

# Living a Lifetime of Climate Change

*A lifelong agriculturalist takes on global warming.*

*By Dana H. Saylor Sr.*

**U**ntil I discovered my own truths, I held those of others. This realization dawned on me about 20 years ago when “global warming” began morphing into “climate change.” After retiring, I started studying this phenomenon more. Of the approximately 20 disciplines relevant to understanding this extremely complex subject, I began by focusing on history—mine and others. “We live life forward but understand it backwards” is an adage that has always intrigued me. As an agriculturalist I am, along with everyone who has ever been involved in this industry, acutely aware of the vagaries of the weather and climate and the challenges of coping with the consequences.

My experiences in life began in Goldthwaite, a small central Texas town where I was born. I arrived in the mid-1930s during the Dust Bowl, one of the warmest decades in American history when CO<sub>2</sub> was extremely low. It was a time when wood heated our homes and cooked our food. Air conditioning was unheard of. Few in the rural areas had indoor plumbing. In the heat of the day we stayed as close as possible to shade and drank a lot of water. At night we slept in a screened-in area to keep out the mosquitoes and let in any possible breeze. We got up when the roosters crowed and did our chores before the heat of the day. Most of our drinking water came from wells, some equipped with hand pumps or windmills. At times, it was judiciously shared with plants and animals.

Weather forecasts, more so the climate, were sketchy at best. Many of the elders seemed to have a sixth sense. When the skies darkened and the wind began to pick up, they were out in force alerting family and neighbors. A storm cellar was usually nearby and when there were signs of a bad storm brewing

we were rushed into it. No youngster will ever forget those times, often in the middle of the night, being hurried into these underground shelters wearing pajamas and wrapped in a blanket. Candles and coal-oil lamps were relied on to light this cramped space. As the storm increased the hailstones also increased, pounding the tin-clad door above, amplifying the sounds of the raging storm, increasing our fears. As we huddled together, we redoubled our prayers. By daybreak the storm had usually abated and we returned home tired but thankfully unharmed.

In many respects the extreme weather

nate. At least we didn’t have to contend with the perpetual dust storms that lasted days and weeks on end. It took many years for the denuded vegetation and eroded soil to recover. John Steinbeck’s novel, “The Grapes of Wrath,” captured only a glimpse of the devastation wrought on many lives during that dreadful period. Over two million people were uprooted and forced to leave, with the majority going West.

By the time I was in high school in the early ’50s, we had leased some grassland and accumulated a good-sized herd of beef and dairy cows. We were beginning to get our

heads above water when the drought hit. Some of the older folks thought it was worse than in the 1930s. It became so bad that to maintain our herd we had to purchase most of their feed. Eventually it became unsustainable and we had to sell all but a few of the better animals. Elmer Kelton, a renowned western writer and friend, recorded this period in a highly acclaimed book, “The Time it Never Rained.”

Around the turn of the last century, almost everyone had some means of self-sufficiency. My family,

as many others, produced much of their food. We had a small plot of land just outside the city limits. Looking back, I am amazed at the number and variety of plants and animals that we nurtured and that nurtured us. I don’t ever recall being hungry, even in bad years. When there was food to spare we shared with others and they with us.

Fear and desperation drove people to do some unreasonable things during those dreadful times. For example, fear of lightning made many install lightning rods on their houses and barns. Selling lightning rods was a

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events then were as bad, if not worse, than in recent times. There were years when rainfall was less than half the normal amount. When it did rain, there was severe flooding. Hurricanes were prevalent. The deadliest in American history destroyed Galveston, Texas, in 1900 when 8,000 to 12,000 lives were lost, more than in the next three combined. Tornadoes were a constant threat and wildfires were so widespread they were seldom mentioned in the news unless they were large or local.

Compared to those living in the Texas Panhandle and western plains, we were fortu-

thriving and profitable enterprise for a while for opportunists. During the extremely dry period of the '50s, cloud seeding was touted as a way to make it rain. For a while it was a money-making business for those promising rain to those desperately praying for it. It is fair to say that the cost of these fear-driven expedencies far exceeded any benefits.

Fast-forward 85 years and the situation is much different today. Few people have experienced a storm cellar or an outhouse. Wood-burning cookstoves might as well be from the Stone Age. Electricity and piped-in water exist in almost every home. Food is plentiful and few worry about producing it. America's agricultural industry is the most advanced and efficient in the world. In the 1930s, approximately 60 percent of the population was involved in food production; today it's less than three percent. This incredible growth in productivity and prosperity would not have been possible had it not been for the abundance of fossil fuels.

My struggle to understand the present "climate change, aka global warming" is not with the scientific facts but with how they are being interpreted and exploited by self-serving entities. If we are to believe that increasing CO<sub>2</sub> dials up the temperature, we must also believe that dialing it down will reduce it. If so, how low does it have to become before it is too cold? The devastation from extreme cold periods is more catastrophic than extreme warm periods for plants, animals and humans.

As late as the 1970s, scientists were telling us that we were headed into an ice age and that the world was running out of oil. Could it be possible that some of these same scientists are still around helping politicians convince us that we should stop using fossil fuels? One doesn't have to look far to discover the many government boondoggles based on false assumptions. These costly revelations may help explain why the voices of many scientists, economists and concerned Americans are being ignored and drowned out today.

Logic, common sense and experience tell me we should be doubtful and extremely skeptical when we are being told that carbon dioxide is a pollutant, if without it there would be no life on earth. The public at large is not being made aware of the evidence that the planet is actually greening, primarily due to more available CO<sub>2</sub>. We are told that "the science is settled" based on correlation, consensus and computer models. Yet many of the things that we have been told about climate change are proven to be false. None of the forecasted climate disasters have occurred as predicted.

Celebrities, politicians and children have become the faces and voices of the "alarmist" movement. Scare tactics and fear-mongering are predominant in the alarmist rhetoric. The issue is now so "politicized" that it is no longer a scientific issue. We are expected to believe that eliminating CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (already less than 0.05 percent of the atmosphere) will significantly override the many other naturally interacting dynamic climatic forces.

American determination and ingenuity have never failed us! Advancements in discovery, recovery, processing and delivery of oil and gas will provide the most versatile, dependable and least costly energy source until more cost-effective and reliable alternatives are available. Many believe that some type of nuclear energy is the most logical solution for the future, but until then and before we buy into another pie-in-the-sky scheme to alter the climate with no assurance it will make it better, we should be asking "Who will benefit the most?" If history is any indication, it is highly unlikely it will be the ones paying for it, nor will it be the over 6.5 billion most economically depressed people in the world. There is no empirical evidence, proof or guarantee that stopping CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will solve anything. In fact, it's apt to make things worse.

After reading the recent U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change climate assessment and its solution to a problem it is perpetuating, I am tempted to trust my gut and buy lightning rods.

I have lived in large cities much of my life but at heart I am still a small-town country boy deeply rooted in agriculture. I strongly believe that human well-being and flourishing are dependent on an economical and reliable food and fuel supply and essential for world peace and prosperity. This is unlikely to happen if there is not an abundant, dependable and low-cost energy source for all. ■



*Dana H. Saylor Sr. is retired and resides in St. Louis, Mo. He and his wife, Giuliana, have six children, one deceased, 15 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren. He has worked for and consulted with major agricultural companies and*

*organizations in the United States and abroad. He has two science degrees. In recent years he has focused on studying climate science and its implications for agriculture and human wellbeing.*