Nebraska Corn Farmers Need Trade Certainty, USMCA Ratification

With the recent storms, Nebraska's corn farmers are bracing for another year of uncertainty. Central and eastern parts of the state are awaiting dry weather, while the western portion is anxiously awaiting a spring thaw to get into the field.

Reaffirming our trading relationships with Mexico and Canada is one important step towards stabilizing an uncertain and struggling Nebraska farm economy. To this extent, passage of the U.S. Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA) is our top national priority.

This is why trade was the Association’s top issue as we led a leadership group from across Nebraska in visits with our congressional delegation on Capitol Hill a couple of weeks ago. We are laying the groundwork for a concerted effort by Nebraska and U.S. agriculture producers to ratify the new modernized NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), now known as USMCA.

USMCA will solidify a $3.1 billion export market, including nearly $800 million in agricultural trade for Nebraska corn farmers for corn in all forms. Ratifying USMCA will also provide a solid foundation for future trade agreements, opening new markets for Nebraska and U.S. agriculture for generations to come.

The existing North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has been an unequivocal success for American agriculture. Since NAFTA was ratified in 1994, corn exports to Canada and Mexico have increased more than seven times, with Mexico now being our top market for U.S. corn. Canada is now our second largest trading partner for ethanol. Beef trade has increased with Mexico and this key trading partner is now our third largest destination.

USMCA maintains zero tariffs on the U.S. for corn in all forms while also setting a high standard for future trade agreements in areas critical to U.S. agriculture, such as biotechnology and the creation of a rapid-response mechanism to address trade challenges.

Trade also goes beyond our industry. Within Nebraska alone, over 51,000 jobs are attributed to business with key trading partners. With 20 percent of our state’s GDP tied to agriculture and 32 percent of gross farm income attributed to trade, solidifying USMCA is also key to Nebraska’s economy.

Nebraska’s corn farmers, the state’s agriculture industry and our state’s economy need USMCA ratified this year! Our ask is for you to stay engaged in support of this key economic driver.
Hello everyone. I am Dan Nerud from Dorchester. I was elected this past December to serve as your president of the Nebraska Corn Growers Association. I farm in the Dorchester, Crete and Wilber areas with my wife, Joan, oldest son, Travis, and daughter-in-law, Kelsey. We run a corn, soybean and pasture operation, both irrigated and dryland. We also have spring and fall calving cow herds.

I am sure everyone is as ready as I am for warmer and dryer weather. We are very wet, but very lucky, as we have missed the major flooding and devastation that has hit much of our state. Our thoughts and prayers go out to everyone that has been affected.

One of the important issues we are working on at the state level, is property taxes. The Nebraska Corn Growers Association is a member of the Ag Leaders Group, along with many of the other livestock and commodity organizations. Together, we are advocating for meaningful property tax relief, including LB497 introduced by Senator Curt Friesen. We are also having conversations with our representatives in Washington, D.C. to make sure the implementation of the Farm Bill and year-round E15 proceeds.

Recently while on the Washington, D.C. Leadership Mission, we met with our representatives and were invited to a briefing at the White House. Ambassador Gregg Doud gave us an update on the progress of the USMCA trade agreement.

As we all head into the spring planting season, with long hours anticipated, please remember to take necessary breaks and always take a second for safety!

If you ever have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (402) 641-7668 or contact the NeCGA office. Again, I hope everyone has a good and safe planting season.

Sincerely,

Dan Nerud
President, Nebraska Corn Growers Association
NeCGA Elects New Leadership at Annual Meeting

Members of the Nebraska Corn Growers Association gathered at Nebraska Innovation Campus in Lincoln on Wednesday, Dec. 19 for their annual meeting. Following the annual meeting, NeCGA held a regular board meeting and elected officers. Dan Nerud, of Dorchester, was elected as president. Other officers elected include: Andy Jobman of Gothenburg, vice president; Chris Grams, of Upland, secretary; and Tom Nathan of Meadow Grove, treasurer. Dan Wesely, past president of NeCGA, moved to chairman of the board. The board is thankful to Dan for his two years of service leading the organization.

During the annual meeting, NeCGA delegates elected two at-large members to the board. Rick Gruber of York, was re-elected, and Michael Dibbern of Cairo, was elected. Curtis Rohrich of Wood River, did not seek re-election to the board of directors. He continues to be active in the Buffalo-Hall Corn Growers Association.

“We are very grateful for the volunteer efforts that our grower leadership and officers give on an annual basis,” said Kelly Brunkhorst, executive director of NeCGA. “I look forward to working alongside our leadership team in increasing opportunities for our membership in the coming year. I also want to thank Curtis Rohrich for his twelve years of service on the board following his decision not to seek re-election.”

