Visits to the Hill 101

Believe me, I am no expert on making visits to congressional representatives, USDA, EPA and other personnel in Washington, D.C. who make laws and direct the policies.

After 3-4 visits though, it does get a bit easier for a guy who still doesn’t like to answer the phone and talk to “strangers”.

For those who haven’t had the privilege of making visits with the NAICC board and several other members that travel to Washington, D.C., here is how the day goes (from my recent March 2010 perspective):

After a good night’s rest, everyone was up and at it, dressed in their best conservative looking clothes. We met for breakfast in the hotel. After a brief overview by Allison Jones and an encouragement and orientation by Ray Young and Tim Case, we divided up in our assigned groups and were off.

Fortunately Allison had done all the leg work lining up the meetings with the various organizations and individuals. Some flagged down cabs and crammed a few too many in the back seats letting the cabbie battle D.C. traffic to get to the assigned destination.

Our group decided to briskly walk the mile to the first meeting from the hotel. At all federal buildings we had to sign in and go through metal detectors and wait for a designated person to come down and escort us to the meeting.

We met with EPA officials to discuss our concerns about the potential new wording on pesticide labels that say “could cause an adverse effect” or “could cause harm” from spray drift. This could limit their usage and would promote frivolous lawsuits. There were also updates on the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits that may be needed in the future and on atrazine continued reviews.

A cab ride then took us to the USDA building on the Mall to meet with USDA/NRCS about the IPM CAPS program. Who says you can’t put four men in the back seat of a cab?

Then we had to decide whether to walk or take another cab to meet up with Jim Thrift from Ag Retailers Association for lunch. We walked. Jim gave us an interesting update on D.C. and the agencies and people he must deal with continually in the entertaining informative manner for which Jim is famous.

Then it was on to CropLife America to get their views on issues such as the above mentioned spray drift, also on the proposed NPDES that is on hold until April 2011. Having to obtain permits to apply pesticides near and around streams and bodies of water will greatly affect future pesticide applications. For the moment, only applications for mosquito control, nuisance aquatic animal and weed control, and application to forests will need the permits. There are legitimate concerns as other agriculture applications will be “dragged” into the regulations. Endangered species issues are also continually being addressed.

One of the highlights of the day was for several of us to meet with Dr. Roger Beachy, the director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (formerly CSREES). It was a pleasure to inform him of our members’ role in conducting independent contract research, quality assurance, and providing crop consulting advice to growers and clients throughout North America.

All of us came together in the basement cafeteria of the Longworth House Office Building for the 13th annual Crawfish Boil on the Hill event. The food was excellent as always. Numerous Congressional and Senate staffers from many states were present. For many, this was their first contact and introduction to independent agriculture consultants and researchers. A record eight Congressmen attended and enjoyed the meal along with other agency personnel who were also in attendance. Many look forward to this and count on this now as an annual activity.

By then, speaking for myself, we were whipped after the long day but several of us braved the Metro ride back to the hotel. Hopefully we represented NAICC membership in an honorable way with our visits.

If you aren’t already, become a fan of NAICC on Facebook and receive updates and view pictures of some activities of the board and members.
Consultants, Researchers Critical to Syngenta

By Peggy Bruton, Field Program Coordinator, Environmental Exposure and Effects, Syngenta Crop Protection

We really look forward to the NAICC meetings. It’s such a nice forum to learn, discuss, mix and mingle with people we work so closely with during the year. When we return from the meetings, we share with the rest of the staff our experiences and interactions with you. And personally... I must admit... I get a kick out of trying to liven up the “Electronic Software Forum.” They slated us for two years now late in the week, right after lunch... and that’s such a dangerous combination! But you guys must be getting something out of it, ‘cause now they’ve asked us to write something for your newsletter. Since we’re using the same software we’ve been using since 1999 (and don’t want to get into discussions on our new system until it’s ready for release) I’m going to use this opportunity to say a few things.

