

OUR SAY

Travel Nebraska

I-80 travelers through Nebraska typically are in a big hurry to get through the state, leaving behind a comment or two about the boring drive. They fail to understand that a few short miles north or south of this major thoroughfare the geography and the sights change dramatically. They also fail to understand, by the way, that as they head east or west through the Platte Valley they pass through some of the richest farmland in the world.

I have this feeling that many Nebraskans — both urban and rural — also fail to realize what Nebraska has to offer in terms of diversity in agriculture, scenery, people and attractions.

That might be just the reason to take your family on an in-state excursion this summer. Sure, prices at the pump are high, but a trip in Nebraska will be cheaper than driving to the mountains or beach, plus it can get you refreshed and away from the TV and those annoying campaign ads. And away from the farm or ranch for a few days, which isn't a bad idea at all.

Start with a county fair. You'll find a listing on Page 36. If that doesn't suit your fancy, take in a local campground. Attend an ethnic festival or rodeo. Visit an agricultural museum, including one of my favorites — the Farm and Ranch Museum in Gering at the foot of Scotts Bluff National Monument where the covered wagon trains traveled.

County museum and historical societies have collections and information most folks overlook, maybe because those exhibits are "too close to home."

Two of Nebraska's more interesting museums are the Strategic Air and Space Museum along I-80 near Ashland and the Museum of the Fur Trade near Chadron. Another one is the Museum of Nebraska Art in Kearney.

Nebraska has its well-recognized attractions, geographic and otherwise, and all are worth a visit, including Wildcat Hills in the Panhandle, Henry

Doorly Zoo in Omaha, Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer in Grand Island, Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park near Royal, and, of course, Pioneer Village in Minden.

But get off the beaten path for the unusual, too, for an adventure such as Carhenge north of Alliance, the Museum of Nebraska Major League Baseball in St. Paul, Our Lady of Fatima Shrine in Arapahoe, or Dancing Earth Lodge and Cultural Center near Wellfleet.

If geography is what you want rather than a specific attraction, the raw and unique beauty of the Sandhills awaits you, or try the Missouri River hills of northeast Nebraska.

Floating down the Niobrara via canoe or tube is a relaxing voyage, but consider floating, or "tanking," in a cow tank down one of Nebraska's rivers like the Calamus or Dismal.

If you're hardcore agriculture even on your time off the farm, check out the different crops and farming/ranching practices in another part of this state.

And make a stop at one of those new Nebraska wineries.

It's about time to get to know more about your own state.

And go to www.visitnebraska.org for a full listing of attractions, events, scenic routes and wineries.



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Grocers try to blame farmers for food cost

By DON HUTCHENS

THE world has learned recently who is behind a multimillion-dollar aggressive campaign to roll back ethanol mandates and shift the blame for higher food prices onto the backs of the American farmer instead of where most of the blame rightly belongs: higher energy costs.

Suspicious were confirmed when the Capitol Hill insider publication *Roll Call* published a story outlining the efforts of the Grocery Manufacturers Association.

Roll Call disclosed the news that GMA hired Glover Park Group to run a six-month, multimillion-dollar campaign. Initially funded at \$5 million, the campaign has been reported as receiving an additional \$10 million from the American Petroleum Institute, which works with another agency being used in the campaign.

It is becoming clear that lot of money is being made by companies that are doing very well with higher energy costs, and they want to keep it that way by shifting the blame to agriculture.

Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, weighed in on the Senate floor by calling GMA's tactics an "ethanol smear campaign." He went on to say, "None of these criticisms are based on sound science, economics or even common sense." Grassley said he felt it is important for policy makers and the American people to know who's behind the effort, and that they have outlined their strategy of using environmental, hunger and food-aid groups to demonstrate their contrived crisis.

It is unfortunate that GMA has taken this position and made such an effort against corn growers and corn ethanol. GMA knows very well that high energy costs are the driver of higher food prices, but believes biofuels are low hanging fruit and an easier target than tackling the real root of the problem.

Another area of concern is that one of GMA's representatives is a former

employee of the Environmental Defense Fund, a group that is generally anti-agriculture and anti-technology. Why GMA would hire someone who is anti-agriculture is something I can't understand.

All one has to do is look at oil company profits, and those of companies that process and package food to realize the profit levels today in selling food products to retail outlets and consumers. The American farmer only receives 19 cents of every dollar spent on food. The rest goes to ... guess who?

The transfer of American wealth to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and the top five oil companies as we look at record oil prices and record retail gas prices should be a wake-up call to the value of renewable energy like ethanol and biodiesel.

According to numerous studies by the USDA and land-grant universities, the largest culprit in today's higher food costs is energy. In fact, a study from Iowa State reported that corn ethanol is saving drivers in the Midwest about 30 to 40 cents per gallon, or an average of \$241 per vehicle per year.

We should also remember that corn ethanol is available now and is helping reduce our dependence on foreign oil, while at the same time revitalizing many rural Nebraska communities.

Hutchens is executive director of the Nebraska Corn Board.

Please take our call

EVERY year we try to make contact with a large number of our readers to catch up on their businesses. This survey is more in-depth than most, but it is an opportunity for us to get to know more about your business so we can serve you better. Please talk to our survey folks when they call, and thanks for your help.



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