

Proposal to Congress closes farming loopholes

A blockbuster proposal by two retired farm-state senators and an emerging Washington think tank urges Congress to eliminate direct payments to farmers and let them depend more on the market.

The plan, put forth by former Sens. Bob Dole of Kansas and Tom Daschle of South Dakota, would cap federal payments at a quarter million dollars a year, closing loopholes that allow some wealthy "farmers," including basketball players and other celebrities, to collect millions while others go broke.

Mr. Dole is a former Republican leader and Mr. Daschle a former Democratic leader in the Senate, and their experience in farm-bill battles is considerable. Their advice bears listening to.

No one is ever "happy" with the farm bill. It's something everyone lives with.

Farmers would be happier, no doubt, just to be able to make a living without constant interference, "help" and advice from the government. The evidence suggests they would be better off financially, too, but getting from here to there has always been the problem.

End federal price supports tomorrow, and you might break half the farmers — and half the banks — in rural America. The system is addicted to federal money, has been for years.

There was a time, when Pat Roberts was chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, that it looked as though the "Freedom to Farm" approach would loose farmers from their subsidy habit. We all know how that ended.

If federal programs really supported family farms or kept anyone on the land, we might want to defend them. The stark truth, told by declining population figures and farm num-

bers, is that these programs may keep the average operation afloat a few years longer than without them. The trend toward fewer, bigger farms is unchanged.

Since the advent of mechanical harvesting equipment and scientific seed propagation, the hard truth is it's taken fewer farmers every year of the last century to grow more food.

The government has tried to pay people to stay on the land while paying land-grant colleges to make farming more efficient. The efficient farmer is winning, and surviving, while others leave the business in great numbers.

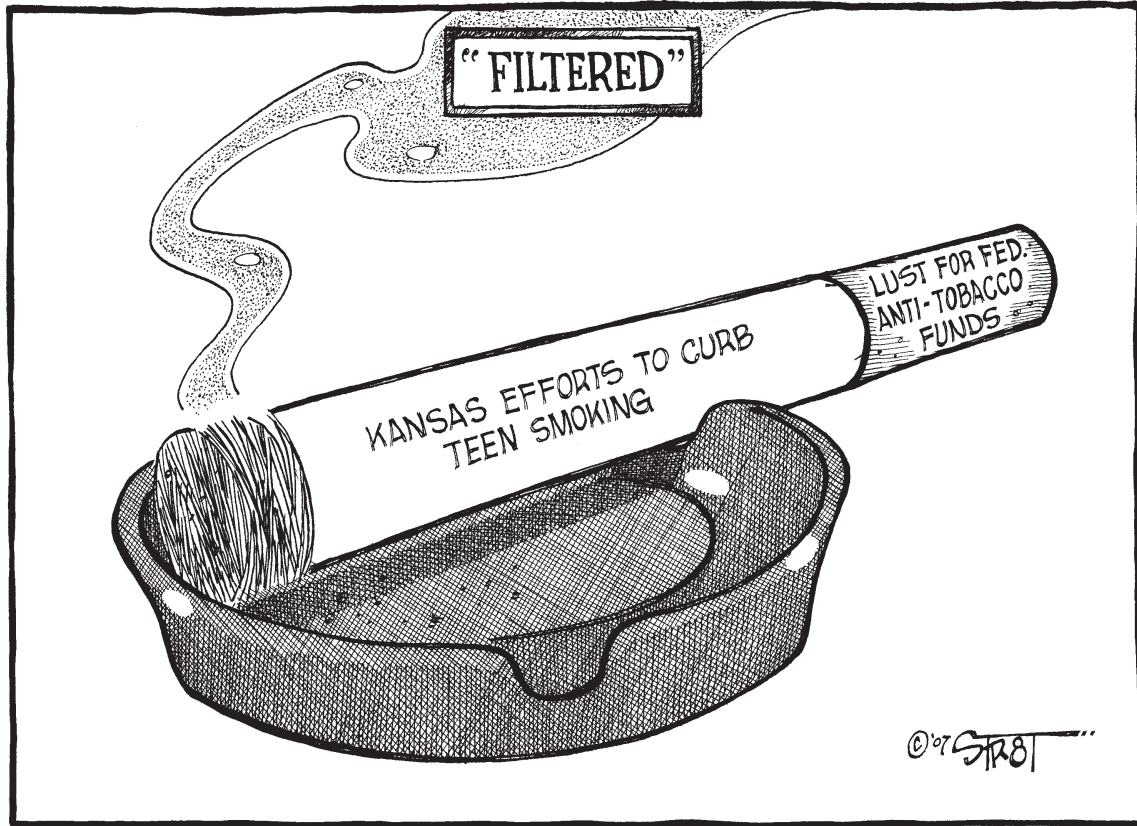
We see no end to that. The question is how to make farming more profitable and make life good for the best producers who remain. And for young men and women who will step up to take their place as the great mass of today's graying farmers retire.

