

OPINION

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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ANOTHER VIEW

U.S. ingenuity thrives down on the farm



ANN MCFEATTERS

A long trip across this amazing country has dispersed the miasma of doom I have been suffused with during this dreadful election season, during which many have been doing their best to make us feel really bad about the future.

But this is not about them; this is about a sign of progress! Yes, America has a lot of greatness. And one wonderful barometer of that is agriculture.

We have heard for decades about the declining family farm. And many of us know families who have worked their hearts out and their fingers to the bone but still lost the farm. The Agriculture Department says the number of farmers declined 4.3 percent from 2007 to 2012; 3.2 million farmers now work 2.1 million farms.

That sounds grim. But nowhere is the legendary American ingenuity more evident than on the farm.

The truth is that farmers now are using the fruits of technology in ways that are increasing their yields, feeding more people around the world, making crops less susceptible to the vagaries of weather and implementing the amazing research that is underway in our universities.

We have not only the behemoth agribusinesses but some really savvy family farmers who know exactly what they are doing. Oh yes, they still work long, tough hours, but they sow, water and fertilize with computers. They talk knowledgeably about genomes, and they are fully aware of the huge demand for better-tasting, more healthful food that does not wreak havoc on the environment.

In just 35 years, the world's farmers will have to produce 70 percent more food than they do now. This can't be done without huge investments in research and development.

The Economist, the incomparable news magazine that tracks major global social issues with dispassion and accuracy, reported that John Deere, world's largest manufacturer of agriculture equipment, began equipping tractors with global positioning systems so farmers could greatly increase efficiency, reduce redundant seeding or missed sections, and cut fuel bills.

While the most dramatic innovations in farming are taking place in the West, philanthropist Bill Gates notes that even in Africa, where millions of farmers still rely on primitive farm tools, there are innovations that will change the world, such as the mapping of Africa's soils, which will tell farmers what seeds to plant, how to fertilize and how to increase yields.

Computer modeling has cut the breeding time of cassava plants in half and reduced the plant's susceptibility to viruses. Farmers are discussing best practices on YouTube videos. New jugs are available to help get milk to market without spoiling.

While there are social and ethical implications in some of the research, overall it is exciting. It should provide hope and proof that American greatness is alive and well.

Ann McFeatters is a columnist with Tribune News Service. Reach her at amcfeatters@nationalpress.com.

ANOTHER VIEW



FROM THE EDITOR

Heartbreaking stories at forum

The community forum about mental health treatment in Spartanburg was at times heartbreaking, frustrating and uplifting.

The biggest surprise was the number of people who came to tell their stories of dealing with mental illness. They told of their struggles with doctors, police and social institutions.

One couple came to talk about their 38-year-old daughter who has schizophrenia. They told about their struggle to get her the care she needs. They talked about the expense of having to get the courts to make them guardians so that they could get her care when she refused it. They talked about when she was hospitalized and then just turned loose in a hospital lobby without anyone to come get her. They talked about how she was unnecessarily tazed once when she was arrested. After the meeting, tears came to her father's eyes when he talked about how his church family, which would rally around someone facing a physical illness, had turned its back on his family.

Another woman talked about her struggle with bipolar disorder and her various encounters with police and hospitals. She talked of being lied to about her condition and being treated against her will. She spoke of fighting to get her wishes and her faith respected by the people who were supposed to be caring for her.

Paton Blough, who served on the panel for the discussion, talked about his struggles with bipolar disorder, of



MIKE SMITH

being in the hospital and the jail. And he told us how through treatment, through working with others who faced similar conditions, through the love of his family and through faith, he was able to put his life back together.

They were powerful stories, and a few truths kept coming to the forefront. The first is that we do not treat conditions affecting the brain the same way we treat disease affecting other organs of the body. There is still a stigma affecting those who struggle with mental illness.

That has tremendous effects. It keeps people from seeking treatment. It keeps families from acknowledging and helping those affected by mental illness. And it limits the access that those affected by mental illness have to our traditional social support structures, including churches.

That stigma is probably also at the root of the way in which we treat the mentally ill. As reported in the "Locked In/Locked Out" package last Sunday, we have few facilities available in the

state to treat the mentally ill. In recent decades, we have cut the hospital beds dedicated to mental health treatment from thousands to hundreds. The result is that we continually use the jails as one of our primary treatment venues. Participants at the forum were right to be outraged by this.

