

Hemp, Farmers, and Regulation



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"Finding the Challenges" is an original bi-weekly column appearing every other Wednesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Verbal Vol. Verbal is a software engineer, college professor, corporate information officer, life long student, farmer, libertarian, literarian, student of computer science and self-ordering phenomena. Archived columns can be found [here](#). FTC-only RSS feed available [here](#).

This week, I'll be writing about various ideas on hemp movements and initiatives around the country. That gets me into the US farm subsidy problem, and the rent-seeking of Big Farmer. Then I think I'll finish with the idea of rent-seeking and regulation in general.

But I must warn you, you will not get any great factual arrows for your quiver on these contentious topics. I am not an expert in any of these areas, but I have stayed in a number of very smart motels in my time. What you will get instead are my best guesses about how we are hoodwinked by the expertocracy.

The POTUS intimated to us recently that we are uninformed about PRISM and the other alphabet soups in which we are being drowned. It occurred to me at that time that this is the same scam we get whenever we are getting the S.H.A.F.T. (Spinners Higher Authority For Tergiversation). The perfect dodge; they'll let us know when we are informed enough to ask questions. But I'll ask one anyway; when were we informed enough to elect these buzzards?

Hemp

Some time ago, I joined the Facebook page for the Kentucky Hemp Initiative. Unfortunately, it has not been tremendously informative and has not shown much initiative. Last week, however, in a fit of love for my fellow man, I posted a link there to my last column – the one about the Constitution. I accompanied the link with the rhetorical question, "How can we live in a world where one cannot grow a crop on one's own land?" You cannot read the thread, and a related thread because the powers that be on that group's page have removed them, even though many group members had marked them as "Liked." I had thought it may have some value for folks looking for freedom of a useful and harmless plant.

To my great surprise, I was brought up short by a woman who had run for Lieutenant Governor on a pro-legalization-of-marijuana ticket. She gave me a line of statist palaver that would have shamed Richard Nixon – something to the effect of “if we could all do whatever we want, then some of us would be growing poppies!” News flash, some of us are growing poppies, such as, it is rumored, the CIA in Afghanistan. Then she gave me a research assignment with the mysterious admonition that if I didn’t understand why Monsanto and the potato demanded that we regulate crops, then I needed to do research and then get back to her. I’m having trouble giving you a blow-by-blow account, since both threads I started have been eliminated from The Kentucky Hemp Initiative Facebook page. I truly love it when statisticians cite a failure of regulation as proof, in their minds, of the need for regulation. (I suppose by that logic that we have air traffic controllers because of the Hindenburg.)

Even if Kentucky lifts the embargo on hemp cropping, we would still need to seek a permit from the federal DEA. What! Hemp is not a drug. In fact, hemp is not even a noxious weed – a term used in the caption of statutes prohibiting deliberate transportation of invasive plants or seeds, in which the statisticians hid their original embargoes of cannabis.

When I asked what was the purpose of regulating hemp, I was unresponsively misinformed that agriculture had always been regulated. Not true, and neither here nor there.

Next, I quoted Bastiat,

If the natural tendencies of mankind are so bad that it is not safe to permit people to be free, how is it that the tendencies of these organizers are always good? Do not the legislators and their appointed agents also belong to the human race? Or do they believe that they themselves are made of a finer clay than the rest of mankind?

The response was a weak attempt to impeach Bastiat – he is not a modern observer. He doesn’t understand the complexities of the modern world. He was not informed.

Now, we really know what the purposes of regulation are in this case – taxation and opening of loopholes for the conduct of graft and corruption. There does not need to be one inch of red tape here, but we will have miles of it.

I suspect one more item on the hidden agenda – police drones and helicopters will not be able to distinguish hemp plants from marijuana plants. For those few among us who value privacy, we may live to regret that problem.

By the way, I have now joined a Facebook group called The Real Kentucky Hemp Initiative. If they turn out to be made of sterner stuff, I will happily report it to you.

I have never grown hemp, not in the past, and not now. Not because it may be illegal, but just that is the way my life has unfolded. I may never grow it; it is far more likely that I would grow lavender or mushrooms or tilapia. But whether or not I do will not be because it suits the procedural preferences of the state, its enforcers, its exploiters, or its politicians. It is my studied opinion that the cropping of hemp should not figure in laws, period, at the State or Federal level.

