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To: Deb Mazour
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Nebraska Cooperative Council's Newsletter



Cooperation in Nebraska

December 30, 2024

ANNUAL MEETING AND HALL OF FAME

The 79th Annual Meeting of the Nebraska Cooperative Council was held in Kearney on November 21, 2024 at the Younes Conference Center North. There was a 20-year high of 266 attendees and guests in attendance.

Council Board Chair Dean Thernes of Battle Creek welcomed special guests, members, and sponsors then gave his Chairman's report. Council President, Rocky Weber, then delivered the financial and President's reports.

Election Committee Chair Jeremy Wilhelm then shared the 2024 Election Committee Report, announcing that Chris Beins of Aurora and Allan Zumpfe of Dorchester, who had both been appointed after 2 members left the Board, were elected to 1-year terms, and Dean Thernes and Jeff Loschen were re-elected to 4-year terms. The Participating Members also re-elected Cary Sandell from CoBank for a 2-year term.

A copy of the minutes is linked [here](#). Please notify the Council at debm@nebr.coop by January 9th if there are any objections or errors. If none are received, the minutes will be deemed accepted as distributed.

The Council and its membership then honored outgoing Board members Evan Brandes and

Bart Moseman. Evan served on the Council's Board for 7 years, including serving on the Excellence in Cooperative Education Committee for 2 years and the Legislative Advisory Committee for 2 years. Bart served on the Council's Board for 5 years, including 4 years on the Legislative Advisory Committee and 4 years on the Excellence in Cooperative Education Committee. The Nebraska Cooperative Council and its members are grateful for all of the hard work and years of service Evan and Bart dedicated to the advancement of Nebraska's cooperative system.

The Council then recognized the first class of its new program, GROUNDWORK - Cultivating the Ag Leaders of Tomorrow, which was launched in conjunction with the NCC Education Foundation and sponsoring cooperatives to provide a platform to develop new leaders for Nebraska's farmer-owned cooperatives.

Participants interacted with national thought leaders, learned about the state and local policymaking process, and discussed ag policy with state and national policymakers. The Council congratulated the following 12 individuals for being an engaged and outstanding class of GROUNDWORK graduates: Kolby Van Newkirk and Devan Oligmueller sponsored by Westco, Cortney Brandes sponsored by the Aurora Co-op, Brett and Donnia Behrends sponsored by Farmers Cooperative-Dorchester, Tucker Hartley and Garret Otter sponsored by Ag Valley Co-op, Tim Bartak and Dylan Rowe sponsored by Country Partners Co-op, Zach and Kelsey Herz sponsored by CPI, and Andrew Neujahr sponsored by Frontier Co-op.

The Council and its members then inducted two extremely deserving cooperators into the Nebraska Cooperative Council Hall of Fame: Ron Hunter and Bill Sebree. Videos highlighting their impressive careers can be found [here](#) on our website. Congratulations to Ron and Bill on their incredible careers and well-earned induction into the NCC Hall of Fame.

The keynote for the evening was delivered by National Council of Farmer Cooperatives President and CEO Chuck Conner. Chuck discussed the opportunities and challenges presented by the results of the 2024 election. The Nebraska Cooperative Council and its members presented a Chuck a plaque honoring him as a Nebraska Cooperator for all of his efforts in support of cooperatives.

After Chuck's remarks, the meeting was adjourned and the annual membership reception began. Members and supporters were able to enjoy fellowship, food, and drinks.

Thank you to these members and supporting organizations for co-sponsoring this successful NCC Annual Meeting:

PLATINUM

CoBank
EBM Construction Inc.
Express Feed and Grain Parts, Inc.

BRONZE

GROWMARK, Inc
Kelley Plucker, LLC
Coop 401(k) Plan by Milliman

Marsh McLennan Agency
ProValue Insurance

GOLD

AGP - Ag Processing Inc
CHS, Inc
Crosby Guenzel LLP
Gardiner+Company
TrueNorth Companies
United Benefits Group

SILVER

Four Points Federal Credit Union
Gallagher
Land O'Lakes, Inc

Nebraska Corn Board
Nebraska Rural Radio Association
Olsson
Stifel - Olson Financial Group
StoneX Financial Inc.
The Cooperative Finance Association
Triangle Insurance

HALL OF FAME

Ag Valley Co-op
Farmers Cooperative-Dorchester





Pictured above:

Row 1: A record 20-yr high of 266 individuals attended our Annual Meeting on November 20 in Kearney.

