Opinion

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Farmers deserve right to own data

Farmers are getting squeezed so hard these days that, if they were oranges, we soon might be stuck with only the rinds.



ANTHONY **PAHNKE**

Kidding aside, farmers today are caught between two kinds of unfair markets. On the purchasing side, President Donald Trump's wayward war in Iran is causing the costs of fertilizer and diesel to sharply rise. Then, when it's time to sell, increasing corporate consolidation lowers prices for farmers — prices that often are below what it costs them to grow, care and harvest their products.

And now there is an additional reason that farmers are feeling the pinch: Big Tech companies pushing for the use of artificial intelligence in farming and agriculture research.

The fight against data centers, it turns out, is only one dimension of the national debate concerning AI. Another is the question: Who owns all that data being stored in those giant concrete buildings gobbling up our land and driving up our utility bills?

Earlier this year, I was asked by a member of the Colorado House of Representatives to speak at a hearing for a state bill known as the Agricultural Data Ownership and Market Competition Act. For farmers who generate data while using certain technologies, this bill would have granted the right to retain ownership of that data and the chance to sell it to service providers.

Speaking in favor, I discussed how farmers with control over their data could make markets more competitive by helping them negotiate terms with manufacturing dealers and corporations.

While that bill did not pass, it did highlight the need for farmer data sovereignty to push back against corporate power and create more just markets.

Farmers generate all kinds of information about their land, crops and animals. Records from past years show change over time, perhaps over generations. Firms covet this information, which they can use to tailor products to sell to the farmers.

While others may use AI bots to conduct research, create images or brainstorm recipes for leftover ingredients, farmers use it in ways that affect their actual livelihood. In an industry with tight margins, some tout AI's potential to help farmers reduce waste and improve yields, while others note that the technology may assist with early disease detection to save crops.

But, as in other areas, AI also comes with unknown risks.

Farmers using AI may receive potentially disastrous information on what to do with their operations, especially if some pertinent data is missing. Companies, depending on their contracts with farmers, or lack thereof, could shirk responsibility and leave producers in the lurch. Others warn that adopting AI could lead to further farm consolidation.

It is only fair that the farmers who produce this data be able to decide what to do with it. But Congress has failed to secure any such protections. The recently introduced Senate bill known as the FARM AI Act of 2026proposes ways to increase access to AI among farmers by expanding U.S. Department of Agriculture research grants, funding rural workforce training for precision agriculture and creating an AI Agriculture Advisor within the USDA.

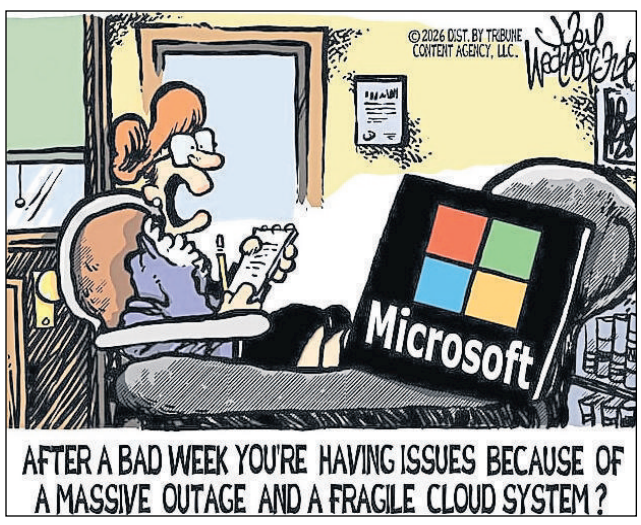
What it doesn't do is provide details about who owns and controls farmer data.

The situation at the state level is more promising. For instance, in April of this year, Nebraska passed the Agricultural Data Privacy Act. This legislation grants farmers rights over how to control and potentially sell the data they produce. While tech companies may process it, they are barred from selling the information that farmers generate about their operations.

Similar legislation has been introduced in Iowa which would mandate that farmers maintain "full ownership rights" over both raw and transformed data, including the right to copyright and sell it.

AI, for better or worse, is increasingly becoming part of our daily lives and is therefore worth a lot of money. For struggling farmers, it could be a much-needed revenue source. It's up to us, and our legislators, to recognize this fact instead of taking farmers for granted and squeezing them more.

