

Farming's Future Path

Farmers Must Reach Out To Consumers And Tell Their Story

BY WALT BONES
South Dakota Secretary of Agriculture

This summer has shown the perseverance and dedication of our producers and processors. A severe drought has swept the country, increasing fire dangers, lowering crop yields and hurting our producers' bottom line. These



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problems are real, but they are not something South Dakota farmers and ranchers haven't seen before. Our producers are creative in their approaches to situations such as this one. They are resourceful and know how to best utilize what's available to them. Feeding the world is never an easy task and this summer our ranchers and farmers will have to work together in order to achieve this goal.

At the end of June, the South Dakota Department of Agriculture (SDDA) hosted South Dakota's agricultural leaders at the Key Leader Roundtable to discuss the challenges we might face and opportunities available to our industry. Emerging from the vast number of ideas and suggestions are eight main priorities:

- Give support to South Dakota State University Agriculture and Biotechnology programs and professors
- Increase livestock production in South Dakota
- Focus on the natural resources and energy opportunities in South Dakota (i.e. impact of oil, mineral rights, expanding oil production but also other forms of energy)
- Address and inform the public and county commissioners on water zoning issues.
- Educate and involve youth in South Dakota agriculture
- Work towards education and collaboration with zoning boards
- Work towards better infrastructure at a local level
- Focus on value-added processing in South Dakota
- Tell the South Dakota agriculture story (use social media and potentially train South Dakota producers on the use of social media)

These priorities are all ongoing and will take work to see progress. I know our agricultural community is willing to work together to see results. Telling our story, educating the public and getting youth involved are priorities we can readily achieve if we work together.

Particularly, consumer outreach is very important in today's world. More and more of us are looking to online news and social media to keep us updated. All of agriculture needs to create content for this new communication medium.

Our customers are looking for the voice of agriculture. They want to meet the dairy farmer who provided their milk. They want to know the producer who supplied their supper.

I encourage all South Dakota producers to tell their story. Write a blog, create a Facebook page, or get on Twitter. Learn about these mediums and how you can be involved to help make a positive difference. The more we talk, the more the world will listen.



Agriculture Has Always Had A Heavy Lift

BY GREG IBACH
Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Agriculture has always been the backbone of our nation's economy and foundation for job creation. As technology has evolved leaving horse-drawn plows in the history books and increasingly smarter tractors in the field, it's no wonder agriculture continues to serve as a building block of today's society.

In Nebraska, agriculture has a statewide impact due to an expansive agricultural production network. This means everything necessary for the basic growing of commodities, to the processing, wholesaling and transporting of finished agricultural goods. This production network is responsible for an economic output of \$68.9 billion in business receipts, or 40.7 percent of the total receipts within the Nebraska economy in 2010, according to a recent study by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The report noted that, considering direct and indirect effects, just over a quarter of the state's economy can be attributed to this agriculture production network, a larger percentage than any state in the nation, with the potential exception of South Dakota.

It is interesting to note that the report authors broke Nebraska into eight sub-state regions and found that, of the eight, Northeast Nebraska's regional economy was most influenced by agriculture. The agricultural production network there accounted for 81 percent of business receipts and 51 percent of the employment.

With agriculture as a leading economic driver, Nebraska strives to be a leader in innovation, ingenuity, education, and research. This is necessary to meet growing challenges and benefit from opportunities.

One of the biggest issues the agriculture industry faces is the future demands of the world's growing population. It's been stated the world will reach a population of 9 billion people by 2050 or sooner. Our farmers and ranchers will continually need to find ways to grow more food, fuel and fiber with the land and water we have available.

Since we can't produce more land or water,



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there needs to be strong support for research and development of agricultural practices that conserve the resources we have while producing more of everything. Public and private investment through our universities and agribusiness companies have led to useful products such as drought tolerant seed varieties, farming practices to conserve soil nutrients, and water conservation tools. Nebraska's progressive farmers and ranchers tend to embrace these ideas and methods, but more education and understanding is needed, as well as greater acceptance of these practices and products around the globe.

We are going to need dedicated workers with backgrounds in science, engineering, business and management, to be the grain merchandisers, agricultural bankers, food safety scientists, food animal veterinarians and plant geneticists of the future.

While modern agriculture provides great opportunities, one of the more current challenges for our industry is basic education. A consuming public that continues to be farther removed from the farm has less and less understanding about how our farmers and ranchers go about putting food on their plates. Groups like the Alliance for the Future of Agriculture in Nebraska (AFAN) are working to bridge the knowledge gap, so folks can better understand the animal welfare and cropping practices farmers and ranchers use to ensure safe, wholesome, quality food for their families to eat. But the agricultural community as a whole needs to make an effort to share information with the public and in the media and explain the issues in plain language for all to comprehend.

Nebraska is known internationally for its quality agricultural products, and outreach through the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) is helping get our products in restaurants, grocery stores and food service outlets around the world. With assistance of

agricultural organizations and federal partners, we continue to foster relationships with businesses in countries that offer the greatest potential. That has helped Nebraska to maintain its position within the top five agricultural exporting states in the nation. Looking down the road, these relationships will no longer be an optional part of a marketing plan, but essential partnerships necessary to feed the world.

There will be other challenges along the way to meeting the 9 billion population milestone. We must address the problem of how to position our youth to return to their rural communities following their post-high-school education. The increasing costs of daily life and the promise of a steady paycheck have drawn many rural children from their family farm or ranch. With the median age for farmers and ranchers continually increasing, it's apparent we will need to find more ways to help the next generation return back to the farm.

As much as we need new farmers and ranchers, we also need to encourage our youth to consider all opportunities to stay involved in the field of agriculture as those who are in our colleges — as well as our middle and high schools — now are the ones who will be front and center in addressing how to feed 9 billion people. We are going to need dedicated workers with backgrounds in science, engineering, business and management, to be the grain merchandisers, agricultural bankers, food safety scientists, food animal veterinarians and plant geneticists of the future. I am excited for our youth, because there are so many options for them to stay engaged in agriculture and present in our rural communities.

While addressing a growing population with existing resources is a huge responsibility, it also is a great opportunity. I believe northeast Nebraska and southeast South Dakota, as well as our states in general, can and will be a successful part of the solution.

Ibach is the director of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

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