

# Nebraska Corn

## Strategic Plan

2023-2027



Enhancing Demand. Adding Value. Ensuring Sustainability.

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# Executive Summary

In the winter of 2022, the **Nebraska Corn Board** (NCB) and **Nebraska Corn Growers Association** (NeCGA) embarked upon a joint strategic planning effort for the Nebraska corn industry.

Over several months, the board of directors and staff evaluated the realities of the corn industry, anticipated significant issues and trends affecting both domestic and export markets. Together the boards developed a three-to-five-year strategic plan to guide their efforts and optimize resource allocation.

The strategic plan has a shared Nebraska Corn vision and values, and three distinct strategy segments: joint strategies, NCB specific strategies and NeCGA specific strategies.

For more than 50 years, the Nebraska Corn Growers Association has been an independent association focused on engaging corn farmers across the state through education, policy and leadership development. Since 1978, Nebraska's corn checkoff success has helped to grow markets for corn through education, market development, research and promotion.

Nebraska Corn has maintained a strong reputation as a leader among a diverse set of key stakeholders at state, national and international levels, and will continue to focus on enhancing demand, adding value and ensuring sustainability through effective programs and projects.

Four core strategic priorities have been established to guide the organization's work:

- 1) Increase grassroots producer engagement in education, leadership development, advocacy, policy efforts and local communities.**
- 2) Collaborate to grow sustainability and demand for corn in all forms.**
- 3) Strengthen the reputation of corn as a trustworthy energy, food and feed ingredient.**
- 4) Foster a culture of continuous coaching and professional development within the organizations to enhance skills and support program, career and leadership growth.**



# NEBRASKA CORN

## Four Strategic Priorities

2023-2027

1

**Increase grassroots producer engagement in education, leadership development, advocacy, policy efforts and local communities.**

2

**Collaborate to grow sustainability and demand for corn in all forms.**

3

**Strengthen the reputation of corn as a trustworthy energy, food and feed ingredient.**

4

**Foster a culture of continuous coaching and professional development within the organizations to enhance skills and support program, career and leadership growth.**

## Background

Nebraska Corn is comprised of two unique organizations: Nebraska Corn Growers Association (NeCGA) and Nebraska Corn Board (NCB).

NeCGA is an independent member-supported association which began in 1972. This organization serves as a voice of Nebraska corn farmers. 27 board members and two ex-officio volunteers lead the association, which is supported through dues paid by its membership and farmers who make a personal choice to join and support the corn industry. When farmers join, they also become a member of the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA).

NeCGA stays connected with policymakers to protect the interests of Nebraska's corn farmers and can lobby at both state and national levels. NeCGA also helps bring a number of valuable programs from soil health workshops to irrigation seminars and grain bin safety events with local responders. There is also a focus on developing the next generation of farmers and agricultural leaders by supporting a wide range of programs for young farm families, college students and farmers who want to grow into state and national leadership roles.

The NCB is a state checkoff agency created in 1978, administered by nine, volunteer farmer directors. It was established by Nebraska corn farmers via the legislature approved Corn Resources Act, as a self-help investment program designed to help develop, carry out and participate in programs of education, research, market development and promotion to enhance profitability (viability). The NCB works to expand the demand and value of Nebraska corn and value-added corn products. The checkoff is prohibited by law from lobbying at the state level-and faces restrictions in its ability to influence federal policy.

Eight members represent specific Nebraska districts and are appointed by the governor, with the board electing the ninth “at large” member. The corn checkoff is collected at the time corn is first sold in the state. These buyers or “first purchasers” include grain elevators, cooperatives, ethanol plants and livestock farmers. The first purchaser is responsible for remitting the checkoff assessments. All corn farmers are required by law to invest in the Nebraska Corn Checkoff.

Nebraska is the nation’s third largest corn producing state. However, Nebraska’s checkoff rate is tied with four other states for the lowest in the nation. Since October 2012, the Nebraska corn checkoff rate has been 1/2 of a cent per bushel (\$0.005/bu.)

The work of Nebraska Corn is executed with the help of five volunteer-led, staff-supported committees including Communications, Government Relations, Grower Services, Market Development and Research & Stewardship.

While corn yield and prices have been rising over the past several years, borrowing costs and production costs have also been increasing, drought and the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been a disrupter to commodity markets.

The future outlook for corn markets is not clear, with predictions of continued farm consolidation and some projections of flat or even decreasing markets in the coming years. This is due to a variety of factors, such as changes in climate, consumer preferences, increased competition from other crops and changes in global trade policies.

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# Background (continued)

Several key pieces of legislation will impact the future of corn farming, including the new Farm Bill, which impacts crop insurance, conservation programs, commodity programs, trade programs and research funding. The Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) sets annual targets for the production of biofuels, including corn ethanol, and could impact demand for corn crops. Changes to tax laws could impact the bottom line for corn growers, particularly those who operate as family-owned businesses. Tax policy changes including those impacting estate tax, capital gains tax and other taxes could also impact the ability of farmers to pass their land and business down to the next generation.