Anthony Pahnke is vice president of Family Farm Defenders and professor of international relations at San Francisco State University. This column was produced for Progressive Perspectives and distributed by Tribune News Service. He can be reached at anthonypahnke@sfsu.edu.



TODAY'S QUOTE

"If I win, it's a bonus. If I lose, the sun still comes up the next day, and it's all good."

— Ashleigh Barty, Australian athlete

TODAY'S HEADLINES

Everyone is a friend on Trump's Asia trip

BY DIDI TANG
ASSOCIATED PRESS



SERGEI BOBYLEV/Associated Press

U.S. President Donald Trump, right, Chinese President Xi Jinping, center, and Russian President Vladimir Putin attend a trilateral meeting at Kylin Villa in Shenzhen.

WASHINGTON — U.S. President Donald Trump huddled with leaders from longtime partners Japan, Australia and India in a resort conference room in Manila, Philippines, this week to strengthen a partnership called the Quad that is meant to counter China.

Two days later, Trump warmly greeted Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin in an unprecedented, trilateral summit of countries that have been long considered rivals to take on "new opportunities and approaches on a range of very important issues."

Trump effusively described all these leaders as friends.

"The Quad, comprising four democracies that uphold the rule of law, represents the post-World War II international order," said Ken Moriyasu, a senior fellow focused on Asia at the Hudson Institute. "The trilateral, meanwhile, raises the prospect of a very different order — one in which three great powers stand above the rest, recognize each other's spheres of influence and refrain from interfering in each other's core interests."

In a no-frills hotel conference room Tuesday in the Philippine capital, Trump sat down with Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

Covered in blue cloth, four long tables formed the appropriate shape of a quadrilateral, with each government taking one side. The leaders were flanked by their Cabinet members. There were no decorations but a display of national flags.

Before the meeting, the four leaders took a photo together, where Trump took questions from reporters and joked around with his counterparts.

Calling the leaders "friends of mine," Trump turned to Albanese and patted him on the back, as the Australian premier nodded. Trump then threw his thumb toward Modi and joked, "And by the way, he's a very tough man," before pointing to Takaichi and saying, "and she may be even tougher."

The scene was much grander but far less spontaneous two days later when Trump joined Putin and Xi at a massive ring-shaped table with a burst of pink flowers in the middle at a state-owned resort in Shenzhen, China. The room was spacious with marble flooring, crystal chandeliers and jade sculptures.

Three leaders were alone at the table, seated some distance from one another. Xi read from a prepared script, with hardly any expression on his face. Putin looked at the documents in front of him, while Trump sat back with a slight smile on the opposite end of the table.

In Manila, Trump said at the Quad meeting that "we're all friends" and suggested that the leaders from Japan, Australia and India can reach him directly.

"We talk a lot when they have a problem, when they have difficulty, when they want to tell me something, my phone is always open and the Oval Office is always open to you," Trump said.

Talking to reporters, Trump praised his fellow Quad leaders, calling them "phenomenal people."

"And they're friends of mine, so that helps," the U.S. president said.

On Thursday, Trump described Xi and Putin similarly, addressing both as his "friend." At the airport in Shenzhen, Trump got a rare greeting there from Xi and even an unusual hug from the Chinese leader.

At a welcoming ceremony for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation grouping, Putin joined Xi and Trump on stage. He and Trump shook hands and held each other briefly by the arm, with Xi looking on and smiling.

At the trilateral meeting, Trump argued that differences among countries should not forestall talks.

"Too often, past leaders avoided talking to nations with whom they had disagreements. And, uh, we feel the opposite," Trump said.

Kenya picks U.S. consortium for critical minerals project

BY EUGÉNIE TENEZAKIS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NAIROBI, Kenya — Kenya's government said Thursday that it had selected a consortium of U.S. companies as the preferred bidder to develop niobium and rare earths deposits on its coast, while residents said they were still waiting for information on the project.

The mining ministry said it had issued a notice of its intention to award the Mrima Hill project in Kwale County to the Frontier Minerals Consortium, which comprises Frontier Minerals LLC, Bunker Hill Mining Corp., ReElement Technologies and American Resources Corp.

The ministry stressed that the notice is not a license. It said the consortium must now "go to the ground," engage communities and obtain "all requisite consents" before applying for a prospecting license.

