An Update from the State Capitol

The 106th Legislature, 2nd Session, is half complete. Speaker Scheer plans to adjourn for the year no later than April 23.

Bills introduced last year that did not pass, or die, carried over to this legislative session. New legislation was introduced during the first 10 days of this session, and the Nebraska Corn Growers Association (NeCGA) identified 50 bills that could affect the operations of our members.

Every year, our top priority is to reduce property taxes significantly. This year, we strongly support the only property tax relief bill, LB 947, introduced by Revenue Committee Chair Lou Ann Linehan.

The bill would cut property taxes for all Nebraska farmers, ranchers, homeowners and commercial property owners by reducing the reliance on property taxes to fund public K-12 education.

Educators strongly oppose LB 947. Negotiations are ongoing, but senators aligned with public education have a stranglehold on the bill.

NeCGA testified and provided letters, stating our position, on several the bills. Committee hearings have wrapped up and the balance of the session will be a full day debate.

Of the bills NeCGA is tracking in the 106th Legislature, the following bills have been prioritized by senators, committees or the speaker:

- LB 930 (Briese) Require a minimum amount within the Property Tax Credit Fund [support]
- LB 931 (Halloran) Clarify overload harvest exemptions [support]
- LB 974 (Linehan) Provide educational funding and property tax relief [support]
- LB 992 (Friesen) Adopt Broadband Internet Service Infrastructure Act [support]
- LB 996 (Brandt) Create Broadband Data Improvement Program [support]
- LR 288 (Slama) Urge Congress and the United States Corps of Engineers to prioritize flood control as a top priority for the management of water systems under their authority in the Missouri River Mainstream Reservoir System Water Control Manual [support]
A Message from the NeCGA President  |  DAN NERUD

As we begin another growing season, and as I move into my second year as president, I can’t help but reflect on 2019. While we are mindful of the disastrous year that 2019 was, we are also looking forward to a hopefully prosperous 2020.

We faced many challenges last year, many of which we could not control. While we can’t control challenges like the weather, we can have a voice in policy issues that affect our industry. As president of your association, I have been working hard to be your voice in Washington, D.C. and Lincoln. Along with my fellow board members and association staff, we have been working on things like ethanol, trade, property tax relief and other priority policy issues.

While 2019 was undeniably a tough year, we did come out with a few wins. First is the signing of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) by President Trump. Our state and national offices worked tirelessly to help get USMCA to the president’s desk, but they could not have done it without all of you. Your vocal support of USMCA played a vital role in moving this trade deal through Congress and getting President Trump’s signature. Thank you! On the trade front, we were also pleased to see phase one deals with Japan and China signed.

On the state level our key priority continues to be meaningful property tax relief. We are also focusing on broadband access and funding for our schools. Keep turning the pages of this newsletter for a state legislative update from our lobbyist, Mick Mines.

As always, if you have questions about what the association is working on, please reach out to myself or any of the staff in the office. We are here working for you! Thank you for your support, and best wishes for the 2020 growing season. Remember, slow down and take a second for safety! A shortcut is not worth your life.

Dan Nerud
President, Nebraska Corn Growers Association
Members of the Nebraska Corn Growers Association (NeCGA) gathered at the Ramada Inn in Grand Island on Tuesday, December 17, 2019, for their annual meeting. Following the annual meeting, NeCGA held a regular board meeting and elected officers.

Dan Nerud, of Dorchester, was re-elected as president. Other officers re-elected include Andy Jobman of Gothenburg, vice president; Chris Grams, of Upland, secretary; and Dan Wesely of Morse Bluff, chairman. Elected to treasurer was Michael Dibbern of Cairo. The board is thankful to Tom Nathan of Meadow Grove, for his years of service as treasurer for the organization.

During the annual meeting, NeCGA delegates elected two at large members to the board. Steve Ebke, of Daykin, and Carl Sousek of Prague, were re-elected.

“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 to increase opportunities for our membership in the coming year.”

