

# Youths' future prospects depend on dental health

BY TANYA DORF BRUNNER  
Special to The Kansas City Star



Rarely do we consider the simple act of brushing our teeth as a catalyst for change. However, Kathy Hunt, dental program director for nonprofit Oral Health Kansas, and Terri Broadus, administrator for the Wyandotte County Juvenile Detention Center, have found that educating incarcerated youth about oral health goes beyond mere hygiene —

it's about restoring dignity and nurturing responsibility.

The inspiration for the program Success Begins with a Smile all started with a 16-year-old boy who required extensive restoration of his teeth because of methamphetamine use. Beyond his dental issues lay a narrative of neglect and the devastating consequences of substance use. Among children and adolescents age 10 to 17 in juvenile detention, nearly 48% need dental extractions because of dental disease. Yet, this young man's story doesn't end in tragedy — and it is creating change inside the walls of the detention center.

With expertise from Oral Health Kansas, financial support from the nonprofit CareSource and the commitment of the team at the Wyandotte County Juvenile Detention Center, dental hygienists Kathy Hunt and James Davis led an interactive training session for the young men in the facility. They shared how dietary habits, timing of meals and tooth brushing habits impact dental health, while emphasizing the correlation between poor oral health and its adverse effects on individuals' ability to secure and keep a job. Even the most skeptical teenagers were engaged in activities that created a link between their oral

care and overall health.

Renee Downing, an instructor with the Wyandotte County Juvenile Detention Center, said the students were engaged and enlightened by the interactive presentation. She shared that even weeks after the session, students were still talking about their increased awareness and better oral health habits because of what they learned.

The success of this initiative is evident not only in the young people's immediate enthusiasm but also in the measurable improvement in knowledge and behaviors revealed through tests before and after the workshop. After the ses-

sion, more than 80% of the participants said they believe having healthy teeth is important — a 12% increase from the baseline — and 100% of them said they learned something about oral health through the training.

These sessions signify a commitment to preventive care, with 96% of participants sharing that they intend to make one positive behavior change related to their oral health, and 83% saying they would make two or more positive behavior changes, laying the foundation for long-term well-being.

Chad Moore, president of CareSource Kansas, emphasized the partnership's importance, stating: "We are dedicated to assisting underserved individuals in recognizing the importance of oral health and its impact on overall well-being. We appreciate the opportunity to sup-

port Oral Health Kansas and the Wyandotte County Juvenile Detention Center to provide essential education tailored to the community's needs as they spearhead this important initiative."

This partnership promises not just to improve the health care prospects of the participants from the Wyandotte County Juvenile Detention Center, but to set a benchmark for similar initiatives across juvenile detention facilities nationwide — truly embodying the notion that every significant journey, including those of rehabilitation and hope, can indeed begin with a healthy smile.

*Tanya Dorf Brunner is executive director of Oral Health Kansas, a Topeka-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit devoted to improving oral health in Kansas through advocacy, public awareness and education.*

# Why farmers are standing up against free trade

BY ANTHONY PAHNKE  
Progressive Perspectives

My mom stood next to my grandfather, both of them crying as he emptied the bulk tank and dumped his milk in protest.

It was the 1960s, and dairy farmers in Wisconsin and elsewhere who were members of the National Farmers Organization were destroying their milk to cause shortages in supply chains and improve prices. They were desperate, struggling to make enough to support their families.

Fast-forward about six decades. Since 2023, farmers globally — from France to India — have been going to the streets to demand fair compensation for the food that they sell.

We should support these farmers and encourage lawmakers to pass policies that improve economic returns for food producers. Now, as free trade agreements are questioned more than ever, movements have the chance to push their national governments to make sure farming can pay the bills.

Farmers are protesting because, since the 1990s, groups such as the World Trade Organization have forced them into a global free trade system.

The WTO's Agreement on Agriculture classifies policies according to the degree that they are "market distorting," prompting governments to end initiatives that support incomes and set prices, allowing authorities to provide resources for limited initiatives such as disaster relief.

Moreover, the WTO's 164 member states — led mainly by the United States and European countries — use the institution to open markets globally for economic growth.

Consider the U.S. case against Mexico dealing with high-fructose corn syrup.

