

Opinions

FFA benefits students, communities

FFA is a success story that far exceeds even its most optimistic founders.

The organization in Iowa, Minnesota and other states has expanded its relevance through innovative programming that has gone beyond plows and livestock to attract membership from urban ranks.

The first Future Farmers of America National Convention was in Kansas City, Mo., back in 1928 and drew members from 18 states, including Iowa and Wisconsin. The origins of FFA date to 1917, when Congress passed the Smith-Hughes National Vocational Agriculture Act. The famil-

iar blue and gold FFA colors were adopted as official in 1930.

The FFA, in recognition of women's changing roles, opened the organization to females in 1969.

The remarkable organization has thrived as evidenced by chapter participation. The Iowa FFA Association has approximately 15,400 student members and 242 local chapters. Minnesota has 183 chapters across the state with 10,655 students enrolled.

With more than 600,000 members and 8,630 chapters in all 50 states as well as the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, membership continues to grow even

as the number of farms continues to decline.

For a long time, cash-strapped public schools ended FFA programs because of low participation numbers. That is not the case anymore and for good reason.

The FFA has helped motivate students who have become leaders in their chosen fields. For that reason and others, the organization has earned and deserves widespread support from farmers, agribusinesses and retailers.

The skills learned through FFA are useful for a lifetime of service.

The 2019 Minnesota FFA state

officers — president Lafe Aasvold of Plainview Elgin Millville, vice president Nicholas Pottshoff of Martin County West, secretary Elaine Dorn of Randolph, treasurer Madilyn Smith of Fillmore Central, and reporter Britton Fugleth of Fertile Beltrami — are the latest in a long line of officers who contribute a great deal.

They are fine ambassadors for agriculture during their year of service.

Agricultural education thrives in both Iowa and Minnesota. Agribusinesses continually search for dedicated and educated workers.

Many FFA members — through projects launched in high school — have launched farming and business careers with projects started in high school. The benefits offered by FFA are numerous. Studies show that involved students are more motivated, disciplined and committed to learning.

FFA Week, which is held in February, is designed to recognize its contributions. Past and present FFA members have committed themselves to benefiting their communities.

Farmers need strong voices and those voices are easily found in FFA.

ED FISCHER'S POINT OF VIEW

Ed Fischer



COMMENTARY

Welcome to paradise, or more likely, paradox

There's an interesting paradox occurring in today's commodity and financial markets. Maybe you've noticed it; market watchers certainly have. Here's what they've seen:

Every time President Donald J. Trump takes to Twitter to threaten a nation with import tariffs — most recently, Mexico — the U.S. stock market shoots higher.

Paradoxically, however, every time U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue attempts to explain any new Trump tariff, commodity markets head south.

For example, the Dow Jones Industrial Average closed at 24,815 on May 31, the day the President said he'd impose 5 percent tariffs on U.S. imports of Mexican goods on June 10 if Mexico didn't stem the flood of immigrants into the U.S.

A week later, after the President declared (a still disputed) victory, the Dow stood at 25,984, up a fat 1,169 points in only five trading days.

Secretary Sonny, however, doesn't have his boss's market mojo. Between the May 31 tariff announcement and the June 7 "deal," December corn futures fell 8 cents per bushel while November soybean futures tumbled 32 cents per bushel.

What explains the Dow rising on presidential trade threats and commodity futures falling on the exact same news?

One explanation is Wall Street securities traders no longer believe Trump's trade bombast while LaSalle Street's commodity traders view any Trump trade news as bad news.

The trend, not surprisingly, flipped June 11 when the U.S. Department of Agriculture's World Agriculture Supply and Demand Estimate predicted the muddled-in 2019 U.S. corn crop won't meet anticipated demand unless higher prices cut are used and 2018 carryover stocks are tapped.

That hard news pushed December corn futures up 12 cents to cover the previous week's "soft news" losses.

Interesting, too, is that before the bullish USDA report launched prices higher midday June 11, December corn futures were seven cents lower because of Perdue's night-before statement that declared USDA lacked legal authority to spend any of the \$16 billion in announced tariff bailout money on unplanted acres.

