



.....STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

Duane A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator, Webster County

August 22, 2015 Edition

I have always been a voracious reader. I guess curiosity and the need to learn has been innate in me. I am sure my mother was hoping that my first words to come out of my mouth as a baby would be "mom" or "dad" but according to my baby book I must have pointed at a light switch and the first words were "What's that?" Obviously nobody had pointed that out to me in my first formative months and I wanted to know! I think inquisitiveness and need to know has led me to be whom and what I am. Of course the retention is not as good as it used to be, but that mental thirst always seems to be there.

Now what is the point of that discussion you might ask? As I progressed through life I started centering in on things that primarily focus on agricultural topics and most people know that is where I have made my living over the years. To get that base knowledge, not only for myself but for the young people I taught and now adult farmers I needed to go to the well to keep abreast and up to date. Farm magazines, periodicals and now with the internet – blogs, websites and access to articles gleaned from all over the country all at the tip of your finger is pure Nirvana to me. In these readings you come across things that you feel you cannot express thoughts any better and it is simply best to share them. I found something written by Tim Lust, who is the CEO of the National Sorghum Producers. I think it is a good read and should give us pause for thought.

"When the well's dry, we shall know the worth of water," said Benjamin Franklin. Similarly, if ever we lose the hard-working independent family farms that take care of the nation's landscape while producing a diverse set of crops more reliably and efficiently than any farm sector in history, then, and only then will we truly understand the value they provide. I, for one, hope we as a nation never get to that point and I will work every day on behalf of agricultural producers to prevent such a scenario. But, it's a challenge for a number of reasons; chief among them is we take our secure, affordable, national food supply for granted. It's always been there, it always will be.

To be sure, the "well" that is the American farmer is not going dry, but here are some reasons why we should make certain that the policies we embrace don't put our farmers in danger. First, the demographics are not on our side. The number of farmers continues to decline and the age of farmers continues to increase. These numbers speak to a way of life that is hard and seems to grow harder by the day. Second, the business of farming is getting ugly. The Secretary of Agriculture is forecasting a 32 percent decline in net farm income from 2014 to 2015 and lower commodity prices for the foreseeable future. Third, when farmers aren't dealing with the vagaries of Mother Nature and falling commodity prices, then they're worried about the constant threat of new regulatory burdens. Just consider recent activity in Washington: the Environmental Protection Agency finalized a rule that some have labeled the biggest land grab in the history of the U.S. causing every ditch across rural America to be regulated as a major waterway. Farmers and ranchers will endure the brunt of this new regulation as the primary stewards of land resources in the U.S.

Finally, to add to this political risk and uncertainty, some lawmakers are trying to use the appropriations process to threaten farm policy one year into the 2014 Farm Bill. This is after the farm safety net has already borne dramatic cuts over the last decade in an effort to reduce our national deficit. Crop Insurance was the primary target. And, while the efforts were rightly rejected, they could have brought an agricultural sector that is already suffering to its knees. Farmers purchase crop insurance to protect against losses due to natural disasters. They only receive an indemnity after suffering a verifiable loss and paying their deductible. Crop insurance enables farmers to rebound quickly after a disaster and it prevents dramatic farm losses, which in turn allows them to pay credit obligations and fixed expenses.

This system is hugely important for not only farmers, but also to rural communities and the national economy as a whole. Nation-wide, agriculture accounts for nearly \$800 billion in economic activity and supports one out of every 11 jobs in the economy. Cutting the farm safety net would serve to reduce farm financial protection and drive independent American farm families out of business. Meanwhile, our foreign competitors seem more than ready to move the U.S. out of the agriculture business as they ramp up support for their own farmers. As Texas Tech University's Darren Hudson recently told a Congressional committee in June, "Other countries are treating their agricultural sectors as a national asset for security purposes and for the U.S. not to consider the implications of those choices would leave us at a competitive disadvantage." Indeed, it would be a tragic commentary if years from now – having squandered our own national asset because we didn't fully appreciate its worth – we look back and remember what we had and lost."

Those issues stated above are national in scope, and I can add a lot of things that are state or local based issues. There is so much that hinges on how we in agriculture approach these coming years. We sometimes can become our own worst enemies and not even know it. We can no longer just sit on the seat of our tractors, oblivious to what is around us. We can no longer just sip coffee at the local coffee shop or co-op and complain about what is happening around us. Don't just be reactive. We must be proactive and most importantly – just become active! Join associations that can work on the problems that are around us. There is strength in numbers and it is powerful when many voices become one. Look at your commodity groups or associations like the local, state or national cattlemen, pork producers, corn growers, sorghum growers, soybean growers and federations like Farm Bureau. Be a part of the solution. The livelihood that you may save could be your own!

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>