Additionally, environmental regulations related to water quality, air quality and other environmental issues could impact the way corn growers operate their farms. Changes to trade policies and tariffs could also impact the demand for corn exports.

Long-term partnerships with associations and organizations related to the golden triangle (corn, ethanol and livestock) in Nebraska, and investments with partners like the U.S. Grains Council, U.S. Meat Export Federation and the National Corn Growers Association have proven to grow demand for corn and corn-related products. Enhanced collaborations and a focus on cultivating new relationships with high-value organizations will be critical to future success.

Continued efforts to develop the human capital driving the work of Nebraska Corn is also a key priority, as many job roles within the organization have turned-over in the past 18 months, including director level roles responsible for areas such as communication, research and market development.

The corn industry is highly versatile, providing a crop that can be used in a wide range of purposes including food, feed, fuel and industrial products. The industry has a strong track record of innovation with ongoing research and development efforts aimed at improving crop yields, reducing inputs and increasing the sustainability of corn production. This innovation helps corn growers stay competitive and adapt to evolving market conditions.

The strategic planning process was driven by the board of directors for the Nebraska Corn Board, the board of directors for the Nebraska Corn Growers Association and Nebraska Corn staff.

**2022-23 NEBRASKA CORN BOARD**

- Debbie Borg
- Adam Grabenstein
- John Greer
- Andy Groskopf
- Brandon Hunnicutt
- John Krohn
- Dan Nerud
- Jay Reiners
- Ted Schrock

**2022-23 NEBRASKA CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION**

- Brian Brown
- Derek Dam
- Michael Dibbern
- Steve Ebke
- Chris Grams
- Rick Gruber
- Russ Kavan
- Ryan Hanousek
- Amy Harsch
- Andy Jobman
- Jason Lewis
- Joel McAfee
- Dave Merrell
- Guy Mills
- Larry Mussack
- Tom Nathan
- Dan Nerud
- Daren Niemeyer
- Clark Pickrel
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- Jesse VonSpreckelsen
- Dave Warner
- Dan Wesely
- Greg Whitmore
- Morgan Wrich
- Ethan Zoerb

**STAFF**

- Kelly Brunkhorst
- Katherine Byrne
- Jill Parrent
- Payton Schaneman
- Rachael Whitehair



# Strategic Planning Milestones



# Strategic Planning Process

The boards considered input from a variety of industry experts, applied the industry knowledge of its members and participated in an intensive planning process to craft a plan that provides clarity and focus to Nebraska Corn.

## ***Strategic Planning Process***

The planning process was facilitated by Colorado-based strategic planning consultant, Sarah J. Bohnenkamp from Sarah J. Bohnenkamp Coaching & Consulting, and included the following activities:

- October-November 2022: Virtual project initiation began with both executive committees, staff and NCB and NeCGA boards.
- November 2022: Board of directors online strategic profile and first in-person planning session in Lincoln.
- December 2022-January 2023: Virtual key stakeholder interviews or surveys with NCGA, Strategic America, U.S. Grains Council, U.S. Meat Export Federation, ethanol boards and associations and invited livestock associations.
- January 2023: Virtual committee planning meetings, followed by in-person board planning workshop and presentations by Invest Nebraska, Nebraska Governor Jim Pillen and Montana rancher Lanie White.
- February 2023: SOAR analysis completed.
- March 2023: Strategic priorities design completed.
- April 2023: Implementation planning completed.
- June 2023: Strategic plan approved by NeCGA and NCB leadership.



# Vision, Values & Mission Statements

The foundational aspirations, organizational "WHYS" and unique differences were assessed by the boards of both the NCB and NeCGA and opportunities were identified to establish joint core values and to redefine the organizational missions.

The Nebraska Corn **vision** was affirmed: **Enhancing Demand. Adding Value. Ensuring Sustainability.**

Six joint **core values** were established:

- **Caring**
- **Collaboration**
- **Integrity**
- **Respect**
- **Stewardship**
- **Trust**

Mission statements for both organizations were refined to more clearly articulate the purpose of each:

## Nebraska Corn Growers Association mission statement

- Old mission: Nebraska Corn Growers Association works to create and increase opportunities for Nebraska corn farmers through advocacy, education, partnerships and leadership development.
- New mission: **Advancing Nebraska corn farmers through leadership, policy and education.**

## Nebraska Corn Board mission statement

- Old mission: Nebraska Corn works to promote the value of corn by creating opportunities.
- New mission: **Increasing the value and sustainability of Nebraska corn through promotion, market development and research.**



# Nebraska Corn Stakeholders

*Not a complete list*

Corn Producers: <i>across all regions, committees, boards</i>	State and Federal Policy Makers	Consumers	National Corn Growers Association (NCGA)
U.S. Grains Council (USGC)	U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF)	Alliance for the Future of Agriculture in Nebraska (AFAN)	Other State Corn Associations & Boards
Nebraska Department of Agriculture	Nebraska Ethanol Board & Renewable Fuels NE	NeCGA and NCB Staff	Nebraska Cattle, Beef, Dairy, Poultry, Pork Associations & Boards
“First purchasers” including grain elevators, cooperatives, ethanol plants and livestock farmers.	University of Nebraska- Lincoln/Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources	Targeted Fuel Retailers	Targeted Food Retailers
CommonGround™	Ag in the Classroom	Strategic America	Field to Market
FFA	4-H	Nebraska Extension	Nebraska Association of Resource Districts

## Key Stakeholders:



## Situational Assessment

Nebraska is the third leading corn producer in the United States, supported by roughly 21,500 corn farmers. More than one billion bushels of corn are produced in the state each year, and in 2022, 9.6 million acres of corn were planted, with more than \$10 billion in production value. Following the 2022 harvest, corn prices remain at historically higher levels (with \$8+ corn seen in the summer of 2022, a nine-year high).

