

Opinion

Support farmers and consumers

By Mark Muller
The alarming rise in obesity and other food-related health concerns have become a regular topic in the media. Public health organizations are asking some very good questions - do food and agricultural policies contribute to the proliferation of unhealthy foods in our stores and restaurants? And why are corn and soybeans, which provide a large percentage of U.S. sweeteners and oils, so much cheaper than healthier crops like fruits and vegetables? The answer is simple - because food companies and the folks in Washington want it that way.
Cheap corn, soybeans and higher-priced fruits and vegetables are a direct consequence of U.S. agriculture policy over the past 30 years. And government food pricing data clearly demonstrates the result. Since 1985, the real price of fresh fruits and vegetables has increased nearly 40 percent, while the real price of sweets, fats and oils, and soft drinks has dropped. With these price signals, is it any wonder people are not eating enough produce and too many calorie-dense foods?
We have made consuming junk food an economically smart choice, particularly for people with limited income.
Rural communities have been hit hard by U.S. agriculture policy, as we've steadily lost farmers and those who continue on the land rely largely on off-farm income to keep farming. Our public health has suffered as well. The extensive use of cheap commodities in food products has resulted in added sugars and fats that fall into the very dietary categories linked to obesity. High fructose corn syrup and hydrogenated vegetable oils-products that did not even exist a few generations ago but now are hard to avoid-have proliferated thanks to artificially cheap corn and soybeans.

Fortunately, a healthier food system and one that rewards farmers fairly is possible, if we shift to a smarter food and agriculture policy. We need to level the playing field for healthy foods by promoting agricultural markets that return fair prices to farmers. Throughout history, agricultural markets have always gone through price extremes, due to issues such as droughts, floods, pests, wars, and excessive production. The large number of variables that impact agricultural production create much greater market volatility than for television manufacturers, for example. The problem with this volatility is that high prices contribute to hunger, and low prices drive farmers out of business and increase reliance on imports, a national security issue.

U.S. farm policies that maintained fair prices for farmers and grain reserves for food security were ravaged in the 1970s, and eliminated in the 1996 farm bill. Since the 1970s real prices for corn and soybeans have been cut in half, and in many cases plunged below even what it costs to produce. The food industry uses its unfettered clout to sell reasonably priced food to consumers by paying absurdly low prices to farmers. The fast food industry has developed this business model to near perfection, selling corn and soybean-fed beef and chicken, corn-syrup sweetened colas, and soybean oil-fried french fries.

How do we break this cycle? First of all, we need to provide farmers with adequate incentives to grow substantially more crops like fruits and vegetables and grass-fed meat and dairy. Currently, it is difficult for a farmer in the rural Midwest to find markets for non-traditional grain and oilseed crops. Amazingly, products like apples are often cheaper coming from other parts of the world than they are from our own region. These healthier crops are short-changed when it comes to public research, government-funded market development, and farm income safety nets.

Second, we need to reverse the perverse incentives for the food industry to use excessive sweeteners and fats. The food industry has dictated government policies that create cheap ingredients for their food products. It works well for stockholders, but not for farmers, and not for public health. When thinking about what kind of food system we want, the livelihood of farmers and the health of our citizens should come first.

Mark Muller is the director of the Environment and Agriculture program at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com.



Caution is understandable, fear is not

Immigration is suddenly a hot-button issue. I can't remember ever seeing as much attention over the issue as there has been over the past few weeks.

Yes, it's an issue, but does it need to be dealt with so expediently? Since when is the United States so paranoid?

This country used to be proud of its reputation as the world's melting pot. And I can't name one person I know that doesn't have an immigrant somewhere in their pedigree.

Maybe the president is using immigration as he has for prescription drugs and Social Security reform — to deflect attention away from the real issues, like soaring gas prices and a so-called war in Iraq that's out of control.

Building a wall to keep out "undesirables" or deporting illegal immigrants won't solve the problem. If Bush wants to do anything about illegal immigration, he could suggest options like creating programs that will make it less desirable to enter the U.S. illegally, and easier to gain access to services and jobs, contingent upon becoming an American citizen.

Making illegal entry a felony will only aggravate the problem. Instead of going after individual immigrants, the government should target people or groups who participate in human trafficking. These people make others pay exorbitant prices to get them into the U.S., but the methods they use are not humane.

Or such organizations use people to traffic drugs, or sold into prostitution or slavery.

I know it's a problem — I'm not advocating illegal immigration into the country. I'm only suggesting there are alternatives other than deportation or building a wall.



Tisha Cox

• Off The Beaten Path

The problem can be dealt with intelligently, and not overnight.

Over the past year or two, I've read several articles on how illegal border crossings have become more than a problem at a couple of national parks and monuments in Arizona and Texas.

Instead of enforcing park rules, park rangers now carry guns and are devoting more and more time to border patrol.

At Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, it's especially a problem.

Testimony from Frank Deckert, superintendent of Big Bend National Park in Texas, testified before the House Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources on the "impact of the drug trade on border security and national parks" in April 2003.

Deckert told the subcommittee in 2001, the Border Patrol estimated more than 250,000 illegal immigrants came into the U.S. through parklands, and more than 200,000 of them came through Organ Pipe.

Rangers and Border Patrol agents have seized drugs on more than one occasion. Border security in the national parks isn't just about captur-

ing illegals, but it's grown to encompass so much more, and it could be a column in itself.

The country shouldn't let one incident half a decade ago dominate its policy formation. It's not right or fair.