Row 2 left: National Council of Farmer Cooperatives President Chuck Conner gave the keynote about opportunities and challenges presented by the 2024 election results.

Row 2 right: Pictured with NCC Board Chair Dean Thernes (far left) and NCC president Rocky Weber (far right) are 2024 Hall of Fame Inductees Ron Hunter and Bill Sebree.

Row 3: Individuals from our first class of *GROUNDWORK - Cultivating the Ag Leaders of Tomorrow* were recognized.

Row 4: Following adjournment of the Annual Meeting, everyone enjoyed time for fellowship, food and drinks.

NCC BOARD RE-FOCUSES FUND FOR EXCELLENCE

At its November 20, 2024 meeting, the NCC Board of Directors voted to amend the Fund For Excellence Policy to reflect current needs and opportunities to put the Fund to its best use.

From 1998 through 2001 the Council raised from its membership \$505,932.01 for the Fund for Excellence. At that time the stated purpose for raising the funds was ***"with the express mission of enhancing cooperative education/extension for the cooperative system."*** Further correspondence with the membership indicated that: ***"The Fund for Excellence (FFE) was created to support educational activities that would enhance the entire cooperative community and to maintain a superior level of service and programs through a land grant college."***

Indeed, since its inception the Fund has been used only to support, periodically, a faculty position at the University of Nebraska, Department of Agricultural Economics, devoted to teaching a cooperative business model class and providing academic study and extension services to the Nebraska farmer cooperative system.

The University of Nebraska no longer maintains such a faculty position and the likelihood of re-establishing such a system is remote. Neighboring states such as Kansas State University, the University of Missouri and the University of Minnesota do maintain such positions.

Since 2021 when the last faculty person left UNL, the Fund has not been used. Its balance as of October 31, 2024, was \$680,857.93. The NCC Board determined that these funds should be put to use and in consideration of changing academic and extension circumstances and changing needs of Nebraska agricultural cooperatives, the decision was to narrowly broaden the use of the Fund for Excellence.

The amended FFE Use of Funds Policy now allows the Fund to be used for: ***".....the financial support for universities and colleges committed to aiding the educational opportunities for persons involved in the management of farmer owned cooperatives and their patrons and for study and research of topics which are of special interest to farmer owned cooperatives and their patrons; supporting colleges and universities in developing and offering classes related to the cooperative business model; the development of educational programs to promote and prepare future leaders for the Nebraska farmer owned cooperative system; to supplement director and management education programs offered by the Council with funds to maintain the participation of national thought leaders and high quality speakers; and for such other purposes as the Board may determine consistent with these uses."***

This change maintains NCC support for University extension and academic support for member cooperatives while recognizing the growing need to educate tomorrow's cooperative leaders and support a high level of education for member boards of directors and management teams by maintaining the ability to access national thought leaders in agricultural and agricultural cooperatives.

COMPLETED EDUCATION PROGRAMS

DIRECTOR/MANAGER WORKSHOP

On November 21st, the morning after the Annual Meeting, the Council hosted experts for the 2024 Director/Manager Workshop, entitled “Smart Agricultural Cooperatives: AI Innovations, Ethical Leadership & Economic Resilience.” There was an 18-year high number of 128 CEOs, staff, and board members in attendance. NCC would like to thank Farm Credit Services of America for hosting the lunch for this workshop.

Andrew Fastow, former CFO of Enron Corp, presented “Unbiased: How to Manage Risk in the Gray Zone.” Andrew used examples from his time with Enron and the decisions he made that ultimately landed him in federal prison for 6 years to get the audience to think about how they calculate risk when operating in the gray zone. He asked thought-provoking questions to help those in attendance plan ways to ensure they are acting not just within the rules, but ethically.

Ty Kreitman, Assistance Economist at the Omaha Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, then presented an Ag Economic Update using the most up-to-date data available to help participants understand the outlook for the ag economy and where we might be headed.

Brett Sciotto, Founder and CEO of Aimpoint Research and retired Army Intelligence Officer, presented “The Rise of AI: Understanding the Accelerating Impact of AI on Agri-Food.” This discussion offered a good background on artificial intelligence as well as how forward-looking companies are incorporating AI into their businesses. Brett gave useful advice to the cooperatives in attendance - “AI is operations, not IT,” for instance.

Teddy Bekele, Chief Technology Officer at Land O’Lakes, then dug further into AI with his presentation “How Digital and AI Are Transforming Cooperatives.” Teddy walked the audience through several ways AI is currently being used and how they can begin utilizing AI for their work.

