

We must keep our Free Trade Agreements

Insight
John Schlageck

Three stalled trade agreements are jeopardizing a vital cog of this country's economy. The inability of Congress and the Obama administration to compromise on Free Trade Agreements with Colombia, Korea and Panama is costing the United States \$3-billion in lost agricultural trade.

Here's the breakdown. If it is ever fully implemented, the Korean free trade agreement would result in approximately \$1.8-billion annually. Gains in exports through the Colombian agreement are expected at \$815-million. The Panama agreement would bolster U.S. ag exports to more than \$195-million.

These trade agreements are crucial for the economic well being of this nation's farmers and ranchers as well as the economic health of their rural communities and the whole of the U.S. economy.

Make no mistake about it, there is a direct correlation with the beginning of the supply chain on this nation's farms and ranches and the workers who package and move the livestock, grain, fuel and fiber to foreign consumers.

A decline in U.S. exports will result in a decline in work for those who are part of that food pipeline. Every billion dollars in agricultural exports creates work for approximately 9,000 workers, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

While the United States has dallied with these free trade agreements for years, other nations — our competitors — are pursuing and in some cases have secured their own trade agreements. Case in point is Canada. They have completed negotiations with Colombia and their agreement awaits implementation.

This debate on free trade is no longer just about generating potential export gains but about the loss of existing U.S. exports. This nation and its farmer and rancher producers are losing billions of dollars to competitors with our stalled agreements.

Here's an example of what I'm talking about. During the 10-year period from 2000 to 2009, the Chilean wine market share in Korea rose from 2.4 percent to 21.5 percent. During this same time period, the U.S. share fell from 17.1 percent to 10.8 percent.

Here's another. The U.S. agriculture peak market share with Colombia totaled 46 percent in 2008. Last year it dropped to 21 percent as Argentina took our share of the ag export pie.

Just one more. A recently completed trade deal between Canada and Panama has given our neighbors to the north a competitive edge over us for products such as beef, pork, beans and various processed foods — if the Canadian trade deal goes into effect before the U.S. agreement.

This country's inability to take action on the trade front has resulted in a loss of market share and economic growth during a period of time when we cannot afford it. The U.S. government's inability to move these free trade agreements forward will continue to benefit our competitors around the world while damaging U.S. agriculture producers and American food-supply workers.

It's past time for this continuing political posturing and lack of cooperation on both sides of the aisle. Our elected leaders were sent to Washington on behalf of this nation's people. It's time for them to lead. It's time for them to implement free-trade agreements.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Your political connection

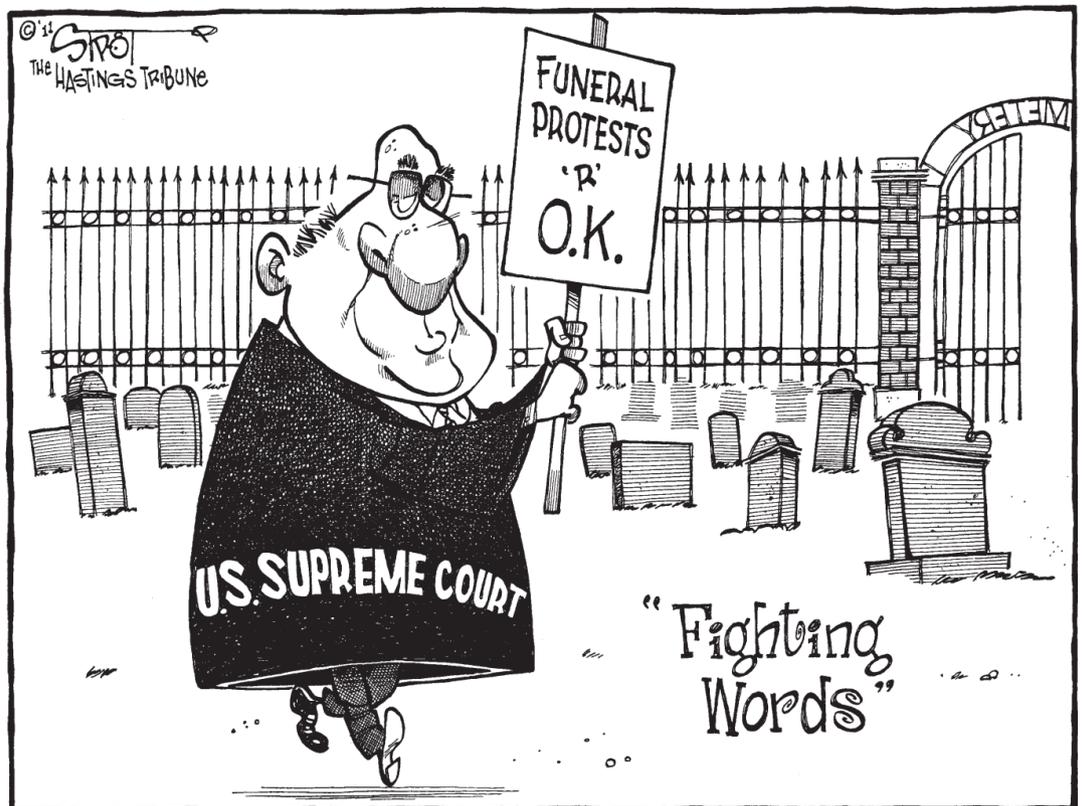
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Being prepared and quick witted

