true costs of their food-buying decisions — that it makes more sense, for example, to buy local apples in season rather than similar products imported from New Zealand or China.

Any corporation, government or family that spends its economic capital eventually will go bankrupt.

Our human-centered approach to nature assumes Earth's resources are here for our exploitation.

It is essential we recognize ourselves as only one species in a complex web of relationships, and that ultimately we are just as threatened by ecological losses as are our co-inhabitants.

We must learn to see our true vested interest. We must reform our markets so we don't keep cooking the ecological books.

We must learn to pay a fair price to Earth.

Charles Francis, professor of agronomy and horticulture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is a member of the Land Institute's Prairie Writers Circle, Salina.

garfield

