

WILD ROSE NEWS

January 2010

WILD ROSE
AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS

Presidents Report



A new year is upon us both as an organization and in our agricultural operations. It is a time to reflect on the past year and make plans to move us into the future.

We held our annual meeting the first week of January this year. As always Rod Scarlett did an excellent job in preparing and arranging this event. Everyone who attended had the opportunity to hear some outstanding speakers and to participate in the business portion of

the meeting. I was very pleased to have a number of MLAs representing all the political parties in Alberta in attendance. Of special note Mr. Broyce Jacobs, Assistant to our Minister of Agriculture Food and Rural Development attended and brought greetings from the government and addressed concerns raised in discussions with members throughout the meeting. The attendance of these MLAs is very important so that they can interact with grassroots producers on many topics.

The speaker at our banquet on Wednesday night was Mr. Reg Steward a farm safety consultant from British Columbia. His presentation was a great balance of farm safety facts and stories balanced with some comedy drawn from activities on the farm. But the bottom line that you left the evening with was the fact that we operate in one of the most dangerous industries and that we must all be more diligent in ensuring that everyone in our operations is working with safety in mind. On this note the provincial government has announced that a committee will be established to investigate the best way to improve farm worker safety and injury insurance coverage. As agriculture in Alberta we are the only province in Canada without mandated farm worker insurance coverage and there is a strong movement to implement legislation. We have submitted a proposal that favors the implementation of a system similar to the one used now in British Columbia that provides a balance of safety training and worker coverage.

A common concern throughout our annual meeting was the perception that consultation by all levels of government was at an all time low and somehow we must work to rebuild this important part of policy development. Assistant to the Minister Mr. Jacobs spoke to this concern and we are hopeful that meaningful consultation will be part of future policy. Also on this topic we have had a new Minister appointed for Agriculture in Alberta. The Honorable Jack Hayden an MLA from Drumheller-Stettler has been appointed our newest agriculture minister. We have been in contact with his office and have gotten an opportunity to meet with him and his executive assistant on February 1, 2010. I think that the meeting went well and our discussion on a wide number of issues was well received and should provide an opportunity to provide further consultation in the future.

Railway issues are a topic that I spend a lot of time on. The delisting of 53 rail sidings by Canadian National Railway in western Canada of which 19 are in Alberta is a huge concern. The loss of these sites will forever affect the way that we in rural Alberta will be able to transport goods both to and from our operations. This loss of service will be a hardship to all the communities involved and magnifies the loss of approximately

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Welcome

to the new Wild Rose news. We have changed our look to better serve you the information you need and want.

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wrap@planet.eon.net

65 additional sites in the past years. There are 2 producer groups in the province that are in the process of purchasing rail lines that the Railways have said will be abandoned in the future. We will support them in any way that we can as the loss of these lines will be a loss for producers in this province. We must get our provincial government engaged as the loss of this rail infrastructure will have a huge impact on the provincial highway infrastructure in the future.

The Rail Service review is moving ahead very slowly and we will be making a presentation on our producer's behalf. The Rail Costing Review is not yet begun and we have not gotten a hard timeline for this process to begin. I believe that we must get this process started now. We have forwarded a study by John Edsforth that states that we are being overcharged \$100 million dollars in the freight rate cap annually. This is an amount that we must get removed from our freight rates as soon as possible.

At our annual meeting this year we elected three board members for terms of three years each. Results of the election had myself and Grant Hicks return to the board and we welcome Russell Wolf from Markerville to the board table. We wish retiring board member Robert Filkohazy the best in the future and thank him for all that he has done for our organization.

The last week of January I attended the annual meeting of Keystone Agricultural producers in Winnipeg. I participated in a session that discussed the different policies and discussions that we have among the western provinces. There are many issues where we are similar but an equal number of diverging concerns. One that was discussed and presented a number of resolutions was the practice of residue burning. This is a practice that we see very little of but it is an important management tool to a number of their producers.

I would like to thank all the board members for all that they do to keep producers represented at the many levels that where we are called on to provide input.

When I started writing this I was going to work at keeping it shorter in length. Somehow I think that I have failed. The issues that I have discussed are only a small part of what we must address in the future. I look forward to the challenge that these will bring forward and am always interested in discussing them with members at any time.

