

## OUR VIEW

## Factory farms reflect changing economy

Anytime someone mentions factory farms or concentrated animal feeding operations, all sorts of warning bells go off in our idealistic college student minds: They're bad for the environment! They're bad for the animals! They'll put the family farm out of business! They stink (literally)!

So when we learned about the factory farm coming to Kirksville (see story, page 3), our knee-jerk reaction was to write a scathing editorial opposing it. We're sure that many students and Kirksville residents will feel the same way. But the fact of the matter is that farming in America is changing, and it might not be as bad as you think.

Environmentalists protest CAFOs on the basis of the massive amount of waste they produce, and according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Web site, factory farms produced more than 250 million tons of manure in 2003.

But the people who run these operations aren't Homer Simpson-like cretins who collect pig feces in giant metal silos and dump them in the nearest lake. The waste is stored for use as fertilizer at carefully monitored levels so that it won't contaminate the groundwater. The Kirksville factory farm will meet all of Adair County's strict health ordinances.

If you're concerned about all that manure producing, well, a distinctive aroma, you're right. However, County Commissioner Gene Schneider visited a factory farm in Knox County similar to the proposed Kirksville facility and stated that the smell isn't detectable until you're 50 feet away from the farm. In other words, unless you're planning a picnic at the local CAFO, it shouldn't be an issue.

The notion that large-scale feeding operations are putting small farms out of business isn't quite accurate, either. CAFOs aren't replacing family farms, they're becoming family farms. Most other industries became

mechanized long ago, and farming finally is catching up to the curve. Farmers realize that factory farms are cheaper and more efficient than traditional methods. CAFOs just make good business sense.

Without CAFOs, the supply of meat in this country simply couldn't keep up with the demand — according to the CDC Web site, CAFOs produced half of the meat in the U.S. in 2003 despite the fact that they accounted for fewer than 10 percent of the feeding operations. Americans want their meat, and they want it cheap, so barring a return to an agrarian society in which every family raises and slaughters their own animals, the factory farm is the only way to satisfy that desire.

Another common complaint is the way animals are treated at these farms. The very phrase "concentrated animal feeding operation" suggests a miserable existence for the hundreds or thousands of pigs, cows or chickens crammed together in a small space awaiting the gallows. Although factory farm owners do their best to provide a climate-controlled environment and take care of sick animals, in general the animals still are viewed and treated as products because that's what they are. That's what you make them every time you chow down on a nice, juicy hamburger or a bucket of fried chicken.

It doesn't make sense to be concerned about an animal's quality of life but have no problem when it comes to killing it for food. So before you march down to the courthouse to protest the new CAFO, it might be wise to take a look at your own values. Adopting a vegetarian lifestyle is certainly one option to consider. If that's what you choose, then by all means, start the anti-CAFO petition. But if you can't bring yourself to give up that T-bone steak, you have no right to oppose the institution that put it on your plate.

## CORRECTIONS

To submit corrections or to contact the editor, please e-mail [index@truman.edu](mailto:index@truman.edu), call us at 660-785-4449, or send a letter to Index, 1200 Barnett Hall, Truman State University, Kirksville, Mo. 63501.



## Letters to the Editor

## More gun rights would increase campus safety

I opened the Aug. 28 issue of the Index expecting to see something controversial in the editorial section that would beg for a response. The two articles debating drug testing policy came close but failed to capture my imagination. For the next issue, I challenge the Editorial Board to come up with something a little juicier, but just in case nothing noteworthy comes out, I'm going to get the ball rolling myself.

This summer I was flipping through the radio stations and something caught my ear. I heard, "in light of the shootings around the country at universities such as Virginia Tech, our organization seeks to lift the ban of guns on college campuses." I wasn't sure if I had heard correctly so I kept listening. It turns out that the organization Students for Concealed Carry on Campus was having its first national conference in Washington, D.C. and was advocating the abolishment of gun-free zones. Most people, like the opposition speaker from the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, immediately will point out how stupid it sounds to reduce shootings by giving people the right to carry guns in more places, but on closer examination it just makes sense.