Residents and farmers have said they fear losing their land. Elders from the local Digo community worry about damage to a sacred forest where they say their ancestors are buried.

"Until now, we have received no information from the government on the content of the project," said Justus Mwero, chairman of the Mrima Farm Owners Community-Based Organization. "It will be hard for us to express our consent or opinion to the company with no information."

Countries including the U.S. are racing to secure the rare earth minerals used in electric vehicle motors, wind turbines and defense technologies, seeking alternatives to China's dominance.

The ministry said it had "deliberately" chosen investors before starting formal consent processes. Mining Minister Hassan Joho said Nov. 2 that the community was consulted before seeking bids.

"The government should make the proposal public, so that the company can be held accountable. The government should not distance themselves from their responsibilities and leave it to the investor," said Fakii Omar of the Kwale Mining Alliance.

The Mrima Hill Sacred Grove was designated a national monument in 1992.

"The notice does not mention if the protected status of the forest has been revoked," Omar added. "Can the proposed mine coexist with the protected status under current laws?"

A previous attempt to mine the site ended in arbitration. In 2013, Kenya's environment regulator rejected an environmental assessment for a license held by Cortec Mining Kenya, citing the site's protected status, according to Extractives Daily. An arbitration tribunal of the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes later ruled that the license should not have been issued without environmental approval, and Kenya won the case.

The Centre for Litigation Trust, a Kenyan civil society group, has asked the High Court in Kwale County to suspend a proposed Kenya-U.S. agreement on Mrima Hill's minerals until residents are consulted. The attorney general has challenged the court's jurisdiction.

BRIEFS

From wire reports

APPEALS COURT GRANTS REQUEST ABOUT VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS

A federal appeals court in California has granted a request by the Trump administration to halt an order that would have restored deportation protections for Venezuelan migrants.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit says the suspension will remain until seven days after a full ruling. The Trump administration filed an emergency appeal asking the Supreme Court to block the order.

A California judge had ruled that ending Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelans was unlawful. TPS was first granted to Venezuelans in March 2021 under President Joe Biden.

About 600,000 Venezuelans have received TPS protections.

VAN GOGH PAINTING GOES FOR $190.4 MILLION

A vibrant landscape painted by Vincent van Gogh weeks before his death has sold for $190.4 million at auction. The painting, "Châtaigniers en fleurs," exceeded its $180 million estimate at a Sotheby's auction in New York on Wednesday.

The sale went ahead after an agreement between its current owners and a Jewish family that sold it in Nazi-era Germany. Sotheby's announced the agreement a day before the auction.

Van Gogh painted "Châtaigniers en fleurs" after his release from a psychiatric asylum in May 1890. He took his own life two months later.

PUTIN CONDEMNS BLOCK OF RUSSIAN TEAM

Russian President Vladimir Putin has condemned what he calls a "disregard for legal norms" in sports after Russia was barred from the ice hockey world junior championships following a move by the Canadian government to block its team.

Russia was reinstated to International Ice Hockey Federation world championships in a ruling from the Court of Arbitration for Sport last month. But Canada has barred Russia's players and the IIHF said last week the Russia team would not take part.

The CAS ruling overturned a ban on Russian teams which the IIHF imposed shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

ZOO STAFF LOSES FIGHT TO SAVE FIONA

Fiona, the hippo whose premature birth and fight for survival at the Cincinnati Zoo turned her into a global sensation nearly a decade ago, died Thursday from complications after swallowing a knit hat that accidentally was flung into her enclosure.

The zoo said Monday that it was providing Fiona with round-the-clock care after she swallowed the hat more than a week ago.

Before she died, veterinarians had been keeping Fiona hydrated, giving her treats and monitoring her every move, the zoo said. They even borrowed a vibration plate from a horse farm, encouraging her to stand on it several times a day in the hopes that the shaking would help move things through her digestive tract.

"Despite multiple attempts to move the hat out of her system, it was ultimately too much to overcome," the zoo said. "The team performed necessary supportive care today in an attempt to save her, but it was not successful and she did not recover."

Within an hour after the announcement, visitors began leaving flowers and cards by a hippo statue outside the zoo entrance.

"Forever our Fiona," one note read — a heart replacing the 'a' in her name.