In closing I wish the best to all producers for the next season and encourage everyone to do their part in reducing the accidents that can be devastating to our producers.

Please work Safe, you are our family.

Plant Breeding Techniques and the Farmer

Over the past 100 years of plant breeding, farmers have benefitted greatly from improved genetics in their crop cultivars. Improved yields, insect and disease resistance and drought tolerance are traits for which plants have been

successfully selected. For every dollar invested in research, the farmer has returned \$5 to \$10 returned to his pocket.

Today there are new plant breeding techniques available to plant breeders. Hybrids, and patentable plants such as Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), as a concept, are gaining acceptance in the farming community. Consumers have no issues with hybrid plants, and credible research seems to indicate that GM grains and products are safe for human and livestock consumption, although some would argue that. We have only to read the farm papers to realize how devastating unwanted GM material in a crop can be. Europe was one of our major buyers of flax, but when they found GM material in the flax we shipped them, all sales were halted, and the Canadian flax price fell drastically. To regain the market, our farmers must have their flax tested for the presence of the foreign gene before it can be delivered – an expense and a nuisance.

But are hybrids and patentable plants such as are produced from GM technology a good idea from the farmer's point of view assuming markets accept the products? Hybrids are touted as higher yielding than non-hybrid varieties. Promoters of GM technology promise fantastic yields, drought resistance, saline tolerance, enhanced nutrient use efficiency, and the availability of niche crops with therapeutic or medicinal qualities. Are these crops the way to go?

GM technology is one method of plant breeding that offers some intriguing possibilities, but it can be very expensive. Each company that has a patent for either a particular gene or a particular technology involved with plant development tends to believe that their particular piece of puzzle is the most important and wants to be financially rewarded accordingly. The end result is that the seed is expensive, and arguably overpriced for the value the farmer receives.

In order to evaluate the usefulness of GM technology, it is important to know a little bit about genetics. Inserting a single gene conferring herbicide or disease resistance, while expensive, is relatively easy to do, and will achieve the desired result, because those characteristics can, in many instances, be controlled by a single gene in the plant. Characteristics like drought resistance, yield, quality characteristics, and water- and nutrient-use-efficiency are generally not controlled by single genes. In some instances, there may be a single primary gene for the trait, but the expression of the attribute will be influenced by other genes, known as modifier genes. In animals, coat color is one characteristic that is highly influenced by modifier genes. (Charolais cattle, for instance, are homozygous for a primary gene giving a red coat color. However, they also carry modifier genes that "mask" the primary gene, resulting in a white coat color.) Or there may be multiple genes involved in controlling these agronomic characteristics, greatly complicating genetic modification and attainment of the desired end result.

There are also differences amongst plant species regarding the complexity of their genomes. Corn, barley, and flax for instance are diploid plants, meaning that there are two copies of each

chromosome. Simplistically, genetic manipulation of diploid plants is more straight-forward than that of plants with higher ploidy numbers, such as bread wheat, which is hexaploid and contains six copies of each chromosome. Agronomic improvement of crop plants with complex genomes via genetic modification (i.e. insertion of a gene) tends to be more expensive, and have a lower success rate, relative to crop plants with smaller, less complex genomes

Private breeders and the companies they work for favor hybrids or GM technology because it gives them control over the seed distribution and prices for 20 years or more for patents, and an indefinite period for hybrids. Promoting the business interests of a company for its share holders is an acceptable thing to do. Farmers need to remember to protect and promote their interests for their "share holders". The farmer's interests could differ significantly from the companies interests .

The resultant seed produced from private breeding out of the farmer's control can become a significant cost to farmers. It could be argued that the improved varieties will be worth the price, but only if there are significant advances, and only if there are no simpler and cheaper methods, some of which may even be faster for developing the same varieties. GM and hybrid technology are just a couple of the numerous tools available to the plant breeder; the choice to use these tools should be based on whether the same outcome could be achieved in an efficient manner using other tools, and considering whether the end result will be of significant net benefit to the producer.

