

The World Gives a Little, Takes a Little

Perhaps trying harder to understand the world in its entirety is enough for now.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center hosts many young people throughout the year. Coincidentally, I could not help but be drawn to a United Nation's (U.N.) report regarding animal-to-human disease transmission.

A couple of weeks ago, students were walking through our pastures, fields and farm shelter belts. The day included hands-on activities.

My thoughts included concepts from the U.N. report. How exposed should we be to the world around us? That is a very serious and deep question. Why? Simply put, our world is a massive living system utilizing all the living to sustain itself. Living is part of that process, a process of recycling and, ultimately, reclaiming.

So, as the students touched, listened to, spoke about or even breathed in the marvelous experience, they, at the same time, integrated into the very system they visited. They become part of it, leaving behind traces and pieces and taking with them traces and pieces.

The cycle

These traces and pieces are at the heart of the U.N. report — some good, some fair, some marginal and some potentially challenging. Student leftovers in the pasture were not as obvious as the leftovers from the center's cattle last summer. The pasture had numerous "cow pies," or, simply put, last year's dried-up cow manure.

Again, the world gives a little and takes a little. The cows took a little and left a little. It's the cycle.

The students noticeably avoided the cow pies. But, with a little encouragement to kick the cow pies, the students were quick to notice the multitude of life cycling under and within the cow pies. The bugs, for lack of the longer scientific

term, were plentiful, even enough to add to their collection vials to take home. Again, the world gives a little and takes a little.

The students also took a little and left a little. It's a cycle.

This cycle is not going away. So I am puzzled by articles that state the obvious: We all take a little and give a little.

The fears

Further puzzling, for those diligently struggling to provide for themselves and others, are these nagging thoughts that generate a perceived fear inherent with the production of food. Will this grow to the extent that we can become fearful of ourselves and our efforts, abandoning centuries of food production processes?

Are we giving way to enjoined fears and forgetting the world gives a little but also takes a little? Yes, we always will have issues and challenges, and those who only want to receive and not to give will struggle. When the world takes, we all may struggle.

What do the big words, the diseases and associated pictures, the doomsday foretelling really offer? Should we run from our food? And if so, where do we go? The animal, bird and plant processes are the cycles within the world. The processes work, and we continue to discover and understand the infinite details of the processes.

But that understanding may bring a thought that we should control these infinite parts in an effort to ultimately find peace for humankind. But the world gives a little and takes a little. Every day a piece is in play. And so, perhaps, the students should pick up those cow pies.

Our grandfathers and grandmothers survived by picking

up cow pies off the prairie and storing them for later use as fuel in the old days or they can simply be used for a throwing contest today. Shame on me; I did not have the students pick up the cow pies. The concept of the students picking up cow pies was not on the agenda nor was explaining to a concerned parent why his or her children had been encouraged to play in cow dung.

The understanding

Life and death are a compilation of all that is around us, and we give a little and take a little. Every day we should appreciate all, including the tremendous life in a cow pie. So instead of gathering our fears and eradicating the source of the marvelous cow pie, we should understand the world gives a little and takes a little.

All living things integrate into this world, and as we learn, we always must ask if we are seeking understanding or control. We hope we answer "understanding," an understanding that will lessen our fear, not create fear.

As humans, we are special. We, too, need to realize our time here is short. For tomorrow, for our future, I hope future generations can walk through that pasture, kick some cow pies and go home and eat a well-balanced meal, including beef.

But for now, perhaps it is enough to ask that we all work harder at understanding the world in its entirety and ponder the relationships of the many pieces we know and seek those we do not. Our children should not fear the food they eat or the land it comes from. Rather, they should welcome an expression of thanksgiving, an appreciation of nurturing that translates into caring for all. **HW**