Corn is an incredibly versatile crop, and it has a wide range of uses across many industries including food, fuel, animal feed, starch, sweeteners, biodegradable plastics, textiles, adhesives and more. Since 1980, U.S. corn yields have increased by 88%, according to the USDA, while also using approximately 55% less water and energy, according to Field to Market.

Of the corn grown in Nebraska, 35% is exported domestically and internationally, spurred by the highest volume purchasers including California, Mexico, China and Japan. Per USMEF, corn-finished beef and pork exports accounted for 503 million bushels of U.S. corn in 2022.

Ethanol is the leading use for Nebraska corn, with a net 28% of the corn crop contributing to domestic ethanol production. The state of Nebraska ranks second in ethanol production and distillers grains (DGs). There are currently 24 ethanol production plants in Nebraska, with a combined production capacity of nearly 2.2 billion gallons of ethanol each year.

Nebraska's corn crop plays a vital role in the state's livestock industry. Approximately 16% of the state's corn production goes into livestock feed, providing essential nutrition to a diverse range of species. One notable example is DGs, a nutrient-rich co-product of dry-milled ethanol production, that serves as both an energy and protein source. With about 3,400 cattle feedyards in the state, cattle feed is another leading use of corn in the livestock sector. As of March 2023, the USDA reported that Nebraska's livestock inventory included an impressive 2.78 million head of beef cattle on feed, as well as 57,000 dairy cows, highlighting the significant impact of corn production on the state's economy and agricultural landscape.

Corn and corn-based products are also widely used in the food and human health industries. Corn is used as a staple ingredient in many different types of dishes and household items, yet gaps in these use areas have been identified in marketing and communication efforts. In the coming years, it will be crucial to address the role of corn as both a food and cooking ingredient, as well as its impact on human health, to address consumer concerns and foster greater trust.

The global corn market is currently facing significant challenges. With drought conditions in many regions, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine impacting corn export trends, rising interest rates and other financial obstacles and the looming threat of Mexico banning GM corn exports, all contribute to an atmosphere of uncertainty. In fact, these factors have combined to make the market the tightest it has been in the last decade. It is clear that stakeholders across the corn industry will need to take decisive action to address these challenges and ensure the continued stability of the global corn market.

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## Situational Assessment (continued)

According to World Bank, the Ukraine-Russia crisis has led to significant disruptions to the production and trade of commodities for which Russia and Ukraine are key exporters. Adding to the challenges, Brazil has increased planted corn acreage in response to high prices and to compensate for Ukraine's drop in corn exports. The South American corn export forecast is now significantly higher. The USDA's corn export forecast is now the second lowest issued in the past six years.

Nebraska Corn's efforts are focused on protecting and improving the value of corn, strengthening partnerships within key markets and improving the image of ethanol and access within Nebraska and beyond. Recent efforts to target California fuel markets has strong producer support, as this state traditionally ranks highest in gasoline prices in the country and ethanol is typically cheaper than gasoline. Ethanol can be an attractive option for consumers looking to save money at the pump, plus California has set aggressively low carbon fuel standards, which require a certain percentage of transportation fuels to come from renewable sources like ethanol. On average, ethanol has been estimated to have lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions that are 46% lower than average gasoline, with some corn ethanol achieving a 61% reduction compared to gasoline and ethanol has one of the highest blending octane values available in the marketplace. These factors can create strong demand for ethanol and provides a stable market for farmers.

The NCB places a strong emphasis on investing in research that drives innovation within the corn industry. Specifically, research opportunities that contribute to the continuous improvement of corn production and key sustainability indicators have been prioritized. However, the boards recognize the need to expand their efforts in the future to include research on emerging trends and possibilities to maximize carbon sequestration and market opportunities.

Further illuminating opportunities in sustainability, the National Corn Growers Association published national sustainability goals in 2021, including a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 13% by 2030. The U.S. Grains Council (USGC) also formally launched their Corn Sustainability Assurance Protocol (CSAP) and Sustainable Corn Exports (SCE) web platform in the winter of 2023, which indicates a growing need for data-based evaluations of production performance related to climate and quality. By remaining committed to research and development, NCB seeks to promote progress and long-term sustainability within the industry.

Ensuring the protection of farmer rights and financial stability is a critical area of focus for Nebraska Corn. Proactive efforts related to the new Farm Bill and other potential policy threats that could impact producer freedoms to operate and farm economics have been prioritized. Moreover, NeCGA's engagement of local farmers in policy related calls-to-action to empower their voices in the policymaking process is critical to safeguard the livelihoods of farmers and promote a sustainable future for the industry.

