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December is here and the twilight of 2015 is quickly approaching. It is amazing how fast the year seems to go by as I get older. Spring seeding, spraying crop and harvest all get lumped together and it feels like I missed having any fun in between those seasons.

Since I last wrote to you a lot has happened. We cut a better than average crop and, after our fall board meeting in October, I feel really fortunate to get what we got. There were some reports of winter wheat yields being the best ever but most of the directors said this was not a stellar year. Drought was prevalent, especially in the western part of the state, and some widespread hail affected a big part of the northern tier. Combine that with pre-2007 prices and I think there will be some belt tightening in the whole industry.

This year is a perfect example of how important crop insurance is to all producers in Montana. With all the variables that affect the performance of our crops, federal crop insurance gives us the assurance of at least recovering part of any losses that occur. Since 2007, our input costs have soared, increasing our risk in the field so that a loss can be catastrophic to our bottom lines. Prices for our commodities have been high for several years and it didn’t take too much grain sales to recover. But now with grain prices sliding and costs that have barely come down, an insurance guarantee is very important. The recent budget cut to federal crop insurance to the tune of three billion dollars shows that even though the farm bill is a five year contract there are still efforts to attack it. Crop insurance is the leading target and although the recent cut would affect only the insurance company’s share of the premiums, it still would have an effect on the service that the producers could expect from the agents. There

Charlie Bumgarner

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Continued from page 2

has also been talk that the cut would be severe enough that companies might not carry federal crop insurance. Although House and Senate leadership have committed to reversing these cuts, it shows the focus of some who would like to do harm to the program.

The MGGA officers and executive Vice President just returned from National Association of Wheat Growers meetings in November. I chair the Joint International Trade Policy Committee (JITPC) and one of the big topics was the passage of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) which is a trade agreement among twelve Pacific Rim countries concerning a variety of matters of economic policy. The agreement was reached on October 5, 2015, after 7 years of negotiations. The day of our JITPC meeting the text for the agreement was released to the public and staff put together a synopsis of what it would mean for the wheat industry. It was agreed that wheat would not get hurt by the agreement and the future looked very good for market access to even more countries. Ag for the most part will benefit by having tariffs lowered and, in most cases, eliminated. But like all trade agreements, you don’t know exactly how they will work until the agreement is accepted by the countries and then implemented. The NAWG Board of Directors and U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) Board of Directors together called on Congress to quickly consider the agreement once it is presented to them. MGGA will be in close contact with our delegation and their staff on the proceedings.

As I sign off for this month’s article, I would like to congratulate MGGA Secretary Michelle Jones and her husband Travis on the arrival of their son Will!! Maybe there is the prospect of a future farmer and MGGA officer?!!
MGGA Elects Officers and Sets Policy Direction for 2016

At the conclusion of this year’s annual convention in Great Falls, the Montana Grain Growers Association elected officers, installed new board members and set the organization’s policy for 2016. These actions put the finishing touches on a successful 60th Annual MGGA Convention attended by 886 farmers, agribusiness representatives and guests.

Rob Davis, a grain producer from Larslan, was installed as MGGA President for the coming year. Elected Vice President was Tom Butcher of Lewistown; Treasurer Michelle Erickson-Jones of Broadview; and Secretary Lyle Benjamin, Sunburst. Charlie Bumgarner, Great Falls, will serve as Past President.

Re-elected to serve a second term on the board of directors are Terry Angvick, Plentywood, District 1; Warren Lybeck, Chinook, District 3; Greg Mathews, Buffalo, District 9; and John Bays, Wilsall and John Schutter, Manhattan, both for District 11.

Newly elected to a four year term are Chad Forest, Richland, District 1; Nathan Keane, Loma, District 5; and Kurt Voss, Circle, District 13.

Each year at the annual convention the membership approves the organization’s policy positions for the coming year. These resolutions guide MGGA, its leadership and staff on issues that affect our members. The approved 2016 resolutions can be found on the MGGA website at http://mgga.org/about-us/resolutions/

* Congratulations to Brian Eggebrecht of Malta, winner of this year’s drawing for a free convention registration! 

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Time for an Upgrade?

