

Cornstalk

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CornBoard
NebraskaCorn.org



Long Family
Grant, Nebraska



Making sure farmers are included in the conversation about food.

Farmers have never been much for tooting their own horns. It used to be that Nebraska farmers—and their colleagues across America—simply did their jobs: produce a safe and abundant food supply for our nation and our world. Until recently, that was enough.

But in recent years, food and food production have become hot topics on national talk shows, on the covers of magazines, in editorials in major newspapers and in best-selling books. And many times, the discussion is extremely one-sided.

As agriculture has come under fire and become the subject of misinformation, misunderstanding and myths, farmers and ranchers have realized that they need to be included in the conversation.

In this edition of *CornsTalk*, we highlight some of the ways in which Nebraska corn farmers and other “advocates” are reaching out to consumers to provide fact-based information about farming, food and food production. “It’s important that people be able to make up their own minds about their food choices,” said Tim Scheer, a St. Paul farmer who serves as chairman of the Nebraska Corn Board. “All we want to do as farmers is make sure that consumers have all the facts they need to make an informed choice.”

Feeding the nine billion people populating the world in the near future will require a combination of food sources—from locally grown to organic to packaged and convenience foods. But traditional conventional sources such as corn, wheat, soybeans, and livestock will continue to play a major role in providing nutrition to the world.

“The fact is that if we’re going to feed a global population of nine billion people, we’re going to have to grow more with less—and at the same time, do so responsibly and sustainably,” Scheer added. “Farmers are the original environmentalists, because we depend on natural resources for our very livelihood over generations. Technology and science have enabled us to improve efficiency, improve animal health and performance, and continually produce more food on the same amount of land. We’re going to have to keep doing that if we’re going to keep the world’s stomachs full.”

“One reason we’re seeing this trend in misinformation and misunderstanding is that each new generation is getting farther away from our agricultural roots,” said Scheer. “At one time, almost everyone knew someone—family or friend—who lived on farm. That’s not the case anymore—and as a result, people are less and less connected to the source of the food they eat—and more and more susceptible to the influence of media and others who have an anti-agriculture bias.”





USFRA Facilitates Conversations About Food

The Food Dialogues, sponsored by USFRA, bring a wide range of people together in major U.S. cities to discuss food and food production. At the top, National Corn Growers Association president Pam Johnson of Iowa (center) talks with a media reporter. Other photos depict the format of The Food Dialogues, which are covered extensively by media and streamed live on the Internet.



More than 80 farmer and rancher-led organizations and agricultural partners have joined to create the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance (USFRA). The organization represents virtually every aspect of agriculture—fruits and vegetables, livestock production, grain and oilseeds, farm membership organizations, and agribusiness.

As a major initiative, USFRA hosts a series of high-profile discussions on food and agriculture called **The Food Dialogues**. The word “dialogue” is important, because these events encourage informed and engaged discussion on food issues—rather than presenting a one-sided view. The Food Dialogues events are held in major media markets such as New York City, Los Angeles and Chicago.

The Food Dialogues events tackle tough questions about biotechnology, antibiotic residue, animal welfare, food safety, agricultural chemicals, and food prices.

“USFRA’s goal for The Food Dialogues is to spark conversation on some of today’s toughest questions surrounding food production,” said Bob Stallman, chairman of USFRA and president of the American Farm Bureau Federation. “The topic of transparency and food is intended to engage consumers and the key decision-makers along the food chain who deliver the products consumers find on the shelves of supermarkets and on menus across the country.”

New State Fair Building to Feature Nebraska Agriculture

Nebraska agriculture will soon have its own dedicated showcase at the Nebraska State Fair.

The new Nebraska Building, recently announced by the Nebraska State Fair Board and slated to open for the 2014 Nebraska State Fair in Grand Island, will include a 25,000 square foot exhibit area devoted exclusively to Nebraska agriculture.

Concept and design for the Nebraska agriculture exhibit are underway, and those involved promise it will be a major showcase for Nebraska’s largest industry.

“This will not be a simple agriculture exhibit. It will be an agricultural experience,” said Dr. Charles Hibberd, dean of extension at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and one of the lead coordinators of the project.

A wide range of Nebraska agriculture advocates are expected to collaborate on the project, which will be available throughout the year as an educational space for extension, 4-H, foreign trade team visits and other uses.

Key themes in the exhibit are expected to include the economic impact of agriculture, science and technology, the importance of animal agriculture, water quality and quantity, stewardship, the global leadership of Nebraska agriculture—with all areas highlighting the Nebraska farmers and ranchers who make it all happen.

“We want to help Nebraskans better understand the value that Nebraska agriculture brings to our state—and that Nebraska is well positioned to be a global leader in agriculture research, stewardship and food production,” Hibberd added. “We expect that people who visit will walk away not only better informed, but darn proud of the farmers and ranchers in their state.”