There is no magic formula for farm success. It takes hard work, brains and a special kind of toughness. A lot of people around here have those qualities.

Farmers who grow unregulated, unsubsidized crops tend to make more money and be happier with their lot than those tied to a federal tether. Making more people free to farm ought to be a goal of the farm bill. So should ending subsidies to those who don't need them, and the real goal should be to ensure that — except in times of disaster — most farmers don't.

The Dole-Daschle plan is the first in recent years to look at that end. It claims to have nearly \$5 billion a year in budget savings while makings farmers better off. It's worth a look, as is any plan to ease farming back to fiscal reality.

— Steve Haynes



Spring is wonderful times three

I love spring, and this year I got to enjoy it three times.

Spring comes early to Kansas. We start seeing buds and blooms in March, and by April and May, the crocus, irises, roses, forsythia, lilacs and wildflowers have shown their glorious colors.

This year, we had a bit of a disappointment when a late frost nipped the fruit tree blossoms and pretty much did in our lilacs in northwest Kansas. I really missed the lilacs.

Steve and I go walking at night a lot, and we always stop to sniff the lilacs along the curbs. You can smell a really large bush about a block away if the wind is right. This year, however, our lilacs took a beating.

We did enjoy the irises and early yellow roses. The ornamental pear tree in the back yard lost some of its blossoms to the freeze, but came out with lots of flowers — at least until the rains hit. Then we had an avalanche of white petals all over the back deck, our cars and the lawn under the tree. It looked like it had hailed until the white petals turned brown and got tracked into the house on feet and paws.

Still, spring in Kansas was wonderful.

Then we went to Colorado to a graduation in late May.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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Salida isn't exactly the highest point in Colorado but it's high enough that in late May, it's spring-time with lilacs, irises and roses. We took an hour to walk around town and sniff anything that was close enough to the sidewalk that we wouldn't be charged with trespassing if we stopped and breathed in the scent.

It was another glorious spring day. Our second spring just two weeks after the first.

Then in early June, we took a trip to the Black Hills of South Dakota. Guess what? Spring comes really late up there.

In Rapid City, we saw all our favorite flowers again and, while we didn't have much time, we took a few minutes to sniff here and there.

Spring is such a lovely time of year. I've always been sad it only came once.

I was wrong. If you work it right, you can get spring again and again. It just takes a little moving around.

Now that summer is here, I'm turning my attention from blossoms to vegetables. My asparagus is about gone but the sugar peas are delicious. I've been eating them right off the vine.

I've given lettuce to everyone I know. Some I didn't know.

We planted too much. We always plant too much. In the spring, there's all this garden with nothing in it, so we go nuts with lettuce seed. Now the tomatoes and peppers need the space and I hate to waste any produce, but the I've got enough lettuce to feed the whole county — with some left over.

It's gotta go.

I may love spring but I've had my share. It's time for both me and the lettuce to move on.

Funeral celebration of life

Do you know the difference between an Italian wedding and an Italian funeral?

Answer: one less person.

That was the joke told by the preacher at my nephew Kevin's funeral. I'm not sure why, but it really struck our whole family as funny. We laughed through the tears, knowing Kevin was the one we were missing.

But what a celebration of his life the funeral was! His was a life well-lived.

We learned that Kevin had been told you can't operate a construction company using Christian principles. He said you could, and set out to prove his detractors wrong.

Judging by the number of plaques and awards he received for excellence of design and performance, I would say he proved his point.

Countless friends of Kevin came to the family and remarked what a man of integrity he was. Well, he came by it naturally.

His dad, my brother Dick, is a man of integrity, and he learned it from our dad. If our father gave his word, he would have died keeping it.

I don't think integrity is something you are born with — I think it is learned. And the only way to learn is by example.

Kevin set a fine example, one his



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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boys can look to as a pattern to live by.

-ob-

We have a new neighbor who moved in next door. He just came here from Florida.

I told him not to get too accustomed to this unseasonably cool weather. This is not normal. Usually, by the middle of June it has hit the 100-degree mark.

Wheat is starting to turn and I know farmer's thoughts are, too. To market prices, weather, yield, weather, hired help, weather, price of gas and, of course, weather.

Some years have seen harvest started by now. No so this year. But it's not far off, either.

-ob-

You will all be glad to know the baby chicks have been moved outside. There is no way you could be as glad as I am, though. It got to where I hated to go into the bathroom.