Special thanks to our gold and platinum sponsors in 2019!
An Update from Washington, D.C.

It can be difficult to keep track of federal policy decisions amid the ongoing back and forth in Washington, D.C., but if you look past the sensational headlines and Twitter fights, you’ll see that real work is still getting done. For corn farmers in 2019, this included approval of new trade deals, and an all hands on deck defense of the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS).

Just over a year ago, National Corn Growers Association’s (NCGA) farmers members recognized the importance of our trading relationship with Mexico and Canada and declared passage of the new U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) the organization’s top legislative priority for 2019. Mexico and Canada are the U.S. corn industry’s largest, most reliable markets.

We achieved our goal of passing USMCA earlier this year, securing overwhelming bipartisan support in Congress, and NCGA leaders represented the organization at a White House signing ceremony January 29.

We also played a role in the U.S.-Japan Trade Agreement. Japan is the second largest export market for corn farmers, purchasing $2 billion in the most recent marketing year. As a high-value market for our livestock industry, Japan is also a major purchaser of U.S. corn through exported meats. The phase one agreement reaffirms and builds on our trading relationship with Japan.

With USMCA now the law of the land, we can use it as a template for securing new market opportunities for U.S. corn, including a phase two deal with Japan. In addition, NCGA will be looking to increase ethanol export opportunities and seek new relationships with markets in Southeast Asia, China, the United Kingdom and India.

NCGA’s efforts to increase market access for ethanol took a big step forward after we pushed EPA to remove the year-round barrier to E15 sales. NCGA President Kevin Ross personally thanked President Trump for delivering on this promise but cautioned, “the EPA’s oil refinery waivers threaten to undo your good works.”

“While the end result isn’t entirely what we asked for, the EPA will reallocate waived gallons beginning with 2020 volumes and has vowed to reduce future waivers. That’s a victory for corn farmers.”

Throughout the summer and into the fall, we continued to share the devastating impact EPA’s abuse of waivers was having on farmers and the ethanol industry. While the end result isn’t entirely what we asked for, the EPA will reallocate waived gallons beginning with 2020 volumes and has vowed to reduce future waivers. That’s a victory for corn farmers.

NCGA is also a party to legal action related to waivers. A recent court ruling striking down three waivers that were improperly issued by EPA could have a broad impact on the agency’s approach to granting future waivers.

These efforts to ensure the EPA follows the law and properly implements the RFS will continue. We will also work closely with our...
Trade School

In February, over 20 corn growers from Nebraska had the opportunity to attend a regional Trade School organized by the U.S. Grains Council (USGC) and the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) with support from Nebraska Corn, Iowa Corn, Missouri Corn, and Kansas Corn. The event was hosted at the John Deere Ag Marketing Center in Olathe, Kansas.

Together, over 80 attendees learned more about the importance of trade to farmers and agriculture, current issues impacting trade and how to better communicate with others regarding the importance of global ag trade.

A highlight of the day was a farmer panel on working with trade policy and market development. Andy Jobman, vice president of NeCGA, was one of the farmers on the panel. He discussed how he became interested in trade issues and described his international travels with USGC to Morocco. Attendees left the day more confident in their knowledge of trade and their ability to talk with growers and community members back home about why trade is so important to the agricultural industry.

“Together, over 80 attendees learned more about the importance of trade to farmers and agriculture, current issues impacting trade and how to better communicate with others regarding the importance of global ag trade.”

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champions in Congress to advance ethanol as a solution to cut carbon emissions. This will include continued education efforts on the low-carbon benefits of ethanol and pursuing legislation for a low carbon octane standard.

In addition to trade and ethanol issues, NCGA has also been active on federal rulemakings, rolling back burdensome regulations like the Waters of the U.S. rule, pressing the administration to equitably compensate corn farmers for losses due to trade disruptions through the Market Facilitation Program (MFP), and advocating congressional appropriators to provide adequate funding for agriculture, transportation and other programs important to NCGA. This work is constant and will continue to be a priority in 2020.

