

# NFO Commodity Programs Fit In With Ag Marketing Clubs

AMES, Iowa — Agricultural group marketing clubs are in a growth trend across rural America. And they represent a potential growth opportunity for the National Farmers Organization (NFO), according to Richard Ellinghuysen, assistant director of NFO's livestock department.

"Marketing clubs are a popular topic in the farm media and within farm groups these days," said Ellinghuysen. "The farm magazines feature marketing club stories. The extension service is promoting the trend. The National Pork Producers Council is promoting group marketing. Neighboring cattlemen in southwest Missouri pool their feeder calves for marketing each fall. Such clubs are sprouting up all over."

Ellinghuysen sees the interest in marketing clubs as a natural response to economic conditions in agriculture. "Commodity prices are low. There's general discontent with the farm bill. Farmers are finally perceiving that they need to create an alternative to their so-called 'normal' marketing activity."

The existing clubs have several activities. According to Ellinghuysen, some try to pool production with emphasis on quality, quantity, and consistency of hogs or grain. Others try to act in a buy/sell relationship with packers to negotiate a better price.

Still others educate members about risk management and futures options, forward contracts, and other marketing strategies. Members exchange ideas and often call on outside industry "experts" to find out about industry trends, commodity outlooks, industry standards, politics, trade, weather patterns, and the farm program.

"What does all this marketing

club activity tell us?" he said. "Ironically, it tells us that the pendulum has swung back to where it was some 35 years ago when farmers became unhappy with the economic conditions in agriculture, and created their own structure which became the National Farmers Organization.

"The bottom line is that these restless farmers feel they are not finding the type of marketing structure that they want within the industry, so they are creating their own structure," Ellinghuysen said. "They don't realize the NFO offers all these benefits — in place and

ready to work for them immediately, but on a national basis through collective bargaining."

Steve Halloran, director of the NFO grain department, also sees marketing club numbers on the rise. "It's not a social phenomenon. It's an economic one," he said. "The purpose behind their formation is not a long-term marketing plan per se, but extracting more income from the marketplace short-term. Farmers realize that many outside forces and factors are affecting their farms' incomes, and they are trying to keep abreast of those changes.

"That's why such clubs give

NFO a real opportunity to 'plug into' their formation and operation. We've successfully been doing for years, what these clubs are trying to do," he said. "We have the experience and the expertise to give the clubs leadership and direction that can lead to success."

Halloran cites one specific marketing club in Nebraska that invited NFO input into its programs. Over time, NFO collective bargaining concepts predominated in the club. Currently, an Illinois marketing club is considering NFO marketing concepts. "That

club is coming along slower, but NFO is assisting every way it can," Halloran said.

With growing interest in marketing clubs, Ellinghuysen said that "given the nature and goals of these clubs, which coincide precisely with what NFO programs can do for them, it seems that NFO's programs are one of the 'best kept secrets' in agriculture today," he said. "There's no need for all these marketing clubs to reinvent the wheel when NFO's wheel is already rolling along to the benefit of farmers and ranchers nationwide."

## Conservation Districts Should Pursue Stronger Role

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — County conservation districts should pursue a stronger role in helping local governments protect water quality, said Caren Glotfelty, deputy secretary for water management, Department of Environmental Resources.

In remarks before the State Conservation Commission recently in New Hope, Bucks Co., Glotfelty expressed the need for technical assistance at the local level.

"Increasingly, municipalities are finding it difficult to comply with the requirements set before them," she said. "I would like to see the involvement of conservation districts strengthened with regards to wetlands protection, nutrient management, land use planning, and sewage disposal." Currently, conservation districts' primary role in assisting local governments centers on erosion and sediment pollution control.

In noting the partnership between conservation districts and DER, Glotfelty said that it's important to have a local presence in many areas of water quality, especially where there is a close link with agriculture.

In response to a related report from DER spokesman, Michael Steiner, the commission supporter the notion of involving conservation districts in DER's program for the application of sewage sludge on agricultural land.

"Conservation districts could and should get involved up front in the preliminary stages of the permitting process," said Steiner, "before the formal permit application is made."

By screening farms for sludge

application, conservation districts would help DER get only quality applications, thereby saving time and money.

The Commission also heard a report on the state's erosion and sediment pollution control program, which is administered jointly

by conservation districts and the DER. Representatives of the Chesapeake Bay Education Office concluded the meeting with a demonstration of a new educational program for vo-ag students called Farm Management Jeopardy.

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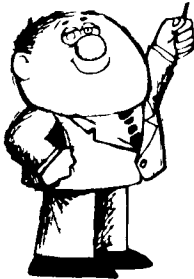
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