Lochiel Edwards, TTMS Group

Our Montana railroad has been on a spending spree. Over the last three years, BNSF Railway spent over 16 billion dollars on upgrade of their track, locomotives, and other equipment. That’s a lot, even by Warren Buffet standards, and more than any other railroad. On the face of it, this was in response to their troubles keeping up with demand a couple years ago. The brutal winter of 13-14, new demand for services in the Bakken oil fields, and a confluence of high shipping demand in most other sectors all combined to expose the aneurisms and blood clots in the BNSF circulatory system.

Here at Edwardsfarm, we seem to have been on a track parallel to the railroad. I’m not sure whether this was a good idea; time will tell.

The Edwardsfarm business model throughout most of its history has been to keep costs low, efficiency high, and to be timely with the field operations. If I were to give credit to one single factor, for those times when we actually hit all three of these marks, it would be our usual practice of buying older, used equipment. BUT, to reach all three goals, three things were necessary. First, it had to be well-used (low cost). Then, it had to be big equipment (high efficiency). Third, we had to spend long winter hours in the shop, rebuilding, repairing, re-engineering, so this machinery would run all summer without breakdowns (timely field operations).

As I mentioned, this was a model that worked well for us, and allowed us to thrive from WWII to the present. Prior to that war, our farm, like many others in Montana, was just in survival mode. We have purchased just 4 new tractors at this farm. The first, the Bull, was in 1914, cost $395 and was later known as the worst tractor ever built. The second was a W-9 in 1945, I think. My uncle was a veteran and was one of the first on the list to be eligible...
to buy machinery as manufacturers shifted from war materials to domestic production. In 1954, we bought our first TD-18A crawler. I grew up running that crawler, as it had a hand clutch I could handle, and I was too light on one end to push the clutch in on the W-9. And, finally, we bought a new Case Quad in 2013. That’s when the wheels came off of our business model.

Our railroad has the similar goals of timely operations and low cost. I can’t say they like to buy old equipment and have it in the shop all winter, but then, they have to run year-round in their business. I will say, however, the great number of Canadian locomotives they borrowed from the CP in ’13 and ’14 did look pretty ratty. BNSF wakes up early every day, thinking about efficiency. It had to have put them through a lot of mental anguish during their winter of discontent, when velocity and efficiency froze over.

BNSF Railway’s solution? Spend a boatload of effort and dollars to build a faster, more timely, more efficient system. This should matter to Montana producers for two reasons. A lot of study was put forth to quantify what the railroads’ difficulties cost farmers due to lost markets and lost basis. All of those studies were gravelly flawed - the accurate answer was just “a lot”. The other reason we should care is that someone must pay for these upgrades. Rail freight is not a government-subsidized program - the shippers pay for the cost of freight. That said, I applaud BNSF’s actions, as our losses due to rail inefficiency did and can eclipse the added cost of a better rail system. If only Washington could realize this, as it applies to our highway system!

Back at the Edwardsfarm boardroom, the vice-presidents were lamenting the aging frames, the decline in horsepower, the downtime, and wondering how to stay timely and efficient with the farming operations. They weren’t discussing the iron. The VPs themselves were getting closer to the tail end of the depreciation schedule, and were thinking about ways to compensate. As I said earlier, that’s when the wheels came off the low-cost operation. We decided to buy New Paint.

This departure from our tried-and-true low cost model has been an experiment to buy labor in the form of less maintenance time. (The jury is still out on whether this holds water!) To be fair, I think we COULD still run the Old model with Old people, but the fact is, we have other things we like to do. The VP of Hauling Stuff does art and photography (edwardsstudio.com), the VP of Cleaning Out Bin Bottoms has a science writing/editing business, and the VP of Fixing Broken Parts is obsessed with ag public policy. Our primary focus is still on timely field operations, but it’s not our whole life. One difference between the railroads and our farm operations is the length of time we might have to wait out a decline in profits. Ag will be in a tight spot for the near future, but the railroads have a broad spectrum of customers - more diversified, I guess. Maybe we should remember that railroads paid some dues during the recent Great Recession, while ag pretty much ignored it. For everything there is a season.

I think and write about these things as I ponder the farm operations next door which have young guns focused on growing things. Those kids still have the lights on in the shop at 10pm on December 23; those kids actually listen when I talk about the 1980s and the opportunities offered by low grain prices and lean times. And then, I wish I could hide from them all the new paint that we bought.