At Syngenta, did you know that your eFTN is reviewed by a minimum of six study personnel? Did you know that the actual data you key in is configured for at least eight different reports? Did you know that the crops you grow, tend and pull out of your fields are handled by personnel from up to four separate companies? Each time your eFTN is reviewed, or your data is reported, or the toil of your trade is shipped or processed or handled or analyzed, you are identified by your name, your company or your trial ID. ... YOU are important to us. We call you, we email you, we visit your facilities. We seek your advice, we value your expertise and we depend on you. Quite frankly, we could not accomplish what we do without you. You... your data... and your support is critical to Syngenta’s success, and on behalf of Syngenta... I’d like to take this opportunity to say thank you for all that you do!

So ok... sometimes it just needs to be said. And I promise, one of these days, we’re gonna talk software!

Research Education Committee Update

By Mike Phillips, Chair REC, Research Manager, South Texas Ag Research, Uvalde, TX

The purpose of the Research Education Subcommittee is to organize the presentations at the 2011 Annual Meeting to be held in Fort Worth, Texas. Because the Research Consultant Group is very diverse, it is mandatory that our subcommittee mirror the diversity of our membership. Our subcommittee contains over 20 members who have an excellent feel for the educational needs of our group. Our first goal is to educate and enhance the professionalism of our members in response to their requests. Our goal is to schedule a program which is timely, energetic, and informative. In structuring this program, we strive to satisfy the needs of as wide a segment of our members as possible.

In addition, our subcommittee is responsive to the NAICC Executive Board. Our Board has a keen knowledge of the membership of our organization. When the Board perceives members need education or training in an area, our subcommittee provides expertise needed to assist in organizing that training.

I feel very blessed to have had the assistance of so many capable friends in putting the 2011 Annual Meeting together.

To that end, we’re pleased to present a glimpse of Research Consultant Program 2011!

Topics that have surfaced for concurrent breakout sessions include:

• Genetically Modified Crops: Perspectives from EPA and USDA Inspectors and from Canada.
• EPA Regulatory Update GMO Sample and Data Collection and also what is in the Pipeline?
• What Industry Wants and Needs from Consultant Trials

Also on tap: roundtable discussion about electronic notebooks, paper archiving and more... and potentially a joint session on business practices with consultants and QAs.

If you haven’t already, please mark JANUARY 19-22, 2011, on your calendar; our Fort Worth meeting will be here before we know it.

Committee Corner

As usual, NAICC committees are hard at work furthering our voice and adding value to our businesses. This column will be used now and in future issues to provide updates on various committee activities, as well as a reminder of each group’s purpose. Please take a minute to thank those involved in these efforts. The time and resources each brings to the table is most appreciated.

Find Us On Facebook!

Friends, neighbors, schools, libraries and more have gravitated toward Facebook. Let’s face it; it’s one more way to connect, from near or far. So it makes every bit of sense that NAICC has joined the Facebook community; we want to take advantage of the networking and information-sharing opportunities it affords our members. Next time you log onto Facebook, become a FAN of NAICC. Take a minute to find us and use this online community to help your business flourish!
To help share professional insight, NAICC’s Newsletter will periodically feature “snippets” about various members and the regions in which they work. Below please find our first “from the field” installments, and look for more in coming issues!

Roger Carter, whose business covers East Central Louisiana, consults on rice, cotton, corn, soybeans, grain sorghum and wheat.

**Q&A with Roger…**

Has the winter weather changed any of your producers cropping plans for this year?
RC: Yes, wet winter prevented farmers from eliminating ruts made during a very wet harvest season; therefore we are later than normal leading to a shift in varieties of various crops.

What are two long term production issues that you see developing in your area?
RC: High cost of maintaining fertility levels and high land rent. And yes, we consider the latter a production problem because high land rent limits the amount of capital remaining for actual crop need inputs.

How do you and your producers hope to deal with these issues?
RC: We are utilizing precision ag with those who’ve accepted it so we can more accurately use the fertilizer we can afford to buy. In other words, by being more efficient in what we are applying.

As far as land rent, we are trying to get major landowners to see the benefits of lowering rent structures so that farmers can put more inputs into production, raise yields and off-set potential rent losses to the landowner.

How has the weather in the last month affected your crops and timing?
RC: The weather has been bad, but it has been nicer to us than the government.

Are crop prices changing the cropping mix in your area?
RC: Yes, more rice, fewer soybeans.