Curiously, Perdue did note that USDA might be able to make tariff bailout

payments to farmers if they planted certain types of crops on the "prevented plant" acres. One of those crops is soybeans.

As arcane as that sounds, Perdue's announcement holds the key to not just what farmers might receive in 2019 tariff

bailouts — what USDA calls Market Facilitation Payments (MFP) — but also the 2019-20 soybean market. Here's why:

Perdue's current reading of USDA's authority says farmers need to plant "approved" crops on previously too-wet corn acres to get any MFP cash. As such, many of those former corn acres — millions, in fact — will now grow soybeans, a crop already in heavy oversupply.

Indeed, the June 11 USDA report forecasts farmers will add to the soy oversupply because of the corn/soy switch caused by weather and USDA's current belief it can't use MFP money to, essentially, pay farmers not to plant a crop we do not need.

Some veteran USDA watchers, however, believe Perdue's reading of the MFP is dead wrong; they claim USDA can pay farmers to not grow soybeans on any or all "prevented plant" acres.

The proof, they say, is that since USDA created MFP out of thin air to dole out \$9 billion in tariff bailout money in 2018, it certainly can amend those same rules to encourage farmers not to grow an unneeded crop in 2019.

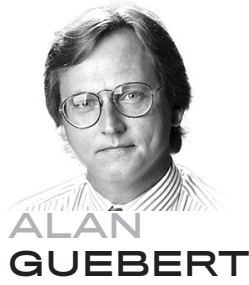
Others agree but suggest USDA doesn't need the MFP money because it already has a pot of money, \$3 billion from the just-passed hurricane-flood relief bill, to "buy down" price-flattening soybeans acres.

That's a red herring because virtually every cent of that \$3 billion headed to USDA was spoken for in March, when the bill was written, and long before any 2019 planting delays arrived in May and June.

So why is the White House linking your grain markets to its struggling immigration policy and why is Sonny Perdue using a federal bailout program to push struggling soybean prices lower?

Beats me, but that's the very nature of paradox, "a seemingly absurd or contradictory statement which when investigated may prove to be well founded or true."

Alan Guebert is an agriculture journalist who lives in Delavan, Ill.



ALAN GUEBERT

Immigration, 'chain migration' are our history

BY HARWOOD D. SCHAFER AND DARYLL E. RAY

On May 30, President Trump tweeted, "On June 10th, the United States will impose a 5% Tariff on all goods coming into our Country from Mexico, until such time as illegal migrants coming through Mexico, and into our Country, STOP. The Tariff will gradually increase until the Illegal Immigration problem is remedied."

Our first questions after reading this concerned the potential impact on U.S. agricultural trade with Mexico, and the U.S., Mexico and Canada Agreement that is awaiting ratification by Congress.

Our thoughts turned to the focus of the tweet — immigration — and how our ancestors entered this country. Given the policy perspectives of the president, would our ancestors have been allowed in?

Daryll's grandfather was 17 when he arrived, unaccompanied, at Ellis Island on May 6, 1906. He had come from the mountainous farming terrain near Bergen, Norway, in search of economic opportunities that were unavailable there. During his first five years in New York City, he worked odd jobs and accumulated sufficient savings to move to North Dakota and homestead a farm.

During his first winter in North Dakota, he used a Sears Roebuck catalog to learn English beyond what he had picked up in NYC. Over time, he traded farms a number of times, arriving in Iowa in 1939 with his wife and three children (Daryll's mother and aunt and uncle).

Before moving to Iowa, he sponsored his parents and all but one of his six siblings to make the move to the "new world." All became productive citizens, accumulating wealth — mostly at farming operations — for their retirement and to hand down to children.

They did not come with advanced degrees or independently wealthy, but they were ambitious, entrepreneurial and had a strong work ethic that they passed on their children and descendants.

Harwood's great-great grandfather came to the U.S. in the middle of the 19th century

along with two other male family members in search of opportunity and to avoid conscription in the Prussian Army, certainly reasons that would not be acceptable in the present political climate. They settled on farms just north of Dayton, Ohio. They too eventually brought other family members here.

