

Farmers might choose between ethanol, feeding

A growing divide between corn growers and cattlemen could strain relationships just as Congress takes up the new Farm Bill — and face the farmer-stockman with some interesting decisions.

Livestock interests, backed by food manufacturers and retailers, worry increasing government emphasis on ethanol fuel may drive corn prices so high, ranchers will be forced to liquidate their herds.

With many cattlemen already under pressure from drought in the Southwest, the possibility portends even higher retail food prices — and lower profits from a shrinking cow herd.

What has stockmen worried is a compromise that traded relief on a requirement to produce 7.5 billion gallons of alcohol-based motor fuel by 2007 for a gradual buildup to 36 billion gallons by 2022. That was coupled with a \$5 billion-a-year federal subsidy for ethanol production that expires this year, but the production target remains.

Others who use corn, from food processors to the beef, poultry and hog industries, fear what might happen as higher and higher fuel targets kick in, especially if bad weather cuts corn production one year.

Corn prices are already nearly double what they were a couple of years ago, and most people in farm country are not complaining. Stockmen who need to feed cattle might not be so happy, however, if the price doubles again.

Our beef production system today is based on feeding grain. It produces efficiencies that grazing cannot match. But if the cost of feed gets too high, it could well force growers to cull and reduce their cow herds, even with relatively strong meat prices.

It's one of those situations where the market ought to be allowed to operate. If people want alcohol-based fuels, they can buy them. But when government steps in and commands people to do the "right" thing, the consequences are hard to predict.

Ethanol production has been good to corn farmers, no doubt. It's created jobs out in farm country that did not exist. But it's harder and harder to justify on environmental or economic grounds, and with the votes shifting to the cities, it may be harder to keep in the Farm Bill, too.

The question for the farmer-stockman may be, "Feed the corn or sell it on the market?"

For the rest of us, it might be to ask whether we're better off with a strong corn market held up only by the good will of an unpredictable Congress, or with a solvent beef industry? Which means more to us in the long run?

Talk of possible corn rationing is just plain scary. Having the government decide who gets corn and who doesn't, and how much, who wants to depend on that?

Some days we'd be a lot better off if the government just stepped aside and let the market work. — Steve Haynes

Fireweed made family's tree

An old friend called the other day to say my column about the tumbleweed Christmas tree brought back many fond memories for him.

Rodney and I attended the same little country school. His sister Mary was in my class and is still one of my dearest friends. He was the oldest child in a large family, and like most country families, they were long on love but short on cash.

He recalled how he and his brother found a nicely shaped fireweed, spray painted it white and set about making decorations for it. He said one of his uncles took tin can lids and with a pair of tin snips began to cut spiral "icicles." These were sprayed red, green and silver. His grandmother made a chain of cranberries and popcorn.

Those are the memories that make up the fabric of life: not what presents we got or gave, but being together with family and friends.

Jim's sister Mary sends me cute e-mails. The last one she sent, though, just made me feel dumb. It was a list of "trick" questions. Most I got right. Like: Johnny's mother had three children. The first child was named April. The second child was named May. What was the third child's name? Well, it was Johnny's mother, right? So the third child was Johnny.

Another was: Which is correct to say, "The yolk of the egg are white," or, "The yolk of the egg is white?" Neither. The yolk of an egg is yellow.

The one that got me (and Mary admitted to missing it, too) was the question: In California, you can-



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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not take a picture of a man with a wooden leg. Why not?

The answer: You can't take a picture with a wooden leg. You need a camera to take pictures.

I like little "brain teasers" — but only if I can get them all right.

-ob-

I am going to walk all over my Christmas present. It's beautiful, it's natural, it's long and lean and came in 34 separate boxes: my new hardwood floor.

This is something we've been saving for, waiting for and longing for for several years.

I believe in delayed gratification. If it's worth having, it's worth waiting for.

Besides, I'm cheap. I would rather wait 'til I have the money than pay for it twice with interest charges. That's, of course, the reason why our house remodel has taken so long. We haven't done a thing unless it was paid for.

Anyway, Jim began laying the floor, starting in the dining room. This is no small task because all the "stuff" we had stored in the office got relocated to a wall in the dining room. Now, that "stuff" has to be moved out of the way. As the new floor inches forward it has to

be moved again to a space on the finished floor. It becomes a "leap frog" project.

I think that "stuff" will magically find its way to the basement. Like I've said before, "We cannot open the boxes in the basement as well as we cannot open them upstairs."