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MGGA Directors Tour Texas Agriculture

Mitch Konen, MGGA Director

November first found six MGGA directors heading south to Lubbock, Texas to join up with fellow producers from northern tier states to participate in a 3-day Multi Commodity Education Program, sponsored by the National Cotton Council and John Deere. Our guides for the tour were John Gibson of the National Cotton Council and Susan Everett of the Cotton Foundation.

MGGA directors participating included Kristen Krueger, Vince Mattson, Kurt Voss, Ben Toeckes, Dan Kolar, and Mitch Konen.

After an introductory evening meeting and meal the participants boarded a tour bus bright and early the next morning to investigate and learn about west Texas agricultural production including cotton production and processing, peanut production, viticulture – grape vineyards, and wine production, water resource practices and issues, and dairy production.

First on the agenda was a visit to the Plains Cotton Growers Association to begin our education of the cotton industry from production through processing including marketing procedures that use a cooperative business model. From here we moved on to the Agrilife Research and Extension Center were we learned about some of the issues concerning cotton production from varietal differences to pest management.

Next stop on the tour was the USDA Ag Research Service Gin Lab where we learned how a cotton gin
Continued from page 9

actually operated in separating the different parts of a cotton boll, the dirt and trash, the lint, and the cotton seed. It was also explained how different modules are labeled and how identity is maintained throughout the entire processing procedure including the bales that come from each module. The identity of each 500 pound, more or less, bale of cotton can be traced back to the producer’s field. Yields are anywhere from 1-3 bales per acre with 3 bales per acre considered exceptional but becoming more the average.

Another day’s agenda had us visiting a local John Deere dealership, Hurst Farm Supply, where we viewed all of the machinery used in the harvesting process of cotton. We inspected the new technology that John Deere has developed to replace most of the current equipment used with an all-in-one machine that rolls the cotton into a large round bale, with solid wrapping to better protect it from the weather, thus resulting in a much smaller labor force to complete their harvest.

A stop at the USDA Ag Marketing Services provided an education on how cotton is graded. In this climate controlled facility, cotton is mechanically graded using high tech sensors which result in standardized grades.

Several different gin coops, and private gins, were also toured, demonstrating the similarities and differences in the ginning process of cotton.

PYCO Industries, a cotton seed processor, explained the different oils extracted from cottonseed as well as the other by-products produced, and how every portion has a value, even as feed stuffs for animals, which led us to a local dairy using cottonseed meal as an ingredient in their feed ration.

We also toured Farmers Co-op Compress, a huge cotton warehousing and shipping facility.

A local farm family, Seaton Farms, accommodated us with a tour of their cotton, milo, peanut, and viticulture operation. Water was a big issue with the lowering of the aquifer levels, which led us to a discussion with the High Plains Water District concerning water rights and resources.

Cap Rock Winery was our final tour stop where we viewed their wine making and bottling process, and enjoyed a meal and wine tasting.

A special thanks to the National Cotton Council and John Deere for the opportunity to network with others and find common ground to sustain our industry of agriculture.

Mike Rydell, MGGA Director-at-Large
McMeel Crop Insurance, Great Falls, 406-453-1580

December is shaping up to be an interesting month for Federal Crop Insurance. For those who don’t remember, back in October the House of Representatives and the Senate passed the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015. Within the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 there were some proposed changes to the Federal Crop Insurance program which would cut/save an estimated $3 Billion over 10 years. Any cuts, changes, etc. would take place during the 2017 crop insurance year and beyond. In December, the proposed cuts are promised to be withdrawn during the appropriations process. However, since the promises were made to take the cuts away there have been many attempts to keep them in place. I urge producers, agents, and the like to think about how these cuts would affect their lives and make calls to their representatives to urge them to not let the cuts go through. In the meantime, with no changes to the 2016 crop insurance year, here are your important dates to remember:

Important Dates:

Spring Sales Closing Deadline: 3.15.2016
- to make changes to your spring crop contracts
- Whole Farm Revenue Protection sign up deadline

Whole Farm Revenue Protection - this is something you will want to take a good hard look at as the coverage can be exceptional, and the premiums are heavily subsidized. There are several variables which will affect the deadline for signing up, so you will want to talk to your crop insurance agent about this. One tip; if you have a 12.31.2015 year end, call your agent right away to discuss your options.