NeCGA leaders include (from left) Dan Wesely, Dan Nerud, Andy Jobman, Chris Grams and Tom Nathan.
Property Tax and Infrastructure Dominate State Budget Discussions

Update provided by Mick Mines, NeCGA Lobbyist

The legislature 90-day session is half completed. Some 106 bills are prioritized by senators (49), committees (32) and the speaker (25). Priority bills that advance from their respective committees move ahead of other bills on the agenda for debate by the body as a whole.

By constitution, the only duty the legislature must fulfill this session is passage of a balanced budget. Early estimates for the next two-year cycle were almost $9.5 billion. However, state revenues have been falling short of predictions, largely due to the agriculture economy. The rainy-day fund, which stood at almost $800 million a few years ago, is now in the neighborhood of $300 million.

Recent flooding and blizzards have greatly devastated many Nebraskans. Sixty five of our 93 counties have declared an emergency. At the state level, one-third of Nebraska’s highways were closed at one time, and 200 miles now require significant repairs. Fifteen bridges must be replaced or repaired, along with an indeterminate amount of clean-up.

Rebuilding the damage will be expensive for individuals and government. FEMA and other federal assistance programs will help with 75 percent of funding to rebuild infrastructure: roads, levies, water and sewer, etc. The State of Nebraska and local cities and counties will share up to 25 percent of repair/replacement costs. Individual losses are generally not covered.

The appropriations committee will deliver their proposed budget to the full legislature by May 2. Property tax relief is still a very real part of the discussions in the revenue committee, as is an increase in the sales tax rate and eliminating some sales tax exemptions.
NeCGA Washington, D.C. Leadership Mission Provides Insight Inside the Beltway

In March, young leaders from across the state took part in the Nebraska Corn Growers Association 31st annual Washington, D.C. Leadership Mission. From March 11-15, 20 producers, along with five grower leaders, got a firsthand experience of Washington, D.C. and the legislative process.

The leadership mission trip to Washington, D.C. is a great way for Nebraska corn farmers to engage with key contacts and help put a face on Nebraska agriculture. The participants had a full slate of meetings over three days including time with the Nebraska congressional delegation as well as important industry partners. The participants were able to talk with a wide variety of people and organizations who have a great deal of influence over their farms back in Nebraska.

Deanna Finke, from Gothenburg, and her husband, Adam, were first time attendees. Deanna had the opportunity to sit in on a meeting at the White House with Ambassador Gregg Doud and a meeting at the Mexico Embassy. “Getting a chance to sit in on a meeting at the White House was a once in a lifetime opportunity. This trip opened my eyes to all the work that is going on behind the scenes. I am so glad I decided to participate in this program,” said Deanna Finke.

“The D.C. Leadership Mission is a chance for new leaders to gain a better understanding of the legislative process and the current issues that face Nebraska’s corn farmers. It is our hope that they will take this knowledge and enthusiasm back with them to their local organizations. This trip is the place where many of our current leaders got their start,” said Dan Nerud, president of NeCGA.

This leadership mission trip would not be possible without support from our sponsors, the Nebraska Corn Board and Farm Credit Services of America.

A group led by Deb Gangwish and Dan Wesely stop for a picture after an industry meeting.

“The group visited the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to talk about the status of USMCA.

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Hello, fellow Nebraska corn farmers!

First and foremost, my thoughts are with all of you as many of us are recovering from winter storms and historic flooding conditions. I know I’ve never seen anything like the devastation we’ve experienced over the last few weeks. I am incredibly encouraged by the outpouring of support from people around the country as we rebuild. There is truly no segment of our population more resilient than the American farmer. While times are tough now, we will get through this. There are many assistance programs available to help farmers and ranchers rebuild and I encourage you all to explore these options.

Our corn industry continues to make national headlines in 2019. You’re likely aware of the publicity we received after a certain unnamed beer company issued a deceptive advertisement during the Super Bowl. While we were disappointed with the beer company’s messaging, the backlash resulted in several very positive discussions on the national stage about the corn industry’s commitment to efficiency and sustainability. We’ve developed and fostered relationships with a variety of media entities who weren’t overly interested in covering ag stories in the past. I challenge you all this planting season to continue the conversations by using your own social media channels to showcase what you’re doing on your farm to promote a sustainable agricultural sector.

In this issue of the Nebraska Corn newsletter, see what your corn checkoff is doing for you to ensure our mission of promoting the value of corn by creating opportunities. You can learn about:

• The current status of the USMCA.
• How we’re promoting ethanol use to a variety of audiences through various high-profile events.
• Why we’re providing science teachers with agricultural curriculum.
• How we’re equipping our CommonGround volunteers with tools to effectively engage with consumers.
• And more!