Blithely accepting the need for hybrids or GM crops might be a dangerous attitude. Farmers, by their own choices, run a huge risk of raising their seed costs several times over. Historically plant breeding research has returned \$5 to \$10 dollars or more to the farmers and or plant breeding companies pocket for every dollar spent. At seed buying time it is no doubt hard to determine the ratio of dollar invested in research to net return, but it should be possible to evaluate whether or not the varieties that require seed to be purchased every season will return more net profit to the farmer than varieties from which farmers can save their own seed. Farmers still have time, but not very much time, to determine if they want to be involved or how much they want to be involved in funding plant breeding So if farmers go shopping for GM or hybrid seed, humming the tune *"I owe my soul to the company store; another day older and deeper in debt. St. Peter don't you call me because I can't go---*", and if the seed still looks like a good choice, by all means, go for it.

Resolution

Be It Resolved That the Wild Rose Agricultural Producers supports the Canadian Federation of Agriculture's policy on voluntary labeling of genetically modified foods.

Whereas short line Railroads provide a real alternative for farmers to market their grain with producer cars and, whereas

there are eleven successful grain dependant short lines in Saskatchewan and, whereas the Saskatchewan government gives real support for short lines railroads with consulting, maintenance and financing, therefore;

Be It Resolved That Wild Rose Agricultural Producers lobby Alberta Transportation to develop programs similar to the Saskatchewan model, to support and nurture short line development in Alberta.

Be It Resolved That the Board of the Wild Rose Agricultural Producers encourage Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to promote the development of a leadership program that is adapted to the needs of the agriculture industry, so that all provinces can count on a national program that will guarantee the ability for current producers to capitalize on their business and their organizations successes to ensure a seamless succession in support of the sustainability and prosperity of agriculture.

Be It Resolved That Wild Rose Agricultural Producers encourage the Government of Alberta to use public consultations in matters that are of concern to the general public.

Be It Resolved That Wild Rose Agricultural Producers lobby the federal government to put in place a succession planning process to replace retiring research scientists.

Be It Resolved That Wild Rose Agricultural Producers lobby the federal government to support and increase public funding dollars spent on primary and applied research.

Be It Resolved That Wild Rose Agricultural Producers urge the Government of Alberta to accept age verification over dentition at the packers.

Be It Resolved That the Wild Rose Agricultural Producers encourages research funders to support research techniques that are cost effective, timely, and not limited to GMO technology.

Be It Resolved That Wild Rose Agricultural Producers support the Alberta Beef Producers in lobbying the provincial and federal governments to use OIE standards in livestock exports and imports to ensure harmonized trade among Canada's trading partners.

Be It Resolved That Wild Rose Agricultural Producers lobby the Government of Alberta to respect the ownership rights of agriculture when dealing with competing interests for the Alberta land and water base. This will ensure that the agriculture sector will continue to have access to the resources necessary to grow safe, healthy food domestically.

Be It Resolved That Wild Rose Agricultural Producers communicate to the Federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and to the Minister of International Trade that the Canadian Wheat Board is not trade distorting as has

been proven in 14 unsuccessful trade challenges by the United States and by a 2004 WTO panel report rejecting the US challenge and;

Be It Further Resolved That the respective Ministers be encouraged that decisions regarding market structure should be made in Canada by producers and not by international trading partners.

Be It Resolved That Wild Rose Agricultural Producers lobby the Alberta government to release human resources to the Growing Forward program so that federal money allocated to this program can be released to qualified recipients.

Whereas quality and replacement feed costs for an area are not currently accurately reflected in the hay and forage production insurance program, causing less than 8% of producers to participate, therefore;

Be It Resolved That the Wild Rose Agriculture Producers lobby the Alberta Government to encourage AFSC to work with WRAP to develop a program that better reflects area hay and forage replacement costs based on area forage prices as opposed to using ICE October barley pricing and to encourage AFSC to include a quality aspect to the hay and forage program.

Leadership in Agriculture – Today's and Tomorrow's Farms



“There is a need to initiate a discussion around the development of a national leadership strategy that will benefit not only this generation of farm workers but the generation to come,” indicates Terry Murray, Chair of the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council's (CAHRC) Board of Directors.

“We need to seek out men and women with vision who can assist us in addressing the question of how to build the capacity of agriculture for the next 25 years and beyond.”

The Council hopes to bring together just such a group of individuals during the four Regional Human Resources (HR) Fora and one combined National/Regional HR Forum to be held across Canada between February and June 2010.

