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Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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Inside C2

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U.S. eases border policy from Trump era for unaccompanied migrant children

March 12 (Reuters) - The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden has eased a controversial border policy from the era of former President Donald Trump, which means that unaccompanied migrant children will not be deported from the United States.

"The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) director is terminating with respect to unaccompanied noncitizen children an Order under Title 42 suspending the right to introduce certain persons into the United States", the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said early on Saturday.

"In effect, this means that unaccompanied noncitizen children will not be expelled from the United States under CDC's order."

The Title 42 order was issued by the CDC in March 2020 at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic and allowed U.S. authorities to rapidly expel migrant families caught crossing the U.S.-Mexico border without a chance to seek refuge in the United States.

Since it went into effect, migrants have been turned away more than 1.6 million times under the policy, though some of those encounters were people crossing multiple times.

In a separate 21-page order justifying the decision to end Title 42 for unaccompanied children, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky cited the recent nationwide decrease in COVID-19 cases and increased vaccination rates in the United States and in the countries of migrants who journey to the southern border.

Early in his presidency, Biden exempted unaccompanied children from the expulsion policy, but a federal judge in Texas ruled on March 4 that minors could not be excluded in a case brought by the state of Texas against the administration.

The Texas ruling, which is at odds with another U.S. district court order in 2020 blocking expulsions of unaccompanied children, has put pressure on the administration to consider whether to roll back the order entirely.

Some 13,000 Ukrainians evacuated from cities on Saturday, deputy PM says

March 12 (Reuters) - Around 13,000 people were evacuated from a number of Ukrainian cities on Saturday, said Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk, almost twice the number who managed to get out the previous day.

Vereshchuk said in an online message that no one had managed to leave the besieged city of Mariupol and blamed obstruction by Russian forces. Moscow had earlier accused Ukrainian forces of intentionally trapping people there.

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

LOCAL NEWS

Berkshire rejects shareholder call to replace Warren Buffett as chairman

March 11 (Reuters) - Berkshire Hathaway Inc (BRKa.N) on Friday urged the rejection of four shareholder proposals recommending that it replace Warren Buffett as chairman, report on its plans to handle climate risk and reduce greenhouse gases, and improve diversity.

The company, run by Buffett since 1965, also said the 91-year-old received $373,204 in compensation for 2021, down from $380,328 a year earlier, comprising his usual $100,000 salary plus personal and home security.

Though Buffett's salary is low for a chief executive officer of a major company, his 16.2% Berkshire stake comprises most of his $117.9 billion net worth, which Forbes magazine said makes him the world's fifth-richest person.

Berkshire disclosed Buffett's pay and recommendations on shareholder proposals in its annual proxy filing, ahead of the Omaha, Nebraska-based company's April 30 annual meeting.

It also said Vice Chairmen Greg Abel and Ajit Jain, who respectively oversee Berkshire's non-insurance and insurance operations, were in 2021 each awarded $19 million for a third straight year. Buffett sets their pay.

Berkshire has said Abel would become CEO and Buffett's son Howard Buffett would become non-executive chairman if Warren Buffett could not continue in those roles.

One shareholder proposal, from the National Legal and Policy Center, said those roles are "greatly diminished" because Buffett holds both, weakening governance, and an independent director should become chairman.

According to the filing, Berkshire's directors agree that is a good idea, but only after Buffett is no longer CEO.

In urging rejections of the environmental proposals, Berkshire said many operating units already make disclosures concerning climate risks, and its insurance operations appropriately manage risks from greenhouse gases.

It also said its operating businesses have committed to diversity, equity and inclusion without needing direction from Buffett.

Berkshire Hathaway Chairman Warren Buffett walks through the exhibit hall as shareholders gather to hear from the billionaire investor at Berkshire Hathaway Inc's annual shareholder meeting in Omaha, Nebraska, U.S., May 4, 2019. REUTERS/Scott Morgan

Berkshire's dozens of business units include Geico car insurance, the BNSF railroad, Berkshire Hathaway Energy, Brooks running and See's candies, among others.

Buffett controls 32.1% of Berkshire's voting power. Shareholder proposals he opposes normally fail by big margins.

Berkshire's share price is up 9% this year, while the Standard & Poor's 500 (.SPX) is down 12%.

