

Attorney made a difference in Wisconsin

CT
comment



By Jim Massey

Andrew Hanson was at times a thorn in the side of Wisconsin agriculture, but he generally brought an important viewpoint to the table.

Environmental attorney Andrew Hanson is leaving Wisconsin, and there may be some agriculturists who can't wait to see the door slam behind him.

But the 31-year-old attorney for Midwest Environmental Advocates has made his mark on Wisconsin agriculture in a matter of just a few years. Perhaps more than anything, he has prompted farmers and others involved in agriculture to look at issues from more than one point of view.

That can only be a good thing. It's imperative agriculture considers environmentalists' viewpoints when it comes to their farming practices and regulations that affect them. Because, after all, agricultural production practices definitely do affect the environment.

Mr. Hanson came to Wisconsin about five years ago and didn't take long to put his feet into the fire. As a 20-something lawyer who was paid to sue farmers if it was deemed that their agricultural practices adversely affected the environment, he didn't exactly endear himself to Wisconsin agriculture.

To his credit, Mr. Hanson wasn't afraid to speak his mind in front of sometimes hostile audiences. Last fall, for example, he offered his opinions on environmental issues in a room full of dairy farmers at a Dairy Business

Association conference. But he didn't back down when asked difficult questions about his involvement in suits against farmers.

Mr. Hanson said his mission as an MEA attorney was clear: He was someone who cared about public health and did what he could to protect it.

"My intention was never to be a thorn in anyone's side," he said. "My intention was to ensure compliance with the law. Law enforcement in this country is not a radical concept. It always surprised me the reaction I got when I said the law needed to be enforced."

Mr. Hanson said when he began his work with the MEA in 2001, he thought odor and air pollution would be the biggest issues associated with large-scale agriculture. Five years later he has a different opinion.

"I think the biggest threat is groundwater contamination," he said. "That's the red light stopping (agricultural) expansion right now. If farmers can get that and manure management under control, I think Wisconsin agriculture will be able to grow."

Richard Stadelman, Wisconsin Towns Association executive director, described Mr. Hanson as a "strong advocate" who understood that compromise was essential when working on important issues.

"He always expressed his position on issues, but at the same time he understood that in some cases he had to give and take a little bit," Mr. Stadelman said. "That didn't mean he always agreed with the end result. Sometimes you don't always get what you want, but you want to get as close as possible."

Paul Zimmerman, Wisconsin Farm Bureau governmental relations executive director, said he had a chance to work "with and opposite" Mr. Hanson.

"To his credit, he knows agriculture, he wasn't just out there to oppose agriculture," Mr. Zimmerman said. "Sometimes I agree with what he's doing, sometimes I disagree. It's a viewpoint that's out there, and it's important to garner a variety of viewpoints."

Mr. Zimmerman said there were those in agriculture who were frustrated by the fact Midwest Environmental Advocates made money by suing farmers. But he said the organization's tactics are legal in today's society.

"The MEA is an organization that appears to be here to stay for the foreseeable future," Mr. Zimmerman said. "It's something that has to be accounted for in the public relations and political process."

Mr. Hanson offered a departing shot to agriculturists who he said are trying to

stall the Department of Natural Resources' animal-confinement regulations (NR243) until after the November election.

"They're hoping their candidate will win the election and the rules won't go forward at all," he said. "I think that's really a shame. Those DNR rules ought to be a win-win for everyone. They ought to protect public health and they don't stop expansion."

Mr. Hanson has accepted a job in the office of civil enforcement at the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington. He will be charged with helping enforce the Clean Air Act. His last day with the MEA is Aug. 25.

