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We are victims of ethanol's unintended consequences

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The Willow Brook Foods bad-news headline would have been more accurate if it announced, "Lost to Ethanol, 780 Local Jobs."

Almost lost in the announcement of job losses at Willow Brook Foods on March 30, was the phrase, "...rising feed costs have posed significant challenges in many sectors..." The article lamented, and rightly so, the loss of jobs and the plight of workers while explaining the difficulties with old equipment and other problems, as marketplace movers and shakers trim fat -- no pun intended -- and utilize resources to the max.

However, the real but unmentioned culprit; the government-spawned, elephant-in-the-room, problem of great pith is the one caused by the evolving ethanol debacle, as government again painfully demonstrates its failure to adequately consider consequences.

Steven M. Gillon, in his book "That's Not What We Meant To Do," reviewed government programs that were created to help -- but caused more problems than they resolved. The Community Mental Health Act of 1963 intended to revolutionize the treatment of the mentally ill and replace large, expensive and ineffective state hospital programs, but resulted in a deinstitutionalization catastrophe that continues to reverberate through that population. Promised community services with adequate care provision capacities and capabilities never materialized.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan kept on his desk the pen used by President Kennedy to sign The Community Mental Health Act into law. Moynihan said that he kept the pen, "...as a reminder of good intentions. I look at it on occasion and wonder what ever became of our capacity to govern ourselves."

Unintended consequences? The Immigration Act of 1965 was touted as "...closing off the possibility of a very substantial increase in future immigration from the one area on which there previously had been no numerical restrictions" and "foreclosed any long-term upward trend in the numbers of immigrants." Guess what. After passage of The Immigration Act the number of new immigrants immediately began to climb far above the projected additional 5,000 a year. From an average of 270,000 a year, the average moved quickly to 400,000.

Gillon notes, "In the 1980's, immigration, still theoretically limited to 270,000 a year averaged more than 700,000. During that decade the nation absorbed 8.9 million legal immigrants and at least 2 million illegal ones. The number are projected to continue to grow and in 2050 there will be 387 million people, 124 million more than in 1997, with immigration accounting for two-thirds of the increase." Unintended consequences.

An addendum to Gillon's book would note that we are beginning to experience the results of our government's great ethanol debacle. The heavily subsidized ethanol program, intended to reduce dependence on foreign oil and produce clean energy, is having the unintended consequence of decreasing available foodstuffs.

You don't have to be a market analyst to understand the obvious. Move a commodity, corn, from its decades-long purpose -- to provide feed for livestock, as well as human consumption as meal and corn syrup -- and there will be a backlash. The repercussions are already being felt. Ask the Willow Brook employees. Ask the average grocery shopper. Ask the farmer or rancher who buys feed for livestock or poultry.

Willow Brook Foods is neither an anomaly nor an isolated incident. Linda Chavez, nationally syndicated columnist and a member of the board of directors of Pilgrim's Pride -- which is a bigger chicken producer than Tyson Foods -- stated that Pilgrim's Pride has shut down one plant and closed

six distribution centers. Due to the cost of foreign oil? No. Due to losses that are a direct result of soaring feed costs as corn cruelly converts to fuel.

Chavez also reports that the aggregate price of wheat, corn, soy oil and soy meal in the U.S. will be \$61.7 billion higher this crop year over the last. Diverting and converting corn to ethanol is directly responsible for driving up food costs. These are just the beginnings of unintended consequences. Others will surface as the world's bread basket empties her silos in a futile attempt to fill her gas tanks.

Is anyone in Washington listening? Or, are they too busy solving the housing mortgage crisis?