Malt Barley Endorsement - this option has been completely re-written for the 2016 crop insurance year. The deadline to take or not take the option is 3.15.2016. The underwriting guidelines, aka rules, have already been adjusted once since its initial release so I hesitate to go into too much detail prior to March as things tend to change. However, the most recent change has made this option more attractive to producers who grow a malting variety of barley. The number one concern I hear is the price/cost for the option. In the past, the Malt B Option/s have been expensive. Only time will tell on this one. I highly advise you bring your contracts in to your agent in January and February to get quotes on this option to figure out if you want it or not.
USDA Issues Safety-Net Payments to Montana Farmers Facing Market Downturn

FSA has begun issuing financial assistance for the 2014 crop year to a number of agricultural producers who are participating in the new safety-net programs established by the 2014 Farm Bill. The new programs, known as Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC), are designed to protect against unexpected drops in crop prices or revenues due to market downturns.

Unlike the old direct payments program, which provided funds in good years and bad years, these new programs only provide financial assistance when prices or revenues drop below normal; this means that not all producers participating in ARC or PLC will receive a 2014 payment. Nationwide, many farms participating in 2014 ARC-County are receiving payments because they experienced a $20 billion drop in county revenues relative to the historical benchmark. However, Montana farms enrolled in 2014 PLC are not receiving payments because no crops produced in Montana have suffered a price loss significant enough to trigger a payment. ARC – Individual payments have not yet been determined.

It is important to note that funds provided by the ARC-County program can vary from county to county. The 2014 Farm Bill requires ARC-County payments to be calculated using the national average market year price (which does not vary by county), and the average county yield (which varies by county). This creates county-by-county differences in payment rates. The county yield data comes from surveys conducted by the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the national standard that uses the highest-precision statistical procedures available.

When that data does not exist, the next strongest data is used: county-level crop insurance data from the Risk Management Agency. If that data does not exist, the next strongest data is used: NASS district data. Where NASS district data doesn’t exist, the FSA State Committees provide data.

Eligible producers will receive a payment if they have a farm enrolled in 2014 ARC-CO with base acres of a covered commodity that triggered a payment. The covered commodities that have currently triggered a payment under 2014 ARC-CO in Montana are as follows:

- **All Barley**: Hill, Phillips, Glacier, Blaine, Missoula
- **All Corn**: Treasure, Carbon, Prairie, Dawson, Rosebud, Richland, Roosevelt, Custer, Daniels, Sheridan, Blaine, Lake, Yellowstone, Missoula, Cascade, Chouteau, Teton, Liberty, Wheatland, Garfield, Hill, Musselshell, Petroleum, Carter, Fallon, Valley, Wibaux, Phillips, Gallatin
- **Irrigated Corn**: Big Horn, Golden Valley, McCone, Stillwater
- **Non-Irrigated Corn**: Big Horn, Golden Valley, McCone, Stillwater
- **All Dry Peas**: Daniels, Garfield, Glacier, Toole, Madison, Phillips, Hill
- **Irrigated Dry Peas**: Gallatin, Flathead
- **All Grain Sorghum**: Big Horn, Carter, Daniels, Roosevelt, Stillwater
- **All Lentils**: Toole, Liberty
- **All Oats**: Judith Basin
- **Non-Irrigated Oats**: Pondera, Teton, Sweet Grass
- **Irrigated Oats**: Big Horn, Blaine, Gallatin, Golden Valley, Musselshell, Pondera, Sweet Grass, Teton, Valley, Yellowstone, Flathead
- **All Soybeans**: Lake, McCon, Musselshell, Phillips, Richland, Rosebud, Roosevelt
- **All Wheat**: Hill, Petroleum, Blaine, Liberty, Daniels, Phillips, Rosebud
- **Irrigated Wheat**: Flathead
- **Non-Irrigated Wheat**: Lewis and Clark County

Additionally, the Farm Service Agency has agreed to allow 2014 and 2015 ARC-CO payments to be recalculated based on the payment rate in each county where a grower has farms. Under rules that FSA had been using, ARC payments were calculated based solely on the payment rate in a grower’s “administrative” county, the county where the producer’s records are handled.

