

# Keeping the Trade Ball Rolling for Nebraska

*Three Nebraskans discuss the importance of producer involvement for successful international trade*

## From Seward to Around the World

If you walk into Alan Tiemann's workshop you will find a Big Wheels bike, stuffed animals and a multitude of toys.

"Sometimes the shop is more of a playground than a work area," Tiemann said with a glimmer in his eye.

Tiemann's grandchildren, Olivia and Wyatt, like to spend a lot of time where they know their grandpa and their dad, Dan, will be preparing for a day's work on their farming operation located near **Seward**.

Tiemann has farmed all his life, following in the footsteps of his dad and mom who began the operation decades ago. In fact, Orville, who is 86, is still the "main truck driver" during harvest season.

When talking with Tiemann, he certainly comes off as a typical Nebraska farmer. What isn't typical is the leadership roles he has assumed for several years in local and national agricultural organizations.

He has served on the **Nebraska Grain Sorghum** and **Corn Boards**, and spent many years on the **U.S. Grains Council** (USGC). He was president of the USGC in 2015-2016.

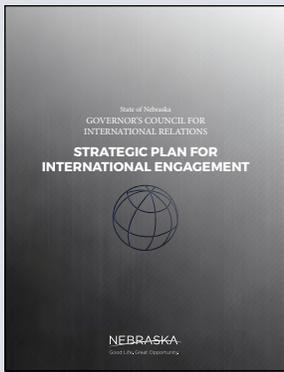
It was in those positions that Tiemann took an active role in promoting U.S. commodities to foreign markets, something he realized was important a long time ago.

"I always believed it is trade that moves the grain markets," said Tiemann. "I would follow daily results and when there was a bump in the markets I would say to myself 'oh, somebody bought grain overseas' and that would be the case."

When you consider that more than 95 percent of the world's population lives outside of the United States, it comes as no surprise that the world's biggest producer of agricultural products, the U.S., needs to market internationally. The biggest part of getting sales in those foreign markets is building relationships.



**Seward farmer Alan Tiemann (far right) with a U.S. Grains Council team on a corn assessment tour in China.**



## Plan to Keep Growing Nebraska Through Trade

In October of 2017, Governor Pete Ricketts hosted the inaugural meeting of the **Nebraska Governor's Council for International Relations**. The Governor announced the formation of the council in July of that year to bring together Nebraska business, agriculture, and education groups to expand overseas trade opportunities and develop new international partnerships for the state.

In **August of 2018**, the Council unveiled its Strategic Plan for International Engagement, which is a long-term strategy for growing Nebraska's international investment, trade exports, and tourism and business profile. This provides a pathway for continuation of promoting Nebraska ag products and increasing market share in international markets.

But you don't build relationships sitting at home in an easy chair watching television. You need to get out and meet the buyers and potential buyers face to face. Thanks to the combined efforts of **USDA** agencies, the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, checkoff boards and commodity associations, Tiemann has been able to participate in numerous trade missions. He estimates he has visited some 30 countries located in Europe, Central America, South America and the Pacific Rim.

While diplomacy and working through governments are important, at the end of the day, making connections with the people who make the buying decisions is key. As Tiemann puts it, whether you're a buyer or a seller, and whether or not you speak the same language, the end goal is typically the same.



Alan Tiemann

phone and what's on the front of it.... a picture of his kids or grandkids," said Tiemann. "It doesn't matter who you are, it's usually about family,

about trying to do better for the next generation."

One of the most enjoyable experiences for Tiemann has been able to meet buyers from other countries and then host them at his farm when they make a return visit.

"They are just as proud of their operations as I am of mine so it's great when we can share experiences," he said.

Despite challenges from some governments at times, Tiemann remains optimistic about increasing the U.S. and Nebraska's share in international markets. He sees countries like China, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea and Mexico as holding great opportunities for expanding both current and new trade.

He also points to ethanol, and its coproduct, distillers grains, as possibly holding the key to opening new doors in countries like India, Brazil and Peru, as well as expanding current markets in China, Japan and Mexico.

### Different Tastes for Different Cultures

Craig Uden has been involved in the beef industry pretty much his entire life.

In his younger days, Uden helped his dad on their farming and cow-calf operation near Bruning in southeast



Craig Uden

Nebraska. But with the agriculture economy going through tough times in the 80s, he knew when he headed to the **University of Nebraska-Lincoln** that he had to branch out on his own.

It didn't take Uden long to get involved with the meats and livestock judging teams at UNL, and that led him to be part of the University's feedlot training program. After interning at a feedlot, Uden got a surprise call one day.

"I was ready to get on with school, and they asked me if I wanted to run a feedlot they had just purchased near **Darr** (just west of Lexington)," Uden said. "That was in 1983 when we started out with 15-hundred head. Today, we're feeding 45-thousand head at a crack."

Expansion such as that at the **Darr Feedlot**, eventually partly-owned and managed by Uden, has helped boost Nebraska to the number one cattle on feed state in the country. With that much production, there's a critical need to keep increasing demand.

"We've got to have export markets because there are 335 million people in the United States and only so much meat they can consume," said Uden.

Uden explains that when it comes to marketing beef, it's much more than selling prime cuts, it's also taking advantage of demand in other countries for cuts that are not as popular with consumers in the states.

"One example is beef tongue," said Uden. "Domestically we might get less than a dollar a pound, but in some foreign markets that might fetch two and a half to three dollars a pound."

