

A fancy name won't get support for farmers

American farmers and ranchers are making a big mistake when they allow themselves to be called "producers."

Once upon a time, perhaps, someone thought it sounded more professional to be a "producer" rather than a simple "farmer." Maybe the world thinks of farmers as hicks and clods, not sophisticated people with university degrees.

But just as lipstick seldom improves the looks of the pig, a fancy name does not do much for the image of a job.

The truth of the matter is, producer just sounds industrial. And in this country, one industry is pretty much the same as the next.

No one much cares about the fate of the faceless producer. No one gives a damn, really.

Now a farmer, he — or she — is someone who works the land, loves his animals and gives his all for his crops.

A rancher is a guy — or a gal — astride a quarter horse, squinting into the sun and watching his herd. She's the one who goes out at 2 a.m. to help a heifer deliver her first calf in 10-degree weather.

Farmers and ranchers are people who work long hours and often have little to show in return except the satisfaction of being close to the land and to nature. They're people we

can relate to.

And there's the key: farmers and ranchers are people. Producers are statistics.

Bureaucrats love to talk about producers when they spout their governmentese. You never hear a federal employee talk or write about farmers. To them, everyone's a producer. Same for the Extension experts.

Maybe they figure that as government employees benefit from fancy titles and programs with initials longer than your arm, so will the farmer, the rancher or that ubiquitous creature of the plains, the farmer-stockman.

But a fancy title won't win anyone a dime more for a bushel of wheat — or another vote in Congress. At a time when the farm vote is less than 2 percent, and the entire ag vote not much more than that, farmers and ranchers need all the support they can get.

We know today's farmer is a professional, handling a six- or seven-figure budget and making decisions that call for real expertise. We know it takes that kind of person to feed the world.

So call yourselves whatever you want, but remember when you need support, it's the human touch that will win people's hearts and minds. Not a fancy title.

— Steve Haynes



Birds holding a convention

The signs of spring are everywhere.

I filled the bird feeders on Thursday, and by Friday night they were half empty.

Twenty robins had a convention in my yard last week. Four of them were perched around an old aluminum roasting pan I keep by the alley. I call it my cat watering dish. Actually, it's available for any thirsty animal that wanders down the road.

The cats use it, of course. The dog hits it for a few slurps after her walk — hey, it tastes delicious, just like cats. And on Sunday, the birds were using it for a bath.

I've had those feeders up for months without much action. I had about decided that the birds didn't like the mix, didn't like my yard, didn't like me. Over the last week, however, I came to realize that they just hadn't arrived until now.

I saw an apple tree that had started to blossom. It may be in for a nasty surprise, but I hope not.

Out in the yard, the crocuses are blooming and the daffodils and tulips are coming up. The lily and iris beds are starting to green up and



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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last week, while Steve was mowing the yard, I went out and removed all the dead lily leaves and stems so the daffodils I planted in among the lilies, could be seen.

Around town, several people have burned off their grass, and with a little water, everything will start to turn green.

The garden got rototilled last week and I put in the lettuce, spinach, carrots, peas and radishes. This is the first time I've tried growing carrots, so we'll just have to see how it goes.

We love lettuce and spinach, and every year I try to grow both a spring and fall crop. Some years it works and some years, oh well.

The radishes are more because I want to put something in the ground than as a crop. I always eat at least

three or four, give some away and let most go to seed. Steve doesn't do radishes. And while he doesn't like peas, he enjoys the snow peas I plant.

With spring in the air, can summer be far behind?

Nope. In fact, I saw the first sure sign of summer on a trip between Oberlin and Colby last week.

I ran into not one, but two road construction stops: flagmen, guys with shovels, big machines, the whole works. The only thing missing was the time. It only took about five minutes of waiting to get through both of them.

When the Department of Transportation is stopping traffic, can summer be far behind?

Open government not simple

By RANDY BROWN

Wichita State University

Open government has power. It fuels democracy. When citizens know what's going on, they can make informed choices about their community and their country.

That sounds simple and noncontroversial. But open government isn't quite like apple pie and the Flag. In concept, everybody says they love it. In practice, that love too often morphs into secrecy.

Take the Kansas Open Records Act. The preamble states firmly and clearly that it's the policy of the state that public records should be open to the public. Then the act lists more than 45 exemptions.

Some of those are legitimate, covering personnel, medical and juvenile records. Some of them are special interest nonsense, such as the exemption that keeps secret information about employees of private companies whose salaries are paid with public money.

A quick example: You can get basic information, including names and salaries, of any public employees, such as school teachers, administrators and janitors. But you can't even find out the names of those who drive buses for Durham School Services, even though Durham receives tens of millions of tax dollars every year to haul thousands of our children to and from school every day in Wichita, Topeka and around the state.

This is clearly a public safety issue — and a brutal violation of the spirit of the Open Records Act. It easily could be fixed by the Legislature, but our lawmakers won't touch it.

Sadder yet is the pervasive attitude that transparency in government is inconvenient and should be avoided if possible.



Opinion

By Randy Brown

The Wichita School District's long search for a new superintendent is a recent and disheartening example.

The district is the largest in the state by a wide margin. It is the largest local taxing body in the state, as well. Yet the school board conducted its search for a leader in secret. Under pressure, it finally let the public briefly in on the process when only two candidates remained, just days before the final selection was made.