Through its mandate to work with industry leaders, governments and education stakeholders to develop and implement programs and activities that will deal with primary agriculture's most pressing challenges, CAHRC will be seeking the input of these stakeholders in addressing farm employment and employer/employee skills development in agriculture.

The sessions will provide the Council and its Board of Directors with a unique opportunity to discuss ways in which to attract and retain workers with the appropriate skills needed to compete in today's global economy. The feedback obtained by participants will be instrumental in identifying the HR needs and best practices particular to primary agriculture in regions across the country.

The sessions, to be held in Moncton, NB; St-Hyacinthe, QC; Guelph, ON; Abbotsford, BC; and Calgary, AB; will feature presentations to increase awareness of CAHRC and its mandate. Moreover, these events will include speakers on agricultural leadership, employment and skills development. Political representatives will be asked to attend each session to provide insight into programs that are ongoing and respond to questions from the participants.

A major component of the day will be the panel discussions on employment and on skills development during which participants will be asked to actively provide their feedback and insights into the challenges currently faced by primary agriculture and the road ahead for one of Canada's most important industries.

The national forum, to be held in Calgary in June 2010, will provide a backdrop from which to showcase speakers who can provide insight and motivation related to leadership and the issues of rural Canada. “Essentially, leadership will be the overarching theme of the national forum,” says Murray. “The national forum will be centered on the HR capacity of our industry and strategies to alleviate labour shortages. It is crucial to explore leadership and look at the long-term picture related to human resources – to sow the seeds for future projects and the maturing of an industry.”

Science, Innovation and the Future of Agriculture:

Report on the 14th Annual Convention, Wild Rose Agricultural Producers Jan 6 & 7, 2010

By: Terry Lee Degenhardt

Science and innovation are very much a part of farming and will continue to be so in the future. Change happens fast and regularly in agriculture, and the speakers at the Wild Rose Agricultural Producers' (WRAP) annual convention spoke on a variety of topics all of which touched on science, innovation and change.

Marcia Hewitt Fischer, the Growing Forward coordinator gave some of the highlights of the Growing Forward program. (It is supplementary to the Agri-stability and Agri-invest program.) Funding is available to producers in 4 general areas – food safety, the environment, management and business competitiveness. Most farms could qualify in at least one area so it is worthwhile to learn more at www.GrowingForward.Alberta.ca, or by phoning 310-Farm(3276).

Dr. Axel Meisen from the Alberta Research council spoke on the topic “What is in Store for the Future”. If steak is the most valuable cut of meat, can it be grown in vitro (in a lab) and bypass producing a steer that includes all the other cuts? Researchers in Holland have taken cells from a pig and produced a pork roast in a lab, using a nutrient solution to grow it on. So far the resulting roast was not very appetizing, but the process may be refined and perfected. It is possible now to grow skin from a person’s own cells, to replace skin for burn victims. Similarly, the starch that can be harvested from a kg of wheat can be grown by tissue culture in a lab. Scientists have calculated that it takes 1500 liters of water to produce 1 kg of wheat, while producing the carbohydrate in a lab equivalent to a kg of wheat use only 1 liter of water. (Just an editorial comment: Obviously the liter of water used would be in the nutrient medium supplied to the cells. But if you look at the environmental footprint of the whole manufacturing system which includes the physical lab itself, I wonder what the water use would be. The wheat plant itself is in fact a factory, so it seems important to compare apples to apples.)

Dr Meisen also talked about biochar which is a carbonaceous material formed by pyrolyzing (heating) biomass. Heating straw in the absence of oxygen, for example, produces a black charry material, or biochar. Because biochar is essentially carbon only (much like coal for example) it is very stable in the soil, yet it acts in much the same way that compost would in holding water and nutrients, and improving the physical tilth of the soil. It may be helpful in solonchic soils. It is also an effective way of storing carbon in the soil because it is so stable. Again the practicality of this is not there yet, but it may be one day. Perhaps the idea could be applied to municipal waste to create a win-win situation.

Lois Macklin, also from the Alberta Research Council talked about the consumer – farmer relationship which is almost non-existent. In the absence of a personal relationship with a farm, consumers are beginning to make more demands around food safety and verification. Technology may one day be available to have a lab on a computer chip whereby a consumer could scan a product with her phone, and it would analyze the food for chemicals, pesticide residue, even the DNA to test for GMO content. It makes one wonder if there is not a better way to connect to the consumer – through agri-tourism or a “blog from the farm” or even more direct sales.