With a presidential election in just a few short months, it’s hard to say what the coming year may bring. Regardless, NCGA will be there, working to ensure what happens in Washington, both in front of the cameras and behind the scenes, is positive for corn. Thank you for your support in our efforts.

Brooke Appleton
NCGA Vice President, Public Policy
“Since my last letter, great progress has been made in the trade arena.”

Fellow corn growers:
This is the sixth letter I’ve written to you since Nebraska Corn started publishing its joint newsletter a couple of years ago. When we first started this grower-focused publication, I was worried I’d eventually run out of things to write about. Fortunately, there are so many things going on in our industry, I could probably write a new letter weekly!

Since my last letter, great progress has been made in the trade arena. President Trump signed the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) into law on Jan. 29, 2020. This important piece of trade legislation generally received positive bipartisan support from the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. USMCA is important because ag exports to Mexico and Canada equate to $1.46 billion, with corn exports totaling over $402 million, ethanol at $96 million and distillers grains at $27 million. Canada still needs to ratify the deal before USMCA takes effect.

We were pleased with the ratification of the U.S.-Japan Trade Agreement, which took effect Jan. 1, 2020. This deal is significant as Japan is the No. 2 buyer of U.S. corn (Japanese customers purchased more than $2 billion worth of corn in the most recent marketing year).

The agreement includes a staged tariff reduction for U.S. ethanol.
Additionally, we’re encouraged by a phase one agreement with China. While there are many unknowns with the specifics of this deal and uncertainty with how this deal may evolve, China has committed to purchasing significantly more American agricultural products.

Outside of trade, the Nebraska corn checkoff has been working hard through our key pillars of market development, promotion, education and research. Through these next few pages, several of our latest initiatives will be highlighted including a new education collaboration, an expanded partnership with Casey’s and a spotlight on our work with the Soil Health Partnership.

For more examples showing how Nebraska Corn is working for you, check out the cover spread of the March 2020 edition of the Nebraska Farmer magazine. We have so many great things going on, and we’re excited to share our progress!

Best of luck this planting season, which will be here before we know it!

David Bruntz
Chairman, Nebraska Corn Board
Greetings from the Soil Health Partnership (SHP)! SHP is a non-profit organization led by farmers—existing to serve farmers—that is part of the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA), under the Stewardship Action Team and serves as their flagship sustainability program. This past fall SHP celebrated its fifth anniversary of developing a farmer-led research network that could measure the impacts of implementing soil health practices on working farms.

I joined SHP in June of 2019 to serve as field manager for Nebraska and Kansas. Currently, we have eight sites in Nebraska that focus on the adoption of cover crops into growers' crop rotations or the impact of switching to no-till systems. The research we conduct at SHP is similar to what UNL does with its On-Farm Research Network, but there are some key differences. For starters, our partners have contracts with us to do the research projects together for multiple years. Additionally, the data we collect is different in many ways. SHP focuses on a wide array of soil samples, in-field observation data and simple grower surveys to collect management data.

In terms of the research that we are conducting in Nebraska, while we collect data from several different parameters, this last year we really chose to focus on a handful of soil health metrics as our cropping systems adapt to the changes we are implementing. I call those the pillars of soil health, and we measure these on a biennial schedule. The pillars consist of water holding capacity, active carbon, aggregate stability, organic matter and soil respiration. Focusing specifically on the cover crop trials we are doing, we are starting to see some changes.

One prime example is the area of aggregate stability. Aggregate stability is a test that shows us how well our soil stays together or makes bonds with itself. This is what supports earthworm tunnels, air pockets and places to store soil moisture. It is also what makes soils stable when they get wet. In other words, if you see a soil that supports your machinery better, is plantable more quickly after a rain event, or even has better resistance to pivot tire ruts, that is aggregate stability at play. Our research in this region is showing statistically significant improvements in aggregate stability. This is because the cover crops extend the growing season and are turning sunlight into fuel for the microbes and organisms in the soil. That increase in activity produces the "glue" that stick the soil together. In addition to the reasons I mentioned above, this improvement is important because it is emerging as a lead indicator, to me, of the soil "awakening" and being at a point where it can support increasing organic matter and carbon storage.