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Editor's Choice

People attend a protest at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), in Glasgow, REUTERS/Yves Herman

A person demonstrates near the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) venue, in Glasgow, Scotland, Britain November REUTERS/Dylan Martinez

Miranda Lambert performs on stage. REUTERS/Harrison McClary

Chris Stapleton wins Male Vocalist of the Year award. REUTERS/Harrison McClary

Gabby Barrett performs on stage. REUTERS/Harrison McClary

People attend a protest at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), in Glasgow, REUTERS/Yves Herman

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

Coffee, Wine, And Wheat Varieties Are Among The Foods We Could Lose Forever

The Extinction Crisis That No One Is Talking About

Tractors harvest a monoculture of soybeans in Mato Grosso, Brazil. (Getty Images/iStockphoto)

Key Point

Supply chain challenges and inflation spikes in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic have now been joined by growing and documented concerns for the potential extinction of endangered foods and the lack of food choices along with the diversity of foods as well as the nutritional values they represent that are in serious danger of disappearing from the global marketplace. Scientific observers are now saying it is time to act and make efforts to bring diversity back into the food system while being motivated by the health of society.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Your morning coffee is in a perilous state. There are just two species of coffee plants on which the entire multibillion-dollar industry is based: One of them is considered poor-tasting, and the other, which you're likely familiar with, is threatened by climate change and a deadly fungal disease.

Thankfully, there's another kind of coffee out there, known as stenophylla. It has a higher heat tolerance, greater resistance to certain fungal pathogens, and it tastes great. There's just one problem: It's incredibly rare, and until recently, scientists believed it was extinct.

Stenophylla is just one of dozens of important foods that are threatened with extinction, according to Dan Saladino, a BBC journalist and author of the new book, "Eating to Extinction: The World's Rarest Foods and Why We Need to Save Them." While grocery stores may seem as abundant as ever, Saladino argues that the diversity of food is actually in decline. Of the hundreds of thousands of wheat varieties that farmers once cultivated, for example, only a handful are now farmed on a large scale, he told Vox.

As we grow and harvest fewer varieties of plants and animals, the foods you can buy in the grocery store may become less nutritious and flavorful, and — as the current state of coffee demonstrates — the global food system could become less resilient. That's why it's so crucial to lift up communities that are protecting foods from disappearing, Saladino told Vox in an interview about his new book.

The important conversation that followers was held between author Dan Saladino and Vox.com interviewer Benji Jones and pinpoints the food diversity challenges that face us all.

Grocery stores may be stocked, but the variety of food is in decline

Benji Jones

You write that a lot of foods, such as varieties of coffee and wheat, are going extinct. Yet when I walk into the grocery store it seems like there's more variety than ever.

Dan Saladino

Whether it's cotton candy grapes or certain varieties of avocado, there's a degree of uniformity. And while you'll see this abundance — consider bread, and the wheat it's made of — it's extremely narrow in terms of its genetics.

In this amazing place in the Arctic called Svalbard, there's a seed vault buried deep under the ice, down a tunnel, in which there are more than 200,000 different unique samples of wheat. That's the kind of diversity that's hidden from us. A farmer today in the UK might get a recommended list of wheat varieties to grow — dictated largely by the food industry and millers and bakers — of fewer than 10 kinds.

You can take all of the world's staple crops, including maize [also known as corn] and rice, and you'll see the same thing. In seed banks around the world, there are tens to hundreds of thousands of varieties, yet in the food system that we experience, it's an extremely small number.

Benji Jones

Why should the average grocery shopper care about losing these rare varieties of food?

Dan Saladino

Endangered foods give us options in a future with many challenges — feeding a growing population, reducing emissions, and finding fresh water, for example.

Take a type of maize tucked away in a mountain village in southern Mexico, very close to where maize was first domesticated thousands of years ago. Botanists arrived in the late 1970s and saw this 16-foot-tall stock of maize. It shouldn't have been growing there because the soil was so poor.

Not only was it so tall, but it also has these aerial roots that were dripping with mucus, like something out of a science fiction film. Just three years ago, a scientist figured out that the mucus is an interplay between sugars and microbes that's actually feeding the plant from the air. That hadn't been seen before in cereal crops.

A type of maize that grows in the Sierra Mixe region of Oaxaca, Mexico. It has aerial roots coated in mucus that help the plant pull nutrients out of the air. (Photo/Allen Van Deynze et. al./PLOS Biology)

Why should we care? If we understand how this plant works, could we potentially use it to reduce our use of fertilizer globally? We know there is a way in which some plants are feeding themselves. We need to give thanks to the Indigenous people who have looked after this maize for centuries, if not thousands of years.

Benji Jones

A wider variety of crops also makes our food system more resilient to threats like disease and climate change, right?