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## Situational Assessment (continued)

NeCGA membership has faced challenges with declining numbers of farmers over the past several years, with today roughly 11% of the state's corn farmers as association members. While new membership growth is limited, member retention is very strong with a 93% average five-year retention rate. Membership marketing and engagement experiences should be refined to attract a new generation of corn farmers and to address challenges related to not having enough time to engage.

Leadership development programs offered through NeCGA are perceived as an organizational strength. Assessing current learning desires and designing solutions to meet the priority needs is an important part of the organizational culture and its ability to deliver significant value for Nebraska's high-potential, future leaders.

To ensure the long-term value of corn over the next three to five years, Nebraska Corn will prioritize the following objectives:

- 1-Increase grassroots producer engagement in education, leadership development, advocacy, policy efforts and local communities.
- 2-Collaborate to grow sustainability and demand for corn in all forms.
- 3-Strengthen the reputation of corn as a trustworthy energy, food and feed ingredient.
- 4-Foster a culture of continuous coaching and professional development within the organizations to enhance skills and support program, career and leadership growth.

Nebraska's corn industry plays a vital role in the state's economy and is a major contributor to the health and well-being of the planet, animals and people around the world. The global market for "America's Crop" faces significant challenges, and stakeholders must take decisive action to ensure its continued stability. Efforts are focused on protecting and improving the value of corn, investing in research to drive innovation and enhance sustainability and expanding efforts to seize opportunities in emerging trends and new uses. By remaining committed to these goals, Nebraska Corn seeks to promote progress and long-term sustainability within the industry.



## Key Issues & Trends

Nebraska Corn invited several industry experts and staff to share their perspectives and expertise on the key issues and trends that will affect the ability to develop opportunities over the coming years.

Outlined below are the top issues and trends identified:

1. Drought and climate challenges.
2. Corn market outlook is filled with unknowns, and some do not expect near-term growth in prices.
3. Russian invasion of Ukraine has been a disrupter to commodity markets.
4. Increasing financial challenges, including rising interest rates, increasing input costs, challenges with gaining access to capital and other financial pressures.
5. Trade policy could create volatility in corn markets and limit the ability of farmers to plan for the future. Example: threats of GM corn bans in export markets.
6. Consumer trust in traditional farming practices can be strengthened and rising consumer demand for sustainable and traceable food could create opportunities for farmers.
7. Increased producer engagement in key association events and political calls-to-action is required for future success.
8. Growing demand for biofuels could create new markets for corn and help support prices.
9. Continued expansion of livestock in Nebraska could provide regional demand opportunities in the state.
10. Changing dietary patterns and preferences, including the rise of plant-based diets, could create new challenges and opportunities for the corn industry.
11. Growing competition from other crops, such as soybeans, could limit the long-term growth potential of the corn market.
12. Opportunities exist to improve conservation management practices across the state of Nebraska.



# Critical Strategic Questions

The following set of strategic questions were used throughout the planning process to help inform decision making:

- What should the Nebraska Corn industry be known for (mission, reputation and values)?
- How is the work of the NCB and NeCGA unique?
- What strategies can be implemented to improve brand awareness and reputation of Nebraska Corn farmers and their products?
- How can grassroots producer engagement in local communities, education, advocacy and policy efforts be increased?
- What actions should be taken to strengthen relationships with stakeholders in the golden triangle?
- What collaborative efforts can grow demand, access to capital and overall value of corn?
- What corn-related innovation is needed in: biofuel, food, feed, fermentation, human health and nutrition?
- What are the educational needs and desires of corn farmers?
- What can attract more farmers to engage in leadership roles in Nebraska Corn?
- What steps can be taken to address rising costs and improve access to capital/affordable credit?
- What can Nebraska Corn do to combat climate change (including drought) and continuously improve sustainability?
- What will ensure widespread availability of low carbon, high-octane fuel and ensure ethanol is a cost-effective and low-carbon octane enhancer?
- What can help to improve the image of ethanol as a renewable fuel source?
- How can Nebraska Corn influence improvements in consumer welfare and reduce carbon emissions?
- Which type of KPIs and evaluation targets are most valuable when measuring program and project effectiveness/ROI?
- How have the organizational needs for human capital and technology resources evolved?
- What measures can be taken to encourage increased adoption rates of climate-smart practices in Nebraska?
- What emerging technologies and innovative farming practices, such as precision agriculture and genetic engineering, could help increase yields and reduce inputs?



