

# The Right Ring, Well Answered



## CORN TALK NEWS

PENNSYLVANIA MASTER CORN GROWERS ASSOC., INC.

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — Recently, Sharon Wencker tracked down the 800-number for a major manufacturing of plastic wrap. This week, she helped a sixth grader squeak by on a homework report due two days from now. And every day, Sharon speculates on what the weather will do.

percent of the calls are an eclectic mix of legislators, government officials, researchers, industry representatives and school-children from across the country and overseas. In one day, for instance, urban callers included a reporter from the newspaper Sacramento Bee, an editor from Bon Appetite magazine, a researcher from Japan, and an entrepreneur from New Zealand.

And then there are those callers that only seem to fit in the "other" category, such as the man seeking information on plastic wrap. He called

NCGA because he knew corn growers promote corn-based degradable plastics. Or there was the Nebraska woman extremely excited about making corn flakes. Not just a few corn flakes, expmehsized Sharon, but a whole truckload.

Sharon patiently fields wrong numbers. Doctors often call wanting to know if particular surgical procedures are covered. While Sharon can talk weather, medical advice is out of her league.

Some of the most difficult calls come from media. "Usually broadcasters or reporters work on deadline. They need to

talk to someone right away and, understandably, get impatient— particularly if there's a development on ethanol," she said. Sharon calculates that when ethanol makes headlines, the number of phone calls jumps to 300 per day.

A greeting from Sharon also softens unhappy callers. "If a caller has a bad day, I'm a buffer. I don't take criticism personally. That usually makes them feel better about calling."

Sharon emphasizes that teamwork makes her job a smooth-running success. "At the National Corn Growers Association, each person is treated with respect and courtesy. I enjoy conveying that feeling to callers," she said.

Sharon carefully considers each phone call as she answers it. To her, the most important message is the one she shares first: "Thank you for calling the National Corn Growers Association."

Sharon is the first voice you hear when you call the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA). As the receptionist, Sharon welcomes rushed appointment holders and stray walk-ins with reassuring finesse. But her passion is the switchboard. Sharon handles eight phone lines, which ring 150 to 200 times a day. Each time, Sharon greets callers with professional courtesy colored with heartfelt warmth.

"I love the phones," said Sharon. "I'm the caller's first impression of the National Corn Growers Association. I make that person feel comfortable in calling. And I assist them in reaching the right person. It's an art. At the same time, it's a challenge."

Usually, less than 10 percent of the calls NCGA receives come from corn growers, Sharon calculates. "Unless it's close to a deadline for Corn Classic or the National Corn Yield Contest," she said with a laugh, "then farmers flood the phones for a day."

But on a typical day, 90-plus

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — The National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) will contribute \$10,000 to the American Red Cross to help support flood victims in rural areas of the Midwest.

NCGA's contribution is being matched by Monsanto Company of St. Louis. In addition to donating \$1 million directly to the Red Cross, Monsanto has allocated another \$1 million to be used to match individual or business contributions on a dollar for dollar basis, according to Hendrick A. Verfaillie, President of the Monsanto Agricultural Group. "Farmers have been unable

to plant crops, others have had corn destroyed by the flooding, and many will have significant reductions in yields due to saturated soils and unusually cool temperatures. NCGA's contribution is intended to help those farmers," said Randy Cruise, NCGA president and corn farmer from Pleasaanton, Neb.

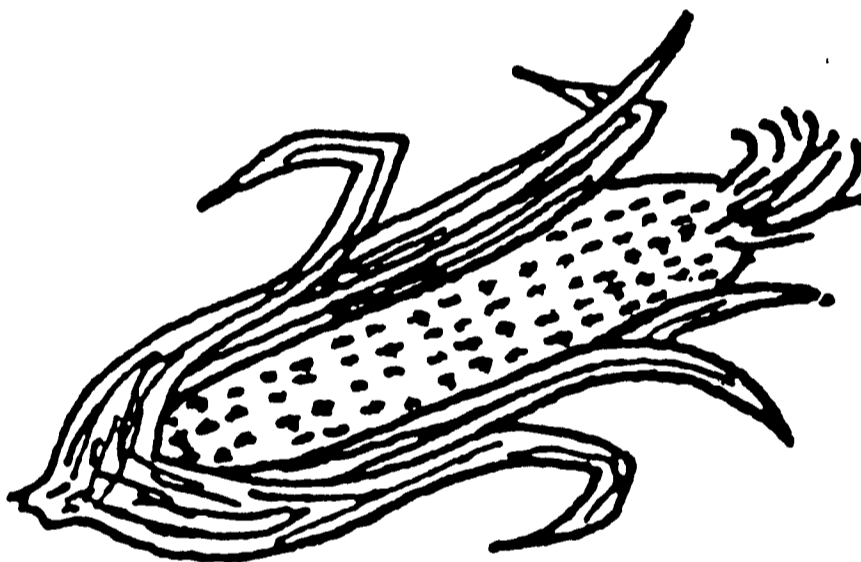
Cruise said that NCGA lead-

ership encourages and challenges its 24 affiliated state associations to also contribute to flood relief for farmers and other rural residents through the Monsanto Company's Matching Fund program.

Contributions to this flood relief effort may be made with a credit card contribution by calling (800) 842-2200 and

designating "Monsanto Matching Contributions." Or a check can be sent to the American Red Cross Rural Flood Relief, Monsanto Matching Contributions, P.O. Box 66921, St. Louis, MO 63166-6692. Checks should be marked "Monsanto Matching Account" to be eligible for matching funds.

# Corn Growers Contribute To Flood Relief



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