Finally, Corey Standley, Senior Associate with alliantgroups’s agricultural practice, and Justin McAnally, Director in alliantgroup’s R&D consulting practice, discussed tax relief incentives for the agricultural industry.



The 2024 Director/Manager Workshop was on "Smart Agricultural Cooperatives: AI Innovations, Ethical Leadership & Economic Resilience" 128 individuals attended.

GROUNDWORK

Directly following the Director/Manager Workshop, the Council was excited to launch the 2nd year of *GROUNDWORK - Cultivating the Ag Leaders of Tomorrow*. The first meeting began with Chuck Conner, President and CEO of NCFC, discussing “2024 Election Impacts.” Brett Sciotto, Founder and CEO of Aimpoint Research, then delivered “Farmer of the Future,” which looks at the traits farmers that survive and thrive in the decades to come will have. Then Ty Kreitman from the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City - Omaha Branch offered an ag economic update.

The new group of participants then got the opportunity to network and discuss their operations over dinner and drinks.

The following morning, NCC President and Legal Counsel Rocky Weber spoke about what makes the cooperative business model unique and the cooperative system in Nebraska. Then the group was joined by a panel consisting of Allan Zumpfe, CEO of Farmers Cooperative; Cortney Brandes, Director at Aurora Cooperative and GROUNDWORK graduate; Zach Herz, Director at CPI and GROUNDWORK graduate; and Neil Stedman, Frontier Cooperative Board Chairman. The group was able to learn about how to be a successful leader of your cooperative and why it is so important and rewarding. The Council is grateful for the excellent insights from everyone on the panel.

The new cohort will join Leadership Luncheon in December, come to Lincoln for a Unicameral Day on February 23-24, participate in virtual programs with national and state thought leaders in the spring, and meet Nebraska’s federal delegation in Washington, DC in the summer. We look forward to seeing this group of talented producers develop their advocacy and leadership skills.

Thank you to the local cooperatives supporting GROUNDWORK Cohort 2:

- Seth Schoeneman - Westco
- Tanner Kauk - Ag Valley Co-op
- Lance Stone - Ag Valley Co-op
- Zach Hinrichs - Aurora Co-op
- Nathan Kramer - Country Partners Co-op
- Kallen Ryan - Country Partners Co-op
- Carson Woodman - CPI
- Scott Leibbrandt - Frenchman Valley
- Dusty Runner - Frenchman Valley
- Tony and Lisa Meister - Frontier Co-op
- Phil Kuehn - Crossroads Co-op



NCC President Rocky Weber led a cooperative panel for the new Groundwork cohort on November 23 for them to learn more about how to be a successful leader of the cooperative and who it is so important and rewarding.

LEADERSHIP LUNCHEON SERIES

On December 12th, David Parker, Executive Vice President of Curious Plot, presented “Futureproofing Your Board.” David offered insights to help cooperatives consider what kind of board they want for the future and how to recruit for it. He discussed important things boards should and should not be doing to be the most effective.

On December 19th, there were 2 presentations on important programs in the state. Alexa Davis and Jesse Bradley from the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources gave updates on the Resilient Soils Act and the Nitrogen Reduction Act. Then Jennifer Swanson from the Nebraska Association of Resource Districts and Thad Kuntz from Adaptive Resources, Inc. and Longitude 103, Inc. presented “ProducerConnect: Leveraging Farm-Specific Data for Optimized Nitrogen Application Recommendations.”

CO-OPS 101

Adam Feser from NCC presented Co-op 101 to 77 college students at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, Central Community College-Hastings, and the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis. Thank you to Chris Wagner from Country Partners, Gary Brandt from CPI, and Jeff Krejdl from Ag Valley for joining these presentations and offering your expertise to the students.

Adam also met with representatives from Northeast Community College (thank you to Dean Thernes of Farmers Pride for setting this up), Central Community College-Columbus, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln about offering Co-op 101 presentations at their universities.

UPCOMING EDUCATION PROGRAMS

ONE-RED LEADERSHIP LUNCHEON

The Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy received a \$307 million grant from the federal Inflation Reduction Act to develop and implement programs to reduce emissions and implement new technologies and systems for industries across the state, including agriculture, with more than \$160 earmarked for ag.

The Nebraska Cooperative Council has arranged for a FREE Leadership Luncheon for NCC members on this topic on Thursday, January 23, 2025 at 12:00pm (CT). Andrew Dunkley, Deputy Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy at the NDEE will discuss the ONE RED Program and how they plan to administer the funds. More information will be sent out to the membership.