This is not illegal, but it's no way to build public trust in an agency with a \$600 million annual budget and a \$370 million bond issue on its plate.

Secrecy in public meetings is another transparency issue. Communities from around the state — from Lawrence and Topeka out to Thomas County — are running afoul of the Kansas Open Meetings Act. The Lawrence City Council was even sent to open government school last year.

One problem is the tendency of local governing bodies to pop into executive session at the slightest opportunity. When discussions veer off of a specified subject or decisions are reached, as sometimes happens, state law is violated. And so is the public interest.

As well meaning as most public officials are, another problem is ignorance of the law — or sometimes just arrogance. State Sen. Tim

Huelskamp, R-Fowler, says local officials frequently violate the open meetings law by discussing public business over lunch, in private meetings and in social settings. That's convenient, after all.

Two key points here: Open government is about citizen access to the workings of democracy, nothing more or less.

Public officials gain something priceless when they do business in the sunshine: credibility and public trust.

In short, open government is essential to a democratic society. Yes, that can make things a bit messy. But then, democracy can be a messy business.

One of my favorite patriots, Patrick Henry, once said something like this: Liberty is never secure when government does business in secret.

That's as true now as it was more than 225 years ago.

Randy Brown, a senior fellow at the Elliott School of Communication at Wichita State University, is executive director of the Kansas Sunshine Coalition for Open Government. For information, see www.sunshinecoalition.com.



Sour cream not a real lunch

During the almost 15 years of our marriage, Jim and I have had an ongoing debate regarding the pros and cons of using old cottage cheese or butter tubs for storing leftovers.

Recently, we had such a discussion with the end result the same. Jim thinks they are economical. I hate them. You can't see what's inside and can never find a lid that fits. With the advent of recycling in our town, he can't even say they are bad for the environment.

Saturday night, Jim fixed supper for himself and his son James. Following their meal, Jim promptly stored the leftovers in a sour cream container. Sunday, we had guests for dinner and served sour cream as one of the condiments. Monday morning Jim had to leave very early for work and I hadn't fixed him any lunch. He grabbed a few things out of the fridge and went out the door.

Later that morning, James and I had been working one of our many projects when I said we needed to take a break for lunch. We planned to have burritos with green chile gravy and sour cream. But, when I opened the sour cream container, I was greeted by beef stroganoff.

"Uh, oh," James said. "Dad was planning to have that for his lunch today. I bet he got the sour cream." Remembering our recent conversation, he added, "Man, that's poetic justice."

"Oh, yes it is," I agreed. "And too good to pass up."

I dialed Jim's number, and when he answered, I asked, "Have you had your lunch yet?"

He said he had.

"How was it?" I asked.

"Are you getting funny with



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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me?" he asked. "You know what happened, don't you?"

"Oh, yes I do," I confirmed.

"Darn," he said. "I hoped I could sneak it back into the fridge and you'd never know."

Then, in almost horror, he said, "This is going in the paper, isn't it?"

"Oh, yeah, for sure," I said.

Hey, I couldn't make this stuff up.

— ob —

I have always been a recipe clipper. This week, I set myself to the task of sorting through all the loose recipes. Some had to be recopied and some just needed taped to index cards. Now it is done.

Perhaps my tastes have changed, because some of those recipes didn't sound very good anymore. Or, perhaps they were too complicated. Anyway, several of them went to "File 13".

One, however, survived. It was for Creme Brulee French Toast. It was one of those make-the-night-before recipes and I had all the ingredients on hand, so I told the men I would have a special treat for Saturday's breakfast. It was a real hit. With brown sugar, butter, French bread, eggs and cream, you can't go wrong. They said I can make it anytime I want to.

— ob —

A friend of mine who prefers to cook with organic produce has begun gardening in a big way. With the help of her husband and five children, they have fenced in a huge garden plot. They have hauled in compost and straw and are making raised beds to grow potatoes, tomatoes, beans, peppers and peas. She said she has never gardened before and is doing it "by the book."

That's okay. Half of gardening is just getting the seed in the ground. Mother Nature will take care of the rest. Personally, I think the hard part comes with the harvest of what you've grown. The real work involves the canning, jammin', jellin', and freezing.

But, oh my....what a reward!

From the Bible

God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us;

That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.

Psalm 67: 1, 2

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Thank you and best wishes to all

To the Editor:

I will not be renewing my subscription to *The Oberlin Herald*.

I have been a subscriber since 1988, and my father, J. Glenn Logan, and paternal grandparents were loyal readers before me.

The Logans were homesteaders in Harlan Township in the 1890s. Ownership of the farmland that came down to my brother, Joseph P. Logan, and me in 1988 was transferred out of our family last October, and so our connection, as well as our family's long-standing connection, to Decatur County has been closed.

It has been an interesting and somewhat melancholy journey for my generation. Having been exposed since early childhood to

the stories of pioneering hardships and sacrifices, sod houses and frugal living standards, along with the joys and innocence of rural life, as compared to today's hectic way of urban life, it was with a deep sense of sadness that we relinquished the land that had been owned, nurtured and cherished by our family for so many years. But it was time.

While moving on, my brother and I would like to thank the people of Decatur County for their friendship over these years. We thoroughly enjoyed our too infrequent visits. In particular, we want to extend our

appreciation to Melvin Smalberger and David and Pam Wilson for their assistance.

We wish the very best in the future to all of you.

Frank A. Logan
Hanover, N.H.

