

An Ear to the Ground

By Walt Bones, South Dakota Secretary of Agriculture

China Revisited

It is a long way from Parker, SD to China! I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to travel there twice in the last 8 months. Even though the land area of the US and China is fairly close, China has nearly four times the people (1.4 billion). In recent years, the population in China has grown every month by the population of South Dakota. It's mind boggling.



I really appreciated the warm welcomes and wonderful hospitality of the Chinese. It reminds me of the way we welcome visitors to South Dakota.

I was struck by the amount of building going on and we joked that the construction crane must be their national bird since it seemed like there was one sitting on top of every building. They have huge challenges to overcome. How do you gainfully employ all those people and have enough housing? But more importantly, how do you produce enough food to feed such a large and growing population?

A big part of that challenge is being answered by the crop and livestock producers right here in South Dakota. For example, one fourth of our soybean crop ends up in China to help satisfy their need for one million metric tons (37 million bushels) of soybeans every week to feed their livestock, provide soybean cooking oil and soy sauce.

Not only do they have an insatiable demand for everything we produce, they also are trying to replicate our production systems. They recognize the value in how our producers continue to strive for efficiency, biosecurity, food safety and sustainability. The Chinese producers' open lots, which expose their livestock to disease and weather, are not working, so they are moving toward our controlled environment systems. They are seeing the value of biotechnology and the superior genetics we have developed in both our crops and livestock.

We were told time and time again, that "made in America" has tremendous value in China.

I am concerned that the very agriculture production systems that are proven and have evolved through science and research seem to have more value or are appreciated more by those that don't have food than those that do.

Walt