ARC/PLC payments are designed to help with unexpected changes in the marketplace, and to supplement other assistance programs, such as crop insurance. To learn more about the data used in calculating payments, how payments are calculated, crop-specific and state-specific information, please visit our website at www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc.
Wheat Growers Act to Revitalize U.S. Wheat Industry

On November 10, the leaders of the National Wheat Foundation (NWF) and National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) announced a joint effort to develop a comprehensive business plan to revitalize the U.S. wheat industry. The National Wheat Action Plan will be a collaborative effort developed with strategic input from key stakeholders across the industry. This effort will serve as a catalyst to increase public and private research, and improve wheat productivity and farmer profitability.

“The wheat industry is not keeping pace with other crops. As a wheat grower-leader, I want to see the industry flourish not decline. Reinvigorating the wheat industry will come from increased productivity and profitability,” said NAWG President Brett Blankenship, wheat grower from Washtucna, Wash. “This strategic plan will provide us with the insight and analysis we need to move the U.S. wheat industry forward in a stronger direction.”

The wheat industry is facing decreased profitability in comparison to other crops, a lack of significant productivity gains, increased global competition and negative consumer sentiment regarding the healthfulness of wheat-based products.

“Wheat has a lot of potential. We want to make sure that potential is fully achieved. We recognize that current efforts are insufficient to generate the turnaround the U.S. wheat industry needs, and we need to change that,” said NWF Chairman Dusty Tallman, wheat grower from Brandon, Colo.

The plan includes research to analyze producer attitudes, best practices and views of the future of the wheat industry, stakeholder input from across the industry and a review of existing funding models both in wheat and other commodities. Following the information gathering, NAWG and NWF will develop a comprehensive business plan that identifies the best revenue generation model for wheat, outlines the steps needed to develop that model and identifies specific uses for national funds and a process for application, distribution, reporting and accounting.

The effort has already attracted significant support from industry partners including: CropLife America, Monsanto, Syngenta and WinField.

“Our nation’s wheat growers have worked tirelessly for generations, making sure that Americans are able to enjoy food products made with wheat,” stated Jay Vroom, president and CEO of CropLife America. “Bread, bagels, cereal and pasta: These are all staples of a healthy diet, and the crop protection industry will continue to support wheat growers in producing these nutritious foods.”

“Monsanto is investing in wheat research and commercialization to bring value to our customers today and into the future,” said Dr. Jeff Koscelny, Wheat Commercial and WestBred brand lead. “But truly raising the bar on wheat productivity and profitability will require innovative technology transfer techniques and a collaborative approach from everyone in the industry. With both of these at the heart of this initiative, we’re proud to be a part of it.”

“Syngenta is pleased to support the U.S. wheat industry as it develops the new National Wheat Action Plan. This is a true partnership where farmers and industry can have an open dialogue to develop the platform driving wheat’s profitability,” said Ryan Findlay, Syngenta North America industry relations lead. “Syngenta is committed to providing farmers with industry-leading genetics, crop protection and innovative solutions such as hybrid wheat to transform how crops are grown.”

“Participating in this collaborative effort that addresses both productivity and profitability for an important segment of American farming is a natural for us,” said Mike Vande Logt, chief operating officer of WinField U.S. “Developing solutions that help farmers succeed in the field and the marketplace is at the core of who we are and how we operate. We look forward to the solutions we can develop working together.”

For more information on the plan, visit the National Wheat Foundation website.
Calling for Grain Trade Equality at the Canadian Border

**U.S. Wheat, NAWG**

**A Tale of Two Farmers**
Imagine two wheat farmers whose farms are ten miles apart. It’s mid-October and both have just finished harvest. The wheat is the same variety and similar quality. The only difference is that one farmer lives north of the U.S.—Canadian border, and the other, south. Now they need to move the grain to one of their local elevators. The Canadian farmer looks at the posted price of wheat in elevators in both Canada and the United States, and can take his wheat to whichever elevator offers the best price.

But the American farmer can only look at prices in U.S. elevators, because if she tries to take her wheat to a Canadian elevator, it will automatically be graded as the lowest value, just because it comes from the southern side of the border. This and other regulations put up a virtual border wall to U.S. wheat along what is otherwise one of the most free and open borders in the world.