## SOAR Analysis ~ Critical Strengths

In developing the strategic plan, the boards assessed current industry dynamics and evaluated trends likely to affect the corn industry. Board members identified the critical strengths, opportunities, aspirations and realities facing the organization, and the following critical **strengths** were identified:

- Demand for corn and corn co-products is strong from livestock industry.
- Nebraska is a leading cattle on feed state (with 3,400 feedyards), driving strong demand for corn feed products, including corn silage and ethanol co-product of distillers grains (DGs).
- Producers have cultivated high-value livestock industry relationships.
- Corn provides renewable fuel, and ethanol is the leading use of Nebraska corn.
- Investments in ethanol in the California market are boosting the adoption of this fuel.
- Production infrastructure provides reliability. Nebraska is home to 24 ethanol plants, producing around 2 billion gallons of ethanol a year, making Nebraska the second largest producer of ethanol and DGs.
- DGs add value to corn and enhance sustainability of corn and beef production.
- Consumer acceptance of corn and corn products is positive.
- The Nebraska Corn Board and Nebraska Corn Growers Association are working together effectively, maximizing resources and improving impact (where appropriate, based on checkoff constraints).
- Passionate and highly engaged producer leadership.
- Recent dairy and poultry industry collaborations have added value to Nebraska's economy.
- Consumers are increasingly interested in where their food, fuels and fibers come from, and many Nebraska residents place a high level of trust in Nebraska farmers to make decisions in the best interest of the public.
- Nebraska corn farmers continue to advance sustainability goals, including those related to soil health, water management and carbon sequestration.



## SOAR Analysis ~ Critical Opportunities

Nebraska Corn identified the following critical **opportunities**:

- Strengthen brand awareness. Grow Nebraska Corn as a primary industry resource, trusted voice and advisor.
- Improve consumer trust related to integrity of corn and corn products like ethanol and sustainability.
- Continue focus on corn demand through red meat (transportation, proximity and production).
- Address impacts of inflation and generational specific issues impacting the financial sustainability and mental health of corn farmers. (Thinner margins, rising interest rates, etc.)
- Provide financial education and other high-value new learning opportunities for farmers (issues, trade and trade missions, financial and business acumen, sustainable production practices, etc.).
- Focus policy efforts on tax relief.
- Explore opportunities for building access to organizational capital (increase checkoff assessment, memberships, sponsorships, grants, etc.).
- Enhance Nebraska Corn communication and brand reputation. Strengthen brand awareness and innovation-focused culture. Grow Nebraska Corn as a primary industry resource, trusted voice and advisor.
- Better articulate the value of membership.
- Continue focus on ethanol market expansion and improve consumer awareness of benefits of this low carbon-high octane fuel that helps to protect public health and improve vehicle efficiency and performance.
- Spur innovation in new uses in medical and human health. Includes chemical and fermentation related innovation, robotics, farming vehicles and equipment, human capital, seed, producer lifestyle, plastics, carbon fiber, etc.
- Explore lower cost alternatives to fertilizers and other leading inputs.
- Set clear targets that will drive increased producer engagement.
- Secure additional lobbying talent/resources (in-house talent vs. contractor shared with multiple groups).
- More clearly articulate producer's lobbying resources and policy calls-to-action responsibilities.
- Explore new partnership and collaboration opportunities with NGOs, private industry, etc.



## SOAR Analysis ~ Critical Aspirations

The following critical **aspirations** were identified:

- Create meaningful impact.
- Corn supports health and care for Nebraska communities and around the world.
- Clean water, clean air.
- Corn is carbon neutral.
- Healthy soil, plants and animals.
- Healthy people, children, families and farmers (safety, mental health and physical health).
- Corn continues to be a signature feed ingredient for livestock, driving quality meat exports.
- Corn provides sustainable energy, in many forms, and a wide-variety of ethanol blends are accessible and trusted by consumers and lawmakers.
- GM corn is trusted around the world.
- Strong corn producer engagement across the state of Nebraska:
  - Nebraska Corn committees
  - Local/regional events and opportunities
  - Policy calls-to-action and overall awareness of issues
  - Checkoff "sell-back" messages
- Corn farmers maintain the freedom to operate.

## SOAR Analysis ~ Critical Realities

The following critical realities were identified:

- Climate change, sustainability demands and water resource constraints will drive changes in the corn and livestock industry.
- Consumer interest in the sustainability story of food and energy has increased and there's an increased focus on attribute-based marketing (non-GM, organic, etc.), water use and soil quality. Consumer perception in these areas, including issues like pesticides and nitrates, will increasingly impact consumer purchasing decisions.
- In the eye of the consumer "corn is corn," no matter how it's used. The corn industry needs to address all their concerns, including corn as food, feed, fuel or fiber (corn syrup, corn meal, corn starch, cattle feed, sweet corn, popcorn, etc.)
- GM seeds continue to be misunderstood by consumers and policymakers around the world. Nebraska corn is 95%+ GM.
- While ethanol markets may mature, some predict a decline in demand over the next three to five years with producer resistance towards ethanol still existing.
- The NCB checkoff amount ranks among the lowest of all state checkoff programs (\$0.005/bu.), comparatively limiting budgets.
- NeCGA budget is currently limited and largely depends on funding through membership dollars and through the Nebraska Corn Board.
- The Farm Bill, passed every five to seven years, supports corn farmers as it provides various programs, commodity support and crop insurance. Programs help farmers manage risk among other benefits.
- Some local association chapters are inactive and need to be re-engaged. Note: Not all farmers can or will be highly engaged and that's understandable.
- Financial pressures continue to grow for generations of farmers and their pressures vary, as producer lifestyles and financial approaches differ.
- Interest rates are increasing and higher than many have seen in their careers.
- Overall rate of inflation and the agriculture economic climate is impacting financial health of farmers from all parts of the state.
- There are gaps in the science around carbon sequestration. It's complex and challenging to accurately understand the efficacy of our lands to sequester carbon long-term.
- There are a number of opportunities emerging from the carbon market space, yet many producers remain skeptical.



