

Utah Farm Bureau Convention

I enjoyed participating in the annual Utah Farm Bureau Convention last week. Members, delegates, and dignitaries from all over the state convened to celebrate successes and to debate agricultural issues. We all agreed that a safe food supply is the basis for health and prosperity within our entire society. Someone said that well fed people have lots of things to worry about, but if the day comes when the populace is hungry we will have only one thing to worry about.

I think I detected a general sense of unity and optimism as I listened to presentations and mingled with growers. New technologies, improved management practices, and stubborn determination have allowed our farmers and ranchers to conserve natural resources, expand crop and livestock production and even see some improved net profits this year. It was especially refreshing to see several capable and confident younger farm couples contribute to convention activities.

Garrick and Holly Hall, Cache Counties Achievement Award Applicants were recognized as outstanding Young Farmers and Ranchers for the State of Utah. Together, they have enjoyed impressive success with their farming operation and demonstrated excellence in leadership and service opportunities. As state winners, the Halls received ownership of a 2007 Polaris ATV, a \$500 cash award from Dodge, and an expense paid trip to the American Farm Bureau Convention in New Orleans. In January 2008, the Halls will compete with other state winners for a 2008 Dodge Ram pickup.

That is not to suggest there are not some dark clouds of discouragement in farming circles. As usual, we discussed a series of issues that concern agriculturalists such as, water law, public and private land policies, tax issues, labor supply, transportation, animal welfare, environmental regulations and a multitude of others. Unfortunately, a dwindling percentage of our people (leaders included) have an understanding and appreciation of the essential process of feeding and clothing a growing population. Unreasonable regulations are sapping farmers and ranchers of the incentive to produce.

One specific example referred to at the convention dealt with Paul Opfar, a 28 year old Utah County native who wanted to live his lifelong dream of running a dairy. In 2005 he approached the city of Mapleton and was granted a building permit to build his dairy. Mapleton City Ordinance 18.28.010 stated, "The A-2 zone is established to provide areas in which agricultural pursuits can be encouraged and supported within the municipality." With a Mapleton City conditional use permit in hand, Opfar began milking at his new dairy in October, 2006.

Within days of the first milking nearby residents that had build their homes in an agriculture zoned portion of the Mapleton bench complained about manure and flies. Opfar was brought before the Mapleton City Board of Adjustment and

ordered to come up with a plan to mitigate odor and fly concerns. Weeks later when Opfar presented his plan to the Board of Adjustment, legal counsel for the neighbors convinced Board members that the plan was too vague. On a 5-0 vote, the appointed (not elected) Board of Adjustment ordered Opfar to shut down his dairy. He had only 30 days to sell the cows and equipment and to walk away from the \$400,000 that had been invested in construction and labor costs to get the dairy launched.

Mapleton City Attorney nervously pointed out that Opfar had received the appropriate legal instruments from the city and warned that revocation of the conditional use permit could provide grounds for legal action against the city. Months later, Opfar accepted a settlement with the city for the modest amount of \$202,000. Mounting legal fees and dwindling financial resources prevented Opfar from demanding a more equitable settlement.

As I listened to delegates at the convention, it became apparent that an increasing number of municipalities are creating zoning ordinances that are nothing more than unreasonable regulations from government entities and selfish private sectors. If our society is unwilling to support reasonable actions designed to protect the rights of farmers and ranchers to produce without irrational restrictions, we may, indeed, have only one thing to worry about.

Well fed people have lots of things to worry about. Hungry people have only one concern.