“Here in the U.S., all wheat, regardless of origin, is graded using identical grading factors. Canada’s discriminatory treatment of imported wheat is taking away opportunities for all American wheat growers, like me,” — Gordon Stoner, Montana wheat grower.

**Affected Border Areas in the United States**
- An estimated 11 percent of Montana, 28 percent of North Dakota, and 8 percent of Minnesota wheat production is within 50 miles of a Canadian grain elevator, totaling 3.2 million metric tons (MMT).
- An estimated 9 percent of North Dakota and 4 percent of Montana production is within 25 miles of a Canadian grain elevator, totaling 1.01 MMT.

**Discrimination Against U.S. Wheat Exports**
There are striking similarities between the way Canada treats grain imported from the U.S. and the way they claim U.S. country of origin labeling (COOL) requirements hurt exports of Canadian livestock. In fact, if the U.S. were to take a case against Canada over its unfair treatment of foreign grain, the case could almost quote Canada’s case on COOL word for word. That case argued that the technical regulations on meat labeling hurt Canadian producers and resulted in their livestock selling at a discount. The same argument applies to Canada’s treatment of U.S. wheat:
- Canada’s wheat grading system and de facto segregation requirement accord imported wheat treatment less favorable than that given to domestic Canadian wheat.
- As a result, imported wheat going into the mainstream marketing system must be sold at a significant discount.
- The feed wheat price discount, the costs of segregation and the fact that imported wheat has access to only a small segment of the domestic market constitute significant barriers to importation—U.S. wheat is at a disadvantage to Canadian wheat because of these practices.

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Highway Bill Passed with Crop Insurance Fix

On December 3, the House and Senate overwhelmingly passed the conference report on the Highway Bill and indications at this writing are that the president will sign the bill. Most notably for agriculture, the bill includes a reversal of the $3 billion in cuts from crop insurance that were part of the budget agreement passed in October.

Overall, the bill reauthorizes highway and transit programs for five years at a cost of approximately $300 billion. The multi-year reauthorization would provide certainty for state and local governments to maintain and move forward with transportation projects. It also provides new flexibilities and streamlines environmental review and permitting processes aimed at accelerating projects. The bill also establishes new national freight policies and programs aimed at improving freight movement and strengthening U.S. economic competitiveness and aspects of the Port Performance Act that are intended to mitigate disruptions at ports such as those incurred during the labor dispute at West Coast ports last year.

NAWG President, Brett Blankenship, a wheat grower from Washtucna, Wash., issued the following statement in response to the legislation.

“This is a huge victory for our agricultural producers and consumers everywhere. Congress made a five-year commitment to our producers when it passed the Farm Bill last year, and the House and Senate confirmed that commitment. Wheat farmers across the country rely on crop insurance to help offset the risks of things that are beyond our control such as drought, severe weather events and market prices depressed by a strong U.S. dollar. The draconian cuts included as part of the budget agreement would have increased the cost of delivering the program, reduced options for producers, and ultimately made premiums more expensive. We sincerely appreciate the corrective action taken by Congress, as do the thousands of farm families who grow wheat across our country.”

Additional institutions that made the list were Purdue University, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and Utah State University.
NAWG Submits Comments to OSTP

Earlier this summer the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) released a memo to three government agencies— the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)—requesting that each agency review and update the Coordinated Framework for the Regulation of Biotechnology originally released in 1986 and updated in 1992. The purpose of the Framework is “to develop a long-term strategy to ensure that the system is prepared for the future products of biotechnology” and to build consumer confidence in the technology and regulatory system.

This fall the White House opened a public comment period and also held their first public meeting on the Framework, inviting members of the public to present oral testimony. NAWG, with industry partners and other commodity groups, submitted comments hoping that “this review process will facilitate continued development and commercialization of safe, beneficial and improved varieties of all crops so that more producers can realize the benefits biotechnology provides.” The comments express concern with the expanded regulatory requirements by some agencies.

