

Thank you, readers, for agreeing, disagreeing or considering(?) our weekly analyses

With this column we reach a milestone—column number 1150—that seemed impossible when we wrote our first column at the beginning of July 2000. A few columns ago, we said we would be winding down the column. Accordingly, this is our last weekly column. That said, we will keep our promise to write occasional columns when we encounter an itch that we just have to scratch.

From our perspective, agriculture is unique among the various sectors of our global economy. We can live a long time without an automobile, a cell phone, or the latest gizmo being hawked on the television, but if we do not have access to food, along with air and water, our days are numbered. Without a dependable supply of food, all other economic sectors cease to function. In that way food ranks with air and water as essentials for human life.

It is that understanding that has driven our analysis of agricultural policy over the last two plus decades.

We have often heard farmers talk about farmers in other countries as global competitors, but we have to recognize that no one farmer or nation is capable of producing enough to feed the world. Farmers everywhere are involved in a joint enterprise with the goal of producing enough food to nourish every man, woman, and child in the world.

Overproduction of basic storable commodities is a much easier problem to manage than production that does not meet the minimum nutritional requirements of every person in the world.

While an automobile company may want to weaken or put a competitor out of business so that they can gain market share and increase their profitability, farmers are not in the business of driving other farmers out of business.

The world needs the productive capacity of every farmer in the world. We think that this will become increasingly important as the effects of global warming become evident. With widespread heat and rainfall events (or the lack thereof) becoming more common, the wider agricultural production is spread around the world, the better the chance that farmers in unaffected areas will be able to fulfil the food needs of the world's population.

On that note, we would reiterate our belief in the need for coordinated national and regional stockholding programs for the basic storable agricultural grains and oilseeds. These stockholding programs should be designed in a manner that will allow farmers to sell their products at a price that covers the full economic cost of production.

These programs should be tied to globally-coordinated environmental policies that, in the long-run, will go beyond reducing the negative impact of agricultural production practices on the environment. Farmers need to be encouraged to develop and implement agricultural production systems that make net positive contributions to the environment.

While each farmer operates within a limited geographic area, the impact of their agricultural practices affect global systems. As we saw in the Dirty 30s, midwestern agricultural practices resulted in dust storms that caused people on the East Coast to close their windows to keep the dust out of their houses.

Today greenhouse gas emissions from an individual farm mingle with emissions from other farms and industries around the world. The combined actions of farmers, each on their own parcel of land, have an impact on global hydrological systems.

With this last plea for agricultural policies that sustain an agricultural productive capacity that exceeds demand in any given year and over decades, we offer our thanks to you, our readers. Without your readership and support, this column would not have lasted a year.

Policy Pennings Column 1150

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