# FOUR CORE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Four priorities have been developed by the joint Nebraska Corn boards, with the following supporting strategies created to provide clear direction for implementation.

## 1

### Increase Producer Engagement



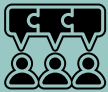
**1-Increase grassroots producer engagement in education, leadership development, advocacy, policy efforts and local communities.**

*Strategy 1.1*-Develop a three-year, comprehensive producer engagement plan to expand reach, improve the quality of local events and education hosted or sponsored by Nebraska Corn and to grow impact.

*Strategy 1.2*-Improve the stories and messaging around the benefits of being a member of NeCGA and contributing to the Nebraska corn checkoff.

## 2

### Collaborate to Grow



**2-Collaborate to grow sustainability and demand for corn in all forms.**

*Strategy 2.1*-Elevate collaboration with golden triangle partners to create mutually beneficial research and market development opportunities related to corn-based livestock feed.

*Strategy 2.2*-Elevate collaboration with golden triangle partners to create mutually beneficial research and market development opportunities related to sustainable, corn-based biofuels and co-product production.

*Strategy 2.3*-Secure and lead new strategic partnerships and enhance existing collaborations to grow corn quality, demand and value.

## 3

### Strengthen Corn Reputation



**3-Strengthen the reputation of corn as a trustworthy energy, food and feed ingredient.**

*Strategy 3.1*-Enhance trust building communication strategies and messaging with targeted consumers including students, educators, technology-focused innovators and young families in Nebraska and other priority regions.

## 4

### Talent Development



**4-Foster a culture of continuous coaching and professional development within the organization, focusing on staff and volunteer leaders, to enhance their skills and support program, career and leadership growth.**

*Strategy 4.1*-Implement high-performance framework to enhance program results and job satisfaction.

# 1

# INCREASE PRODUCER ENGAGEMENT

Priority 1

## PRIORITY 1-INCREASE GRASSROOTS PRODUCER ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, ADVOCACY, POLICY EFFORTS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

**Strategy 1.1-Develop a three-year, comprehensive producer engagement plan to expand reach, improve the quality of local events and education hosted or sponsored by Nebraska Corn, and to grow impact.**

- *Tactic 1.1.1*-Design and deliver **educational content** that will increase producer knowledge and competitiveness, spotlighting innovative production practices, trade, sustainability, long-term carbon sequestration and carbon capture technologies, biofuels markets, water quality, climate-smart programs, rural mental health and agriculture policy. **(NeCGA & NCB)**
  - KPI-Conduct a formal needs assessment to determine the current knowledge, skills and competencies of association members through surveys, focus groups and interviews. (Quarter 4, 2023)
  - KPI-Use needs assessment results to identify the areas where members need additional education and training and establish a three-year producer-focused education plan. (Quarter 3, 2024)
- *Tactic 1.1.2*-Add value to **community-level events**, incorporating targeted outreach opportunities, interactive knowledge-sharing activities and high-value partnerships with local agriculture associations and related agri-business organizations/retailers. **(NeCGA & NCB)**
  - KPI: Create enhanced event planning structures for state and regional events, including multi-pronged communication strategies and follow-up expectations. (Quarter 4, 2023)
  - KPI: Annually measure and report producer attendance and engagement in hosted events. (Quarter 2, 2024)
- *Tactic 1.1.3*-Enhance **leadership development** strategies through high-impact partnerships to improve competencies of farmers. **(NeCGA & NCB)**
  - KPI: Evaluate essential leadership skills. (Quarter 4, 2023)
  - KPI: Research potential partners that align with the identified leadership competencies, including those related to soy and cattle organizations. Establish partnerships with these organizations and work with them to design and implement experiential leadership development programs. (Quarter 3, 2024)
  - KPI: Continuously evaluate and communicate the effectiveness of leadership programs, including successes in leadership pipeline development over time, with annual reporting. (Quarter 2, 2024)

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# 1

## INCREASE PRODUCER ENGAGEMENT

Priority 1 ~ continued

- *Tactic 1.1.4*-Engage bottom-up **information sharing** tactics and introduce new community building platforms to increase producer confidence related to sustainable production practices and technologies, and policy focused calls-to-action. **(NeCGA & NCB)**
  - KPI: Explore opportunities related to building new producer-focused forums and incentives for information and idea exchange. (Quarter 4, 2023)
  - KPI: Quarterly measure and report the types of issues, best practices, education opportunities and other information shared with resulting action items. (Quarter 1, 2024)
- *Tactic 1.1.5*-Implement a formal **new member on-boarding experience** to help new members feel valued and to improve satisfaction. **(NeCGA)**
  - KPI: Explore opportunities related to new member on-boarding, including tactics that help them understand the benefits of membership and opportunities to engage in the association's activities. Create formal program framework for future development, including milestones for implementation throughout 2025. (Quarter 4, 2023)
  - KPI: Annually measure and report new member engagement in association activities. (Quarter 4, 2024)
  - KPI-Annually measure and report the number of referrals made by new members. (Quarter 4, 2024)

