ICGA Board Climbs Capitol Hill

The Illinois Corn Growers Association Board of Directors spent four busy days in Washington, DC lobbying for your issues on March 20-24.

Following the board meeting on March 21, every subsequent day was focused on reaching friends or foes with our key message: that Illinois Corn Farmers are growing food, feed, and fuel for our nation and the world in a sustainable way. During the more than 80 meetings conducted in the four days, ICGA leadership focused on several key issues.

One important issue the group focused on was international indirect land use change and the concept that acres in Illinois can affect what is grown on acres around the world. Your leadership spoke to agencies and individuals regarding this concept, showing each that research shows this concept to be, at best, invalid and undefined.

A second key issue was the need for funding allocations to improve

Funding for Locks and Dams Possible

After years and countless hours of fighting for upgraded locks and dams on the Upper Mississippi and Illinois River system, this might just be the year for change.

The Inland Waterways User Board (IWUB), a group of industry professionals that govern how the Inland Waterway Trust Fund is spent, has this month proposed a plan that will both prioritize projects for the Army Corp of Engineers and raise funds for the needed upgrades to match federal dollars.

Not only will this plan get lock and dam upgrades on the table sooner rather than later, it will offer needed construction jobs to the people of Illinois.

“The National Corn Growers...”
Political Action Committee 101

Your association is now more active than ever thanks to your support and a ramped up Illinois Corn Grower Association Political Action Committee.

The ICGA PAC has been able to provide needed financial support to elected officials in key positions making decisions in your favor. The ICGA PAC has also been able to support candidates for federal office that you support, making our effectiveness once those candidates are elected into office highly improved. Thanks go to you, our membership, for making this association as successful as it is. And it can be more successful with your continued support.

Illinois corn farmers are facing a host of misinformation in Washington, DC. The Environmental Protection Agency thinks that they know how you should grow your crops. Animal welfare activists threaten your largest market. Bureaucrats are standing behind their own agendas instead of sound science.

ICGA looks forward to continuing to support candidates that understand Illinois agriculture and listen to your needs.

Capitol Hill (cont.)

and upgrade the Upper Mississippi and Illinois Waterway transportation system. It appears that 2010 could finally be the year to see some movement in this area so Illinois Corn Growers Association Directors, along with our partners in this project the Waterways Council, Inc and the Carpenters Union, visited with key Congressional leaders hoping to garner their support.

ICGA is also already beginning research and preparations for the 2012 Farm Bill. During our Washington, DC visits, we spoke with USDA officials and others to begin informing key personnel what Illinois farmers need from future Farm Bills.

Perhaps the most exciting activity of the visit was that the Volumetric Ethanol Excise Tax Credit (VEETC) legislation was introduced just as our board lobbied members of Congress. This legislation would extend VEETC into the future instead of allowing it to sunset at the end of 2010, helping ethanol plants in Illinois remain operational through the nation’s economic downturn. Due in part to our visits with the Illinois Congressional Delegation, nine of our 19 Congressmen have signed on to date (Costello (IL-12), Davis (IL-7), Foster (IL-14), Halvorson (IL-11), Hare (IL-17), Johnson (IL-15), Kirk (IL-10), and Schock (IL-18) including John Shimkus, IL-19 who is an original sponsor of the bill.

Everything considered, the Washington, DC visit was a success.

“We never hear everything that we want to hear when we visit Washington, DC, but having access to people that make decisions that affect corn growers and at least having the opportunity to provide them with our data and our point of view always makes for a successful trip,” said President Tim Lenz.
Association voted to support the IWUB’s “Capital Investment Strategy”, said IL Corn Growers Association President Tim Lenz. “The reason we supported the plan, despite the cost, is that farmers will see almost immediate gains in efficiency to ship their product as well as increased export opportunities if our waterway transportation system can keep pace with other countries.”

The fuel tax increase would amount to an additional 1/4 of a cent to export a bushel of grain. If federal spending is approved in Congress to match the higher contribution from the Inland Waterways Trust Fund, rehabilitation of Lock 25 on the Mississippi would start in 2011. That means Illinois farmers can finally realize those efficiency gains and Illinois’ unemployed can finally get back to work.

At first glance, it seems that the stars might align this year, giving locks and dams the funding they need after authorization of the projects occurred in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007.

“Elected officials seem interested to talk with us about upgrading the river transportation system when we tell them that we are bring money to the table too,” said Lenz. “Not many groups are asking for projects and showing that the projects are so important to our economy that industry is willing to share the costs with the Federal Government so that’s a bonus for us,” he said.
Advocating for free trade and growing export markets are an important aspect of the work Illinois Corn Growers Association does for corn farmers. Cuba is a key market with potential for expanding opportunity for Illinois corn.

H.R. 4645 is a bill currently in the House Agriculture Committee that would allow increased trade and travel to Cuba. This bill is important to Illinois corn farmers because 100 percent of the corn exported to Cuba from the US comes from the Mississippi River Gulf and, because of its competitive advantage with the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers, much of that corn comes from Illinois.

Outside of corn, USDA data indicates that the US captured all of the soybean imports to Cuba over the last five years and would presumably capture any increased soybean consumption. In addition, trend growth in pork indicates that pork exports to Cuba could increase this trade to 6,600 metric tons of pork by 2015.

Illinois Corn is actively working on members of Congress to both get this bill out of House Ag Committee and onto the House floor and ensure that this bill has a good chance of passage once it gets there.

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