The comments support three goals that government policy should follow in new breeding techniques: government policies should be science and risk-based, predictable, and promote innovation and advancements in breeding; governments should not differentially regulate products developed through precision breeding tools that are similar to or indistinguishable from products resulting from more traditional breeding tools, since such similar products are not likely to pose different risks; and governments should avoid creating new trade barriers or disruptions due to non-harmonious policies and practices.
Leading Agriculture Organizations Call on Congress to Pass "SAFE Trucking Act"

More than 70 of the nation’s leading food and agriculture associations – including the National Association of Wheat Growers, National Barley Growers Association, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, National Grain and Feed Association, American Farm Bureau and the National Farmers Union sent a letter in early November urging Congress to include the Safe, Flexible and Efficient (SAFE) Trucking Act (H.R. 3488) as an amendment to the highway reauthorization legislation.

In the letter, the organizations wrote: “In the agriculture and food industries, our farms and businesses are growing and making products more resourcefully, but outdated federal transportation rules force trucks to leave the farm and our plants when they are partly empty. By giving states the option to raise the federal gross vehicle weight limit from 80,000 pounds to 91,000 pounds for trucks equipped with six axles rather than the typical five, the SAFE Trucking Act would safely modernize truck shipments on Interstate highways by reducing the number of trucks needed to move our commodities and products through better utilization of existing capacity.”

In its most recent “Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Study,” the U.S. Department of Transportation found that six-axle trucks can safely weigh up to 91,000 pounds—the configuration allowable under the SAFE Trucking Act—while yielding significant truckload reductions, pavement wear savings and environmental efficiency benefits without diverting significant freight from rail. The U.S. DOT has also stated that the configuration is compliant with the federal bridge formula, and that wide use of the SAFE Trucking Act configuration would not cause any increase in one-time rehabilitation costs for Interstate bridges. Critically, the SAFE Trucking Act enables the U.S. DOT to require additional safety equipment for these vehicles before states can put these trucks to work.

“On behalf of America’s food and agriculture community, we urge you to support Representative Ribble’s common-sense amendment because it is good for taxpayers, consumers, farmers, businesses, highway safety and the environment,” the groups concluded in the letter.

New USDA Commitments to Next Generation of Farmers and Ranchers

Agriculture Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden announced a commitment by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to prioritize $5.6 billion over the next two years within USDA programs and services that serve new and beginning farmers and ranchers. Deputy Secretary Harden also announced a new, tailored web tool designed to connect burgeoning farm entrepreneurs with programs and resources available to help them get started.

“Today’s announcement is symbolic of the evolution of USDA’s efforts to better serve the next generation of farmers and ranchers. What began seven years ago with the recognition that the rapid aging of the American farmer was an emerging challenge, has transformed into a robust, transparent, tech-based strategy to recruit the farmers of the future,” said Harden. “No matter where you’re from, no matter what you look like, no matter your background, we want USDA to be the first stop for anyone who is looking to be a part of the story and legacy of American agriculture.”

The new web tool is available at www.usda.gov/newfarmers. The site was designed based on feedback from new and beginning farmers and ranchers around the country, who cited unfamiliarity with programs and resources as a challenge to starting and expanding their operations. The site features advice and guidance on everything a new farm business owner needs to know, from writing a business plan, to obtaining a loan to grow their business, to filing taxes as a new small business owner. By answering a series of questions about their operation, farmers can use the site’s Discovery Tool to build a personalized set of recommendations of USDA programs and services that may meet their needs.

Using the new web tool and other outreach activities, and operating within its existing resources, USDA has set a new goal of increasing beginning farmer and rancher participation by an additional 6.6 percent across key USDA programs, which were established or strengthened by the 2014 Farm Bill, for a total investment value of approximately $5.6 billion. Programs were targeted for expanded outreach and commitment based on their impact on expanding opportunity for new and beginning farmers and ranchers, including starting or expanding an operation, developing new markets, supporting more effective farming and conservation practices, and having access to relevant training and education.
opportunities. USDA will provide quarterly updates on
its progress towards meeting its goal. A full explanation
of the investment targets, benchmarks and outcomes is
available at: BFR-Commitment-Factsheet.

Deputy Secretary Harden made the announcements
during remarks to more than 60,000 attendees at the
National FFA Convention in Louisville, Kentucky.
The National FFA Organization is the largest youth
organization in the United States, and focuses on
preparing students for a wide range of careers in
agriculture, agribusiness and other agriculture-related
occupations.