As always, keep up with the Nebraska Corn Board throughout the year through our newly remodeled website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube.

I hope you all have a great planting season with favorable weather and limited setbacks! Most of all, I hope those impacted by the storms are able to make progress on rebuilding. #NebraskaStrong

David Bruntz
Chairman, Nebraska Corn Board

“There is truly no segment of our population more resilient than the American farmer.”
The 2019 Midlands International Auto Show was held at the CHI Health Center in Omaha January 24-27, 2019. This is the first time the Nebraska Corn Board has partnered with the auto show and the Omaha World Herald to have an educational presence at the consumer-focused event promoting the use of higher blends of American Ethanol.

Over 40,000 people attended the auto show over the four-day event. As attendees had the opportunity to see the latest models of vehicles, they were able to meet RoboTron E15, a nine-foot tall interactive robot. RoboTron E15 was present four times daily to talk with attendees about E15 and its importance to the public, motorists and Nebraska. As people waited to get their photo taken with RoboTron E15, they were also able to learn about the benefits of clean-burning American Ethanol. Board members and staff from the Nebraska Corn Board, the Nebraska Corn Growers Association and the Nebraska Ethanol Board were on hand to answer consumers questions and encourage them to walk through the Biofuels Mobile Education Center (BMEC).

The BMEC is a 45-foot long trailer that is stocked full of educational and interactive displays showcasing the benefits of renewable fuels. In the trailer, there is even a sample blender pump which allows volunteers to talk about the differences of the various blends and which vehicles can use them.

“We were at an ideal event to share ethanol messaging,” said Debbie Borg, secretary and treasurer with the Nebraska Corn Board and a family farmer from Allen, Nebraska. “Most of the people we talked to were aware of ethanol, but weren’t sure if higher blends would work in their vehicles. Additionally, we were able to share ethanol’s clean air benefits with attendees. Having RoboTron E15 near our booth ensured a steady stream of traffic to our exhibit throughout the auto show.”

Key messages shared with attendees focused on the cleaner air aspects of ethanol, its lower cost and higher-octane ratings. The ethanol volunteers followed up with specific locations where consumers can find higher ethanol blends in the Omaha market.

Along with the American Ethanol exhibit at the auto show, the overall sponsorship also included ethanol advertising through the Omaha World Herald, Omaha television and through a variety of digital platforms.
CommonGround Training

Nebraska CommonGround volunteers are ready and prepared to connect with consumers after participating in two training sessions held in Kearney on January 23 and in Fremont on January 24. The training workshops were designed to help familiarize new volunteers with the CommonGround program and to provide current volunteers with tips and advice relating to consumer engagement.

Since its inception in 2010, CommonGround is made up of women farmers and ranchers who are passionate about bridging the gap between agricultural production and modern consumers.

“Consumers are increasingly removed from the farm, yet are increasingly interested in how food is grown and produced,” said Kurtis Harms, director of communications with the Nebraska Corn Board and one of the coordinators of Nebraska’s CommonGround program.

“Walk down the aisle in any grocery store, and you’re bound to see a number of misleading labels on food packages. Our goal with CommonGround isn’t to tell people one production method is better than another, but to help them better understand what the labels actually mean, so consumers can make their food purchasing decisions based on fact, rather than fear.”

During this year’s CommonGround Nebraska conference, attendees were able to learn more about organic production from Linda Swartz, CommonGround volunteer and farmer from Bertrand, the science behind GMOs from Heather Bryan, Jane Hunt and Susan Sherer, EducationProjects.org, and the meeting concluded with a presentation on media training with Terri Moore, Center for Food Integrity.

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“Each year, we try to focus on a couple of different production systems within agriculture, so our volunteers are well-versed on a variety of different issues,” said Harms. “Additionally, our volunteers appreciate having a media training component because so much of our outreach process is through television, radio and newspaper interviews, social media posts and public appearances. Having instruction on how we can best tell our agricultural stories makes our volunteers well-prepared to be advocates for our industry.”

Nebraska’s CommonGround program is funded through the state’s corn and soybean checkoffs. To learn more about Nebraska’s CommonGround program, or if you’re interested in volunteering, visit CommonGroundNebraska.com.

The 42nd annual Lincoln Marathon will be held May 5, 2019. This is the second year the Nebraska Corn Board has partnered with the Nebraska Ethanol Board to be the premier sponsor of the event. This event is a unique opportunity to engage with a very health conscious audience from across the country. Over 13,000 runners (plus their friends and families) will be in Lincoln for the marathon/half marathon.