-ob-

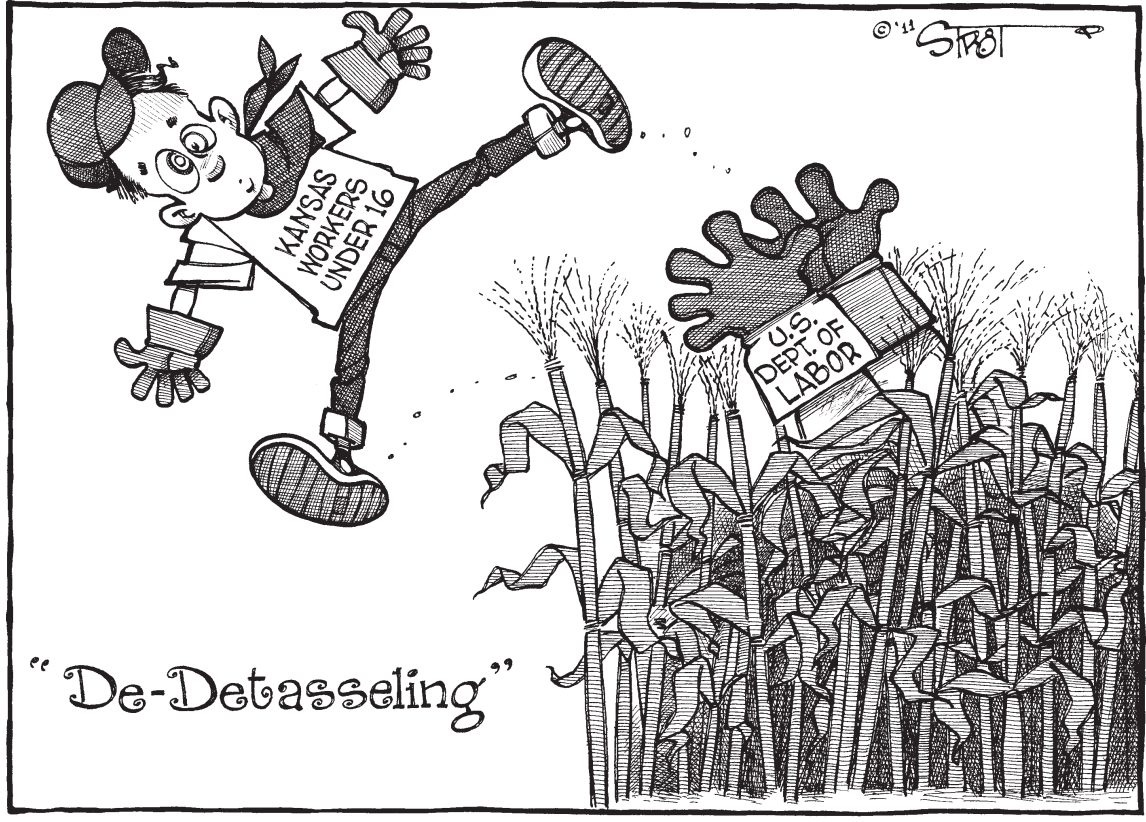
Just a few more batches of caramel corn and I'll be able to pack away the hot air popper. In its place, however, will be the chocolate melter. This is a handy little unit, since I dip so many goodies in chocolate. Saturday I dipped 115 Butterfinger Balls; Sunday night I dipped about a jillion pretzel sticks.

What's left to make? Peanut brittle, sunflower-seed brittle, Christmas wreaths (made with marshmallows, corn flakes and green food coloring), minted walnuts and spicy-sugared nuts. Maybe a few other things, but I'll be happy if I get all that done.

We will be seeing our kids, all of them, during Christmas week. This is a first. For once, I don't have to mail boxes.

I hope you are enjoying this Christmas season and remembering the reason for it.

Feliz Navidad.



Trip through airport a trial

Our trip to Georgia the other day went fine — once we got in the air — but getting to that point was sort of a trial.

No major problems, mind you. Nothing that couldn't be handled with a calm head. Just one little disaster after another.

The drive to Denver went fine. In the morning, though, when I went to take my various pills, I realized I'd done an awful thing: left them sitting at home. You can't get away with that today: the blood tests tell on you, and you get a scolding from your doctor.

I confessed to my bride. "Oh," she said. "It's no big deal. You've got some spares in your suitcase, enough to get you through the weekend. And I'll have the pharmacy send an emergency supply to the kids' house."

We looked out the window at snow falling sideways. A fine day in the Queen City of the Plains. My phone rang; it was Delta's computer telling me our flight was half an hour late.

We got on the hotel shuttle and crept to the airport. Went to the ticket counter, where a lady told us since our plane was late, we should check with special services. That counter agent told us we'd be "protected" on a later flight out of Atlanta — if necessary.

He gave us boarding passes, and we rushed off to security. The government guy looked at them, turned to Cynthia and said, "Where's yours?"

She got a blank look on her face, but sure enough, all we had were my boarding passes for two flights.

Not to worry, the security guy said: "Just go get yours, take this pass, you can come back in through the employee lane." She took to calling it her "get-out-of-jail-free" card.

I promised to wait for her on the far side of the scanning-and-poking-and-prodding place. Never got past the metal detector, though, because when I emptied my pockets, there was my \$40 Leatherman tool.

They gave me one of those "get



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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out of jail free" cards so I could go mail it home. Cost \$3.15, first-class mail. Called Cynthia and told her I wouldn't be waiting at security because I was going to the post office.

"I thought you had learned your lesson about that knife," she remonstrated.