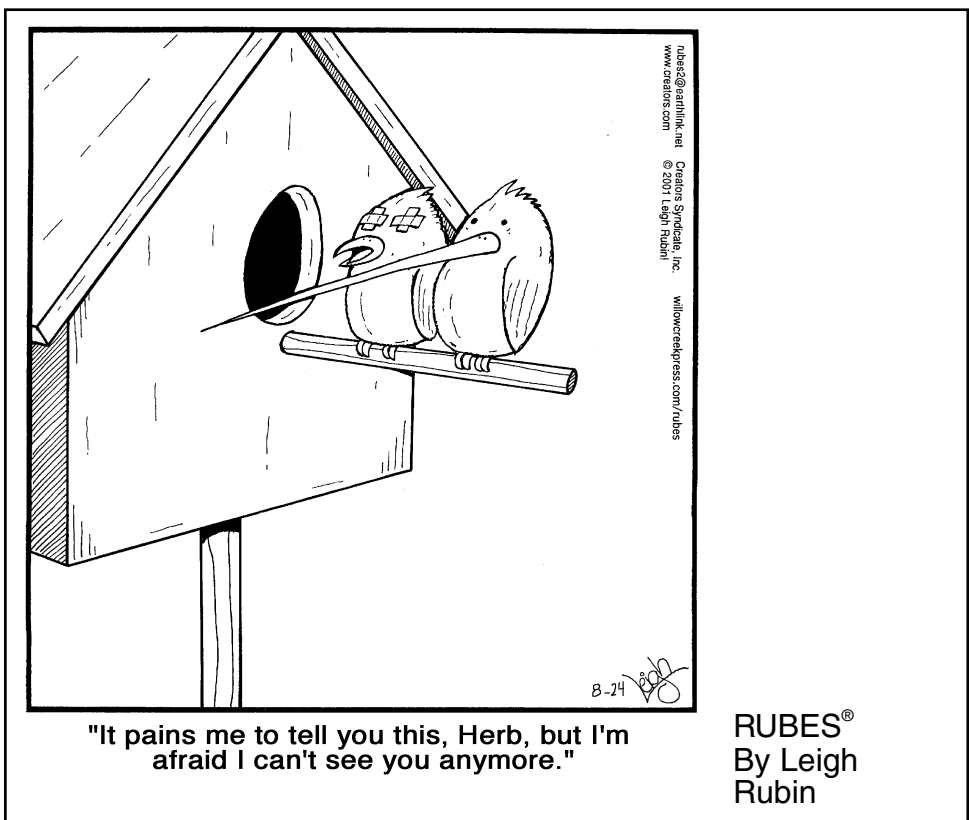
Mr. Stadelman said Mr. Hanson likely would find his new role to be quite a change from his role in Wisconsin.

"He may find it interesting to go from being an advocate to being a regulator," Mr. Stadelman said. "(As a regulator), you have to wear whatever hat you have on."

Mr. Hanson wouldn't say whether he thought he had made a difference while working as an environmental advocate in Wisconsin.

"I'd like to think that, but I'm going to let other people decide," he said.

From this point of view, there's no doubt.



RUBES®
By Leigh Rubin

Listening sessions a waste

August is the month public officials traditionally use your tax dollars to travel to gather information, ideas and frequent flier miles they claim will help them serve you better.

Their travels remind me of my week-long tour of Canadian agriculture each summer. The tour, based at a walleye lake in southern Ontario, keeps me informed on changes in Canadian agriculture like, oh, night crawler production, barley fermentation and cigar incineration.

It's little different in American farm and ranch country. With debate over the 2007 Farm Bill lurking, politicians of every stripe, intellect and attire now lurk at every fair, coffee shop and pasture gate.

Already, the House Ag Committee has held 11 "field" hearings outside of Washington and several subcommittee "listening sessions" around the nation to "learn" what producers want in the 2007 Farm Bill.

The Senate Ag Committee, also searching for a 2007 Farm Bill recipe, has been or will be on the road from Albany, Ga., to Redmond, Wash., from late June through early September conducting at least eight farm bill field hearings.

The aggie politicos using the most shoe leather, however, are the unelected ones at the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. In March, the USDA released 41 (41!) papers that summarized public comments from 52 (52!) farm bill hearings it held around the nation in 2005.

The USDA also plans dozens more farm bill gabfests around the United States in the coming months. No fewer than 15 sessions are scheduled from Brewer, Maine, to Fairbanks, Alaska, in the coming month on the absolutely breathless farm bill topic of "cooperative conservation and environmental partnerships."

And, yes, it's just coincidental that several of these hearings — featuring, the "Secretaries of Agriculture, Interior, Commerce, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality," according to the USDA — will be in states that sport both tough congressional races and tender, tasty fish.

None of this is new; it happens every August in an election year.

Nor is the bottom line new this year. All this driving, droning and dredging has yet to produce any new fix to old farm bill failures.

farm
and food



By Alan Guebert

Nor will it; at least not this year because Congress has scheduled only 15 working days more in Washington prior to the November elections.

If, however, the nation's farm and ranch brain trust can squeeze 15 minutes into their smoked salmon-packed schedules, there is one place they could visit for a staggeringly blunt, fact-packed presentation on what to fix immediately in the 2007 Farm Bill.

And, best of all, they can make the visit without leaving their rooms at the Radisson. All they need to do is point their Web browsers to <http://apacweb.ag.utk.edu/articles06.html> and click to read the July 21, July 28 and Aug. 11 ag policy columns of the University of Tennessee's Darryl Ray.

The three pieces — two on the failing Loan Deficiency Program begun under 1996's failing Freedom to Farm, the third on the sacred "market access" concept — feature Mr. Ray's typical feet-in-the-dirt policy analysis.

In short, they torch all the gassy palaver by all the farm yakkers to date.

For example, in his July 21 column on LDPs, Mr. Ray likens their use as a price-raising, export-boosting tool to that of "playing limbo with yourself. The lower you go, the lower you have to go."

