

Opinion

Editor

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VIEWPOINT

Time for shift in farm subsidies

In the next year, Congress will come up with a new farm bill, that infamous federal subsidy program that so undercuts the legitimacy of — but never the propounding of — the argument that the U.S. is an example of the free market system. Well, I'm not against subsidies, in fact I'm for them when they benefit society as a whole and not just a chosen few.

Who are the chosen few? The 2002 Farm Bill allocated 93 percent of its \$20 billion a year to the growers of five crops — corn, soybeans, rice, cotton, and wheat. Ten percent of subsidy-receiving farmers get 72 percent of that money.

Corn farmers are so heavily subsidized that economists have established that U.S. exports of corn to Mexico constitute dumping — the selling of a product below the cost of production. This is driving thousands of Mexican farmers from their lands because they can't compete with the price of the imported subsidized corn, farmers who have been the growers and guardians of the very genetic diversity of corn that breeders have used to develop the high-yielding varieties that are now being sold in the Mexican markets.

There is a genuine need to shift farm subsidies toward helping Americans improve their diet and to help the growers of health-promoting foods — fruits and vegetables — get those foods into the mouths of the taxpayer. Obesity and diet-related diabetes (Type II) are at epidemic levels in this country due to excessive consumption of fat, sweeteners and junk foods. The American public needs help in improving their diet, and this is where agricultural subsidies can help. Subsidies should be an investment. Any investment in helping Americans improve their diet will pay off manifold in health care savings, not to mention the improved productivity of people in good health.

There are several ways that federal subsidies can be used to promote the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Start with advertising. Set a goal of having, via federal subsidy money, half as much TV airtime promoting the eating of fresh fruits and vegetables as the soda-pop industry has, for one. It's been said that one can do anything with enough advertising



A READER WRITES

DON LOTTER

OUR OPINION

Environmental group

To the environmental group Salton Sea Coalition, for saying it wants to piece together its own plan for saving the Salton Sea.

We agree with the group that something must be done, but after years of

discussions this group has no plan to present, just talk of doing so. The group said it would like to take elements of various plans submitted to the state and come up with its own plan. It's too late for that. It is not reasonable to cherry pick portions of other plans and then create your own that, unlike the others, has not been studied

The coalition undoubtedly has good intentions, but its response time to this process has been too slow. We agree with Imperial County Supervi-

sor Gary Wyatt who said, "If we keep coming up with different plans, the delay could cause the death of the sea."

To the life of the Rev. George Stevens, the longtime civil rights activist and former El Centro resident who died last week.

While Stevens lived in San Diego and served on the City

Council there for 11 years, he never forgot the Valley. He was known as a man who contributed to his community and church, and was quick to help out those in need.

He set an example in life for others to follow. He will be missed.

To Republican candidate Tan. D. Nguyen for allegedly sending thousands of letters

ANOTHER



The development of programs that incentivize the purveyors of snack foods to include fresh produce and fresh natural juices in their offerings would increase their consumption. At the ball game you go to get peanuts and ice cream and come back with slices of cantaloupe. OK, that's far-fetched, but how about this one: You're hurrying to a meeting and you need to grab some food from a vending machine. Next to the machines offering Oreo cookies and Coke is a machine with containers of juices and sliced fruit at attractive prices. Voila, change in diet.

The development and promotion of farmer's markets is another way to promote the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Farmer's markets are a great place for consumers to meet and get to know the people who grow their food, as well as for farmers to get paid prices that are close to retail. I realize that most Imperial Valley growers aren't set up to do farmer's markets; however, there are thousands of small and medium sized produce farms around the U.S. whose owners are struggling to survive. The farm bill should help these farmers.

Programs that promote and subsidize the serving of fresh fruits and vegetables in school and institutional cafeterias should be the beneficiaries of subsidies.

What is our tax money for if not to help us solve our problems? That problem is obesity, heart disease, and diet-related diabetes, as well as U.S. fruit and vegetable producers struggling to survive in a global market with lots of cheap labor. Let's call for some of that farm subsidy money to go this way in the 2007 Farm Bill.

» Don Lotter, Ph.D. is in charge of the Agriculture Program at Imperial Valley College.

»EDITOR'S NOTE: To achieve the greatest participation and encourage the widest range of opinion, the number of letters used by a single writer is limited to two per month. In the interest of space, please keep letters as concise as possible and no more than 350 words and include an address and daytime telephone number so you can be reached if there are questions.

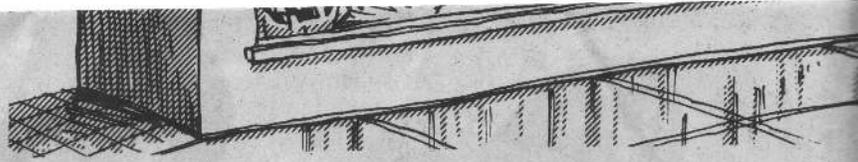
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»The Press reserves the right to reject letters deemed libelous, in poor taste, produced on a mass basis or are solicitations.



"WHAT?... DIDN'T YOU GET MAD LAST YEAR 'CAUSE WE

Board members forgot their roots

The Calexico Unified School Board members voted at their Oct. 12 meeting to extend Superintendent David Alvarez's contract for one more year with a 3-2 vote. I have some issues with this decision. CUSD has ignored and done nothing regarding this man for years. The three board members who voted for his extension, President Enrique Alvarado, Rita Huerta and Gloria Rodriguez have been all too happy being wined and dined by this man using his "big city tactics" to win them over, and have ignored all the requests for his removal by their constituents.

By ignoring the requests for the removal of David Alvarez by the voters, these three board members have shown no consideration toward their constituent and have betrayed the trust given to them by the voters to do what is best for our students.

During the past years this man has been involved in countless controversial issues, questionable use of consultants and finances are just a few.

As a taxpayer this makes me angry. Calexico students and taxpayers deserve much better than this.

We as voters have an opportunity to change things with the upcoming November elections. Rita Huerta is running for re-election. Don't vote for her. We don't need board members that won't listen to the "voice of the people." While President Enrique Alvarado isn't running soon, let's make sure we elect board members who won't support him as president; we don't need a board president who will not listen to the "voice of the people."

On the other hand my hats off to board members Eduardo Rivera and Salvador Pacheco for not voting for David Alvarez's contract extension and for listening to their constituents. I would also like to

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STORIES OF THE

» 50 years ago — There were almost 1,000 birds killed in the Imperial Valley, said El Centro game warden Bob Womack after the first weekend of duck hunting had become history.

Womack said this was "good for the first two days," but predicted the heavy shooting of concentrated hunters would scare a great number of the birds back to the refuge at Westmorland.

"It's been too warm for really good hunting," Womack said. He went on to say "with the first cool spell around Tule Lake and Bakersfield it should improve."

» 40 years ago — Dr. Stanley Leland, the county health director, is hot and bothered about those warm Mexicali tortillas, and he is not going to cool off until the chill is applied.

It seems that many tortillas are brought across

sanitary, he says.

Dr. Leland, who is very fussy indeed, wrote a letter about it to the County Supervisors. The traffic in warm and tillas has tripled in the past three years. It is high time that something is done about it.

» 30 years ago — The three largest California most likely will be forced to loan from the Mexican government. Reports of a runaway deficit are true, an official said Friday.

During a question-and-answer session at the El Centro Kiwanis Club, guest speaker and Manny Jimenez from United Calafia briefly briefed the club of Mexico's decision to devalue the peso.

Araujo, branch manager of UCS