Dan Saladino

That's another really important lesson. I traveled to eastern Turkey to get as close as I could to the Fertile Crescent, where wheat was first domesticated. I found farmers who had saved a type of emmer wheat that had been growing for 8,000 to 9,000 years. It's been growing in high altitudes where it's damp.

If you put a modern wheat variety in that environment, fungal diseases would ruin the crop. And so what they have in Turkey is a precious genetic resource that has forms of resistance, such as to fungal pathogens.

A field of kavilca, or emmer, wheat. (Dan Saladino)

You can also find those principles of disease resilience among ancient varieties of rice and maize — really, in all of the crops. Over thousands of years, our ancestors created these adaptations through farming under different conditions.

What we've done since is create these incredibly high-performance plants that need specific conditions to grow, and a lot of inputs, like fertilizer. Each wheat or maize plant is almost a clone, whereas in traditional farming, there's a huge amount of genetic diversity in the field. If you get a bad summer or too much or too little rain, some of those traditional varieties are still going to bear grains because there is diversity within the crops.

You can breed out bitterness, but you might lose deliciousness

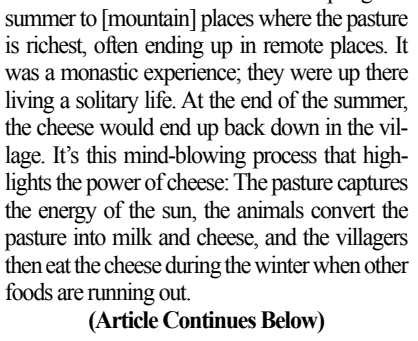
Benji Jones

Is there a flavor extinction happening as well?

Dan Saladino

Absolutely. I tell the story of a type of wild citrus from northern India called memang narang. It has a cultural, culinary, and medicinal function, but the striking thing is how bitter these fruits are. The people who live here place huge value on bitterness, a flavor that's disappearing from most of our palates. Fruit breeders, over centuries, have been ingenious at giving us something that we love: sweetness. They have bred out the bitterness.

When you realize that the bitter taste comes from compounds that help plants protect themselves from pests, then you understand why it might be beneficial to retain that flavor. We've taken the beneficial bitter compounds out, and we've cloaked plants in pesticides and other chemicals to protect them.



A type of rare coffee, Coffea stenophylla. (Getty Images)

Another example comes from coffee. We live in a world where we can enjoy a lot of different types of arabica coffee. There's robusta as well. But these are just two of more than a hundred different types of coffee around the world.

Historically, there were cultures in parts of Africa that had more distinctive types of coffee, including one called stenophylla that was prized in parts of East Africa up until the 1960s, when it pretty much went extinct because farming systems changed. It has greater disease resistance than arabica. And arabica is under pressure now because of climate change — it's an extremely delicate plant. Stenophylla offers the benefit of disease resistance, and it's an amazing-tasting coffee.

Coffee as we know it is in danger. Can we breed a better cup?

Benji Jones

Another example that helps explain the decline of flavor comes from a region of France, home to the Salers cow. It really shows the connection between biodiversity and flavor, right?

Dan Saladino

"Salers" is a place, a breed of cow, and a cheese. Farmers would take their cattle in the spring and summer to [mountain] places where the pasture is richest, often ending up in remote places. It was a monastic experience; they were up there living a solitary life. At the end of the summer, the cheese would end up back down in the village. It's this mind-blowing process that highlights the power of cheese: The pasture captures the energy of the sun, the animals convert the pasture into milk and cheese, and the villagers then eat the cheese during the winter when other foods are running out.

(Article Continues Below)

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

COMMUNITY

(Article Continues From Above)

Coffee, Wine, And Wheat Varieties Are Among The Foods We Could Lose Forever

The Extinction Crisis That No One Is Talking About

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Dan Saladino

The remarkable thing is that the pasture is so rich in microbes that these farmers don't even need a starter culture to coagulate the milk and turn it into cheese. As soon as the milk hits these wooden barrels, it's inoculated with microbes. For a modern health inspector, it would be a nightmare to watch.

We've been talking about the endangered genetics of crops and endangered tastes. Here, we're talking about endangered microbes that are not only missing from the cheese making process, but also from our gut microbiomes.

A breed of cattle called Salers in the Cantal region of France. (Photo/Andia/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

Benji Jones

You also explain that when these cows have access to a wide diversity of plants in the pasture, their milk and cheese end up tasting richer. That's because different grasses have different types of defense chemicals called terpenes, which can translate to flavor in the milk.

Dan Saladino

Terpenes can be found in milk from rich pastures, but not in cheese made from cattle that have been fed on grains. We're only beginning to understand the connections between biodiversity and our food and our health and our flavors.