Currently, we are working on plans for 2021 and beyond to be able to increase our impact on Nebraska soils, agriculture and stewardship of the land. We are working with our partners to secure funding to place research in specific watersheds, nitrogen management areas and the higher elevation, arid climates of the western half of the state.

If you see me speaking at a field day, conference, or event in the next few months, please come up and say "hello," and tell me about your soil health journey.
Nebraska Corn Board partners with Casey’s to offer higher ethanol blends

Through a recent partnership between the Nebraska Corn Board (NCB) and Casey’s General Stores (Casey’s), motorists in the state now have increased access to higher blends of ethanol. Through its blender pump incentive infrastructure program, NCB provided grant assistance to help Casey’s upgrade existing fuel pumps to offer Unleaded88, a 15% ethanol blend. Twelve Casey’s locations in Nebraska have been upgraded – nine in Omaha, one in La Vista, one in Papillion and one in Norfolk.

“In an environmentally-conscious world, filling up with ethanol is an easy way for us all to do our part for the planet and our overall health,” said John Greer, District 2 Director of NCB and farmer from Edgar. “Ethanol is a clean-burning, renewable fuel that is less toxic than traditional gasoline, which is good for our air. By investing in our ethanol infrastructure, we’re not only working toward a greener world, but we’re also saving consumers money while boosting Nebraska’s economy. Ethanol is a win for everyone.”

This isn’t the Ankeny, Iowa-based fuel retailer’s first venture into offering higher ethanol blends. This summer, Casey’s added Unleaded88 infrastructure to more than 60 of its locations. In Nebraska, the retailer also began offering E85 at its stores in Ogallala and Cozad.

“We’re offering Unleaded88 at more stores because our guests want it. The benefits of a lower price and higher octane are hard to argue with,” said Jake Comer, fuel pricing manager at Casey’s.

“Unleaded88, or E15, is the most widely tested fuel ever,” said David Bruntz, chairman of the NCB and farmer from Friend. “We know these fuels work well in vehicles and provide countless benefits. The Nebraska Corn Board has worked hard and will continue to work hard to ensure consumers have easy access to these options. We also applaud Casey’s for being an outstanding partner in this process.”

To find all local fuel retailers offering higher ethanol blends, visit getbiofuel.com.

The twelve upgraded Casey’s locations are:

- # 2885
  1020 S 13th Street
  Norfolk, NE
- # 2986
  9905 Q Street
  Omaha, NE
- # 2987
  15275 Weir Plaza Street
  Omaha, NE
- # 3813
  9911 S 71st Avenue
  Papillion, NE
- # 3814
  14330 Hillsdale Avenue
  Omaha, NE
- # 3815
  15611 Harrison Street
  Omaha, NE
- # 3816
  3725 N 147th Street
  Omaha, NE
- # 3817
  18280 Wright Street
  Omaha, NE
- # 3818
  250 N 168th Circle
  Omaha, NE
- # 3819
  16960 Evans Plaza
  Omaha, NE
- # 3820
  7828 S 123rd Street
  La Vista, NE
- # 3821
  2540 N 90th Street
  Omaha, NE

On May 17, 2019, Nathaniel Doddridge, director of fuels at Casey’s (at podium), joined Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts and Kelly Brunkhorst, executive director of the Nebraska Corn Board and the Nebraska Corn Growers Association (right) in proclaiming the month of May as Renewable Fuels Month at a pump promotion event at Casey’s in Bennington. The location was one of the first of the retailer’s stations in Nebraska to offer higher blends of ethanol.
Women serve important roles in farms and ranches, and the Nebraska Corn Board (NCB) is proud to support all women in agriculture. By empowering women to serve in leadership roles and through investments in professional development opportunities, NCB is dedicated to helping women play active roles on their farm and ranch operations.

