

February 27, 2009

WATER, LAND & ENERGY

On the same day in February as the Wilber Crop Clinic this year, co-worker Paul Hay was privileged to attend an educational conference hosted by Monsanto in Denver, Colorado. I had also received an invitation to attend, but was happy to host a good crowd of area producers in Wilber on a stormy day. Steve Wiese, a farmer near Clatonia, attended the same meeting as a representative of the Corn Growers Association. Paul wrote some reflections down from the conference of a few of the themes presented by a talented group of nationally recognized presenters from both the public and private sector.

Dr. Lowell Catlett of New Mexico State University says, “It’s not what we don’t know which hurts us. It is what we do know and do not apply or won’t admit.” Paul said he was forced to like that quote. It has been the theme of his Extension work with clients in trouble and clients moving forward when few are headed in that direction. His focus is to relate how we, our society today, think about our businesses and environment in a different way than past generations because of their different experiences growing up. Referring back to the quote, agriculture is sustainability, our environment, our future, and it is and will be, weird in the future. And we can own it if we are not afraid to admit it.

In 1940, agriculture throughout the world was delivering 1300 calories per person per day to two and a half billion people. The world operated on a food reserve at any given moment in time of 45-60 days. Food resources were not well distributed, so famine was real.

Today we deliver 2700 calories per person per day to six and a half billion people. The food reserve hasn’t changed, but food resource distribution has improved quite a bit, famine can still happen. In 20 years we will be at nine billion people, which clearly shows the need for talent, technology, and quality resource planning.

The conference focused on the challenges we face in efficient use of our land, water and energy in the Great Plains region to meet this food production challenge. Monsanto and other companies are really just in the infancy of bringing new biotech and molecular breeding technology to producers throughout the world. There are amazing things going to be available on an almost continuous basis for the foreseeable future. Technology seed yield increases expectations are 7% for Roundup Ready II soybeans, 8% for drought tolerant corn, 6% for SmartStax combined trait products, improved fungicides and seed treatments, etc. How these technologies are going to be adapted and economically used by Nebraska farmers creates an exciting future.

It is not enough for us to be sustainable. We must be better producers and better stewards of our land, water and people resources. Change is not easy, but has been, is, and will be a vital part of production agriculture.

Paul Hay asked several questions, as did a number of other agronomists, about genetic diversity, cropping systems, and management flexibility. He said he was asked by a university professor if their questions were answered. The response was they were more interested in how the questions



were answered than the exact answers given. There are some exciting possibilities ahead in the future. They were also concerned that our farms, our communities, and the world will be sufficiently diverse to be able to flex in response to potential threats of all kinds in the future.

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