As the average age of the American farmer now
exceeds 58 years, and data shows that almost 10
percent of farmland in the continental United States
will change hands in the next five years, we have no
time to lose in getting more new farmers and ranchers
established. Equally important is encouraging young
people to pursue careers in industries that support
American agriculture. According to an employment
outlook report released by USDA’s National Institute
of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and Purdue University,
one of the best fields for new college graduates is
agriculture. Nearly 60,000 high-skilled agriculture job
openings are expected annually in the United States
for the next five years, yet only 35,000 graduates with
a bachelor’s degree or higher in agriculture related
fields are expected to be available to fill them. The
report also shows that women make up more than half
of the food, agriculture, renewable natural resources,
and environment higher education graduates in the
United States. USDA recently released a series of fact
sheets showcasing the impact of women in agriculture
nationwide.

To learn more about USDA’s efforts, visit the Beginning
Farmers and Ranchers Results Page.

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**History Lessons for TPP Ratification**

*By Dalton Henry, USW Director of Policy*

As details of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)
continue to garner headlines, there is a lot of speculation
about when Congress will consider the agreement. A
delay would be very costly and the proof of that is found
in the recent history of U.S. free trade agreements. It is
worth looking back in recent history to just how costly
delays in trade agreements can be.

Nine years ago, on the day before the Thanksgiving
holiday the U.S. and Colombia finished negotiations on
a free trade agreement that promised lower wheat costs
for Colombian millers and greater market access for U.S.
wheat producers. The United States dragged its feet on
implementing the agreement for nearly six years amid
tepid congressional support and the election of a new
administration that insisted on renegotiating certain new
provisions.

During that delay, Colombia moved to secure agreements
with other countries, most notably Canada. With faster
approval by the Canadian government, the Canada-
Colombia Free Trade Agreement went into effect nine
months ahead of the U.S. agreement. It allowed duty
free access to Canadian wheat supplies, which in turn
put U.S. wheat at a disadvantage. As U.S. wheat growers
waited for the U.S. government to act on our FTA,
U.S. wheat market share in Colombia plummeted to 27
percent in 2011/12, from the previous three-year average
of 55 percent.

A delay in the consideration and approval of the TPP
could have similar far-reaching effects for the U.S.
wheat industry. Vietnam is a rapidly growing wheat
market for quality U.S. supplies, with imports from the
U.S. steadily rising over the last decade. The dark side

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NAWG joined a broad coalition in a joint letter urging the U.S. House of Representatives to support S. 808, the Surface Transportation Board (STB) Reauthorization Act of 2015. The bill, which was introduced by Senate Commerce Committee Chairman John Thune (R-SD) and passed the Senate by unanimous consent on June 18, is the first STB reauthorization bill since 1995.

Specifically, the legislation includes transparency requirements for the operation of the Board, would increase the Board from three to five members, and it would enable the Board to initiate investigations on its own without having to wait for a formal complaint.

The current timeline scenarios for TPP consideration are troubling. The agreement is a third of the way through a congressionally mandated 90-day public review period. The U.S. International Trade Commission is formally evaluating the agreement in a review expected to last until mid-May 2016. That means congressional consideration would likely not start before mid-2016. Many commentators believe that timeline would put consideration too close to the fall 2016 U.S. elections, giving political cover for those who insist the agreement will have to wait until late 2016. Even more concerning would be a delay demanded by opponents to hold off consideration until a new administration takes office and the next Congress is seated.

We believe the old saying that those who fail to study history are doomed to repeat it applies to our concern about the future of the TPP agreement. Any of these delays will cost U.S. growers and their customers dearly, and that is something worth remembering.

NAWG Urges House to Support STB Reauthorization Bill

Continued from page 17

of this comparison lies in the enactment of the recently completed ASEAN-Australia free trade agreement, which gives Vietnamese millers duty-free access to Australian wheat after Jan. 1, 2016. Without equal tariff treatment that would come with TPP’s implementation, U.S. supplies will suffer a $12 to $15 per metric ton (MT) disadvantage. That would likely negate for a time much of the technical and trade service work USW has invested in Vietnam and potentially blocking more than 600,000 MT of U.S. wheat over the next two years from customers who want to import it.

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