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To: Deb Mazour
Subject: Cooperation in Nebraska - December 2019



Cooperation in Nebraska

a newsletter from the Nebraska Cooperative Council

December 20, 2019

Annual Meeting and Hall of Fame

The 74th Annual Meeting of the Nebraska Cooperative Council was held at the Holiday Inn in Kearney on November 21st with 208 people attending. [Click here for a copy of the minutes](#). Per NCC governance, please notify the Council at ncoopc@nebr.coop by December 30, 2019 if there are any objections/errors. If none are received, the minutes shall be deemed accepted as distributed.

The meeting began with the financial report given Council President Rocky Weber. Council Chairman David Briggs from Westco in Alliance provided the Chairman's Report. Committee reports were given as follows: Excellence in Cooperative Education by ECEC Chair Galen Kuska with Farmers Co-op in Dorchester, and the NCC-Political Action Committee by Committee Chair Dean Thernes with Farmers Pride in Battle Creek. Rocky Weber then finished up the business meeting with his President's Report.

After a short break, the group reconvened to hear a moving presentation by Michael Benfante. Michael was in the World Trade Center North Tower on that fateful day of September 11, 2001. He and a co-worker carried a wheel chair-bound woman down 68 flights of stairs to safety. His presentation certainly revived numerous memories for all in attendance.

The final portion of the Annual Meeting was the Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony. This year we were pleased to induct Dale Johnson, retired general manager of Agland Co-op in Oakland and retired COO of Central Valley Ag Co-op in York. [Click here to go to our website to view the video which played upon his introduction as well as to see the plaque wording which summarizes Dale's career highlights.](#)

Following the Hall of Fame ceremony and adjournment of the Annual Meeting, the membership reception was held which provided a great opportunity for cooperative friends from across the state to visit.



Dean Thernes, NCC Board Vice Chair and Co-Chair of the NCC-Political Action Committee, provided the NCC-PAC report to the membership. Dean is CEO of Farmers Pride headquartered in Battle Creek.



On November 21st, Dale Johnson became the 66th person inducted into the NCC Cooperative Hall of Fame. Dale is the retired general manager of Agland Co-op in Oakland and retired COO at CVA headquartered in York. Pictured are NCC Board Chair David Briggs, Ann & Dale Johnson, and NCC President Rocky Weber.

NCC Board and Committee Reorganization

As announced at the Annual Meeting, four individuals were re-elected to the NCC Board: David Briggs, CEO of Westco headquartered in Alliance, Galen Kuska, Bd Chair of Farmers Co-op headquartered in Dorchester, Bart Moseman, CEO of Farmers Co-op Elevator Co. headquartered in Hemingford, and Jeremy Wilhelm, CEO of Frontier Co-op headquartered in Lincoln. Officers for the upcoming fiscal year were also elected by the NCC Board. Re-elected were David Briggs as Chair, Dean Thernes (CEO of Farmers Pride headquartered in Battle Creek) as Vice Chair, and Dave Beckman (Bd Chair of CVA headquartered in York) as Secretary. In addition, standing committees have also been reorganized. [Click here for the 2020 committee makeup which becomes effective on January 1st.](#)

Director/Manager Workshop

On November 22nd, the 2019 Director/Manager Workshop was held in Kearney with 78 cooperative representatives in attendance.

The day began with an economic outlook from Dr. David Kohl, retired professor from Virginia Tech. Dr. Kohl provided his usual entertaining and insightful views on where agriculture may be heading.

Brett Sciotto, President & CEO of Aimpoint Research, then provided a summary of his landmark research into the “Farmer of the Future.” In the afternoon, Sciotto continued with a discussion on “Self Evaluation - How Does the Farmer Owned Cooperative Prepare for the Farmer of the Future?” Both sessions were very informative and thought provoking.

The evaluations indicated that participants valued the program and showed that this was one of the most highly valued workshops that the Council has offered in recent years.



Brett Sciotto, President & CEO of Aimpoint Research, updated Director/Manager Workshop participants with results of his landmark research into the Farmer of the Future.

Upcoming Education Programs

There are still numerous opportunities for cooperative directors and staff members to participate in Council education programs. Programs to come yet this winter are listed below. [Our 2019/20 education booklet \(linked here\) includes more details about each program.](#)

Director Certification Program: All four phases of DCP will be held in January 7-8 in Kearney. Attorney Bill Kutilek, Iowa State University Professor Dr. Keri Jacobs, UNL Professor Dr. Greg McKee; CoBank Vice President Tom Houser, and Council President Rocky Weber will all be involved in the four phases. [Click here for the registration form.](#)