CommonGround continues to be one of NCB’s signature outreach programs. CommonGround is made up of several farm and ranch women across Nebraska who are passionate about bridging the gap between consumers and those who grow and raise food. Through a mom-to-mom, woman-to-woman approach, CommonGround volunteers are helping consumers make grocery store purchasing decisions based on facts, not misleading marketing campaigns. CommonGround Nebraska is sponsored by NCB and the Nebraska Soybean Board.

NCB continues to invest in professional development opportunities, such as the AgCeptional Women’s Conference (coordinated by Northeast Community College) and the Women in Agriculture Conference (coordinated by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln).

Popular CornsTalk publication goes digital

For years, the Nebraska Corn Board (NCB) has published its consumer-focused CornsTalk publications and released them through daily and weekly newspapers across the state. Each edition typically focuses on one key issue NCB wants consumers to better understand. Past editions have focused on issues such as biotechnology, soil, water, international trade, family farming and more.

To keep up with consumer preferences and provide informative content through a variety of platforms, NCB recently released a new digital supplement to the printed CornsTalk: necornstalk.com. Through this digital version, readers have access to all of the great articles from the most recent CornsTalk (as well as selected previous editions). Readers can also read more in-depth articles, watch videos, listen to audio and easily share content through their own social media channels.

NCB will continue to also release the printed versions of CornsTalk. The newest version will be released in spring 2020 and will focus on agriculture and the environment.
Nearly 40,000 auto enthusiasts had an opportunity to learn more about the benefits of clean-burning, American Ethanol at the Midlands International Auto Show Jan. 23-26 at the CHI Health Center in Omaha. This is the second year the Nebraska Corn Board partnered with the auto show.

“The auto show has proven to be a great opportunity for us to engage with the public and provide them with information about ethanol,” said Dave Merrell, District 7 director of the Nebraska Corn Board and farmer from St. Edward. “Through our conversations, it’s apparent there’s still some misinformation out there regarding ethanol, but most of the people we talked to had an open mind. There were several people who have been using ethanol for years and didn’t even know it. By answering questions and promoting the benefits, I think consumers will be more inclined to choose an ethanol option at the pump.”

Part of the ethanol educational experience at the auto show included the Biofuels Mobile Education Center (BMEC), which is a 45-foot long trailer. Attendees had the opportunity to walk through the trailer, which was full of educational and interactive displays showcasing the benefits of renewable fuels. In the trailer, there was also a sample blender pump, which helped motorists get a better understanding of the different options they may see at their local fuel retailers.

The auto show was coordinated and hosted by the Omaha World Herald. As part of the agreement with the newspaper, the Nebraska Corn Board was included on several promotional pieces leading up to and during the event. “We’re not only reaching the 40,000 people who attended the show, but our sponsorship of the event helped us promote American Ethanol through TV commercials, broadcast and printed news stories, social media posts and billboards,” said Kurtis Harms, director of communications with the Nebraska Corn Board. “Additionally, our sponsorship included RoboTron E15, a nine-foot tall interactive robot. This was really a great addition to our ethanol display because it drew people to our exhibit throughout the four days. Attendees were waiting to meet the robot, which led to great discussions with our staff, they walked through the trailer and every photo of the robot posted on social media spread our ethanol messaging even further. Through repeated exposures, we’re slowly helping consumers become more informed and comfortable with using ethanol in their vehicles.”

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. The Nebraska Corn Board partnered with the Nebraska Corn Growers Association and the Nebraska Ethanol Board to help staff the event.
Supporting teachers, supporting youth

One of the Nebraska Corn Board’s (NCB) four main pillars is education, and the board works to develop and implement educational programs with an impact. Over its 42-year history, NCB has helped people of all ages and backgrounds better understand the state’s corn industry. As fewer people are growing up and residing in rural areas, a larger gap exists between consumer and producer, which is why NCB identified youth as an important audience to reach through its education efforts.