How do you see the growing season unfolding for the coming crop year?
RC: With great anxiety; for many who have had crop disasters in both 2008 from Gustav and 2009 from constant rains during harvest, 2010 will be a “coming out” or “going out” year.

Do any of the new hybrid traits for the different crops look intriguing to you or are any of your producers going to try some?
RC: Not at the price farmers have to pay for technology

This issue’s second regional update is from Steve West, who works in Arizona and on the Mexico and California borders. Major crops he services include all “flavors” of vegetables, citrus, wheat, corn, canola and cotton.

**Q&A with Steve…**

Has the winter weather changed any of your producers cropping plans for this year?
SW: Wet spring kept the mid season spring durum plantings down.

What are two long term production issues that you see developing in your area?
SW: Labor, labor, labor and a litany of bureaucracy in the form of food safety regulations and requirements.

How do you and your producers hope to deal with them?
SW: By spending a whole bunch of money.

How has the weather the last 30 days been treating your crops and timing?
SW: Great! Things are rolling on at warp speed.

Are crop prices changing the cropping mix in your area?
SW: We are a very reactive niche market… when wheat is good, we plant, and so on. Vegetables are a whole different world and do not play by the same economics.

How do you see the growing season unfolding for the coming crop year?
SW: Which one? We are wrapping up vegetables, planting melons, wheat is 50 percent of the way along, fall vegetables are in the planning stages… Hectic, that is how I see the season.

Do any of the new hybrid traits for the different crops look intriguing to you or are any of your producers going to try some?
SW: We change varieties all the time. The average lettuce grower uses a dozen different ones over the season. Wheat has just two varieties of durum, cotton has just a couple varieties, melons have a half dozen choices, which vary by planting slot.

Here, just about every grower has three or four variety plots in each crop to see what is going to be better.

Stan Winslow, whose consulting work is concentrated in North Carolina and Virginia, works on potatoes, wheat, corn, soy, cotton, peanut, melons and cabbage.

**Some insights from Stan…**

Has the winter weather changed any of your producers cropping plans for this year?
SW: Less wheat was planted.

What are two long-term production issues that you see developing in your area?
SW: Glyphosate resistant Marestail and Palmer Amaranth. And in wheat, the Hession fly.

How do you and your producers hope to deal with them?
SW: More use of residual herbicides. My son is also working to provide more insight on the Hession fly through a Master’s project on the pest.

How has the weather the last 30 days been treating your crops and timing?
SW: Wheat is thin and water hurt. We’re also seeing lots of soil borne mosaic virus.

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Continued on page 4.
Potatoes are coming up and should be fine. Corn planting just started on-time.

Are crop prices changing the cropping mix in your area?
SW: We’re seeing about a 10-15 percent increase in cotton acres while corn acreage is falling.

How do you see the growing season unfolding for the coming crop year?
SW: The good Lord will determine how the growing season will be. We definitely broke our long-term drought.

Do any of the new hybrid traits for the different crops look intriguing to you or are any of your producers going to try some?
SW: I’m looking forward to LL/RR in the same package.

Loren Seaman, Seaman Crop Consulting, weighs in from Hugoton, Kansas. He is a consultant on corn, cotton, alfalfa, grain sorghum, potato, wheat, soybeans and sunflowers.

Has the winter weather changed any of your producers’ cropping plans for this year?
LS: No real changes in irrigation production; dry-land corn acres will increase 25 percent due to increased winter moisture and we’ll see less grain sorghum.

What are two long-term production issues you see developing in your area?
LS: First, allocation of water resources and second, what to grow on 100,000 acres of CRP land coming back into dry-land production.

How do you and your producers hope to deal with them?
LS: Both require increasing reliance on drought-tolerant genetics.

How has the weather the last 30 days been treating your crops and timing?
LS: The wheat crop, irrigation and dry-land are in very good condition. We’re three weeks late in fertilizing ground for summer crops but will still make it ok.

Are crop prices changing the cropping mix in your area?
LS: Not significantly. Higher cotton prices will convert some dry-land grain sorghum acres to cotton. Potato contracts are higher so there will be a few more acres.