Jim made them a cute little coop

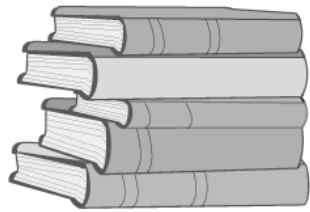
and they are totally content to be outside. The added bonus is the light bulb Jim installed for warmth attracts insects and the little "cheepers" think we serve a smorgasbord every night.

Now I know what the expression "like a chicken on a June bug" means.

From the Bible

Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands; Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious.

Psalm 66: 1, 2



Dawn expands into a rainbow

Dawn starts as a small band of color on the eastern horizon, seen from 39,000 feet against the dark blue night sky.

The band expands and separates into primary colors, sort of a muted rainbow in the eastern sky. The bands grade from light yellow through orange and blood red to powder blue and deepest midnight.

Call it dawn over the birthplace of civilization.

Iraq is down there on the left, and we are flying safely into Saudi airspace. Between the Tigris and the Euphrates lie not only war-torn Baghdad, but the ancient cradle of Western Civilization.

Here, legend tells us, was the Garden of Eden. Here civilization grew and prospered centuries before the time of Jesus and Mohammed. Wars were fought, cities built, generations lived their lives.

The Mideast is today, as always, a study in contrast. We're flying past war and strife to Abu Dhabi in the tiny nation known as the United Arab Emirates, or U.A.E., where oil has turned a barren desert into a garden spot.

In Abu Dhabi and Dubai, the two largest and best-known emirates, sparkling cities stand against the desert haze, one part humidity, the locals say, one part dust. Officials proclaim that nearly 345 high-rise buildings are under construction in the two cities. It's said that 15 percent of the world's population of single-leg cranes dwells here.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. We land in Abu Dhabi as guests of



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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the federal government, itself barely 35 years old, a dozen American editors and professors. The rulers of the seven sheikdoms — absolute monarchs descended from tribal chiefs of yore — want us to see what they are doing with three decades of oil money.

Forty years ago, officials proudly note, the seven tiny principalities along the Arabian Sea (or Persian Gulf to most of us) were dusty British protectorates preparing for independence.

Then, as the saying goes, they found oil. Lots of oil, maybe a quarter of all the oil on the Arabian peninsula.

That came just as the Emirates were banding together as a nation, and the founding leader, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan of Abu Dhabi, projected a vision of sharing this new-found wealth with his countrymen and his neighbors.

Today the Emirates' citizens are provided their education through college, health care, government, family support and even a house from oil money. There are no taxes. Everyone has a job; in fact, as the desert blossomed, the emirates had to import workers. Today these

guests make up nearly 80 percent of the roughly 4.1 million population.

While wealthy and influential, the tiny states are not powerful in the sense the United States is. They live in perilous times, on the edge of war and under the threat of far larger, sometimes unfriendly, always ambitious, Iran.

All that oil has to be shipped out through the Strait of Hormuz, right under the guns and missiles of the Iranian military.

The Emirates depend on diplomacy and friendly powers to shield them from harm. The nation has money to invest, but relations with the U.S. can be rocky; remember the storm over the Dubai contract to run American ports last year?

We have a lot to learn as we step out into the heat of the day, and it's summer, nearly 50 degrees (around 118 degrees Fahrenheit), with humidity that makes Kansas look dry.

Everywhere, palm trees and buildings sprout from the sand. Whole islands sprout from the sea. You almost have to see it to believe it.

And over the next six days, we will.

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Memorial Day in Norcatatur great

The following letter was taken from the June 12, 2007 edition of the Norcatatur News.

To the Editor:

I enjoyed a week of visiting friends and relatives in Norcatatur. The hometown and the Norcatatur Cemetery looked great for Memorial Day. It was great to get away from the normal routine of life in the fast lane.

Brother Dick and sister Patty followed me back to California. Yesterday we went and toured the aircraft carrier USS Midway, which was home ported in Japan and was replaced by the USS Kitty Hawk.

I retired off the Kitty Hawk in April 1985. The Midway is now decommissioned and is in a museum

here in San Diego. They have some idea of what life on an aircraft carrier was like.

Dick and Patty left for home this morning. With the help of cell

phones, I got them on the Interstate and headed east.

Norman R. Beachel Jr.
San Diego

Swim team impressive

To the Editor:

Swimmers are really neat kids. We were so impressed and pleased after the Saturday swim meet, involving 225 swimmers plus coaches and families. The park and

surrounding area were left as clean or cleaner than when they arrived.

We hope they come back next year.

Gaylord and Shirley Shields
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