Using the American Ethanol brand, representatives from the corn and ethanol boards will visit with runners and their guests during packet pickup at the Cornhusker Marriott (May 3 and 4) and at the finish line on race day (May 5). “Run Green, Run Clean” is the theme of the event, and ethanol messaging will be focused on the cleaner burning aspects of ethanol. Attendees will also learn about which ethanol blends they can use and better understand overall benefits of higher blends.

To register to run the Lincoln marathon or half marathon, visit lincolnmarathon.org. To volunteer to help out with American Ethanol’s exhibit during race weekend, stay tuned to future communication from the Nebraska Corn Board, or email Kurtis Harms at kurtis.harms@nebraska.gov.

The Lincoln Marathon/Half Marathon (fueled by American Ethanol) promotes higher ethanol blends to a health-conscious audience. Over 13,000 runners and their family and friends attend the event each year from all 50 states.

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The theme for this year’s CommonGround conference was “leading with your heart,” which made conversation hearts the perfect conference snack.
Nebraska Corn Farmers Provide Training and Equipment to Science Teachers

The Nebraska Corn Board is partnering with the team at EducationProjects.org to bring hands-on science to teachers across the state. For over 20 years EducationProjects.org has been connecting agriculture to the classroom. They’ve launched programs with corn growers in Kansas and Ohio focused on the concepts of modern farming. Through NCB’s Feed the World initiative, educators will have access to free workshops, curriculum, and supplies to help them bring the science of corn into their classrooms. These lessons connect with current state education standards in subjects such as chemistry, biology, environmental science and more.

By reaching teachers and encouraging them to include agriculture in their science lessons, EducationProjects.org is helping students see the importance of Nebraska corn in energy and the economy. On behalf of the Nebraska Corn Board, Feed the World has presented a genetic transformation lab activity from the biotechnology curriculum to educators at the Nebraska Association of Teachers of Science conference and “GMOs: what do you know?” workshops to CommonGround Nebraska groups. Feed the World also hosts a website of free curriculum for teachers and communicates with them about educational and industry news through a monthly newsletter and social media.

Currently, Feed the World is reaching out to hundreds of teachers by participating in conferences for Nebraska Academy of Sciences, Nebraska Education Technology Association, and Nebraska Career Education. EducationProjects is also preparing for two summer workshops in Lincoln: STEM in Ag, to be held June 4 and 5, will help teachers understand how science is contributing to the future of global food and energy security, and how advancing technologies help us produce more with less. Inquiry-based, hands-on science labs with an engineering design focus will cover these topics: biotechnology, soil science, water quality, energy production, and sustainable agricultural practices. Ag biotech on June 7 shows how ag biotechnology contributes to food security. Participants will learn about the latest seed research and the impact of environmental issues and sustainability.

Both workshops will include an opportunity for teachers to talk with industry experts, participate in lessons designed to meet the Nebraska science standards, and get free classroom materials. An industry dinner at the STEM in Ag workshop will allow teachers to meet and talk with local farmers and industry experts and see technology demonstrations.

For more information go to www.nebraskacorneducation.org or check us out on Twitter @NECornEducation.

During the EducationProjects.org workshop at NATS in September, science teachers from across the state were able to learn about the importance of biotechnology.
Deb Gangwish, farmer from Shelton, greeted teachers at the Nebraska Academy of Sciences (NATS) conference in September.

At Commodity Classic in Orlando, Catherine Jones received a $1,000 scholarship from the National Corn Growers Association and the BASF Corporation. The NCGA William C. Berg/BASF Scholarship program is designed for students who are at least in their second year at an accredited junior college, college or university. Recipients must be a member of NCGA or the son or daughter of an NCGA member.

Catherine was a communication and market development intern with the Nebraska Corn Board office from May 2017 through April 2018. She is currently studying agricultural and environmental sciences communication at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and will graduate in May of this year. She plans to continue her education in the fall at the University of Georgia and will begin a master’s degree program focused in agricultural communications.

Another UNL student also received the 2019 NCGA William C. Berg/BASF Scholarship. Osler Ortez is currently a Ph.D. candidate at UNL studying agronomy and horticulture. Osler is originally from Nicaragua.

Intern Spotlight: Catherine Jones

At this year’s Commodity Classic, Scott Kay from BASF presented the NCGA William C. Berg/BASF scholarship to Catherine Jones, a former intern with the Nebraska Corn Board.

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The other scholarship recipient from Nebraska was Osler Ortez. Ortez is a Ph.D. student at UNL studying agronomy and horticulture.

Two University of Nebraska–Lincoln students received this year’s scholarship: Catherine Jones (middle) and Osler Ortez (left).
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