

NCGA Warns Of Competitive Losses Because Of Poor River Infrastructure

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — The National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) has sounded the alarm regarding this country's inadequate river infrastructure.

The competitive edge the U.S. holds in world corn markets is seriously threatened and lost in the dust if corrective measures aren't taken soon, according to members of an NCGA transportation task force which recently returned from a fact-finding trip to Argentina to examine that country's improved corn production and marketing capacity.

"In a short time, they're going to be the tail that wags the dog if we don't get our infrastructure up to snuff," said task force member Greg Guenther, a corn grower from Belleville, Ill., referring to the \$650 million upgrade of Argentina's barge system on the Parana River, the Argentinean equivalent to the Mississippi River. "They have 2,200 miles of river system with not one single lock. They don't have three-day waits to move 15 barges through. It's a superhighway to them."

Iowa corn grower Glenn Moeller, task force chairman, described Argentina's river infrastructure improvements as enthusiastic. "It was a wake-up call to American agriculture and the U.S. as a whole as to the competitive edge we could soon be losing," he said.

The comprehensive program undertaken by the Argentine government and shippers includes dredging to make way for larger ocean-

going grain-hauling vessels and updating plants and terminals along 250 miles of the Parana.

"The issue for U.S. corn growers is the need to improve our river transportation system to move grain efficiently," explained John Green, NCGA's director of production and education. "In Argentina, we're seeing a river system that allows them easier and cheaper access to the oceans."

Attitude, said task force member Mike Randall, a corn grower from Dell Rapids, S.D. is a major contributing factor in Argentina's successful river upgrade programs. "They're willing to do what it

takes to so that the river benefits agriculture, and that's what we should be striving for in this country."

Task force members also noted a federation of five South American countries dedicated to the development of the Parana River. In addition to Argentina, money for this development comes from Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, and Brazil.

"I think that this fact-finding mission has given us a valuable firsthand view to take to Congress to try to impress upon them the importance of upgrading our river transportation infrastructure," said Guenther.

"It's imperative that the NCGA and corn growers of the United States personally learn the extent of these events (in Argentina) to help us in our lobby efforts," noted Green adding that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is studying the infrastructure on the upper Mississippi River, where many of the locks and dams are outdated and ill-equipped to handle the region's transportation needs. "We have encouraged the Corps to complete their navigation study and then move quickly on improving and upgrading these locks which are in terrible condition and a hindrance to navigation," he said. The Corps of

Engineers study is due in late spring or early summer, 1998.

While the NCGA has taken a lead in pushing for improvements in the U.S. river infrastructure, the issue is not just an agricultural one, according to Guenther. "The fact that it's perceived to be (agricultural) is a tribute in a sense to the ag community," he said. "The NCGA and state corn grower organizations have been way ahead of the curve in recognizing the need to improve our transportation infrastructure, but there are a lot of other commodities besides corn that move on the river.

NCGA Passes 30,000 Membership Milestone

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — When historians take a look back at 1997 one conclusion will be clear. This had been a banner year for NCGA recruiting efforts.

The official tally in late October set a new record, going beyond the 30,000 mark to a record high of 30,360 members.

"Busting 30,000 has been something we've all been working to accomplish for a long time," said Mountain Lake, Minn., corn farmer Richard Peterson, chairman of NCGA's Field Services Committee.

Peterson points to efforts made by state associations as the primary reason for the new NCGA record.

"There was lots of hard work put in by many state recruiters and they deserve tremendous credit for making it happen,"

he said. Most notable, according to Peterson are states like Iowa, with the largest numeric increase and Kansas, with the highest percentage increase.

Peterson has been chairman of the NCGA Field Services Committee for the past two years and was re-elected at the August board meeting to again serve in this capacity through 1998.

He takes his NCGA recruiting job seriously and leads by example in September, he recruited 27 new members. "I figure if the chairman can't get new members, he can't expect others to do so," Peterson said.

State associations have devised different techniques to enhance their recruitment efforts. The Iowa Corn Growers Association uses the "divide and conquer" method. Most of Iowa's counties have an organized county association. From

October to the end of March, a group of part-time staff field representatives helped recruiters in the counties by serving as sources of information and ideas as well as extra arms and legs.

"Our field reps serve as liaisons between membership staff and county recruiters," said Ray Hansen, Iowa's director of grower services. "The reps go to meetings and generally help the county association members feel like they are more in

touch with our office. This helps a lot."

This year one Iowa county held an unusual call-a-thon, using cellular phones. "Recruiters would make calls on their cell phones while they were driving to a farm and tell the farmer, 'I'm on my way over and we really hope you'll renew your membership'," Hansen said. "Usually by the time they got there, the farmer would have the check already written out."



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