So had I; so had I. At this point, if you believe the old tale about bad things coming in threes, you'd think we'd have paid our dues. Not so. We faced a second cycle.

When I got back, Cynthia was waiting for me. We took the shuttle train to the terminal. She wanted to wander around, look at food options. Then felt in her pocket, got a funny look on her face.

"No phone?" I asked.

"No phone," she said.

We figured it must be at security. A nice young man at the information desk called down there, and they said, yes, we have it. He tried to explain to her how to get back up the normally one-way channel to the back side of security.

She looked like a deer caught in the headlights, and I figured I'd better go with her. We were running out of time, even for a delayed plane. But it's not really that far back to the main terminal at Denver, and at security, she showed her ID and signed a form, and they gave her the phone.

We rushed back aboard the shuttle; it took off with a lurch; we seemed to fairly fly back to the Delta terminal. There, the train stopped with a lurch, my suitcase went flying and knocked a man's lunch right out of his hands. His hoagie spilled out of the sack, right on the floor.

I apologized. He glared. His wife seemed a little amused. They took off ahead of us. Cynthia stopped at McDonald's for a Big Mac. I went on down the concourse for something more substantial. I was waiting for my burger when a pleasant-looking blonde woman behind me said, "Are you going to buy us a sandwich?"

I think I had that blank look, and she went on to say, "You knocked our lunch onto the floor."

Ah, it was her. Well, given a chance to atone for my sins, I did. We had a nice chat while we waited.

Both Cynthia and I got back to the gate before our plane began boarding. With a 41-minute connection, we left only a half-hour late.

When it's snowing, though, planes have to be de-iced. Lines at some stations were four and five deep. I thought we'd lucked out when we got in a line with only one plane, but ground control had other ideas. The ramps and taxi ways were crowded, our runway closed for snow plowing. Wait, they said. Wait we did.

We were an hour down leaving Denver, but the rest of the day went like clockwork. I'm guessing we'd done our penance.

In Atlanta, we had 30 minutes to catch our — later — flight, two terminals away. Went like clockwork, the gate agent had our passes ready and we made the hop to Augusta with 10 minutes to spare.

Our daughter was surprised to see us so soon; so surprised, she hadn't left home yet. But she came right down to get us, and things have been fine since.

Congress needs to get cutting

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

Here we go again. We have a Congress that thinks the only thing they were voted into office for was to fight the other party. Have they ever heard of compromise?

I would recommend that they make cuts in spending, starting with their own salaries, which should be cut by at least half.

I think they should be on Social Security at retirement age, rather than a government pension. I think we would be amazed at how quickly our Social Security problems would be solved.

I think most foreign aid should be cut off. Most of these countries don't like us anyway.

The post office problem was

caused by Congress, as they thought the Postal Service should pay its own retirement going forward 50 years or so.

The big oil companies are really sticking it to us, laughing all the way to the bank. It was a terrible time to raise prices as we were just beginning to get out of the recession.

If we want jobs, let's bring back manufacturing. We don't need to think global, as this would not be the case 90 percent of the time.

I think more shipping ought to be by rail, as this would appear to be the most economical mode. Trucks

could pick up merchandise at a rail head and deliver it.

If we quit re-electing our congressmen and put new ones in each time, eventually we will get rid of all the fat-headed politicians.

The Tea Party is not a party, just a bunch of disgruntled Republicans. The majority of voters are independents, and we should get more into office. The two-party system is not working.

Limit campaign spending, as this is getting to be a biggest-liar contest.

Jack D. Roberts, Longmont, Colo.

Take precautions to avoid diabetes

To the Editor:

November was National Diabetes Month. Since I am a diabetic, I'm probably more aware of the latest facts concerning diabetes than most people.

If I had known years ago that I had low blood sugar, I would have worked harder to help prevent my Type 2 diabetes. Those of you who have diabetes in your family history; try hard to prevent it.

It will help if you maintain a lower weight. Follow a healthy meal plan. Briskly exercise at least 30 minutes a day. Be sure to ask your doctor first what kind of a plan is best for you.

Try to eat foods that are high in protein. A good diet is fruits and vegetables, whole-grain cereals and breads, low-fat dairy products and proteins such as beans, lean meats,

chicken, fish and eggs.

Diabetes has many complications. If not treated effectively, it is the leading cause of blindness and therefore diabetics should have their eyes checked once a year. It is most common in adults age 20 to 74.

Every year, more than 65,000 people with diabetes have their limbs amputated due to circulatory problems from the disease.

Some 202,000 people are living with end-stage kidney disease due to diabetes. They are living on dialysis or a kidney transplant, if they can get one.

Some of the symptoms of diabetes are excessive thirst, hunger and severe fatigue. You may have sores that are slow to heal, frequent infections and frequent urination. Or you may have none of these

symptoms.

If in doubt about diabetes, see your doctor and try to prevent it from happening. The more knowledge you have, the more you can control it and prevent the complications associated with the disease.

Elsie Wolters, Oberlin

From the Bible

And in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

— Luke 1:26-27

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