In the late 1990s, Mexico claimed that U.S. imports of corn syrup would negatively impact their domestic sugar industry. The Mexican government placed

tariffs on the product, which the U.S. appealed to the WTO. Seeing tariffs as market distorting, the WTO forced Mexico to lift its restrictions. A similar logic has governed the more than 600 other cases that have been brought before the WTO.

But times have changed.

Former President Donald Trump, guided by his America First policy, decided not to appoint new appellate judges to the WTO. Without judges to review cases, the institution became much less active. Trump also made tariffs a tool to support U.S. interests in global trade, which President Joe Biden's administration has continued while also subsidizing certain domestic firms.

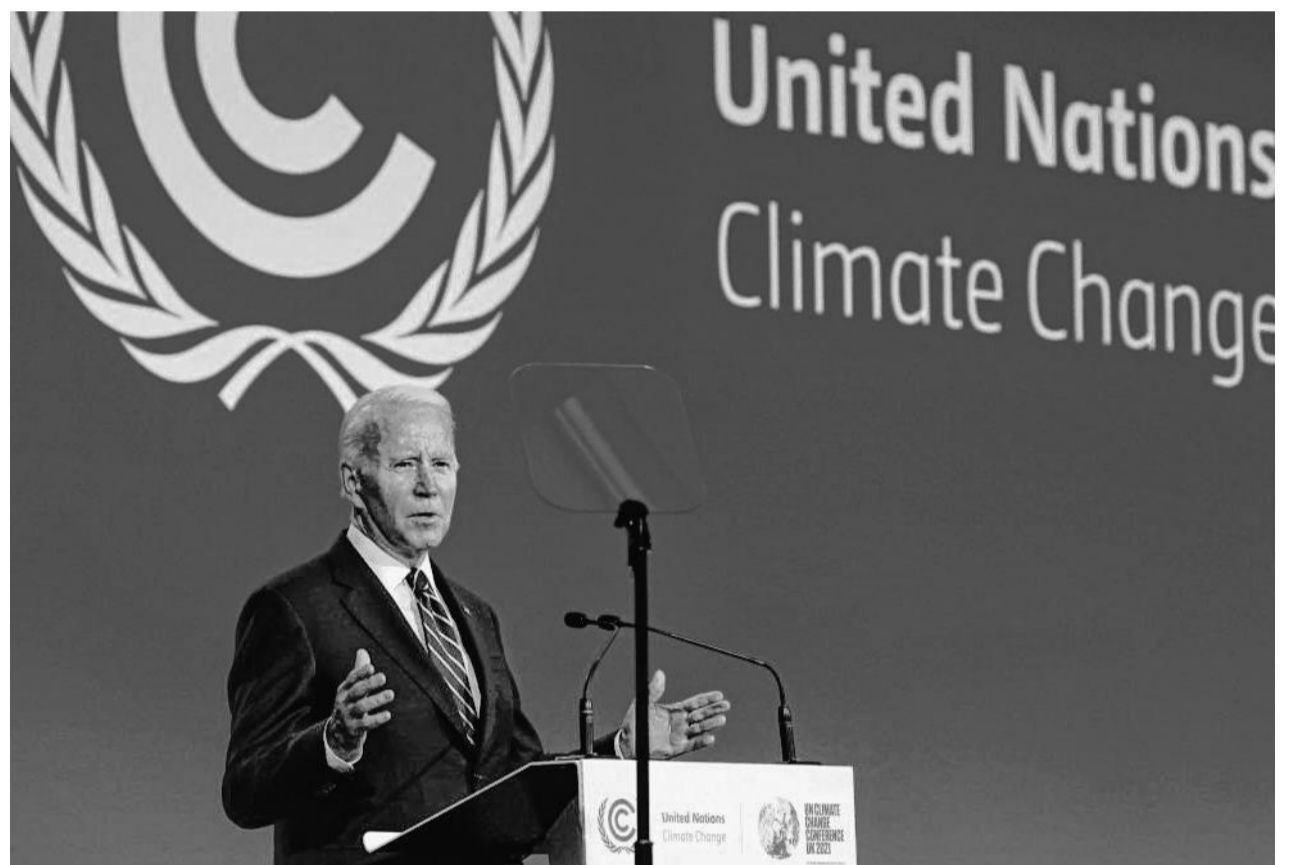
The global pushback on free trade defies ideological divisions of right and left. Farmers understand this, and they are demanding fair compensation both from center-left governments in France and Narendra Modi's right-wing regime in India.

