

Opinion

Voice your priorities

LEAD COMMENT



By **CURT FRIESEN,**
LEAD CLASS XXVII
(2007-09), 1000 17th
St., Henderson, NE
68371-8906

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Friesen and his wife, Nancy, have been farming corn and soybeans in Hamilton County for 34 years. He received his associate's degree in diesel technology from Southeast Community College in Milford. He is past president of the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District board and served on the governor's Water Policy Task Force. At present, Friesen is chairman of the Hamilton County Corn Growers and serves on the National Corn Growers Association Public Policy Action Team. He also is a member of the Nebraska Corn Board. The Friesens have four children and three grandchildren. One son, Neal, is currently on a cross-country bike ride to raise awareness and funds for the Mennonite Disaster Service.

QUESTION

As hearings begin this year on the next farm bill, what would be your priorities for a federal farm program safety net?

ANSWER

With \$8 corn, \$14 soybeans and \$20 wheat, who needs a farm program? Well, prices have changed — as we all knew they would. Now, with input costs rising, land prices skyrocketing and cash rents going up, we all know that margins will be tight once again. With the House Ag Committee announcing that it will start hearings on the next farm bill — when it seems they still do not know what is in the current farm bill — we need to be proactive if we want input on this important legislation.

Between the deficit spending that has been going on for too many years, the national debt exceeding \$13 trillion and projections of much higher deficits to come, we must realize that budget cuts are imminent. Direct payments will be a thing of the past. Crop insurance subsidies will be on the chopping block.

We need to cut spending, so what are

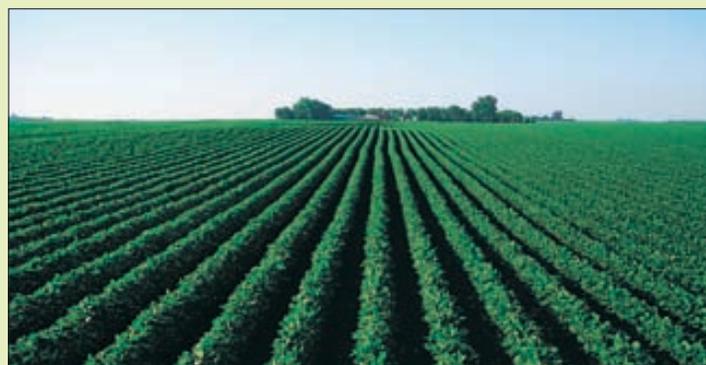
our priorities? I feel that the Average Crop Revenue Election program, or ACRE, that was rolled out as an option in the current farm bill provides the safety net we've all been saying we want. The program started out fairly simple, but when Congress puts its touch on programs, they can get extremely complicated. With some minor changes to reflect what the original ACRE program should have looked like, it could be an excellent program that provides support in times of low prices or low yields.

My No. 1 priority would be to make changes to the ACRE program that would simplify it and make it more responsive to localized economic conditions. Currently, one of the triggers for an ACRE payment is a loss (price drop or yield loss) at the state level. This should be brought down to the county, or even the individual farm level.

Additionally, use of the five-year Olympic average of price and yield (drop the high and low) makes the program very responsive to the yield and price increases that we have seen in the past few years. A 10% cap on coverage change (either up or down) provides for a soft landing in the wild markets that we have been experiencing. By offering the ACRE program as the only alternative in the next farm bill, we could lower the cost of the program and provide the safety net that is needed with these higher prices and input costs.

My next priority would be to maintain some level of federal crop insurance. Without government subsidies, many insurance products that are offered would not be affordable. Some reforms may be needed, but by using these products with a good hedging plan, a market gain is possible during summer price spikes when you are still not comfortable with yield prospects.

I, along with most other farmers, would want our income to come from the marketplace rather than the government farm program, but with the high cost of putting in a crop and the extreme fluctuations in prices, we will again experience tight margins and fewer farmers. So, if you have any suggestions on the new farm bill, or question the need for a farm bill, now is the time to let your voice be heard.



Soybeans offer many environmental benefits

By **JOHN COOPER**

U.S. soybean farmers have long been good environmental stewards. Soybeans represent one of the most popular legumes. Precisely for that reason, soybeans are one of the most common oilseeds as part of a crop rotation. The soybean checkoff has demonstrated, in several ways, the sustainability of U.S. soybeans and soybean production.

A recent checkoff-funded study reviewed the life cycle profile of U.S. soybean production and showed multiple energy and environmental benefits.

A few key findings from the study include:

- The 3.36 billion bushels of soybeans grown in the United States last year removed the carbon equivalent of taking 21 million cars off the road.

- The calculated release of nitrous oxide (N₂O), a greenhouse gas, is 85% less than previous calculations.

- The updated data shows approximately 20% less direct energy used in soybean farming due to reduced diesel and gasoline usage.

- Soybean processing facilities have cut energy consumption by 45% in the last 10 years.

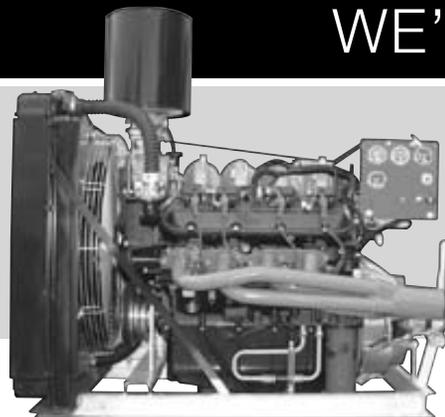
The independent, nonprofit Keystone Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture created a report that helps track the sustainability performance in U.S. agriculture. Early analysis shows that soybean production proves to be more efficient today than it was 20 years ago. Soybean farmers have reduced their energy and irrigated water use, and they have also reduced their carbon emissions per acre, all of which contribute to more sustainably produced U.S. soy products.

The Council for Agricultural Science and Technology compiled a report that evaluates the current and projected future status of soybean production in the U.S. The review of soybean research findings leads to the conclusion that common soybean production systems are environmentally sustainable and can be managed for profit when proper practices and technologies are used.

As a checkoff farmer-leader, I will continue to help promote sustainability within the U.S. soy industry and to our existing and new customers. They're our soybeans. We can be proud to put them to work for us, our country and world in many different, sustainable ways.

Cooper is a United Soybean Board director from Wynne, Ark.

WE'VE GOT THE POWER TO PUMP!



NATURAL GAS IRRIGATION ENGINES: Energy-efficient and low maintenance

SourceGas offers a complete line of natural gas
GM Industrial Irrigation Engines, including:

- :: 8.1 L 496 c.i. 80-175 HP
- :: 5.7 L 350 c.i. 50-94 HP
- :: 4.3 L 262 c.i. 30-70 HP
- :: 3.0 L 181 c.i. 20-48 HP

SourceGas

1.800.563.0012
www.SourceGas.com

Call us —
we can help you
save money on
your irrigation
costs!