### **Strategy 1.2-Improve the stories and messaging around the benefits of being a member of NeCGA and contributing to the Nebraska corn checkoff.**

- *Tactic 1.2.1*-Innovate existing **producer-focused communication and recognition tactics**, highlighting the benefits of membership to corn farmers and ways in which their contributions support the growth and sustainability of the corn industry. **(NeCGA & NCB)**
  - KPI-Enhance annual producer-focused recognition tactics and schedule, including volunteer awards, board member recognition, member engagement and other tactics tailored to the unique needs and culture of Nebraska Corn. (Quarter 3, 2024)
  - KPI-Enhance producer-related messaging strategy and tactics, including tone, key narratives, desired frequency of curated posts per channel and schedule for annual communication and marketing efforts, revising annually thereafter. (Quarter 4, 2023)
  - KPI-Establish clear reach and engagement performance metrics for all producer-focused communication channels and events including radio and digital communication, revising annually thereafter. (Digital communication efforts may include emails, social media, text messages and localized event) (Quarter 4, 2023)
  - KPI-Benchmark and improve producer trust in Nebraska Corn year-over-year. Provide ongoing monitoring and annual reporting of producer sentiment, policy related engagement rates, association membership trends and referrals of new members as a sign of trust. (Quarter 2, 2024)



# 2

## COLLABORATE TO GROW

Priority 2

### PRIORITY 2-COLLABORATE TO GROW SUSTAINABILITY AND DEMAND FOR CORN IN ALL FORMS.

**Strategy 2.1-Elevate and lead collaborations with golden triangle partners to create mutually beneficial research and market development opportunities related to corn-based livestock feed.**

- *Tactic 2.1.1*-Spur localized and regional **AFAN related collaborations** to influence economic impact in Nebraska and strengthen Nebraska Corn's position as the leading provider of signature feed ingredients in the beef, dairy, poultry and swine industries. **(NCB)**
  - KPI-Engage in a minimum of two multi-region, novel research or market development projects or programs each fiscal year. Once goals and objectives have been defined for each, identify the KPIs that will be used to measure success. (Quarter 2, 2024)
  - KPI-Engage in a minimum of five localized projects or partnerships with AFAN partners each fiscal year. Once goals and objectives have been defined for each, identify the KPIs that will be used to measure success. (Quarter 1, 2024)
  - KPI-Benchmark and annually evaluate the value of Nebraska Corn as a collaborative livestock partner. (Quarter 3, 2024)
- *Tactic 2.1.2*-Collaborate and support annual **consumer-focused, joint marketing and promotional plans** to increase demand for **corn-fed, animal-based protein** in domestic and international export markets. **(NCB)**
  - KPI-Leverage partner communication tools and resources, prioritizing expanded digital communication technologies and annually thereafter. (Quarter 3, 2023)
  - KPI-Annually evaluate the increase in corn-fed, animal protein product market share in both domestic and international markets, with enhanced producer-focused reporting. (Quarter 4, 2023)



# 2

## COLLABORATE TO GROW

Priority 2 ~ continued

**Strategy 2.2-Elevate and lead collaborations with golden triangle partners to create mutually beneficial research and market development opportunities related to sustainable, corn-based biofuels and co-product production.**

- *Tactic 2.2.1-Tactic 1-Improve Nebraska Corn's position as a top provider of corn-based ethanol and sustainable biofuel production through **collaborative consumer-focused marketing and promotion programs**, including participation in regional marketing programs and initiatives that increase awareness and demand for sustainable biofuels. (NCB)*
  - KPI-Enhance formal biofuel-related marketing plans of action, leveraging partner communication tools and resources, including expanded digital communication technologies, revising annually thereafter. (Quarter 3, 2023)
  - KPI-Enhance evaluation and communication of the effectiveness of TV advertising campaigns, including reach, frequency and ethanol sales increases in targeted markets. (Quarter 1, 2024)
  - KPI-Annually evaluate and report the impact of marketing collaborations by measuring the number of successful promotions, measuring achievement of biofuels market growth goals and evaluating the extent to which combined efforts have contributed to improving consumer perception of biofuels. (Quarter 4, 2024)
  
- *Tactic 2.2.2-Elevate ethanol and sustainable **biofuels focused opportunities** and **policy** efforts to protect and expand access and blend percentages related to sustainable energy, such as year-round E15, sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) and efforts related to the Next Generation Fuels Act. (NeCGA & NCB)*
  - KPI-Enhance evaluation and on-going communication of the impact of policy efforts related to biofuels, measuring the number of policy changes or legislative initiatives that protect and/or promote the use of biofuels. (Quarter 1, 2024)
  - KPI-Enhance evaluation and on-going communication of the volume of biofuels exports to assess growth and competitiveness in domestic and international markets. (Quarter 4, 2023)
  
- *Tactic 2.2.3-Lead and support multi-state and national **collaborative research** opportunities related to sustainable, corn-based biofuels and co-product production. (NCB)*
  - KPI-Enhance project evaluation and on-going communication strategies, reporting scope of collaborative research initiatives and the collective impact of the research network. (Quarter 3, 2023)
  - KPI-Annually measure and report the rate at which research findings are communicated and/or adopted by corn and energy industries to assess the practical impact of the research. (Quarter 2, 2024)



## 2

# COLLABORATE TO GROW

Priority 2 ~ continued

## Strategy 2.3-Secure and lead new strategic partnerships and enhance existing collaborations to grow corn quality, demand, and value.