Federal Farm Programs

It should be enough for me to say that the Federal government first got its clutches on the lives of the American farmer under the auspices of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. But I am sure that even larger forces are at play. Every dominant world power in history has had its boot on the throats of its people, if for no other reason than to control what they ate. Everything is about food. It is so natural that the warlords would have their fingers in those pies. The next item down the list would be intoxicants – fermented food. After that comes narcotic substances. The state has one sure way to control every man, woman, and child; dictate every substance that goes into every body.

You may think that the number one excuse for government is “roads!” or maybe “war!”, but both of those are in service to what we will put into our bodies. Who will tell us what is safe to eat and what drugs are prudent? Who will take the risks out of farming and delivering food? If your answer is “the government,” then I will ask you to consider the wisdom of relying on the entity to which you pay tribute to give you full value in return. The government has no mind, but even if it did where would you think your benefit and welfare stood in that mind?

Farming is an inherently risky business, subject of course to the variances of nature. Early farmers in America were never more than one bad crop year from losing it all. The pressure was crushing – why do you think the men were ready to run off to war at the clang of a sword? – could it have been to escape the tedium and extremely hard labor of clearing and tilling land of questionable fertility? Were they trading the high risk, low return calculus of the homestead for the much higher risk, but promise of fame and fortune waved before them by the war lords?

The scheme has always been to sustain the ruling class at the expense of the plowman. In Ireland, the people were ravaged by famine while the fancy foodstuffs were exported by the British masters. In plantations all over the world, the natives died while the Europeans loaded their ships for the aristocrats back home. In the USSR, the favored Muscovite party members ate while peasants died of starvation or died in the gulag for not meeting quota.

In fact, planned starvation was the most effective tool of Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, and the hereditary idiots of North Korea. It is hard to think about what else you may be missing when you are starving to death.

The late Sam Kinison used to advise the starving throngs in the Horn of Africa to “get a U-Haul! Get outta there! It’s sand! It has never grown anything, and it never will!” Once I thought Reverend Sam was being crass, thirty years ago, but leaving the Horn of Africa would have served those people far better than anything else that has happened to them in the three decades since.

There is no natural law that says the problems of sustenance must be resolved by a king, ruler, warlord, aristocrat, or government functionary.

There has never been a better example of the heroic individual than the American farmer in the first 175 years of the country, but the interventionists in Washington took advantage of the perfect storm of the Depression, the Dust Bowl, the 1000-year War of Europe, the aftermath of colonialism, and the mechanization of killing, to wrest control away from those heroic individuals.

In our country, the state has as ironclad a hammerlock on our subsistence as any warlord ever had on any people. If voluntarism is not about what you eat, how you clothe yourself, how you shelter your family, how you seek a locale that can support your family, and how you heal, then what could be the constructive purpose of voluntarism?

When the state has quashed the last family farm by manipulating every activity toward the self-interest of industrial farming, by turning the risk of individual farming against the individual, when the state controls every channel of sustenance into the overcrowded, bankrupt cities, we will be wards of the state, like the urban dweller in Moscow and the tenant farmer of Ireland. The social engineers talk of how we will be fed, how the weather will be controlled, how the floods will be stemmed, how we will be housed day and night, how we may or may not move about in our own native land. We must go back to the individual, not asking that someone feed us, but declaring our own individuality and responsibility for our own welfare. Nature intends that we provide for ourselves by agreement, transaction, negotiation, location, and action. The fake choice to solve that problem through a king or warlord has always failed.

The state now functions on wealth extracted from producers. It converts that wealth to power and, in turn, extracts wealth from the wealthy who purchase shares of that power as their self-interests suit them. Using the powers of the state to gain excess wealth, unearned wealth, is called rent-seeking. The Glossary of Economic Research defines rent-seeking as, “a search for extraordinary profits, beyond the normal returns to investment. It often implies putting someone else at a disadvantage.” In this column I define rent-seeking

more specifically as the borrowing of government's monopoly on coercion and violence to gain a profit that would not normally be available in an open market.

