

**Hot Talk**

"This bill makes major investments in America's food and energy security — and does so without adding one cent to our nation's deficit." — **Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., on the Senate farm bill, which he says is \$1 billion less than the Bush administration's proposal.**



"I am hopeful that ... we can convene a conference committee and send this important legislation to the White House ... and send it there with sufficiently strong bipartisan support to override the threatened veto." — **Rep. Stephanie Herserth-Sandlin, D-S.D., on her outlook for the farm bill.**



"If nothing is in writing, maybe the writing is on the wall." — **Ron Hanson, University of Nebraska professor of ag economics, on the risk young people take in sacrificing to work on the family farm when there is no formal, written, legal succession plan in place.**



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**GUEST EDITORIAL**

**The 'free lunch' may be ending**

By **DAN CRUMMETT**



**O**KLAHOMA enacted a tough anti-illegal-immigration law Nov. 1 to fill the void left by congressional inaction.

In essence, the law makes it a felony to harbor or knowingly employ illegals and empowers local police and sheriff's departments to become involved in the country-of-origin status of anyone arrested.

Oklahoma's law is probably one of the toughest of several similar state-enacted measures because it strikes at the source of the problem: employment. As the lawmaker who introduced the bill explained, "If there are no jobs for them in Oklahoma, then illegals will go elsewhere."

That they did. More than a month before the bill became law, there were published reports that hundreds of undocumented individuals were leaving Oklahoma, mainly for Texas and California. A close friend of mine who works in a publicly funded health care facility that deals primarily with illegal immigrants said patients had been moving on for weeks. Then, the day the law took effect, she said the halls at the facility were empty.

**Leaving town**

News reports were filled with horror stories of the "fear" these people felt in face of the new law — a situation that fails to impress me as I still do not understand what many in this nation, in our own Congress and in Mexico don't understand about the word "illegal." It's unambiguous, it means "it's against the law" — the same body of rules and regulations I am expected to obey or suffer the consequences.

Now, it is estimated 12 million illegals are in this nation because they came here to work in farm fields and in other jobs legal citizens of the U.S. may not want to fill. That does not change the "illegal" status, nor give anyone in law enforcement or legislative authority the right to turn a blind eye to the practice.

While much of the fresh produce in the U.S. comes from fields staffed with these folks, employing illegals should be illegal. And, despite the financial burden American agriculture will feel if field labor has to be paid at a rate sufficient to attract legal residents, the investment must be made. If it is not, then which set of laws will we begin ignoring next?

Yes, producers with perishable produce in the field will be in a crunch, but ultimately the U.S. consumer must begin paying the freight for goods produced "legally." That will mean a much higher price to pay for the labor — finally.

*Crummett is a Farm Progress executive editor.*