DIRECTOR CERTIFICATION PROGRAM / DIRECTOR GROWTH FORUM

DCP Phases 3 and 4 and the Director Growth Forum will take place at the Holiday Inn in Kearney on January 7th and 8th. Phase 3 will help directors understand financial statements and how a cooperative is capitalized, and Phase 4 examines the relationship between the Board and Management.

Facilitators for DCP include Dr. Keri Jacobs, Partridge Chair in Cooperative Leadership and Executive Director of the Graduate Institute of Cooperative Leadership at the University of Missouri, and Brook Stromer, Vice President with CoBank's Regional Agribusiness Banking Group. DCP will also feature a panel with Neil Stedman, Chair of Frontier Cooperative's Board of Directors, and John McClelland, retired General Manager of Garden City Cooperative in Garden City, KS.

The Director Growth Forum (DGF) will begin with Eric Coet's interactive presentation: "Transformative Leadership - The Role of a Director." Eric will discuss strategic and effective leadership.

The 2nd day will focus on Carbon Intensity Scoring and Cooperatives. Michael Dolch and Nate Nolte from AGP will give an update on the policy and regulatory landscape. Then Alejandro Plastina, Director of the University of Missouri's Rural and Farm Finance Policy Analysis Center, will present "Cost and Benefits of Lowering the Carbon Intensity of Corn Production." Lastly, Matthew Elliott, Associate Professor in the Ness School of Management and Economics at South Dakota State University, will present "Real-time Risk & Carbon Intensity Scoring for Cooperatives and Members."

Both DCP and DGF participants will be able to network and share fellowship at the evening reception and dinner, sponsored by CoBank. The evening will feature a keynote address from Adam Carriker.

If you have not yet registered, the registration forms are linked here ([DCP](#), [DGF](#)). The pre-registration deadline was December 24th.

BOARD LEADERSHIP SEMINAR

The 2025 Board Leadership Seminar will take place on March 3rd at the Hilton-Omaha from 10am-3pm. Rocky Weber and Bill Kutilek will discuss important board leadership issues and answer questions members bring. The open forum discussion format of this program allows for participants to learn about current issues and gain knowledge about a broad array of topics. The registration form is linked [here](#) and the pre-registration deadline is February 17th.

COOPERATIVE MONTH

October was Co-op Month with the theme "The Future Is Cooperative." The Council raised awareness about the importance of cooperatives to our state with a series of segments on KOLN/KGIN. The Council's NCC in the News page ([link](#)) has links to the interviews. Thank you to Jeremy Wilhelm from Frontier Cooperative, Brett and Donnia Behrends and Allan Zumpfe from Farmers Cooperative, and Nate Bowman and Matt Reese from CVA for doing an excellent job of highlighting how the Future Is Cooperative.

NCC EDUCATION FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS



The NCCEF Scholarship Program began in 1993. Since that time, 251 scholarships totaling \$364,700 have been awarded. Applications are now being accepted for the 2025/26 academic year with an application deadline of April 15, 2025. Promotional materials and application forms are [here](#) on our website.

THANK YOU PROVALUE

The Board of Directors and Staff of the Council would like to recognize the Board of Directors and Management of ProValue Insurance (a Supporting Member of NCC) for its recent unsolicited donation of \$100,000 to the Nebraska Cooperative Council. The purpose of this donation was to provide support to the Council as it pursues its mission to defend, protect and enhance Nebraska's agricultural cooperatives through its various programs.

Responding to this generous donation, Dean Thernes, Council Chairman, stated that: "On behalf of the cooperative membership of the Nebraska Cooperative Council, we appreciate this generous support from ProValue Insurance, a valued industry partner, which will reinforce the ability of the Council to continue to evolve to assist its member cooperatives in meeting the challenges of today and in the future." A sincere THANK YOU to ProValue Insurance for this generous donation.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Thanks to the following new 24/25 Supporting Members for their support of the Council and its members:

alliantgroup - Houston TX
Commodity Solutions Inc - Omaha
General Excavating - Lincoln
Lockton Companies - Omaha
TrueNorth - W Des Moines, IA

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

- January 7-8, 2025 - Director Certification Program Phases 3&4 - Kearney, Holiday Inn
- January 7-8, 2025 - Director Growth Forum - Kearney, Holiday Inn
- January 23, 2025 - ONE RED Leadership Luncheon
- March 3, 2025 - Board Leadership Seminar - Omaha, Hilton

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