



Other Viewpoints

Little hope found in latest jobs report

The latest report on unemployment in Kansas doesn't hold out a lot of hope for those seeking signs the state is ready to pull out of an economic slump.

Unemployment in the state reached 7.7 percent in July, the seventh consecutive month in which the number of non-farm jobs was lower than the 2008 numbers for the same month.

The number of jobs lost in July, 48,500, was lower than that for June this year, 54,800, but that is of little consolation for state officials who have been looking for some relief from revenue shortfalls that have forced four rounds of budget cuts within the past year.

Kansas generates the bulk of its tax revenue from income and sales taxes, and people who don't have jobs don't pay income taxes and usually cut back on their personal spending....

Gov. Mark Parkinson has said he hopes the state's finances stabilize later this year, but the latest unemployment figures indicate he, legislators and elected and appointed department heads should prepare to oversee another round of budget cuts.

We think that group has done an outstanding job thus far of responding to revenue shortfalls and trying to be judicious about where they make cuts, but it's obvious this is no time for them to rest on their laurels.

There is some good news on the nation's economic outlook, but some of it comes from a segment of the economy in which Kansas had been faring better than the national average — the housing market....

The stock market also has been performing well of late, but with a few stumbles that indicate the recession isn't yet willing to reduce its grip on the country.

And given that some economists say Kansas usually lags behind other states when coming out of a recession, it appears we can hope for the best but should be ready for a slow economic recovery.

— Topeka Capital-Journal, via The Associated Press

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- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521
- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124
- State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Room 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com
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Mud pies and concrete spell progress

There is concrete work being done just outside the back door of our office. It's one of those things which has fascinated me since I was a kid, when a neighbor put in a new driveway. After all, wet concrete is a lot like mud pies, especially to a kid.

You start with a wonderful, gloppy mess. Then you mold it, and shape it, and smooth it. Finally, you let it dry into a beautiful creation. Not that I recall dry mud pies being especially beautiful, but imagination helped a lot.

When I was a kid, I had a lot of chances to watch concrete work. There was the aforementioned driveway, which actually called for a truck from the local mixing plant. There was an occasional weekend brick fireplace project, which I guess purists would say involves mortar rather than concrete — it still looked like fun to a little kid.

Then there were the big projects. The college campus near my home had a building boom during the years I was growing up. I kept a close eye, from dirt work to ribbon-cutting, on at least six projects — a library, a student union built in two stages about a year apart, and three dormitories. Through a child's eyes, seeing a weedy field transformed first by giant earth-moving machinery and huge holes in the ground, followed by various steps in pouring concrete, erecting steel and brick, and finally inside finishing, is little short of a miracle.

Do builders find great satisfaction in creating? I suppose some do and some don't care much. Not that I'm an expert. The toughest thing I every built was a bookshelf, and I stretched my talents to the limit getting that done. I can paint, as long as accuracy is not a big issue. Maybe that's why I'm a bit in awe



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

of builders.

Looking around Colby this summer, there's a lot of building. Some projects are small — a little remodeling, a little painting, a little fixing up. Some are bigger — a garage or an extra room. Some big projects are under way as well. While driving down Range one day, I ran into a dust cloud from new construction, and it cheered me up to know something new is coming into being.

We tend to see construction as a sign of progress, an indicator that a community is growing. That's fine, but we also need to consider the flip side. What happens with worn-out, used-up buildings and abandoned projects?

It's easy to take "shovel-ready" bare ground and build on it. It's less simple, but more important to a community, to transform neglected property into an attractive asset for the neighborhood. This is an ever-present need in both Colby and in outlying towns.

Weedy, overgrown fence rows and wind-breaks, abandoned vehicles and farm tools and falling-down sheds and barns may make for picturesque imagery, but they're a detriment to the people who have to live with them. Not only can they be hazardous, they prevent the land they occupy from being used for anything more positive. Nonproductive farm ground

bugs farmers, nonproductive city lots bug townspeople.

Small towns do the best they can with the resources they have. They often struggle to maintain basic services. Yet the same small scale that makes the basics a struggle also makes transformation easier. Projects that involve a whole community of 150 people can turn things around a whole lot faster than projects that involve a whole community of 150,000.

Money is tight right now. Yet it costs nothing to organize a group to pick up trash along the road or cut weeds and tree sprouts around abandoned houses. When no one takes responsibility, a problem patch just keeps on growing. When everyone takes responsibility, the job is soon done.

A new patch of concrete speaks to me of a spot where work is being done to make this corner of the world spiffier. A newly plowed field does the same, as does a newly planted hillside of 6-inch-tall baby trees where a forest fire has gone through.

Construction is not the be-all and end-all of progress. Responsibility is, however. If you built it, maintain it. If your neighbor built it, and moved — or died — 15 years ago, the community still has a present need. Make a difference, and bring encouragement to those around. Like new concrete, it can inspire the imagination.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Make your own plan for profit

The vocation of agriculture began thousands of years ago when the first farmer dug a hole in the soil and planted the first seed. Way back then, others began working with and domesticating animals that have evolved into present-day hogs, cattle, sheep, chickens and other livestock.

The farm and ranch creed has always been to nurture the land and livestock while making improvements and coaxing a bountiful harvest. Farmers and ranchers hold enduring respect for the land that sustains them. Their devotion has resulted in abundance.

With this evolution in agriculture, today's farmer faces many new and sometimes unexpected challenges. Profit margins and production costs are in a constant state of flux. Weather patterns change while farmers and ranchers continue looking for ways to make a profit and stay in this business.

This week, Insight takes a look at the opposite end of the spectrum. Here are 11 ways to cut your profit margins. Think long and hard before implementing any of these in your operation.

- Blindly follow seasonal trends or patterns. If the market is going up, do not sell. It may go higher. If the market falls — do not sell. It may turn around and go up.
- Never trust a U.S. Department of Agriculture crop or livestock report. From all the information available, these reports are "strictly legit." But never mind; discard these reports at all costs.
- Blame the big grain companies. Everyone



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

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- Blame the big cattle packers. Everyone knows they manipulate stockmen and make all the profits.

- Assume prices and costs are related. No place is it written that because you spend \$450 to \$500 an acre to produce irrigated corn you are guaranteed a profit on your grain.

- Hold the short crop because less corn, wheat or beans must mean the price of these commodities will increase. In reality, by the time you hear a crop is in short supply, everyone else has heard the news and the price has already gone up.

- Follow the majority. If your neighbor sells his corn, it is probably the right time for you to sell yours. Ignore most conversation in the local coffee shop or co-op. Figure out your own marketing strategy.

- Ignore the futures market and basis because everyone knows that a bunch of speculators are rigging it. Remember, speculators lose money, too, but they provide liquidity for the market.

- Never sell until you have a crop. Often-

times, before you harvest a crop is the best time to lock in profits. Take a hard look at future contracting.

- Shoot for the market high. Smart marketers have abandoned this philosophy for the goal of "shooting for higher."

- Blame the banker or your wife. Again, everyone knows a banker lends you money when he/she shouldn't. And if all else fails, who has any broader shoulders than your spouse.

You may just want to take a hard look at yourself. Operating a farm or ranch is as tough a profession as there is going these days. It takes all the wisdom, knowledge, technology, dedication and determination, luck and the blessing of Mother Nature to grow a profitable crop or market outstanding livestock.

And that's not even taking into consideration a continually evolving marketing plan. Each farm and ranch and farmer and rancher is different. Look to yourself and those who are knowledgeable and can help you be successful.

Best of luck.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.



Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

