

## Code Blue For Old Man River, Says NCGA

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Citing imminent losses in domestic and export corn markets, coupled with exorbitant transportation costs, National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) Corn Board member Tim Burrack of Arlington, Iowa, told the Mississippi River Caucus in Washington, D.C. that the future of agriculture rests on drastically needed improvements along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers.

Burrack noted that the future financial success of corn growers throughout the nation is directly tied to the Mississippi and Illinois river system. Subsequently, infrastructure improvements are a top priority for NCGA — namely the doubling the 600-foot lock chambers at Mississippi River Lock and Dam 25, 24, 22, 20 and 21 and LaGrange and Peoria locks on the Illinois River. To further improve the river's efficiency, NCGA is pushing

for the extension of guide-walls at the Mississippi Lock and Dam 18-14.

"If we are unable to move agricultural products in an efficient manner, the United States will become less and less competitive in export markets and we will lose domestic markets as well," Burrack said. "Unless we make the improvements along the river, U.S. agriculture will pay the price."

Without continued investments in the transportation infrastructure, he said, U.S. farmers are being placed at a severe disadvantage as foreign countries increase their commitment to developing their agricultural export markets.

For the past six years, NCGA has watched the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers conduct the \$40 million upper Mississippi-Illinois Waterway Navigation Study and has attempted to be fully engaged in the study process

every step of the way.

"However, our opinion of this process — a true watershed — has eroded from cautious optimism to having lost all faith in the study," said Burrack. "Perhaps we were naive in thinking that this study would confirm the obvious; that the majority of locks are outdated, under capacity and under maintained, and in dire need of improvement. Instead, we have seen the Corps produce one implausible theorem after another."

He further illustrated NCGA's frustration by noting that the Corps claims that the rail rates will not rise, even though they did not study capacity constraints at the ports; the Corps has decided that advances currently being made in biotechnology will not lead to beyond trend line yield increases; the Corps has not taken into account what U.S. competitors are doing to strengthen their export positions; and



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the Corps is indicating that the environmental benefits of river transportation will not be accounted for properly.

"If this were not enough, they (the Corps of Engineers) have spent the last year trying to determine the elasticity of demand for barge transportation, and quite frankly, they blew it," Burrack said.

He explained that Iowa is the second largest shipper of corn and soybeans on the Mississippi and Illinois rivers that Iowa farmers shipped an average of 203 million bushels of corn and 66 million bushels of soybeans on the Mississippi River every year during the 1990s. In addition, a large volume of Iowa grain is railed or trucked to the Illinois River

for shipment. For corn, the Mississippi shipments equal more than one of every eight rows grown in Iowa, and in 1997, corn shipments were worth more than \$340 million.



## Statement

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tity preservation require additional handling, which may pose challenges for farmers and elevator managers during harvest.

NCGA maintains that users who prefer guaranteed conventional corn must be prepared to pay for the added management costs and equipment expenses required to segregate it.

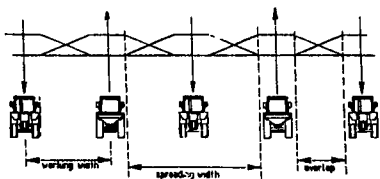
NCGA will continue to work closely with all sectors of agriculture and with the government agencies that regulate biotechnology and that promote the export of U.S. crops. NCGA will continue to provide farmers with the information necessary to evaluate their markets. Furthermore, NCGA will insist that technology companies provide farmers with timely, accurate information and the choice to buy the best hybrids either as conventional seed or as those enhanced through biotechnology.



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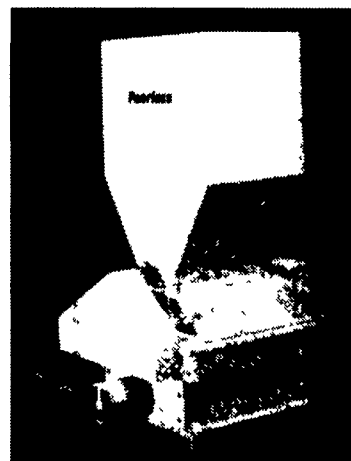
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