



10-16-09

## **NCGA President continues quest for unity on ethanol messages**

**By Sara Wyant**

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Officers of the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) will be in Washington, DC the week of October 18th, visiting with leaders of the nation's top ethanol industry groups in an ongoing attempt to find common ground on key messages.

"We are still talking. We have had a good, open discussion with both Growth Energy and the Renewable Fuels Association (RFA) and will continue to do so," says NCGA President Darrin Ihnen. "It's unfortunate how this whole event hit the press, but we are going to work through this. It is not nearly as big of a disagreement as people might think. It's basically saying we are serious about getting the ethanol industry together.... maybe not unified as groups, but unified in message."

As we reported in the October 7<sup>th</sup> edition of *Agri-Pulse*, NCGA President Darrin Ihnen sent a strongly worded letter to both Growth Energy and the Renewable Fuels Association, asking them to respond by Oct. 9th to his request for the groups to reconcile immediately and offered arbitration as a way to reach consensus. He described the situation as "dysfunctional" and a "clear and present danger to the corn industry."

"At the most critical time in the history of the ethanol industry and, perhaps, the corn industry, way too much attention and resources are being diverted to the gymnastics going on between Growth Energy and RFA. Regardless of whether either is right or wrong, it is very clear the status quo is very detrimental to the future health of the ethanol industry and the corn industry," Ihnen wrote in a memo to state and national corn grower staff members, which was obtained by *Agri-Pulse*.

Ihnen says sending the letter was "a bold move," and perhaps even more so for someone who officially became president of the corn growers group just one day before the letter was sent. The South Dakota farmer is charged with looking out for a multitude of corn grower interests, including the livestock industry, exports markets, and ethanol. But on a personal level, he's long been active in the ethanol industry. Ihnen currently serves on the board of Growth Energy as their agricultural advisor, is president of a board overseeing a Poet ethanol plant and his family invests in Poet ethanol plants. Poet's President and CEO, Jeff Broin, is also co-chairman of Growth Energy, along with Gen. Wesley Clark.

Both ethanol groups have been doing some good things, emphasizes Ihnen. Since launching last fall, “Growth Energy has been real aggressive and they’ve raised the bar for all of us. So there are a lot of positive things going on.

“This is not about pushing back at Growth Energy or RFA. They will continue to do many of the great things they have been doing,” he adds.

While both Growth Energy and RFA responded positively to the NCGA letter about their desire to keep working with others industry members, Growth Energy pointed out NCGA’s demand for binding arbitration may be in violation of federal anti-trust laws. See a copy of their letter: <http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20091012S.pdf>

After *Agri-Pulse* obtained a copy of the letter from Growth Energy, NCGA sent us the following statement:

“While disagreements within any industry are common and to be expected, it is vitally important that U.S. ethanol supporters work together on Capitol Hill. We have stressed this with our allies a number of times, and NCGA is moving forward with plans to work more closely with the Renewable Fuels Association and the American Coalition for Ethanol.”

Ihnen says that the NCGA statement (above) “was our initial response. Since then we’ve had discussions with both Growth Energy and RFA and so we are still working towards how this coalition will be put together.”

“The arbitration response and our offer for arbitration is off the table,” he adds. “Maybe it wasn’t the right choice of words but we wanted some way to mediate or facilitate a constructive discussion on how we can get the corn industry speaking the same message when we are on the Hill and when we are working towards good ethanol and energy policy.”

Ihnen says his desired outcome remains the same: “Carrying the same message, walking arm and arm when we go into Hill offices and agreeing on working together to promote good, strong policy. That’s still our goal. We think we can still do that with the coalition in the way NCGA wants to put this together.”