We can and must do better.

We have to end the stigma that surrounds mental illness. We have to rally around and help the mentally ill and their families the same way that we support those who are sick or injured in other ways. Our churches and institutions have to help rather than shame them and their families.

And we have to recognize that we need an infrastructure to give our mentally ill neighbors the treatment they need. It isn't enough to warehouse them in the jail. County Councilman Michael Brown says he will introduce a resolution to the council calling for a reduction in the number of mentally ill people in jail. That's fine. The resolution should pass.

But action is needed beyond statements. To begin with, Spartanburg County needs a mental health court similar to the one that operates in Greenville County. That would help channel people into the treatment they need rather than incarceration.

Michael Smith is the Herald-Journal's executive editor.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Focus on conservation

About nine years ago, a group of conservation-minded individuals came together to form Conservation Partners with the goal of forming alliances, sharing resources and strengthening the conservation profile in Spartanburg. At the beginning, it was an opportunity to meet local representatives of each of the organizations, both volunteer and paid staff. From these regular meetings have sprung many collaborative efforts and strong alliances around a common cause: the wise use of our natural resources.

Groups represented include the Watershed Ecology Center, Trees Coalition, Tyger River Foundation, Hatcher Garden, Spartanburg Area Conservancy, Upstate Forever, Piedmont Audubon, Spartanburg Soil and Water Conservation District, Spartanburg County Recycling, Wofford's Environmental Studies Program, Partners for Active Living, the League of Women Voters' Natural Resources group, Glendale Outdoor Leadership School and Spartanburg Water.

Nine years later, we have all become friends in conservation, pooling resources on projects, events and issues. The group has collaborated on field trips, Earth Day events, recycling, water quality education and monitoring, drug take-back and household hazardous waste collection, bird counts, film series, educational speaking engagements, stormwater education, and much more.

We've shared resources such as equipment, volunteers, facilities and creativity. We've joined together in advocacy efforts both locally and on a state level. Through all of the organizations' various

communication outlets, there has been considerable cross promotion of each other's programs and events.

Until recently, conservationists have been in the minority and not at all popular. This has made us realize the strength in numbers and that with selfless teamwork and collaboration we can achieve our goals while benefiting not only the local community but the world.

Over the next few months, members of Conservation Partners will submit guest columns on various natural resource interests and issues. We hope you will read with interest, take heed, and spread the conservation story.

Angela Viney
Director of Spartanburg office, Upstate Forever

It's about we the people

I want to express my gratitude to S.C. House District 38 for the confidence you have placed in me in our tremendous conservative victory on June 14. A special thank you goes to each one who voted for me and who spread the word about our campaign. I know you are praising the Lord with me for His guidance and provision. I'd also like to thank those who chose differently this time, for being involved in the process that allows our constitutional republic to function.

It has been a privilege to meet so many folks concerned about our country's direction. I have heard firsthand that you are fed up with the political power structure. I found the issues that matter to you involve fixing our roads by fixing the transportation system, defending our families, preserving the Second Amendment, and protecting local business. I

will make these issues my priority as your representative!

The results of June 14 set a trend. They prove that even an underfunded political outsider, with a lot of hard work and a record of pro-Constitution citizen activism, can win handily in our state.

I intend to represent each member of our community with dignity and respect. I believe the position of state representative is not about me but about we the people. I believe my job, as stated in the Declaration of Independence, is to secure the rights of each individual as given by our Creator.

To remain accountable to you, I will publish a quarterly newsletter so you can stay aware of the issues in Columbia, where I stand on those issues, and how you can express your views. You may sign up at my website, MagnusonSC.com.

If you have a question or concern, whether small or large, feel free to contact me at j@magnusonsc.com.

Josiah Magnuson
Campobello

Putting blame on guns

Some Republicans/conservatives foolishly maintain that the Orlando, Fla., massacre is tied to radical Islam. Nothing could be further from the truth.

President Barack Obama and the Democrats know that this tragedy, and of course inner-city crime, are caused by guns. Let's end it. There's no point in letting the Constitution stand in the way of our president's good intentions.

George Burnett
Spartanburg