Judith Dyck, a communication consultant talked about using the social media – face book, blogs, and the amazing range of topics through the internet. These are tools the young farmers are comfortable with and a learning challenge for the rest of us. Information can be at our finger tips. A web page gives a person influence – an opportunity to say something, and also to listen to comments coming back if the page is set up for that. There are business opportunities.

Jeff Clark, from the company “Kitchen Partners” talked about Innovation up the Value Chain. Kitchen Partners is an Edmonton based food service company. They have hired people with lots of experience who get things done. Because it is relatively small, and highly flexible, and produces high

quality, its products are in demand. Clark told about meeting with suppliers and other partners to find win/win solutions for lowering costs which is important to staying competitive with places like Walmart or Cosco. On the topic of value chain innovation, Clark’s advice was to challenge yourself to continually improve, find win/win solutions, have an open mind, and look for real partners.

Al Scholz, consultant, challenged the group to think about meeting change. If you told 1 person 1 thing about how you prepare for change, what would it be? He suggested the prominent changes in the next decade will be about the environment, sustainable food systems and greenhouse gases. The tsunami of change can be a wave of opportunity. His advice was to be alert and aware, be proactive, and stick up for yourself – be assertive. Sometimes the accepted knowledge of the day do not hold up under scientific scrutiny.

Canola and the Future of Seed Technologies was the topic Rick Warren from Dow Agrosiences spoke about. Their plant breeders have focused on the global health and wellness trends in their plant breeding. They are marketing canola varieties containing oil high in omega 9 – the fatty acid profile is 70% oleic and less than 3% linolenic. They are working on developing omega 3 DHA (same kind of omega 3 as is found in fish oils).

Laurent Pellerin, a farmer from Quebec, and president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) very eloquently spelled out the disconnect between science and trade. Fair trade and free trade do not exist. They are myths we keep chasing. According to WTO rules, phytosanitary restrictions must be science based. Canadian farmers in the last few years have seen time and again where any excuse will close a border – BSE, H1N1, GMO material in flax, the presence of fungal spores on canola. Science has proven that none of these issues represents a health concern, yet countries use that excuse to stop trade. Canada on the other hand does not test products imported from other countries for pesticides that are banned from use here. So Canadian farmers are at a disadvantage both ways – we are denied the use of some effective pesticides that our competitors use, and yet anything we produce and sell must meet the very highest standard, which comes at significant cost to the farmer.

Pellerin also suggested that market offer and demand – supply and demand – is a theory, not a law of economics and often does not work. It needs a large number of sellers, and large number of buyers. As farmers we represent a large number of sellers, but there are only 1 or 2 buyers for many of the products we grow. And on the input side, there are only 1 or 2 or 3 input providers who can set prices pretty much as they wish.

The third myth that Pellerin challenged was the idea that population pressure will result in food shortages. The world has plenty of capacity to produce enough food, but market signal can’t be depended upon to indicate that need. The fact is that much of the population increase is occurring in countries and regions that earn less than \$1/day, and those people have no opportunity to influence markets or to access food.

Reg Steward was the after supper speaker and his topic was farm safety. Steward highlighted the causes of many farm accidents – working under stress, working when tired, being in a hurry, not taking regular rest and nutrition breaks, and this while working in an unpredictable environment. Machinery can fail, livestock can be unpredictable, weather can create havoc. Safety must be given more than lip service. Carry a radio or cell phone with you, be alert to dangers like walking under a raised front end loader, take breaks, even just to walk around your machine and have a drink of water. Farming is the only business where we live at the work site, so special care must be given to the safety of children. Steward was an excellent speaker who entertained and taught in the same sentence.

Jim Smolik, Assistant Chief Commission of the Canadian Grain Commission (CGC) reminded the group of the need to sign a legal document for each load of grain delivered to declare its class. He covered a variety of other topics. Over the next few months the CGC will be reviewing the classification of bonded companies, so there may be changes there. Even at licensed facilities, farmers are only eligible for payment within 90 days of delivery. The CGC now has a 3 year phase out for de-registering varieties so farmers are not caught planting a licensed variety in the spring only to find it has been de-registered by harvest time. Ochratoxin A is produced by storage fungi and occurs post-harvest in tough and damp grain, at temperatures even as low as 3 degrees. There has been more concern in recent years about levels of this toxin by importing countries.

