



(Continued from Page A10)

price of pickups by thousands of dollars even as it would drastically cut their weight and power. The new result would be trucks too expensive for many farmers and other working people, but without the power to carry a heavy load or make their way across an early spring pasture in hubcap-deep mud.

It's not that the government has anything against pickup trucks in particular. The damage would be done in the name of fuel efficiency and the environment. And the weapon of choice would be the notoriously inefficient corporate average fuel efficiency (CAFE) regulations. These are a set of federal regulations adopted in 1975 in response to the Arab oil embargo that require manufacturers to meet average gas mileage requirements for specific classes of vehicles.

As a quick measurement of the effectiveness of CAFE regulations in achieving their original intent of reducing America's dependence on imported oil, consider that we were importing 35 percent of our oil before them, and 50 percent today.

Nonetheless, the Senate is con-

sidering a bill that would mandate an unrealistically steep increase in the CAFE gas mileage requirements for light trucks.

Specifically, the mileage exception for vehicles in the "light truck" category (including all pickups) would be eliminated. That would mean raising the light truck average from 20.7 miles per gallon (mpg) to 35 mpg, rolling them in with normal passenger cars that today are only expected to meet a 27 mpg average.

The only way vehicle manufacturers could comply would be to strip down the weight and power of light trucks while boosting the sticker price. Farmers would be left with no option but to buy politically correct toys that kind of look like pickups used to.

Those toys might be OK for weekend pickup drivers, but they are no substitute for the powerful pickups that are the main workhorse for most farmers. No wonder so many farm organizations have come out strongly against this increase in CAFE regulations, but the danger of these regulations goes well beyond their potential economic damage to U.S. farmers.

Well intentional as CAFE reg-

ulations might have been, they have created a generation of unsafe lightweight passenger cars. People in these lighter vehicles are tragically more vulnerable in traffic accidents.

A Harvard Center for Risk Analysis study found that traffic deaths are increased by 1,300 to 2,600 a year as the result of vehicles downsized to comply with CAFE. In 1999, USA Today found that traffic accidents since the CAFE mandated downsizing had killed 46,000 people who would have survived had they been in heavier vehicles.

There is no environmental reason for extending CAFE's dismal record with passenger cars into light trucks. The higher mileage CAFE mandated for cars only encouraged people to drive more, spewing more exhaust into the environment. And the higher prices for these cars caused people to keep them longer, resulting in more older cars with higher emission levels.

We can't undo the damage CAFE regulations have already done. Maybe someday we can get rid of them altogether. But for now, I'm sure I speak for all American farmers and ranchers when I urge our U.S. senators to leave our pickup trucks alone.

Lynn Cornwell
Third Generation
Glasgow, Mont. Rancher
and Past President Of the
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University Of Maryland To Forego Field Days

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Faced with changing clientele and priorities, as well as shrinking state budgets, the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (AGNR) will forego all major field day activities in 2002.

Cancelled field days include the annual August field day at the Wye Research and Education Center (WREC), the Farm and Family Field Day at the lower Eastern Shore facility (LESREC), etc.

The college will convene a task force of faculty, staff, and others to examine the role of field day activities. Their goal: to make

recommendations that allow the college to best achieve the outreach education component of its mission within the fiscal constraints it faces.

Friends and clients of the college can share their ideas and suggestions by calling (301) 405-2072 or emailing rb11@umail.umd.edu.

AGNR will continue to offer highly focused open houses, twilight tours, and other issue- or audience-specific educational programs and activities at its research and education centers and local Maryland Cooperative Extension offices.

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