Earlier this year, NCB approved three new education initiatives to support teachers and students across Nebraska. Through each initiative, NCB will partner with other groups to expand reach, avoid duplication and promote implementation into actual classroom settings.

The “Nebraska Soil Summer Institute” is a partnership between the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), Lincoln Public Schools and NCB. Through this pilot program, high school science teachers will take part in a two-week summer workshop. Throughout the two weeks, the teachers will get an in-depth training in soil science concepts, hands-on experiments and learning activities. Teacher participants will then develop curriculum for their science classrooms that meet state science standards and can be utilized by other teachers.

“Soil science integrates multiple disciplines such as biology, chemistry and physics,” said Dr. Martha Mamo, head of UNL’s Department of Agronomy and Horticulture. “By training science teachers in soil science, we support science education and strengthen agricultural education across the state.”

“Learn, Then Do!” is a collaborative effort between the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation (NFBF), LPS and NCB. This program began as part of a grant from the national Ag in the Classroom program. Through this program, 20 high school science teachers will take part in a three-day workshop. As part of the program, the teachers will take part in various lessons and field trips to better understand how agriculture can be incorporated into their science courses. Teachers will then work with a national curriculum expert to develop lessons that meet Nebraska’s state science standards.

“Recently, Nebraska modified its state science standards, which are now modeled after and closely align with the Next Generation Science Standards, or NGSS,” said Megahn Schafer, executive director of NFBF. “This puts us in a unique position because there isn’t that much curriculum available at this time that meets NGSS standards. By being on the forefront and developing this content now, we can reach teachers who are looking for these materials, and they’re all based on agricultural concepts. We’re thankful for the support from the Nebraska Corn Board who recognize the importance of exposing teachers and students to agriculture.”

The final project, “Making the Connection: An Agricultural Literacy Conference,” is a partnership between NFBF and NCB. This conference will bring together a variety of Nebraska educators who are wanting to incorporate agriculture into their programs. Participants could include teachers, Nebraska Extension educators and youth leaders. One key goal of the program is to demonstrate the partnerships between Nebraska commodity organizations, UNL, Nebraska Extension and NFBF, and show how high-quality resources and activities from multiple sources can be used to build a meaningful agricultural literacy program.

“We know we are stronger together,” said Brandon Hunnicutt, vice chair of NCB and farmer from Giltner. “By partnering with groups like the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation, Lincoln Public Schools and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, our goal is to reach teachers and students across the state with meaningful agricultural curriculum. We know this is the start of something great. Something we can continue to build upon and make stronger.”
Nebraska Corn Board seeking candidates for three districts

Nebraska farmers have a unique opportunity to help shape the state’s corn industry by serving on the Nebraska Corn Board (NCB). NCB is currently seeking candidates for Districts 2, 3 and the board’s at large director.

**District 2** – Includes the counties of Adams, Clay, Fillmore, Franklin, Webster, Nuckolls and Thayer

**District 3** – Includes the counties of Merrick, Polk, Hamilton and York

**At large** – The at large director represents all counties in Nebraska

Appointments for Districts 2 and 3 are made by the Governor of Nebraska. The at large director appointment is made by the board. Any candidate seeking appointment may place his or her name on the candidacy list by filing a petition with NCB.

**Eligibility requirements include:**

Those who are citizens of Nebraska (and live in an open district),

Are at least 21 years old,

Have been actively engaged in growing corn in Nebraska for a period of five years or more and

Derive a substantial portion of their income from growing corn.

Petitions may be obtained by writing the Nebraska Corn Board (P.O. Box 95107, Lincoln, NE 68509-5107), by calling 800-632-6761 or emailing nikki.bentzinger@nebraska.gov. A candidacy petition must carry the signatures of at least 50 corn producers from that district. All petitions must be received by the Nebraska Corn Board no later than 5:00 p.m. CT on Friday, May 15, 2020. Faxed copies do not qualify.