



.....STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

Duane A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator, Webster County

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There are several things that I have been watching concerning regulations and in particular those proposed regulations that affect Nebraska and Nebraska agriculture. I think that this is a critical time for agriculture and there is a need for farmers and ranchers to become more active in protecting their livelihood. It seems that we are continually being hit with discussion on clean air, clean water and the need for the “Greening of the USA” Oh I know, a lot of this hinges around what people call Climate Change. I have my own thoughts on this as I have heard it all my working life. I think we have a lot of green!

Many of you may not know it, but in the mid to late 70’s we in ag education were told we were on the brink of Global Cooling and that Nebraska would need to start looking at crops that are more common to South and even North Dakota by the year 2010. Canolla, oats and wheat would be our staples. I think I even still have the lesson plans for that. It is a good thing I was a procrastinator, because if I hadn’t been - I would have looked rather foolish. Since that didn’t work out so well for those that predicted that, or those that perhaps had an agenda concerning this issue, it then became Global Warming. All the coasts would be under water from the polar caps, and snow on the mountain tops melting by 2015. Many were scared.

That didn’t work out so well either, so now we are to just simply call it Global Climate Change. I do believe that we have always had climate change. I don’t think anyone will argue that. Weather has always affected us in agriculture and I don’t see that as a new or extraordinary claim. I have seen a lot of that in my 66 years, but there are other factors that become involved and I will not delve into all of that. I will let the scientists and politicians argue that one, as I am seeing this more and more as an ideological or political football. One thing I do know is that this issue or at least agendas that derive their impetus from this issue is driving lots of regulations, laws, rules and unfortunately a lot of angst for we in agriculture.

Let’s start with the RFS, an acronym that has been batted around for some time now. As I and many others of us who have studied these issues you can conclude that Nebraskans would be among the millions of Americans harmed by an EPA proposal to make changes to the federal Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS). The RFS establishes the amount of ethanol required to be blended into the nation’s fuel supply. In May, EPA proposed modifications to reduce blending requirements below levels established by Congress. I think that Steve Nelson, Nebraska Farm Bureau President, hits it right on the nose when he points out that “Ethanol is a Nebraska produced renewable fuel source that’s helped reduce our dependency on foreign oil, lowered fuel costs for consumers and provided significant environmental benefits. It’s also one side of Nebraska’s corn, cattle, ethanol triangle that has bolstered Nebraska’s rural economy and lifted Nebraska’s economy as a whole. In failing to meet the blending requirements for ethanol as outlined by Congress, the EPA is jeopardizing a key segment of Nebraska agriculture. I agree with his analysis and am puzzled by those that don’t see it that way.

Nebraska is the third-largest producer of corn in the country and ranks second in ethanol production and distillers grains, which is a livestock feed ingredient produced by ethanol plants. Nebraska also ranks first in the number of cattle on feed and second in cow-calf production. The synergy that exists in adding value to corn by turning it into a fuel source that also provides an added feed source for our strong livestock sector can’t be understated. It is clear to many that the EPA’s RFS proposal is a step in the wrong direction as it relates to American energy policy, and more importantly for Nebraskans. With corn prices the way they are, we cannot afford another hit to marketability. This is a basic economic fact, Nebraska’s ethanol industry is worth an estimated \$5 billion per year to Nebraska’s economy and has helped create 3,000 Nebraska jobs.

I know the people in South Central Nebraska know how important the ethanol industry is as we live in an area that depends a great deal on the plants for our corn markets and for livestock feed. It is a “Golden Triangle” that has been good to our farmers, our communities, our small towns, schools, municipalities and our county coffers. I remember well when the first plant was put in at Hastings and all those that followed. It is an industry that started as a single plant in 1985 and has grown to 24 plants statewide today. Farm leaders and businessmen all across Nebraska believe that it is vital that the EPA recognize the benefits of ethanol to farmers, consumers and the environment. Meeting the RFS targets established by Congress is a place to start. The RFS has been a topic of debate for several years in part because of the corn ethanol blend wall, which is a bit less than 10 percent of national gasoline consumption, currently at 135 billion gallons per year. Most gasoline in the U.S. is consumed as a 10 percent ethanol blend. The EPA says they are trying to find a balance.

I believe we can even do better than that with increased usage of this renewable fuel source. We keep hearing about the troubles around the world where we get a lot of our energy in the form of oil, let’s make use of the natural, renewable source we have growing in on our farms, between and around our towns and cities. But we need for our Congressmen and the EPA to hear our voices. We need to take part in the discussion or the talking will be without us and we know how that goes. I suggest that if you are interested in this issue that you join other individuals and groups who will file public comments with EPA on the proposal. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is now accepting comments on its proposal to slash the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) and reduce the amount of homegrown ethanol blended in our fuel supply by 4 billion gallons in 2014, 2015 and 2016. You may want to check out the National Corn Growers Association’s excellent RFS website for useful tools, comment directions and information at <http://www.ncga.com/rfs>. Tear down that ethanol wall!!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or Nebraska Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email to: dlienemann2@unl.edu or go to the website at: <http://www.webster.unl.edu/home>