In less than four hours I have to be ready to roll. We are leaving on the first leg of our Spring Mexico mission trip and, of course, I don't have one thing packed. The good news is I have all the laundry done. Besides, the clothes you take on a mission trip are the kind you don't care if you bring home or not. I'll be wearing one decent can-be-seen-in-public outfit with "church clothes" packed in my bag. Everything else is t-shirts, sweat pants and tennis shoes.

Jim does the lion's share of packing. He is responsible for our sleeping bags, air mattress, tools and all the second-hand gift items I pack along as presents for "our" family. Really, after packing my stuff, all I have to do is jump in the van and we're gone.

I don't mean to sound blasé. Because, inside, I'm all giddy and excited to go. To know we are helping build a safe, secure home for a poor family is a great feeling. One we would love to share with anyone who would like to help change lives, one family at a time. But, I warn you,

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



you WILL be changed. You never come back the same person who went.

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One day the TV was on, for noise mostly, when I overheard what was probably a commercial. A guy approached a girl and said, "Do you know how much a polar bear weighs?"

She said, "No. How much does a polar bear weigh?"

He said, "Enough to break the ice. Hi. My name's Bill. What's yours?"

Now, that was a pretty good pick-up line. Almost as good as the one used on me ages ago - back in "the day".

I was out with some girlfriends after

work. We were at a table in a nice lounge when this guy approached our table. Don't remember his name but, I'll never forget the line. He said to me, "You look just like my third wife."

Rather smugly, I replied, "Really? And, how many times have you been married?"

Without missing a beat he said, "Two."

Back then, I was known as the Queen of Snappy Come Backs. So, I said, "Well, that sounds like a proposal to me. My club has rented a party boat Saturday night. Why don't you come and we can have the captain marry us at sea?"

Wouldn't you know it. He called my bluff and showed up. My only out was to tell him the captain said we had to be in international waters (we were on a land-locked lake) so, he couldn't perform a wedding. Whew! Dodged that one. Besides, look at what I would have missed.

Maintaining the health of our calves

Vet tips Dr. Aaron White



Did you know that scours is the most important threat to your neonatal calves and it causes the greatest economic loss in this age group than any other disease? Calf scours is not a single disease entity; it is a clinical syndrome associated with several factors characterized by diarrhea. Prevention means concentrating on nutrition, immunity, and environment. Scours is a management disease, when one of these areas is overlooked, scours is inevitable.

There are a number of pathogens that can be responsible for scours; E. coli, rotavirus, coronavirus, cryptosporidiosis and Salmonella are among the most common. They often occur as multiple infections in the same calf. Different pathogens tend to cause scours at different times during the first month of life. But, they all cause the same result: diarrhea, dehydration, and acidosis.

Vaccines are available and are most beneficial when administered to the cows and heifers prior to calving. This way the calves will receive antibodies via their mother's colostrum. I prefer to vaccinate heifers at six weeks prior and again at three weeks prior to calving. Cows get one booster 30 days prior to calving.

Since the pathogens are all around, management can be the key to whether an

outbreak will occur. The most important reservoir for these enteric agents is previously or currently infected cattle. That is why it is very important to maintain a closed herd throughout calving season. Another good rule of thumb is to keep heifers separate throughout calving season. Generally, their calves scour at twice the rate of cows. Calves that demonstrate symptoms should be removed as soon as possible from the group and placed into an isolation area.

Nutrition is a critical anchor to a scour prevention program, so that the immune system is ready to respond. 60 to 90 days prior to calving, make sure your cattle have balance rations. Long before calving, cow condition and grass pasture should be evaluated. Cows that go into winter with a BCS of 5.5 to 6 are easier to maintain into the colder months. The most important nutritional point for calves, of course, is to get sufficient colostrum quickly. Absorption of important

IgG antibodies begins to decline immediately after birth. The result of inadequate colostrum intake is inadequate passive transfer, and it may be the single most important factor in calf scours.

Controlling the weather during calving isn't possible, but you can have a good cow flow system. This includes four different areas, which have been unoccupied since the previous calving season. These include: a pre-calving area that cattle move into just a couple of weeks before calving starts, a calving area, a nursery, and a treatment area for sick calves to remain isolated. Avoid calving in used feeding pastures or lots with heavy fecal contamination. All calving areas should be as clean and dry as possible; also producers should feed in different places moving feedbunks every few days. Not overcrowding animals is an important part of keeping sanitation as high as possible. Also, don't forget a good windbreak; it can make a big difference in the health of your herd. The bottom line is management; calf scours is a preventable and treatable condition. A well managed herd is the best way to control scours and to keep your calf crop healthy! Your veterinarian is your best information source for your cattle!



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