One of the pro-concealed carry speakers illustrated this with a simple example: Suppose someone is stalking you and you are fearful for your family's life. Would you A) call the police and maybe buy a gun or B) put a sign in your front yard that says "No guns allowed"? If you're like me, you wouldn't pick B. That option tells the would-be attacker that you don't have any guns and are unlikely to do the assailant any harm should he or she come after your family with a gun. You could call the police after he or she enters, but what good will it be to you if law enforcement gets there 10 minutes after the attacker has hurt you and your family? When shopping centers and universities enact gun-free policies, they simply are putting signs in their front yards and inviting in bad guys. By having gun-free zones,

we are ensuring that law-abiding citizens over the age of 21 who normally have the right to carry a gun in most states will not bring that gun with them when they teach class or attend school.

I know I won't break that law because if I do, I won't ever be able to attend another university, and likewise, professors wouldn't be able to get another teaching job. Do you really think, though, that the same applies to would-be criminals? Would a mass murderer facing 40 consecutive life sentences think, "Oh, I better not bring that gun on campus or I could lose my license," or instead think about how no one else will have a gun and how he or she will be able to have free reign as you run for your life?

Justin Logan  
Junior

## Researching presidential candidates isn't difficult

I was pleased to read Caitlin Dean's column in the Aug. 28 issue of the Index, in which she raised questions about the extent to which Rock the Vote encourages potential voters to research candidates and issues. One of Truman's institutional goals is that our students become "creative, socially responsible leaders and engaged world citizens" (2008-09 General/Graduate Catalogue). The presence of Dean's column, as well as Brenna McDermott's piece and the In Brief note on convention coverage, reflects well on the civic engagement of Truman students.

However, I take issue with Dean's discouraging statement that "the information we [voters] need is buried deep." Truman students typically are highly motivated, intelligent people who are comfortable with modern information technology. I'm confident that most Index readers know how to use Google and follow Web links. After about five minutes of Googling candidate names, the word "issues" and the phrase "voters guide," I found the following four resources:

- <http://www.barackobama.com/issues/>
- <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/>

- <http://www.sos.mo.gov/media/votersGuide/>
- <http://votesmart.org/index.htm>.

Becoming an informed participant in the electoral process isn't rocket science. If Truman students can succeed in rigorous degree programs, participate in undergraduate research and impress national audiences with conference presentations, surely they can look up the Nov. 4 ballot issues. Missouri's deadline to register for the November election is Oct. 8. If that's long enough to prepare for midterm exams, isn't it enough time to read an issues page?

Melissa Blagg Holcomb  
Assistant Professor of Nursing

## Drug testing is normal part of hiring process

If you would have told me last week that Truman did not have a policy of mandatory drug testing for official University employees, I wouldn't have believed you. And until I saw the One-on-One column in the Aug. 28 issue of the Index, I never would have thought this topic even required debate. For every job I have accepted as an adult — a county health department, a public and a private hospital, a pathology laboratory (to name a few) — I have been required to take a drug test. A drug test is just a small part of an attempt to find employees who are responsible, law-abiding citizens and one that, unlike a resume or application, is pretty difficult to fake.

Although there are plenty of responsible people who use drugs occasionally, different types of drug tests can discriminate fairly easily between casual and heavy users. And more importantly, it is the employer's right to request this information. It really seems here that Zach Vicars was put to the task of playing devil's advocate. Is respect for a potential job candidate really enough of a reason for a university to forgo employee drug testing? Employers could do much worse than make you pee in a cup.

Craig Hermann  
Alumnus

## INDEX

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## Editorial Policy

The Index is published Thursdays during the school year by students at Truman State University, Kirksville, MO 63501. The first copy is free, and additional copies cost 50 cents each. The production offices are located in Barnett Hall. We can be reached by phone at 660-785-4449. The Index is a designated public forum, and content of the Index is the responsibility of the Index staff. The editor in chief consults with the staff and adviser but ultimately is responsible for all decisions. Opinions of Index columnists are not necessarily representative of the opinions of the staff or the newspaper. Our View editorials represent the view of the Editorial Board through a majority vote. The Editorial Board consists of the editor in chief, managing editor, news editor, copy chief and opinions editor. The Index reserves the right to edit submitted material because of space limitations, repetitive subject matter, libelous content or any other reason the editor in chief deems appropriate. Submitted material includes advertisements and letters to the editor.

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## What was going on in the INDEX?

10 years ago – September 3, 1998

U.S. Customs officials detained an airplane carrying between \$9 million and \$12 million worth of cocaine destined for Kirksville in Dalhart, Texas.

30 years ago – September 7, 1978

The Index Editorial Board encouraged students at Northeast Missouri State University to keep up with local news and register to vote in Kirksville.