How do you see the growing season unfolding for the coming crop year?
LS: I anticipate higher risk of disease pressure in wheat, mainly leaf rust and tan spot. I think summer will be pretty normal with moderate temps. Dry-land production here will start off better than normal due to good moisture storage from the wet winter.

Do any of the new hybrid traits for the different crops look intriguing to you or are any of your producers going to try some?
LS: In this intensive farmed area, we will continue to use a lot of genetic trait variations simply to avoid resistance buildup in our insect, weed and disease populations.

In Southeast South Dakota, Griffin Vlietstra consults on corn, soybeans and alfalfa.

He had this to share:
Has the winter weather changed any of your producers cropping plans for this year?
GV: No, not really at all

How has the weather the last 30 days been treating your crops and timing?
GV: The weather has been excellent here for melting the snow and getting fields into field-ready shape. Winter wheat survived the winter very well.

Are crop prices changing the cropping mix in your area?
GV: Yes, somewhat. A slight shift to more soybeans.

How do you see the growing season unfolding for the coming crop year?
GV: Optimistic after the long winter. We’ve had a few guys starting field work.

Do any of the new hybrid traits for the different crops look intriguing to you or are any of your producers going to try some?
GV: Around 15-20 percent of the corn I scout will be SmartStax. We had several areas last year where the VT3 rootworm gene failed, plus Monsanto has been aggressively marketing the SmartStax.

We will probably have roughly the same percentage of RR 2 soybeans.

Insights from Loren Horsman in Homestead, Florida, where he works on sweet corn, snap beans, tomato, eggplant, cucumbers, strawberries and ornamental tree farms:

Has the winter weather changed any of your producers cropping plans for this year?
LH: Yes, major damage from freezes and floods has reduced yields and quality as well as delayed harvesting.

What are two long-term production issues that you see developing in your area?
LH: Loss of methyl bromide on plastic crops, increasing regulation, food safety issues and urban encroachment.

How do you and your producers hope to deal with them?
LH: Some are willing to invest in alternative production techniques and food safety but others are likely to leave agriculture altogether.

How has the weather the last 30 days been treating your crops and timing?
LH: The weather has returned to more normal conditions but in most cases it is too little too late for this season.

Are crop prices changing the cropping mix in your area?
LH: Because of weather problems, prices have been good overall but not enough to make up for heavy losses. Many vegetable producers may not survive.

How do you see the growing season unfolding for the coming crop year?
LH: Not good for the reasons listed above. The strong will survive but the weak links will be gone.
NAIICC Appreciates Partnership with United Sorghum Checkoff Program

Many thanks to the recently established United Sorghum Checkoff Program for exhibiting at our recent meeting in Orlando, and for serving as a partner to our organization. We look forward to working with this group for the betterment of our industry as a whole.

Below please find further information about Checkoff, and to learn more about their goals and activities visit www.sorghumcheckoff.com or call 877-643-8727

After years of declining sorghum acres and a "technology gap" between sorghum and other crops, the newly established United Sorghum Checkoff Program (USCP) is a producer-funded organization that plans to energize the sorghum industry by providing new research, market development and promotion opportunities for producers.

The Sorghum Checkoff was established in July of 2008 under the Commodity, Promotion, Research and Information Act of 1996. Since then, the Checkoff board of directors has worked diligently to create an organization with a single-minded focus on improving the profitability of the sorghum industry through research, promotion and information. The Checkoff rate for grain sorghum is 0.6 percent of the net value and is collected at the first point of sale. The Checkoff rate for forage sorghum is 0.35 percent of net value.

The program has funded more than $1.25 million in research projects. These projects include over-the-top weed and grass control technologies and optimal irrigation strategies, as well as research on sorghum germplasm, drought and cold tolerance traits. At the same time, USCP has also created regional production handbooks for practical, hands-on production advice. This guide includes information regarding hybrid selection, efficient water and nitrogen use and pest management.

In addition to research projects, the Sorghum Checkoff has sponsored market development events in its first year of operation. They targeted research on the use of sorghum in ethanol and found that 30 percent of U.S. sorghum production is used in ethanol. Scientists also studied the best methods to overcome barriers to further use. In conjunction with the U.S. Grains Council, the Sorghum Checkoff has sponsored multiple foreign buyer missions, some of which resulted in the international purchase of thousands of tons of American sorghum.