When Harwood's great-grandfather finished eighth grade in the nearby country school, he left the farm, walked to Dayton and found a room where he could stay while he attended and graduated from high school. He then obtained a job and worked his way into upper management in the shoe department of a major department store in Dayton. His son, Harwood's grandfather and namesake, followed in his father's footsteps in the shoe business and continued working until he was nearly 80.

While the story of African Americans and American Indians is quite different from these stories, the majority of farmers in the U.S. can trace their origins to immigrants, many of whom came as economic migrants and through "chain migration." Many who came through formal ports of entry were deloused and treated with suspicion of possible criminal connections. They faced ethnic discrimination for years.

In many ways, the story of earlier waves of immigrants is not so different from those who arrive at America's borders each day. Today, as then, they are seeking economic opportunity not available in their home countries, and in many cases to escape disorder and violence. They want a better opportunity for themselves and their children.

If the experience of our ancestors is any indication, the children and grandchildren of today's immigrants will make major contributions to the future of this nation.

Dr. Harwood D. Schaffer is an adjunct research assistant professor at the University of Tennessee. Dr. Daryll E. Ray is an emeritus professor at the University of Tennessee.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Farming is full of 'if's

I feel for the small farmer. Things are so out of hand. The competition is unreal.

A farmer gets no bonus pay, no vacation pay, no sick pay, no raises, unpredictable weather. Getting a good night's sleep, no. No 9-to-5, 8-to-4 hours. Try 18 to 22 hours. Now, you're probably saying, a farmer gets into farming and expects the best, well, how about you? You go into a job and expect the best also. We all deserve it!

Farmers go into farming to carry on the family farm, it's their dream, or they want to prove what they can do. The good points outweigh the bad: a new baby calf, a litter of pigs, knee high corn by the 4th of July,

a good hay crop, a pail of fresh laid eggs, these are the rewards in farming. If you have good luck. A farmer depends on the weather; it depends if he gets the crops in; or if he gets them in, can he get a good crop and a good price. There's always "if."

The future looks bleak for farmers; it's a big gamble. You see more auctions than you want to and I think the sales barns see it too. There's a big change in farming.

If you know a farmer, see a farmer, tell them "thank you." Lend a hand too. They were and are your "bread and butter." Don't forget that.

Bonnie Broton, DODGE CENTER

Animal unit caps are reasonable, vital

As we read your story about the dairy census numbers and animal unit caps, we wondered what your objective might be. The data you cited as fact simply don't suggest that an animal unit cap serves no useful purpose.

We've researched and we're not seeing any data backing up Winona County Commissioner Steve Jacob's claim that "cows are leaving Winona County as dairy farmers move to neighboring counties that don't impede growth." Also, the suggestion that smaller dairies are "less likely to use cover crops" is not supported by data.

The fact is, federal and state farming policies have driven and continue to drive smaller and mid-sized dairies out of business throughout the nation. In 1992, Minnesota had about 14,000 dairy farms. Now there are slightly less than 4,000.

When we have fair and competitive markets in place, dairies of any size which are managed well and keep total debt low, are able to run profitably. There is no correlation between size and profitability. Larger animal numbers simply mean greater gross

dollars, not automatic profits. "Economies of scale" can act as a myth that hides how dairy processors bias benefits for the biggest players through farm policies that are in drastic need of overhaul.

For over 25 years, our family has made our living operating our 175-cow grazing dairy farm in Fillmore County. It's situated over the same sensitive karst geology that is present throughout Winona County. All along, we have worked with our farming community to run a profitable dairy enterprise while protecting the land, our water, environment and community. We have a deep understanding of the challenges, realities and fundamental limits involved when you're working to maintain water quality and healthy soil while farming in this region and keeping your farm business up and running.

An animal unit cap is a reasonable and vital limit for balance at all levels within any region, and especially in a region with surface and ground water as sensitive as ours.

Vance and Bonnie Haugen, CANTON, MINN.