Other items categorized as **offal**, such as hearts, livers and tripe (stomach), also have a much higher value and demand in areas such as the **Pacific Rim** and Mexico. The same is true of cuts such as inside rounds and shoulder meat.

However, Uden points out that the demand for high quality beef and prime cuts, especially those from Nebraska, is rapidly increasing internationally.

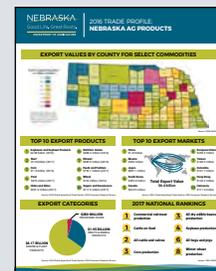
"We're starting to see a younger, more affluent and well educated population growing in countries like China, Japan, Vietnam, South Korea and Hong Kong," said Uden. "This typically means an increase in income which means an increase in demand for quality protein in their diet."

Much of that demand is specifically for Nebraska beef, pork and poultry thanks in great part to the combined efforts of several agri-businesses, farm organizations, checkoff boards and government agencies.

"I think we have been able to establish a brand for Nebraska," said Uden. "Through market promotions, participating in trade missions and hosting trade teams we have been able to differentiate our products from others as being high quality, great tasting and produced in a sound and safe environment."

Uden has held top leadership roles with the **Nebraska Beef Council**, the **Federation of State Beef Councils**, **Nebraska Cattlemen** and **National Cattlemen's Beef Association**.

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture's **Commodity and Trade Profiles** highlight statewide production and exports and how trade ultimately brings value to every county in the state.



Agricultural trade plays a vital role in the economic health of Nebraska's communities, both rural and urban.

View the profiles online:  
<http://bit.ly/NDAProfiles>

"I think it has been beneficial to me to be able to work on both the product side and the policy side," commented Uden. "Understanding both is really important when you are dealing with international markets. We have to be able to increase market share in order to add value to all the agriculture products we produce."

## Jumping Hurdles

Steve Wellman is a lifetime Nebraska farmer. He and his wife, Susan, reside on a farmstead near **Syracuse** where they raise corn, soybeans, wheat, alfalfa and cattle.

Wellman has not been one to sit around and hope that the markets take care of themselves and provide a price that will give him a profit for all the hard work it takes to produce his crops and livestock. Instead, he decided several years ago to get involved with an organization that was proactive in marketing and promoting one of his major crops.



*Uden, then National Cattlemen's Beef Association President, joined USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue and other dignitaries in China to celebrate the return of U.S. beef.*

"I became active in the **Nebraska Soybean Association** (NSA) in the early 90s," said Wellman. "It really struck me when it was pointed out that about half of all the soybeans we grow are exported. That's when I knew how important it was for us as farmers to be proactive in international trade."

Serving as a director for NSA, and then eventually being elected as president of the national arm of the organization, the **American Soybean Association** (ASA), Wellman was able to gain first-hand experience in international trade.

"I think the most important lesson I learned was that there was a marketing side to it and a policy side to it," said Wellman. "It's not always just about being able to supply a quality product, it's just as much about gaining market access."

Wellman pointed out that access to export markets are often limited by the importing country's government policies. Further challenges can come in the form of tariff and non-tariff barriers, as well as sanitary and phytosanitary regulations.

In the early 2000s, Wellman experienced the product marketing side of trade when he traveled with soybean processor AGP to Vietnam and Thailand. The company wanted him and other farmers to provide information to its buyers on how they produced soybeans in Nebraska and Iowa.

"From the buyer perspective they wanted to know about quality and quantity and that they would have a safe, secure and consistent supply," said Wellman. "We told them a lot about our best production practices and how efficient we are at growing quality soybeans."

After going on several trade missions as president of ASA, Wellman was part of Nebraska **Governor Pete Ricketts's** trade team that headed to the **European Union** in 2015.

"There were, and still are, challenges with gaining access to the E.U. markets," said Wellman. "We discussed issues such as biotech trait approvals, quotas on beef and product quality. These are all hurdles we have to jump in order to sell our products to certain countries."

It was Wellman's knowledge, experience and understanding of trade that provided the springboard to him being appointed as Director of the **Nebraska Department of Agriculture** (NDA) by Governor Ricketts in late 2017.

"As a family farmer and respected leader in Nebraska agriculture, Steve brings broad experience to the position having served in leadership in ag organizations at the state and local level," said Governor Ricketts when announcing Wellman's appointment.

In addition to his other duties, Wellman plans to continue to focus on trade and finding new and expanding current markets to sell Nebraska agricultural products. He also knows NDA can't do it alone.

"The cooperation of the state's farm, ranch, commodity and livestock organizations is key," said Wellman. "They have the expertise about their products and they also have funding targeted for market promotion and development."

Wellman added that national and federal organizations such as the **U.S. Grains Council**, **U.S. Meat Exports Federation** and USDA's **Foreign Agricultural Service** and **Ag Marketing Service** have been vital not only in assisting with funding but providing key contacts in developing foreign markets.

Tiemann, Uden and Wellman all agree that Governor Ricketts's international trade efforts have been important in opening doors to current and potential foreign customers.

All three mentioned the success of recent trade missions to Canada and Mexico designed simply to thank buyers in those countries for their business. They were all optimistic about the future of trade for Nebraska as long as proactive efforts continue around the world to share the story of Nebraska's quality ag products.



*NDA Director Steve Wellman with Thai Huong, Founder and Chairwoman of THGroup, during an August 2018 trade mission to Vietnam.*



*Governor Pete Ricketts and NDA Director Steve Wellman team together to promote Nebraska agricultural products.*