

**CHOICE WORDS**

# Sprawl doesn't pay its way

By **JOHN SPITLER**

IT'S not that we're opposed to all development, we're not. But we do draw the line when it's largely developers doing the planning and the growth ends in a rapid, not-so-well-planned expansion under the guise, as it so often is, that there is such a thing as "good" sprawl. In the long run that kind of growth based on that kind of reasoning doesn't do anyone, especially agriculture, any good.

Some argue that so-called good sprawl should be permitted because it fills the county coffers with tax dollars, that it pays its way and then some.

No, what it actually does is devour ranchland and farmland and wildlife habitat and then cost some. A Cost-of-Community-Services study performed on rapidly growing Custer County, Colo., by the San Isabel Land Protection Trust, Sonoran Institute, Custer Heritage Committee and American Farmland Trust, examined this rapid growth and questioned which, if any, type of development actually pays its own way.

The study found consistently the only development that generates a tax surplus is commercial and industrial. Agriculture (industrial) produced a healthy surplus.

Residences certainly don't. Not after being provided fire and police protection, schools and road maintenance. Despite the healthy increase in taxes they yield in Custer County, there was a net drain on the treasury. For every tax dollar taken in, there was a payout in services of \$1.16 for houses and strip malls. On the other hand, for every tax dollar taken in for ranchland or farmland only 54 cents in services is paid out.

The University of Colorado graduate

student performing the study found an average 160-acre hay field produced \$540 in taxes yet only required \$290 in services. Houses on the approximately same acreage didn't nearly pay for their required services. They generate around \$21,000 in taxes, but required more than \$23,000 in services.

Today's inflated land values thrill de-

velopers and landowners, but for those who want to make a living from the Good Earth they're a royal hassle. But it's not just about the rancher or farmer who finds it less and less possible to buy out or lease a neighbor's place to farm or ranch. Losing our agriculturists is not best for the community as a whole, the environment or county coffers.

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