And, he adds, a basic truth all in Washington know but will not acknowledge: The "real beneficiaries" of LDPs "are not U.S. producers, but rather bulk commodity importing countries, commodity processors and other users ... like integrated animal-feeding operations."

His July 28 piece reinforces that truth with historical facts and figures.

Then Mr. Ray takes on market access or the near-holy grail that unfettered exports will bring prosperity to U.S. farmers and ranchers. After 25 years of farm bill tinkering to gain that access, however, he notes, today's exports of the eight major U.S. crops hover around 80 to 85 percent of 1980 levels.

Mr. Ray's well-reasoned analysis deserves a full airing during this month's many "listening" sessions. Maybe our hired hands can fit it in when they're not yakking.

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Alan Guebert's *Farm and Food File* is published weekly in more than 75 newspapers in North America. He lives in Delavan, Ill., and may be contacted at agcomm@sbcglobal.net.

Lesson in changing tire goes unlearned

Thmpft, thmpft, thmpft, thmpft, thmpft.

I'd never heard that sound before. Though I didn't want to admit it, I knew what it meant.

I pulled off Highway 53 north of Chippewa Falls and popped on my hazard lights. Between whizzing cars, I snuck out the door and checked the front and back tires. Both looked normal.

I went to the other side and saw the culprit: a deflated, wrinkly rear tire.

Traffic went by in bursts of sound and wind, rocking my Subaru wagon. I'd just hiked 10 miles on the mosquito-infested Ice Age Trail.

I'd borrowed a friend's dog for the company. We both needed water. The car interior heated up in the sun. The dog panting and drooled.

While I didn't want to admit the problem, I also knew I needed to fix it.

I may have grown up in the country, tossing hay bales and playing in mud puddles, but I can't deny I'm a girl — a girl whose dad took care of these inconveniences during my earlier driving years.

So I weighed my options. I could call my roadside assistance service and perhaps get off the side of the highway faster, or take a little longer and figure it out myself.

I called the roadside assistance 800-number and went through 10 minutes of questions about my car and location. The friendly man secured help that would

arrive within 45 minutes. My throat seized up at the wait.

So I dug out the spare and manual and tried to educate myself. I marveled that no one stopped to offer assistance, but then I realized I never stop to offer assistance either — mostly because I'd be no help. But maybe I *didn't* want anyone to stop. It could make a bad situation worse.

I glanced up and saw a red truck with a bed full of lumber had pulled over.

A middle-aged man and his son hopped out, smiled and asked if I needed help. They saw my flat and laughed about the manual limp in my hands.

"You might as well cancel the roadside assistance. We'll have this done in five minutes," the dad said.

They were from Janesville and had picked up lumber in Rice Lake. As promised, they had the tire nearly fixed by

the time I worked through the telephone prompts to cancel the service.

So once again, I didn't learn how to change my own tire. I vow to work on that, but it's also nice to know there are people kind enough to lend a hand to a girly-girl who prefers mud puddles and hay bales over greasy fingers.

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By Megan Parker

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Editorial upsets Wildlife Federation director

I can see that The Country Today really does miss Tom Lawin.

The first reason is that the recent The Country Today editorial, "Legislators acted well with manure rules," would not have criticized me by name for the NR 243 press statement issued by Wisconsin Wildlife Federation President Corky Meyer (Corky, not George).

Secondly, The Country Today would not have been apologists for those farm groups and legislative agricultural committee members who are trying to delay for a couple more years or even worse, greatly weakened liquid manure-spreading rules for the largest 150 animal operations in the state. These farm groups have had a deliberate strategy to delay these rules and have done so for more than four years.

I was born and raised on a dairy farm and was the most pro-agriculture DNR secretary that Wisconsin has ever had. I know, as Tom Lawin did, that most farmers are good conscientious land stewards and don't support the liquid manure-handling practices that have seriously damaged tens of streams and their fisheries and contaminated in excess of 70 rural wells in the last two years.

Those farmers would be as outraged as the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation at the story of

the Scott Tremel family and their seriously sick children because their well was highly contaminated from the liquid manure spreading practices of one of those 150 largest animal operations.

Tom Lawin would have printed the Tremel's story and you should also.

The Federation will be looking for this letter and the Tremel story in one of the next editions of The Country Today.

George Meyer is the executive director of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation.

in my
opinion

By
George Meyer

Editor's note: Tom Lawin served as *The Country Today's* editor from 1977 to 1994 and was a state Natural Resources Board member from 1987 to 1992.

George Meyer was a DNR employee from 1972 to 1993 and DNR secretary from 1993 to 2001. The news release about which George Meyer writes quoted WWF president Corky Meyer, but was e-mailed to this newspaper with comments by George Meyer.

Tremel family supporters were among 47 people who testified during 7½ hours at a legislative agriculture committee hearing; *The Country Today* staff during 2005 wrote several stories about the Tremel family's claims that manure contaminated their wells.