NDSGA 2017 SBARE Proposal

Our proposal request is a natural component to the important and effective work ongoing in the Precision Agricultural arena. The core of Agricultural & Biosciences Engineering precision agriculture work is focused on “doing right things, right ways . . . effectively.”

Technological advances provide new opportunities due to sensor and machinery advancements, as well as waste reduction strategies with potential benefits to both farmer productivity and profitability. There is much to be done with the “economics” of technology acquisition decisions made by individual farmers. Big Data remains a significant hurdle for most of production agriculture. Deployment of advances made and decision options and processes remain challenged within our Extension education services.

Before I bring focus to our exact request, let me share a little ground work with you on where we find ourselves situated today on the topic of water quality and nutrient management. Most of the states in our country and region have water quality related nutrient management plans. Our neighbor to the east, and Red River basin partner, has had a plan for a number of years, along with significant nutrient reduction strategies impacting the agricultural sector, and others. Our neighbors to the north are also working on similar plans that are certain to impact our shared basin.

So, it is not new news that the North Dakota Department of Health is headed in the same direction. They have been gathering stakeholder inputs for a couple of years and are diligently working toward the release of the North Dakota Nutrient Reduction Strategy for Surface Waters plan sooner than later. As we gather here today, their stakeholder planning cell is meeting in Bismarck identifying plan roll-out options, time lines, etc.

The stated purpose of the plan is to: “To address the serious environmental, human health and water quality issues caused by excessive nutrients in our waters, the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) has developed this Nutrient Reduction Strategy (strategy) for North Dakota to serve as a blueprint for local, state and federal agencies, cities, counties and the public to address excessive nutrient runoff and loading to our rivers, streams, lakes, reservoirs and wetlands. The goal of the strategy is to help the State prioritize watersheds and best management practices (BMPs) to achieve cost effective solutions to achieve cost effective solutions to reduce the delivery of nutrients to the State’s lakes, reservoirs, rivers, streams and wetlands.”

The bulk of the nutrient assessment and reduction activities are science based. North Dakota’s agricultural producers will need your help to sort out the science “chaff from the wheat” in these processes.

Generally, usually, normally... nutrient assessments and reduction activities are centered on specific watersheds. I am certain North Dakota’s activities will follow that model also. I believe the Red River Basin will be the initial watershed to experience our state’s nutrient reduction focus.

One other comment needs to be made at this point. The primary focus of North Dakota’s public water policy has been moving in the direction of watershed management, along with funding processes for the last three legislative sessions. I believe we can expect that trend to grow.

Our first request is for Agricultural Research and Extension leaders collaborate with the ND Health Department to consolidate agriculture related water quality/nutrient management information currently available on NDSU’s websites into a single headline webpage so it is easily found by producer utilized access devices. It is critical that producers have easy access to pertinent and accurate information as these processes move forward.

Our second request is that gaps in available information on important nutrient assessment and mitigation opportunities be identified and filled, particularly if resolution of those gaps include other opportunities such as pollinator habitat, etc.

Third, we believe strongly that mitigation trial projects be placed with collaborating farmer’s and rancher’s operations to create a producer network available to provide personal experience testimonials for sharing with other farmers and the public at large.

We believe that it is both possible and necessary for North Dakota’s farmers and ranchers to proactively maintain and grow the reputation and legacy of resource stewardship and then share those accomplishments with our more urban neighbors.

We stand ready and willing to cooperate in both tested and creative ways to move these efforts forward. The path forward must be constructed with readily available reliable information, collaborative efforts, focus and collaborative project financing to accomplish this worth-while work.

Thank You,
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