Caution is understandable, but paranoia and fear are not.

Thinking terrorists are going to come in through one of the borders is one thing, if they actually do it is another. And as far as anyone knows, they haven't.

History teaches that closing the borders and hoping for the best isn't the most suitable course of action.

Back before World War I, the U.S. wanted to close its borders, and let the rest of the world go its own way.

Before World War II, the country took a wait and see attitude before being dragged into the war after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

This country is also no stranger to xenophobia, which Oxford American Dictionaries defines as "an intense or irrational dislike of people from other countries."

Funny, considering just how many cultures and backgrounds this country encompasses.

In the end, it's going to come down to new policy allowing everyone to come in, or not at all.

To me, it's sad paranoia and fear are becoming the mechanisms by which we make decisions regarding our present and future. I hope that changes.

Tisha Cox is a general assignment reporter/photographer for the Free Press. Her column appears on Mondays. tcx@nwkansas.com.

Who deserves a college education?

From The Hutchinson News

Rep. Becky Hutchins, a Holton Republican, has tried repeatedly this legislative session to abolish a law allowing some children of illegal immigrants to pay in-state tuition at public colleges and universities. She thinks her persistence eventually will pay off.

But supporters of the law have shown even more persistence and patience.

The Appropriations Committee gave the Hutchins proposal yet one more chance, including it as part of the new budget set to take effect July 1. The House rejected it for the sixth time, voting 65-58 to protect the law. That should put the issue to rest, for this session.

Instead limiting options for children of undocumented aliens by making college more expensive, Rep. Nile Dillmore, a Wichita Democrat, joined with other lawmakers to go after the

root cause of illegal immigration — unemployment.

Dillmore sponsored an amendment preventing state contracts with companies caught intentionally hiring illegal immigrants within the last five years. The amendment also requires those companies to repay tax breaks they'd earlier received. House members approved the amendment on a voice vote.

Two years ago, lawmakers saw a way to improve life for a new generation of Kansans. They passed a bill allowing undocumented college students to pay in-state tuition if they attended a state high school for three years, graduated and promised to seek U.S. citizenship.

By making college more affordable for young undocumented aliens, and by encouraging them to become citizens, lawmakers ensured a new generation of Kansas scientists, teachers and

community leaders.

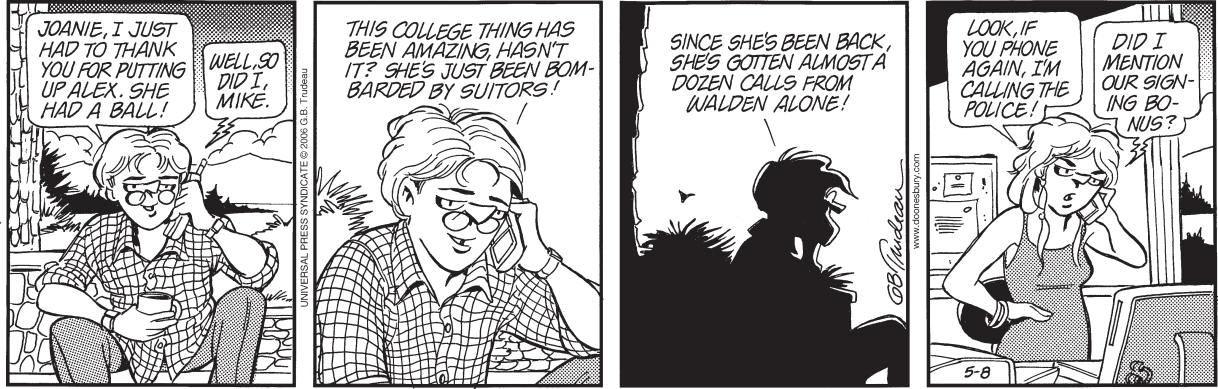
But as state lawmakers understand, Kansas cannot support an unending stream of undocumented aliens. If the federal government refuses to address illegal immigration, states must step in.

The availability of jobs in the United States draws illegal immigrants across the border. Kansas must join other states and the federal government in addressing the highly complex problem of illegal immigration.

But instead of limiting future prospects for children of illegal immigrants who already have found their way here and live among us, we need to view them as a valuable resource. They have joined a new generation of Kansans yearning for education and willing to work to expand their opportunities.

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau



Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



COLBY FREE PRESS
155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701
State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.
Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.
John Van Nostrand - Publisher
jvannostrand@nwkansas.com
NEWS
Patty Decker - Editor
pdecker@nwkansas.com
Tisha Cox - General Assignment
tcx@nwkansas.com
Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter
ackermanjk@ruraltel.net
ADVERTISING
Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director
crystalr@nwkansas.com
Jasmine Crotinger - Advertising Sales
jasminec@nwkansas.com
John Altman - Advertising Sales
jaltman@nwkansas.com
BUSINESS OFFICE
Lea Bandy - Circulation Manager
lea@nwkansas.com
Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping & Ad Building
japplegate@nwkansas.com
Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com
NOR'WEST PRESS
Jim Bowker - General Manager
Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Ron VanLoenen, Judy McKnight
THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.
PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701. THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association. **SUBSCRIPTION RATES:** In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$38, 8 months \$53, 12 months \$70. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$50, 8 months \$62, 12 months \$78. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$57, 8 months \$67, 12 months \$81. All other states, \$81, 12 months.

Nor'West Newspapers
Haynes Publishing Company