U.S.-based movements are also pushing for economic justice.

Restoring Country of Origin Labeling — which the WTO struck down in 2015 — is being proposed by groups such as the National Family Farm Coalition. Passing this legislation would help producers by making consumers aware of where their food comes from, which would help them support local producers.

Protest means sacrifice, which my family knows well. Farmers around the world are taking time away from their farms to go to the streets and call for decent incomes that would help their families and local economies. Our lawmakers now have the chance to support them, promoting policies that just 10 years ago would not have seen the light of day.

*Anthony Pahnke is the vice president of Family Farm Defenders and an associate professor of international relations at San Francisco State University in San Francisco.*



YVES HERMAN Pool/AFP via Getty Images/TNS, file

President Joe Biden presents his national statement as part of the World Leaders' Summit of the COP26 U.N. Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, Scotland, on Nov. 1, 2021.

# Voters can't tell between the arsonist and the firefighter

BY MARK GONGLOFF  
Bloomberg Opinion

If you were shopping for toaster ovens and your choice was between one that posed a 1% chance of setting your house on fire and a competing one that would not only 100% set your house on fire but proudly guaranteed it right on the box, then you would probably go with the 1% model.

U.S. voters face a similar choice this November when it comes to which presidential candidate will set the climate on fire. But they don't seem to realize how much of a no-brainer that choice truly is.

President Joe Biden may not have a spotless climate record, but he has done much more to ensure a livable environment for future generations than any of his predecessors. Donald Trump, on the other hand, not only has history's worst climate record, but he has announced, loudly and often, that his second term would be far, far worse.

Voters haven't received the message, according to poll after poll. The latest is from CBS News, which found that 49% of Americans have heard little or

nothing about what Biden has done for the climate. More alarmingly, most Americans think neither Biden's second-term policies nor Trump's would make any difference to the climate. That is dangerous nonsense.

The list of what Biden has already done is long and substantial, and it goes beyond the Inflation Reduction Act, easily the biggest climate bill in history. He also passed a bipartisan infrastructure bill and the Chips and Science Act, both with significant investments in the renewable-energy transition. He rejoined the Paris accord to limit long-term warming to 2 degrees Celsius, tightened emissions standards for power plants and cars and limited oil and gas drilling and liquefied natural gas exports. To name just a few things.

Biden has frustrated environmentalists at times with compromises such as approving the Willow drilling project in Alaska and pulling some regulatory punches on emissions and corporate disclosures. But he has done these things mostly in the name of getting reelected.

During his first term, Trump ditched the Paris

accord and loosened regulatory fetters on the fossil-fuel and other polluting industries at the worst possible moment, just as the global concentration of atmospheric carbon was reaching dangerous levels. A Trump restoration would again come at a key point, just when scientists say the window to avoid the worst effects of a chaotic climate is slamming shut.

And Trump's advisers are vowing to wreck progress even more aggressively in a second term. The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 lays out an agenda for Trump II that includes leaving the Paris accord again; undoing Biden's efforts to regulate pollution; repealing the IRA or at least neutralizing it by closing the Energy Department loan office; throwing the entire country open to oil and gas exploration; and dismantling the climate-tracking National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. To name just a few things.

A second Trump term would add 4 billion extra tons of carbon to the atmosphere, according to an analysis by Carbon Brief, a nonprofit advocacy group. That's about two-thirds of

what the U.S. produces in an entire year and matches the combined annual emissions of the European Union and Japan.

Seven out of 10 Biden voters in 2020 said climate was important to their vote, according to a Pew Research Center poll. Nearly a fifth of Biden voters consider it their top priority, according to an Economist/YouGov poll. If he wants these voters back at the polls in November, then Biden must convince them early and often that staying home and giving Trump the White House would make all their worst fears come true.

The trick is that Biden may also need to win swing voters, most of whom don't care as much about the environment and may fear (incorrectly) that there's a trade-off between fighting global warming and growing the economy. That's one reason Biden and his advisers spend so much time trumpeting the jobs the IRA and other climate actions create.

The good news is that the politics of this issue have shifted drastically in recent years. Most Americans now think global warming is real and human-made and support Biden's policies when they hear about them.

But we can't wait for the battleship of public opinion to complete its U-turn. We don't have another four years to waste.