Cooperatives For Tomorrow Seminar and Graduate Director Seminar: CFT and GDS will be held back-to-back on February 6 & 7 in Lincoln. CFT will once again focus on the “Big Picture” in terms of agriculture’s evolution. Dr. Greg McKee will begin the seminar with a look at the changing demographics in agriculture that will impact cooperatives. Millikin University Professor Dr. J. Mark Munoz will then discuss artificial intelligence and the implementation and impact on agriculture and cooperative. The final presentation will be from Purdue University Professor Dr. Jayson Lusk. He will discuss how consumer preferences and the food chain are changing and will continue to change production agriculture. GDS will feature a presentation by business consultant David Parker. He will address “Executive the Strategic Plan” which will challenge board members to develop and implement a plan best suited for their cooperatives. The second session will feature Wade Johannes with Mark Jewell Speaking & Training. Wade will focus on a hands-on method to help directors to effectively communicate with patrons and other stakeholders. Click here for the registration forms: [CFT](#) [GDS](#)

Board Leadership Seminar: The final program for this winter will be BLS featuring Attorney Bill Kutilek with Crosby Guenzel LLP and Council President Rocky Weber. This ever-popular program will once again feature an “open forum” discussion that is driven by participants. [Click here for the registration form.](#)

NCCEF Scholarships Available for 2020/21AY



Applications are now being accepted at UNL, NCTA, and UNK for NCC Education Foundation scholarships for the 2020/21 academic year - eleven scholarships totaling \$31,000 will be awarded for the upcoming academic year. [Click here to go to our website for the online applications and selection criteria.](#) The application deadline is April 15, 2020.

Co-ops 101

The Council has begun its 9th year of offering Co-ops 101 presentations to college and select high school ag programs. Over the past 9 years, we have received grant funds from the CHS Foundation's Cooperative Education Grants Program to help defray the costs of these valuable presentations.

This fall, we have provided presentations at Doane College, Central Community College at Hastings, UNK, the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture at Curtis, and Southeast Community College at Beatrice.

The Co-ops 101 presentations provide students with a basic understanding of the cooperative business model and what sets cooperatives apart from other models. We also incorporate cooperative careers into the presentation.

Since the program's inception in the fall of 2011, we have provided 121 presentations to over 2,100 ag students in Nebraska.



Celebrating Co-op Month

The Council participated in celebrating Co-op Month by coordinating three activities to bring attention to the value that cooperatives provide for Nebraskans.

We began this effort by working with the Governor's office to have the Governor sign a proclamation (Deb to link proclamation) proclaiming October as Cooperative Month. The signing ceremony was held on September 16th with the Governor and cooperative representatives present (see photo at bottom of section).

In addition, David Briggs, CEO of Westco headquartered in Alliance; Dean Thernes, President of Farmers Pride headquartered in Battle Creek; Tod Clark, CEO of Country Partners headquartered in Gothenburg; and Chris Vincent, President of the Aurora Co-op Elevator Co headquartered in Aurora; each filmed a segment for the Pure Nebraska television show that was shown each week during October. [Each of these segments can be found on our website by clicking here.](#) Please take a few minutes to watch them.



October was proclaimed as Co-op Month by Governor Pete Ricketts in a signing ceremony at the State Capitol. Co-op representatives who participated in the ceremony were (L to R): Dave Beckman, Bd Chair of CVA headquartered in York; Tim Rowe, Bd Chair of Country Partners Co-op headquartered in Gothenburg; Neil Stedman, Bd Chair of Frontier Co-op Co. headquartered in Lincoln; NCC President & General Counsel Rocky Weber; Galen Kuska, Bd Chair of Farmers Co-op headquartered in Dorchester; Evan Brandes, Vice Chair of the Aurora Co-op Elevator Company headquartered in Aurora; and Jeff Loschen, Bd Chair of CPI headquartered in Hastings.

100th Anniversary Celebrations

Three of our member cooperatives celebrated their 100th anniversaries in 2019 - Farmers Union Co-op Company headquartered in Friend, Farmers Co-op Elevator Company headquartered in Hemingford, and Farmers Cooperative headquartered in Pilger. NCC President Rocky Weber presented each with a certificate recognizing their 100 years of service to Nebraska's farmers and ranchers.

*Rocky and Ed Menke,
manager of Farmers Union
Co-op Company
headquartered in Friend.*



*Rocky and Bart Moseman,
CEO of Farmers Co-op
Elevator Company
headquartered in Hemingford.*



*VerNeal Marotz, Bd Chair of
Farmers Cooperative
headquartered in Pilger, and
Rocky.*



Contributions to the NCC Education Foundation

For those planning any end-of-year giving, a memorial gift or a honorary gift, please consider a donation to the NCC Education Foundation. [Click here for a form which can be included with your gift.](#)

Policy Makers Convene Dicamba Summit

In early November, under the leadership of Sen. Steve Halloran, Chairman of the Legislature's Agriculture Committee, a meeting was organized that included, in addition to Senator Halloran, Senators Myron Dorn, Tom Brandt, Julie Slama, and Curt Friesen, Nebraska Secretary of Agriculture Steve Wellman, representatives of Nebraska's agriculture trade associations, and representatives of national farm chemical companies for the purpose of reviewing the status of Dicamba complaints in Nebraska and whether any regulatory or statutory changes should be made regarding use of this product.