Farm Women Connect WITH Urban Counterparts THROUGH CommonGround™

In most households, women are the decision makers when it comes to food purchases. And more and more women are becoming interested—and in some cases, concerned—about what they are hearing about where their family's food comes from and how it's produced.

Who better to talk with about these concerns than a fellow mom who helps produce that food?

That's the focus of CommonGround, a national initiative in which volunteer farm women interact with urban women in grocery stores, food shows and other events across America. While many CommonGround conversations take place in large urban areas, these conversations are also taking place in Nebraska communities such as Grand Island, Norfolk and Hastings.

"Our goal is to have conversations between women who grow food and women who buy food," said Dawn Caldwell, an Edgar farmer and CommonGround volunteer. "We want them to realize that, in most cases, the media coverage is much more colorful and exaggerated than real life."

"We're normal people just like them. We shop in the same grocery stores and eat in the same restaurants."

DAWN CALDWELL

Edgar Farmer & CommonGround volunteer

According to Caldwell, older women tend to know where their food comes from, but have questions regarding the value of organic versus conventional—or the differences between corn-fed and grass-fed beef. Younger consumers are concerned about the use of antibiotics, hormone implants and the general safety of the food they eat.

"We actually tend to do more listening than talking" she added. "Then we explain how and why we do what we do—and that we're very comfortable with the choices we're making as producers."

One of the most memorable experiences was a trip to New York City to meet with leading food editors from national media. "We were the only booth not serving food, but we were also the only booth with people who actually grow food," Caldwell said. "We had a long line of editors waiting to talk with us—many of whom had never been outside the city."

Caldwell said it's important that urban women understand that their concerns are shared by the farm women who help grow their food. "We're normal people just like them. We shop in the same grocery stores and eat in the same restaurants," she said. "In the end, it's all good—organic, processed foods and conventional agriculture. It really comes down to having the information you need to make the right decisions for you and your family."



Joan Ruskamp talks with a consumer during a grocery store visit.



Conversations About Farming and Food
findourcommonground.org

CommonGround™ volunteers from Nebraska include:



**DIANE
BECKER** Madison



**LESLIE
BOSWELL** Shickley



**SHANA
BEATTIE** Sumner



**DAWN
CALDWELL** Edgar



**KRISTEN
EGGERLING** Martell



**LANA
HOFFSCHNEIDER**
Waco



**CHANDRA
HORKY** Sargent



**DAWN
KUCERA** Madison



**SUSAN
LITTLEFIELD** Surprise



**HILARY
MARICLE** Albion



**SHARON
PORTENIER** Harvard



**JOAN
RUSKAMP** Dodge



**LINDA
SCHWARZ** Bertrand

Ag Curriculum Helps Teachers Meet State Standards

Agriculture in the Classroom is a nationwide educational program to help students develop awareness and understanding that agriculture is the source of our food, clothing, shelter and other life essentials.

In Nebraska, Ag in the Classroom provides resources and training for K-12 teachers on ways to use agriculture as the vehicle to teach across existing curriculum. Using an integrated, hands-on approach to learning, all resources are correlated with Nebraska State Standards in the basic subject areas. The Ag in the Classroom program also works with the teacher colleges across the state, helping new teachers integrate agriculture into their curriculums as they enter their own classroom.



Kevin Cooksley, a rancher from Weissert, Nebraska, visits Beattie Elementary School in Lincoln.

The **Ag Pen Pal Program** links classrooms with farm and ranch families across Nebraska. The students and farm/ranch families write each other at least three times per year. The students ask questions about life on the farm or ranch, send samples of their classroom projects and, in some cases, visit the farm or ranch.

The farm families answer the students' questions and send videos, photos and samples of what they grow. Some farmers and ranchers have visited classrooms to talk with the students.

A new computer-based education resource called **Ag Skype Chats** enables students to take virtual field trips to a farm or ranch without leaving their classroom. Students are able to ride along with a farmer as he plants and harvests his cornfield. They are also able to track corn as it becomes livestock feed or one of several co-products. Students are able to ask questions and receive instant feedback.

ne-aitc.org



Revamped Centennial Mall to Feature Ag Messages and Legacy

Connecting the seat of Nebraska government with the state's land grant university, Centennial Mall has been called "Nebraska's Front Door." Built 40 years ago, the mall has aged and deteriorated, tarnishing Nebraska's "curb appeal."

That is about to change as a \$9.6 million project is underway to revitalize Centennial Mall. "When it's all done, it's going to be beautiful, substantial, educational and a source of pride for all Nebraskans," said campaign leader Roger Larson. In other words, Centennial Mall is a perfect place for agriculture to tell its story.

A group of ag advocates is seeking to raise \$500,000 to ensure that agriculture is featured prominently along the length of the refurbished Centennial Mall. "It is not only fitting but imperative that agriculture be highly visible along Centennial Mall," said Don Hutchens, executive director of the Nebraska Corn Board. "Agriculture is the foundation of the state's success—and we want to share that with the hundreds of thousands of people who will visit the mall each year."