- *Tactic 2.3.1-Secure **new partnerships*** with NGOs, private industry, retailers, other commodities and innovative corn states to expand uses, sustainability and overall value of corn. Include projects related to fermentation, fuels, feeds, fertilizer, precision in chemical use, carbon sequestration and carbon technologies, communication, human health and nutrition, animal health and wellbeing, leadership development and water-focused innovation. **(NeCGA & NCB)**
  - KPI-Set annual goals for the desired number of new partnerships to secure and priority topic areas for program or project development. (Quarter 1, 2024)
  - KPI-Annually measure and report the level of innovation and value created through new and enhanced partnerships. Spotlight the number of new strategic partnerships established, levels of investments from new partners, impacts related to market growth and the number of sustainable practices influenced. (Quarter 3, 2024)
- *Tactic 2.3.2-Elevate existing state and national partnerships*, prioritizing those related to the Nebraska administration, NCGA, USMEF and USGC to facilitate sustained success with domestic policy efforts and export market growth. **(NeCGA & NCB)**
  - KPI-Set annual goals for the priority topic areas for program or project development. (Quarter 4, 2023)
  - KPI-Enhance measurement and reporting of state and national partnerships to assess the levels of collaboration and impact, continuously improving annually. (Quarter 4, 2023)  
Evaluation and reporting should include:
    - Project volume and scope: The number and type of joint state and national projects initiated.
    - Policy impact: The number of policy changes or legislative initiatives that protect and/or promote the use of corn in all forms.
    - Market exposure: The number of market-focused trade shows, trade team visits to Nebraska and international trade missions attended.
    - Export market growth: The export volume of corn and corn-based products.
    - Leadership: The number of leadership roles Nebraska Corn fulfills with key collaborators.



# 3

# STRENGTHEN CORN REPUTATION

Priority 3

## STRENGTHEN THE REPUTATION OF CORN AS A TRUSTWORTHY ENERGY, FOOD AND FEED INGREDIENT.

**Strategy 3.1-Enhance trust building communication strategies and messaging with targeted consumers including students, educators, technology-focused innovators and young families in Nebraska and other priority regions.**

- *Tactic 3.1.1*-Design innovative, annual consumer-focused **communication** plans and tactics, prioritizing high-value communication partnerships and collaborations, social media and localized events to:
  - Highlight and normalize on-farm conservation and emphasize corn's role in food, fuel and bio-products. **(NCB)**
  - Address human and environmental needs while addressing concerns related to genetics, natural resources and corn production practices. **(NCB)**
  - Spotlight benefits and myths related to ethanol and Low Carbon Renewable Fuel related storytelling. **(NCB)**
  - Explore sustainability-related messaging for corn-fed, animal-based proteins. **(NCB)**
- KPI-Enhance consumer-focused, multi-dimensional corn messaging and resources, evaluating at least annually. (Quarter 3, 2024)
- KPI-Establish and regularly report clear reach and engagement performance metrics for all communication channels. This would include tracking the number of social media engagements, localized event attendance, paid and earned media metrics and website visitors to gauge how many people are impacted by communication efforts, revising at least annually. (Quarter 1, 2024)
- KPI-Annually measure consumer trust towards corn, tracking any changes in consumer beliefs with targeted audiences and annually thereafter. (Quarter 2, 2024)



# 4

## TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Priority 4

**FOSTER A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS COACHING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE ORGANIZATIONS TO ENHANCE SKILLS AND SUPPORT PROGRAM, CAREER AND LEADERSHIP GROWTH.**

**Strategy 4.1-Implement high-performance framework to enhance program results and job satisfaction.**

- **Tactic 4.1.1-Enhance staff and volunteer-leader professional development and coaching models. (NeCGA & NCB)**
  - KPI-Implement monthly, one-on-one coaching sessions, conducted by executive director with all staff. Compliment coaching process with semi-annual performance appraisals, including self and committee appraisal components. (Quarter 2, 2023)
  - KPI-Conduct research on best practices for staff and board development and recognition, prioritizing competency development related to communication, relationship building, farmer engagement and recruitment strategies, collaboration, data-driven program evaluation and decision making. Identify areas for framework improvement. (Quarter 1, 2024)
  - KPI-Design and develop a collaborative plan of action to enhance professional development approach, including metrics to track growth and the overall success of high-performance culture, setting milestones for continuous improvement thereafter. (Quarter 4, 2023)