In 2017 there were 96 Dicamba damage claims made to the Department of Agriculture. That number rose to 106 in 2018 and 131 in 2019. The general experience of the Department is that it is difficult to find out where the damage originated from and what the conditions at the time of application were. In a high percentage of claims they have not been able to find applicator error and upon questioning, the Department indicated that most complaints involved producer application and not commercial application.

Nebraska has stayed with the EPA label recommendations for Dicamba application. Some states, including Illinois, have limited the period of time in which application can be made. At the

conclusion of the meeting, the Department of Agriculture indicated that it would explore its current regulatory structure and determine if any changes would be recommended for Dicamba application.

Land O'Lakes Cooperative Farmer Health Plan

In 2019 Land O' Lakes was able to introduce a self-insured cooperative farmer member health plan in Nebraska. This was possible as a result of regulatory action by the Department of Labor (DOL) that allowed for the creation of Association Health Plans.

Unfortunately in April of 2019 a federal court invalidated the Association Health Plan rule, determining that the DOL had exceeded its statutory authorization in creating the rule. While the DOL did appeal that ruling, it created a statutory and regulatory vacuum that unless states had statutes allowing such plans, they could not continue in 2020.

Land O' Lakes and the Council have been actively working with the Nebraska Department of Insurance in exploring legislative changes that would allow Land O'Lakes to again offer its farmer health plan in 2021. As of the publication of this newsletter it appears likely that a bill will be introduced in 2020 to amend Nebraska statutes. We will keep you advised of the legislative efforts as they unfold.

President's Message

As I write this on the week before Christmas, I am amazed at how quickly 2019 has passed. It seems as though we just finished the 2019 legislative session, and we are already busy meeting with state senators and other policy makers on issues important to Nebraska cooperatives that may be addressed in the upcoming 2020 legislative session. As we gear up for this next session, I am continually reminded how important your NCC-PAC has been in creating relationships between the Council and its membership and our state legislators. Relationships created with the Council during the campaigns endure and continue after elections. I appreciate the broad support of our membership this year in support of the NCC-PAC for the 2020 legislative election cycle.

Yesterday, the Senate included the provisions of the SECURE Act in its appropriations bill that has been sent to President Trump for signature. This is a material piece of legislation that will help the Nebraska farmer owned cooperatives that are members of the Coop Retirement Plan. Through the SECURE Act, Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation premiums will be substantially lowered from those required by previous law which will save participating cooperatives approximately 2% of payroll costs. The Council has worked closely with our Congressional Delegation to make sure that they understood the importance of pension premium relief for retirement plans like the Coop Retirement Plan. A coalition of the United Benefits Group, the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives (NCFC), and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association provided the

primary legislative effort on the Hill to achieve this result.

Passage of the SECURE Act came hand in hand with the adoption of the USMCA by Congress as well as announcements of an easing of the trade war with China. Over the last two years, I have participated with other NCFC members in meetings with various trade representatives urging swift action on these agreements to reopen and enhance export markets for farm commodities. It appears that on a federal level we are finally getting some traction in these areas.

To say 2019 has been a difficult year in agriculture is an understatement. The farm kid in me always looks to next year with optimism that the weather will be better, the crops more productive, the markets higher and that our farmer owners will finally start seeing improvements in economic conditions on the farm. As you all know, on farm economics directly impact our farmer cooperative economics. I am hopeful that 2020 sees economic improvements across the agricultural landscape.

This week I began to hear radio personalities discussing the “Best of the Decade” lists, and it had not even dawned on me that not only was another year coming to a close, but that we would soon be embarking on a new decade! In 2020 your Nebraska Cooperative Council will celebrate its 75th Anniversary. As we mark this achievement, I want to acknowledge and thank all of you who not only support the Council with dues, attendance at education programs and contributions to the NCC-PAC and the NCC Education Foundation, but all of you who have helped with marking Cooperative Month in October 2019 and who give of their time and talent to serve on the Board of Directors, standing committees, and who are so good about calling and keeping me in the loop on issues that are affecting you. I believe your collaborative and “cooperative” efforts are the backbone of the Council continuing to be a presence in legislative and regulatory issues that affect your operations. It has been and truly remains a pleasure for me to be able to work and interact with all of you. I am grateful!

2019 has brought many challenges and lessons, not the least of which is to not take anything for granted. We (our membership and me) are lucky to have the support of Ed Woepel, Glenda Gaston and Deb Mazour. They are invaluable in keeping everything running smoothly. I am grateful for them as well!

As we begin a new year and new decade, I do so with renewed optimism and wish each of you a Very Merry Christmas and Healthy Happy New Year!

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

- Tue-Wed, Jan 7-8, 2020 - Director Certification Program - Younes Center, Kearney
- Thu, Feb 6, 2020 - Cooperatives For Tomorrow Seminar - Embassy Suites, Lincoln
- Fri, Feb 7, 2020 - Graduate Director Seminar - Embassy Suites, Lincoln

- Thu, Feb 20, 2020 - Board Leadership Seminar - Embassy Suites, LaVista

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