Rent-Seeking and Regulation

Rent-seeking is a logical outcome of regulation, so much so that it cannot possibly be described as an unforeseen consequence. This relationship may have been unforeseen at some point in the misty past.

I have a rubric that I apply to things that government does to emphasize through irony how badly government does it and how the original problem still remains, perhaps in a more virulent form:

*We wanted to live in a world without A, so we asked government to stop A; now we still have A (and perhaps bad side effects B, C, ...)
AND government.*

If you don't know the history of Hawai'i, and how it became American territory, read, enjoy (hint: look for rent-seeking). One of the bad side effects of the Americanization of Hawai'i was that the sugar planters (overwhelmingly American interlopers) introduced mongooses to control the rat population. But in present day Hawai'i, the mongooses are out of control, killing turtles, birds, domestic dogs and cats. The mongoose population grows, all competing species diminish, except the rats. A further irony is that the sugar industry is also defunct in Hawai'i. This is a metaphor for the introduction of regulatory schemes in the form of government.

Let's try out the rubric: We wanted to live in a world without violence, so we asked government to stop violence; now we still have violence (and gun control, and the highest imprisonment rate on the planet, and law enforcement answerable to no one, and ...) AND government – out of control.

I told you I was no expert. That is because expertise is a myth – we all proceed by trial and error. But I am sort of a jakeleg expert on one type of regulation, as I worked in the insurance industry for 32 years. That industry is purportedly regulated. So perhaps you will give me some credibility when I say that regulation is not about anyone's protection, it is rather about tax collection. It is about regulatory capture. Regulatory capture is where the regulated industry controls the regulating agency – it always happens. It is about wealth redistribution.

Here's how the capture works. The industry itself begs for regulation, to squeeze out the little competitors. Then the industry, chafing under the regulation they sought, seeks to

offset the irritation by rent-seeking (in fact, the original drive for regulation is a form of rent-seeking), the rent-seeking requires the payment of taxes and the cession of egotistical power to the regulator (very seldom real power as far as the industry is concerned). The industry becomes addicted to the shelter of regulation, the government becomes addicted to the treasure of regulation as well as the busywork, and the consumer becomes addicted to the illusion of security and a kind of mythical vengeance they believe they are having done to the nasty big business.

What is wrong with influencing the practices of others toward you through agreeing on the basis for your interaction directly? If you only do business with those who will voluntarily treat you as you would voluntarily treat them, wouldn't that be regulation enough? Why wouldn't you just quit doing business with a rapacious firm? Do you really hope that government will make them into a pleasant firm? Why would you do business with the untrustworthy? Do you think that the government stands between you and the unreliable, really?

Sure, one may argue that there are some pitiable individuals who may be taken unfair advantage of by sharp operators, but if government and regulation were a remedy to such, they should have been long extinct by now. P. T. Barnum once may have said that a sucker is born every minute, but I say two suckers for government are born every half-minute.

I cannot say it any better than this, as written by my Facebook friend, Frank Bacon:

We are not the Government. Government is a small subset of people. Representative democracy is designed to foster the illusion of participation, while constantly allowing a small number of people to contradict the will of the rest of the people. On a local level there may be some influence that an individual can have, maybe a bit in small States that have referendums, but at the Federal level we have no control. None.

Another friend once said something like, you can't play ball with those guys, they will stick the bat where the sun doesn't shine. You cannot "legalize" hemp without creating whole new echelons of government. That doesn't even replace old echelons, which just step back and expand. Let your mind roam over the possibilities for new farm programs, new regulations, new law enforcement duties, new regulations, new rent-seeking, new regulations, new confiscations of private property, new regulations, new surveillance, new regulations, new transgressions on the Fourth Amendment, new regulations.

We cannot have what we need but through voluntaryism. Try this rubric: we wanted a world of voluntaryism (A), so we each did what we each could to make it so (A).

Very well, two weeks from now, if the creek doesn't rise and the NSA doesn't sniff out old Verbal Vol, I will extend these ideas. I will talk about a particular tragedy of the miscalculations in regulation, control, and law enforcement. I will return to the witches brew scene from MacBeth that is being re-enacted in the smoke-filled rooms of Kentucky over the continued bondage of a plant. And I will celebrate *music*, that great collective activity that is the very essence of individualism, freedom, creativity, and voluntaryism.