

An Ear to the Ground

By Walt Bones, South Dakota Secretary of Agriculture



Challenges in Agriculture

One question I am frequently asked is “What is the biggest challenge agriculture faces today?”

Farming and ranching have always been challenging. Twenty years ago I would have said the biggest challenge in agriculture was the markets or the weather. Today, I feel it’s other uncertainties. It’s the impact of government interventions. What kind of new rules and regulations will hamper the sustainability of our farms in South Dakota? It seems that the Federal government is continually coming out with new regulations that prevent farmers and ranchers from producing the food to feed the world.

One example of these restrictions that seem to lack common sense is the recent consideration by EPA to regulate dust in rural America. Last summer, EPA reviewed their air quality standards and one of the staff recommendations was to further regulate dust emissions (or coarse particulate matter, as EPA calls it). This spring EPA will decide whether or not to formally propose more rigorous rules for the dust standard.

Here in South Dakota, dust is a fact of life. When you drive down one of our thousands of miles of gravel roads, you kick up dust. When you plant corn, harvest wheat or work cattle, there’s dust.

Yes, farmers and ranchers need to be responsible stewards of the environment. And most of us are. Many producers have implemented no-till and other best management practices into their operations to reduce soil erosion. But, this is not a time to impose burdensome regulatory policies that will decrease our ability to produce the very food, feed, fiber, and fuel that the world needs.

The South Dakota Department of Agriculture keeps a close eye on what EPA and other Federal agencies are doing. The Office of Ag Policy was created within the department in 2001 to research and develop factual information on issues affecting the State of South Dakota and its agricultural industry. According to statute, the office may develop briefing documents, policy statements, and other informational documents.

Our Office of Ag Policy monitors Federal regulations, listens to Congressional hearings, and works with our Congressional delegation on behalf of our producers. We provide comments and feedback to Federal agencies. We also gather the top agricultural news from across the web into one convenient location every day – <http://sdda.sd.gov/AgPolicy/News>.

Ag Policy staff will also keep a close eye on the development of the 2012 Farm Bill.

One of my goals as Secretary of Agriculture is to be accessible and responsive to our producers and constituents. If you have an issue you’d like to discuss, please call me at 800-228-5254 or email me at agmail@state.sd.us.

Walt