



Inside Dakota Ag
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NO WIND: A sign announces a landowner's position on wind energy development.

FARM LIFE

Rural development needs your support

Too many people don't want anything to change rural America.

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I was driving through Lincoln County south of Sioux Falls the other day and saw a lot of "No wind turbine" signs.

I don't know all the ins and outs of the local issue being debated. That part of Lincoln County has many acreages, and the farther east you go toward the Big Sioux River and Newton Hills, the more scenic it is — if you like hills, trees and rivers. I'm sure there are good reasons that people who live there are against a commercial wind farm being built in the county.

But I sighed when I saw the signs. There are too many signs in rural America that are against things — pipelines, hog barns, new dairies, chicken houses, etc.

Where are the signs that are “for” something? For jobs, for growth, for investment?

Where are the “save our school” signs, or the “keep the café going” signs or the “we need our hospital” signs?

People don't move to South Dakota and North Dakota for clean air, pretty sunrises, spectacular sunsets and great hunting. They may visit for those things, but don't stay. It takes jobs and business opportunities to make people stay.

In 1987, Deborah and Frank Popper, New Jersey-based scholars, riled up people in the Dakotas when they proposed turning the Great Plains into a giant park. They called it Buffalo Commons. Their idea was that the Great Plains was sparsely populated and on a downward trend, so it might as well be turned a giant park where the buffalo could roam freely across the unfenced prairie again.

At the time, I thought the Poppers were saying that the federal government should shut the Great Plains off from development to preserve grasslands and wetlands for the benefit of the bison, waterfowl, pheasant, deer and a

whole bunch of other animals. Sometimes it seemed as if the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies were working hard at it. Ducks were more important than people.

But maybe it isn't the federal government that we have to be worried about. Maybe it isn't people like the Poppers. Maybe the problem is us. Maybe we will turn the Dakotas into the Buffalo Commons by being against everything.

So the next time you get a chance, be for something. Be for jobs. Be for rural economic development. Be for the new hog farm, the new dairy or the new feedlot. Be for the new ag processing plant, pipeline or wind farm. Be for the new business that wants to come to town. Be for the people who will come to work in those businesses, even if they are recent immigrants to America. And put up a sign.

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