

Fair public comment on issues of importance.

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As an Agrologist, I'm bound by a Code of Ethics which requires me to act with "integrity, fidelity, fairness and impartiality" in the discharge of my "duties and obligations to the public..."

When I sign this Code following a university degree in agriculture, a period of apprenticeship (1 to 3 years) and final review and acceptance by my peers as a person qualified to practice Agrology in this province (and the rest of Canada), I am bound by it to "be interested in public welfare" and "ready to apply special knowledge for the benefit of the profession and of society as a whole."

And further to "endeavour to extend public knowledge of Agrology and... publish in appropriate or popular media such reports and expository articles as will contribute to the further development and improvement of the profession. '

Were I to stray from these principles, I could be brought before our professional ethics committee (consistently comprised of our best and brightest) to answer for my conduct. A Committee with the authority to strip me of my title ("Agrologist"; its professional designate "P.Ag.") should they find me in violation of my sworn principles.

Faithful adherence to this mandate isn't always easy. Particularly when frank comment on ag policy issues fundamental to the sustainability of farming in this province seems to provoke such extreme reaction (bordering on twitchy-ness) in some quarters.

It is particularly amazing when such reaction comes from senior bureaucrats in Victoria paid to defend the sustainable interests of our farm sector (and, by definition, to welcome and incorporate frank comment in that regard...).

I am advised by members of the farm community that scarce time has been taken up in their meetings with bureaucrats on the topic of why "Wendy won't get any more work if she doesn't stop writing those columns".

I have heard — anecdotally— the comment of civil servants in the field that "we'd like to get Wendy to do this, but it'd never be approved by Victoria."

Come on, guys. Get real here...

First of all, you haven't thrown me any bones for over two years. (Thank goodness we're finally moving to "industry led". Which means farmers developing the terms of reference and holding the majority of votes on consultant selection and steering committees...)

Secondly, fair public comment on issues of importance to the farm community *is my work*. My pro bono work, in any event.

As an Agrologist enough enamoured with professional responsibility to have served as both President of the B.C. Institute of Agrologists and B.C. Councilor of the Agriculture Institute of Canada, I will continue to write on subjects which, in my professional judgment, I feel are integral to the future of farming in this province.

As a columnist, I will continue to raise the issues increasingly suggested to me for comment by my readers.

And as an individual who deeply respects the tremendous capacity of our farmers and our farm sector, I will continue to defend their interest in public policy which is facilitative, not destructive (no,

not necessarily an oxymoron) and in the development of a voice which is both clear and effective in delivering its message to politicians.

Out of interest, I believe I received more positive comment on last month's (September's) column than on any previous column. I understand the GVRD Agricultural Advisory Committee is planning on writing a letter to SAVE ON FOODS reiterating the points raised in the column. Good for them...

(And thank you to all of you who continue to provide me with such positive feedback and encouragement on these columns...)

At the time of writing, many hard-working and very dedicated civil servants within the Ministry are sitting wondering if the axe expected to fall in the impending announcement of MAFF downsizing will fall on them.

(I did take you, in past columns, through my distinction between civil servants and bureaucrats, didn't I? The former can be found working hard in the regions — and, very occasionally, at 808 Douglas — for the farmers and the public interest in sustainable food policy. The latter are often overheard making statements like “that might not be in my Minister's interest”, grouping together in small, tight clusters with other suits at farm conferences and generally without two sweet clues on how farm decisions are actually made...)

Unfortunately, for some, it undoubtedly will. (Wouldn't it be nice if we were given a vote?)

The final word from an article (“Observations on New Zealand's Tree Fruit Industry) in September's Good Fruit Grower seems germane but sadly prophetic:

“...the lack of Extension presence in New Zealand, Chile and Argentina and the trend to the privatization of information delivery systems throughout the world, has the potential to harm agricultural productivity and profitability. Growers need an independent source of information. The growers in the South Tyrol of Italy realized the need for independent scientifically based information and funded a semi-private Extension service to help the industry modernize. This industry is now one of the most productive in the world.”

So maybe, when they (inevitably, but prove me wrong, guys...) make the mistake of letting the good ones go, we can construct some new vehicle to catch and hold their expertise for the benefit of the farming community???

With just a snip of a column left, one quick question for farmers and food consumers to throw at those seeking office in the next municipal election:

Are you in favour of guaranteeing a minimum irrigation allotment to higher capability ALR land?

The only way of ensuring this protection in perpetuity is through guaranteed (mandated) water access rights. Like the Americans have with farmland in the Columbia Basin. So many acre feet per acre.

While we're on the topic, does the new Farm Practices Protection Board have a comment on this? What do you think, Corky? Surely, irrigation is a farm practice worth protecting? Isn't this part of the ALR equation?