Benji Jones

You traveled the world sampling all of these foods with unique flavors. What were some that stood out?

Dan Saladino

Skerpikjøt is this food from the Faroe Islands. There's not enough sunlight or firewood there to produce salt to preserve food. People instead built these huts that have gaps that allow the sea air in. They raise sheep and hang the meat in these huts, which gets bathed by the salty air and slowly fermented and preserved. It doesn't look like food. It's covered in mold. It needs to be washed. It's almost as if this sheep meat is gently rotting away in these huts, but actually, the conditions are exactly right so it doesn't rot or become too funky. It becomes this wonderful preserved meat.

Benji Jones

You also have an incredible chapter about a type of wine in the country Georgia, which you explain is where some of the world's first — or the first — winemakers were practicing their craft.

Dan Saladino

Georgia is the most likely country in which grapes were domesticated and the first winemakers were practicing their craft. They have a technology that predates the barrel by thousands of years — the qvevri. These are terracotta vessels that you bury underground with whole branches of grapes with skin and pips [seeds] inside. Many people think France and Italy and Spain and California are great wine-producing regions. Here is a place where the relationship with wine just goes up another level. There is a reverence and spiritual dimension to wine drinking.

A workshop where Georgian qvevris are being made. (Photo/Dan Saladino)

Our relationship with food mirrors our relationship with nature

Benji Jones

In your book, you talk about how losing certain foods isn't just about losing resilience, flavor, and culture, but also about our changing relationship with nature. You explain that some groups, like the Hadza people of Tanzania, are deeply connected to their environment through food — and by losing certain foods, we may be losing these connections.

Dan Saladino

The Hadza story brilliantly sums that up. I followed some of these hunter-gatherers out within a landscape of baobab trees. In those trees, some of which are a thousand years old, you can find bees' nests and one of the greatest prizes the Hadza can find: honey. It's an extremely important food — and their favorite food — but it's hard for them to find the hives high up in the trees.

The Hadza whistle, and after a period of time, if they're lucky, a very humble-looking bird will fly down. The bird will start a "conversation" with the hunter-gatherers and lead them to a tree with honey. The bird knows where the honey is, whereas the hunter-gatherers have the fire and the smoke to get rid of the bees, which are a risk for the bird. The Hadza can go up, extract the honey, and then leave something behind for the birds.

An illustration of a greater honeyguide. (Photo/Brown Bear/Windmill Books/Universal Images Group via Getty Images,)

Toward the end of the Hadza visit, we went to a mud and brick hut, and inside there were cans and cans of soda. This was a source of sugar and energy that could mean that they no longer use that skill to find honey within our lifetimes — something so fundamentally important to human history could disappear.

Benji Jones

Do we run the risk of glorifying some of these older cultures? Don't some of these groups want soda — or access to health care, or other benefits that come with Western or modern life?

Dan Saladino

There's story after story of another culture coming in and imposing its food and its farming systems and its values and its desires on these Indigenous food systems. My argument is that people should be given the choice. They should have access to health care, but that doesn't necessarily mean that their way of life should be fundamentally changed because they're buying into our system.

A man dries a rare, prized type of Venezuelan cacao called criollo. (Photo/Dan Saladino)

How to save endangered foods

Benji Jones

There are clearly a lot of things that don't work with our food system. What gave you hope while reporting the book? What inspired you?

Dan Saladino

There's a network of people out there who are saving the diversity of foods. Before Covid, they gathered at a slow food event to bring their foods from around the world, and share stories about what they've saved and what threats they're facing. This solidarity is what gives me optimism.

In southwestern China, I met a farmer saving an extremely rare type of highly nutritious colored rice. He got out his phone and sold rice through WeChat to people in Beijing and Chengdu, some of the biggest cities in the world. Modern technology can actually connect us.

Benji Jones

The food industry is massive and largely run by just a small number of companies. How does one person help prevent these unique foods from going extinct?

Dan Saladino

It's important to understand what we mean by endangered foods and diversity. I think we should all choose our favorite foods and interrogate the diversity of that food. Explore cacao, coffee, or different types of cheeses. Then maybe develop a relationship with a cheesemaker and become a different kind of customer — somebody who's supporting a local farmer.

These levers do exist for governments to make a big, significant change. I also think we have the most selfish reasons to embrace diversity — our own health. We know what's happening in many parts of the world, in terms of type 2 diabetes, cancers, and other diseases that have a food dimension. Perhaps we will be motivated by health to try and bring diversity back into the food system. The science says we need to. (Courtesy vox.com)