Messages about Nebraska's agricultural leadership will be prominently

displayed on granite landscape walls at five high-profile "anchor" locations along the Mall—each with its own green space.

"In linking the icons of Nebraska government and higher education, Centennial Mall provides the perfect place for Nebraska agriculture to have a prominent presence," Hutchens added.

Additionally, Nebraska farm and ranch families will have the opportunity to share their family's agricultural history permanently and prominently by purchasing an Ag Legacy bronze tile which will be among others displayed along the seven-block walkway. The tiles will include information about the family's operation as well as a quick response (QR) code that smartphone users can scan to connect with a web page containing detailed information on that family's ag history, including photos and videos.

"Imagine children, their children and their grandchildren visiting Centennial Mall over the generations—proudly reconnecting with their family's history and contributions to Nebraska," Hutchens said. "Even if their lives take them away from the land or away from Nebraska, they will always know from whence they came."



Nebraska Classrooms Receive Free iPads with Ag Literacy Focus

Students in 20 schools across Nebraska will soon be learning about agriculture on new iPads. The iPad ag literacy initiative was funded through a grant from DuPont Pioneer and matched by funds from the Nebraska Corn Board.

More than 50 schools applied for the iPads—and the applications included some very creative essays, photos and videos to explain why they should receive the iPads. Schools in the following communities were selected:

- BERTRAND
- CROFTON
- CURTIS
- DAVID CITY
- HOLDREGE
- KEARNEY
- MURRAY
- NORFOLK
- OMAHA
- PLAINVIEW
- ST. EDWARD

A list of agricultural apps and suggested web pages for ag information and resources will be provided to each teacher.

Additionally, representatives of the Nebraska Corn Board will visit the schools during the year. A monthly eAgLetter will be distributed to the winning schools and other schools interested in receiving it.

“Technology is fundamental to education today—and we see this as an effective means to improve agricultural literacy among young people in Nebraska,” said Mark Jagels, a Nebraska Corn Board member from Davenport. Jagels has been using technology to share videos, farming information and real-time conversations with students at an urban school in Texas.

“The students are engaged and excited to learn about what we do on our farm—and that can only help increase their awareness and appreciation for where their food comes from.”

You can view several of the video applications from the schools at:

[youtube.com/user/TheCobSquad](https://www.youtube.com/user/TheCobSquad)



Museum Exhibits Help Children Learn About Agriculture

Youngsters visiting the Omaha Children’s Museum will soon have the opportunity to learn more about agriculture and food production in a new exhibit that is currently in development.

From Field to Fork will teach kids and their families about the role of agriculture in their daily lives. The interactive exhibit, encompassing 10,000 square feet, will feature displays on machinery, water, livestock, crops and natural resources—using science as a basis for teaching about food production and environmental stewardship.

The Omaha Children’s Museum is working in partnership on this community-built exhibit with the Nebraska Corn Board and other commodity boards, as well as ag groups such as Farm Bureau, Ag in the Classroom, extension educators from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and agribusinesses. The display is slated to open in October 2014.

The Nebraska Corn Board has also sponsored an interactive ethanol display at the Edgerton Explorit Center in Aurora and an ethanol display at the Lincoln Children’s Museum.



An ethanol display at the Lincoln Children’s Museum sponsored by the Nebraska Corn Board provides basic information about Nebraska’s homegrown renewable fuel.



“We’re proving that ethanol is the right choice for America’s consumers, America’s economy and our nation’s energy security.”

KENNY WALLACE
NASCAR driver and ethanol advocate

NASCAR driver and ethanol advocate Kenny Wallace

was at the Albion Speedway in Albion, Nebraska, in May to race on the dirt track and to promote NASCAR’s use of E15. To date, NASCAR competitors have raced more than 4 million trouble-free miles on E15. “This is a high-performance fuel that professionals are using in engines worth several hundred thousand dollars,” Wallace said.



District 1
Dave Nielsen
Lincoln, NE



District 6
Dennis Gengenbach
Smithfield, NE

District 2
Mark Jagels
Davenport, NE



District 7
David Merrell
St. Edward, NE

District 3
Curtis Friesen
Henderson, NE



District 8
Jon Holzfaster
Paxton, NE

District 4
Bob Dickey
Laurel, NE



At-large
Alan Tiemann
Seward, NE

District 5
Tim Scheer
St. Paul, NE



Nebraska Corn Board members represent the eight districts indicated on the map and are appointed by the Governor. One at-large member is elected by the other Board members.



The Corn Farmers Coalition, an initiative funded by several corn states including Nebraska, has placed a high-visibility campaign in Washington, DC subway stations this summer. This is the fourth year of the campaign designed to strengthen confidence in America’s corn farmers and communicate key issues such as sustainability, reliability and stewardship. The campaign also includes web, print and other media designed to reach policy makers and their staff members inside the Beltway. For information, visit CornFarmersCoalition.org.



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