From the CWB representative, Gregg Biolobzyski, the group learned that CN has delisted a number of sidings in this province, with the intention to begin ripping them out in the spring. This is bad news for communities, and for farmers who may want to load a producer car. The WTO, in its current text, would see the CWB eliminated by 2013. The agreement is not signed yet, but the goal is to have an agreement reached in 2010, so there is time, but not much, to lobby your MP to change the current WTO text.

WRAP delegates dealt with 15 resolutions which are reported on elsewhere in this issue.



Back row L- R: Terry Murray, Russell Wolf, Keith Degenhardt, Dwayne Marshman, Lee Townsend, **Front:** Andrew Peden, Humphrey Banack, Lynn Jacobson (missing Grant Hicks)

WILD ROSE

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS

Yes! I wish to join Wild Rose Agricultural Producers

Name:

Spouse:

Address:

Town: Postal Code:

Telephone: Fax:

Email:

Membership Fee:

1 – year	\$ 147 (140 + 7.00 GST)	\$
3 – year	\$ 388.50 (370 + 18.50 GST)	\$
Associate	\$ 68.25 (65 + 3.25 GST)	\$

Please make cheques out to: **Wild Rose Agricultural Producers**
 Visa or Mastercard (Please check off one)

Credit Card number.....

Expiry Date.....

Signature.....

GST #: R122545304 | **A receipt will be mailed out to you**

Type of agricultural operation:

Grain Cattle Hogs Poultry Horticulture

Other

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Director's Report – January 2010 By: Dwayne Marshman



One of the challenges facing agriculture going into the future is the centralized consolidation of agri business, whether it is our suppliers to our grain buyers to the centralization of Rail Service and the abandonment of railroads and rail sidings. The two major railroads, CN and CP, through the development of technology are continuing to move bigger trains faster than ever before. These companies are no longer interested in stopping to provide service to individuals and businesses along their lines which require less than 50 – 100 cars and more. Although this may seem like an impediment to the economic development along these lines it has actually opened up opportunity for producers and businesses to purchase these lines and buy back service and development. In Western Canada today producers are banding together to take control of this opportunity. Short Line Railroads are becoming more available

all the time and producer car loading sites are springing up along these lines to open up a competitive alternative to agri business consolidation

Currently in Alberta we have two such groups of producers negotiating with CN for the purchase of the railroad to begin operations. The Battle River Rail new generation coop has just about reached their goal of raising 3.5 million dollars from 180 shareholders and borrowing the rest for the purchase of the Camrose to Alliance rail line. The producers and municipalities to the south of them on the Oyen to Lytla rail line are just beginning their attempt to negotiate the purchase of that line. It is unfortunate that at this time in agriculture when farm debt is at its highest that this loss of rail service from these rail companies should cost producers in these areas multi millions of dollars to purchase them and bring back rail service to those communities to maintain that competitive alternative for not only loading out products but bringing products in which could include fertilizer, dried distillers grain and corn which could help to lower grain and livestock producers input costs. As grain producers we might not like to allow cheaper alternatives but that is the reality faced by the livestock industry, if you cannot get more for your product then you have to lower your input costs. At first glance you might not think that there is a need for these lines but when you stop and think about the future, with rising fuel cost, rising infrastructure costs, rising road maintenance costs, congested highways, then maintaining these infrastructures just makes sense. In the future as freight costs rise businesses that depend on the movement of freight could look to these communities bringing vitally needed rural economic development back and helping to remove congestion out of the big cities.

Whether you live along these lines or not they will help to keep competition in the market and benefit all producers and communities. Even though this is a large capital investment today in the long run WRAP believes we will all be better equipped for the future by taking ownership of this infrastructure. WRAP along with the CFA has been encouraging the governments at all levels to back these types of producer initiatives with tax incentives and loan programs. Most of these cooperative efforts whether they are for railroads, livestock marketing or biofuel development will probably never see shares that can be cashed in and have a value. The value is in the added return to the shareholders and members through what the cooperative offers them in service and benefits.