The Sorghum Checkoff is unified in its mission and will continue to bring new thinking and energy to the industry. Your input about the Checkoff is very important. Sorghum Checkoff board members and staff are happy to answer your questions about the program. For more information or to request a copy of a production guide, please visit the Sorghum Checkoff website at www.sorghumcheckoff.com or call the office at 877-643-8727.

NAIICC’s First GLP Training – A Recap

By Kathryn Hackett-Fields

The NAIICC Board authorized a pre-conference training course in application of Good Laboratory Practice (GLP) principles for a combined audience of Research Consultants and Quality Assurance (QA) professionals. The half-day session was well received and will be kept as part of our training opportunities with some minor revisions.

I appreciate this forum to explain how the course was developed, which also might answer some of the questions found on surveys. In a four-hour timeframe, we realized presenting "basic GLP" training was out of the question – the first rude awakening but better early than late. Instead, using the 2008 year of EPA inspection results presented at NAIICC in 2009, we chose the strategy of picking some weak areas of GLP compliance highlighted during that talk as a starting point. As we fleshed out a possible outline, we could then independently produce segments to circulate to the team via email for comments. Occasionally, we met over teleconference to discuss the progress and further refine each segment.

Paul Tall developed the first segment from those weak areas, concluding with audience participation review and questions. Following this, other segments comprised a detailed review of certain GLP requirements; a focus on typical equipment concerns; professional development and education plans; resources for information and regulatory guidance; instruction on facility inspection; an array of situations for small-group analysis and closing recap with the whole class. Our other speakers were Michelle Higgins, Carlos Gomez and me. Lisa Wheelock served as Moderator, Stu Mertz our Auditor and facilitator and all hands pitched in as needed to set up and carry out the course.

Our group was about two-thirds research-oriented and one-third QA-focused – our first surprise. From the 2009 surveys we had expected more QA people, but actually the balance was perfect. Common to many of the surveys was appreciation of the chance to discuss typical field situations “from both sides,” and drill down on areas of study conduct where EPA had negative findings to the benefit of all. Who attended? From position titles on surveys, “Research” was King – Directors, Managers, Contractors, PI’s, Scientists, an Agronomist and Assistants. QA professionals were self-employed as contractors or affiliated with corporations or universities. The experience levels of all participants ranged from one month to over 11 years. In development, we felt our target audience would be “fairly new to under four years experience,” but having some more seasoned professionals provided valuable feedback during the course as well as to the development team. Future courses should take advantage of the synergy of discussing actual field situations and dual-perspective questions where QA could develop findings and Researchers develop responses.

All things considered, we were rated as having met the goal of helping others to more fully understand GLP application and basic quality system principles. The Board will be working in the future with a team of three Research and three QA professionals to improve and continue this valuable training. The “launch” team wishes them well and is ready to assist where needed, and also gives special thanks to our first participants for their support and enthusiastic response.

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that -- for CPCC Certification – applicants must document all pesticide safety training equivalent to the requirements set forth in the Worker Protection Standard?

Did you know that NAIICC headquarters can loan you a video that you can watch to satisfy this requirement? Alternatively, you can review the video at http://www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/aginfo/pesticid/wps.htm.
Dennis Hattermann visited the office of Congressman Jack Kingston (R-GA) while in DC in March. Kingston serves on the House Appropriations Committee and is Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies.

Congressman Walt Minnick (D-ID) was greeted by Dennis Hattermann and Stan Winslow at the Crawfish Boil on the Hill.

Dorothy Young enjoyed spending time with long-time friend Nancy Alexander at the Crawfish Boil. Nancy is the wife of Congressman Rodney Alexander (R-LA), both who attend the event each year.

Congressman Earl Pomeroy (ND-At Large) visits with NAICC Government Affairs Chairman Tim Case.

NAICC in Green Bay at the 2010 Focus on Precision Conference

WAPAC President Bill Schaumberg presides over the WAPAC Business Meeting that was held in conjunction with the Focus on Precision Conference. Bill is a member of NAICC and served on the planning committee for the conference.

NAICC Members Jim Steffel and Sue Bellman network in the exhibit hall during the Focus on Precision Conference in Green Bay.