

## Don't Bury Your Head in the Sand

The ostrich is a curious thing. What else can you say about a flightless 300-pound bird that believes it can avoid danger by sticking its head in a hole? Was the Creator in a playful mood the day he made the first one, or did He have a more significant reason?

We all know people who, like the ostrich, attempt to avoid problems by refusing to face them. Rather than getting involved, they hope the problem will go away on its own or that someone else will take care of it. That may work for the ostrich, but it is not the way to achieve farmer-friendly legislation.

This is the third and final installment in a series of articles highlighting the most frequently heard excuses some farmers give for not joining the American Soybean Association. Many producers do not realize that ASA must generate membership revenue to fund its policy efforts.

**EXCUSE 5:** Although ASA's membership role includes farms of all sizes, some producers believe that only farmers with large numbers of soybean acres need to join the ASA. "I farm only 100 acres of beans, so I don't think it's important for me to join." These producers are missing the point. Membership is not about acres, it's about *representation*. Each member, regardless of how many acres they farm, has one equal voice in the development of ASA's policies.

Representation counts. When ASA's leaders call on Congress, membership size is crucial because in Washington, membership translates into *voters*. With the total number of farms trending down each year, it becomes increasingly more important that every soybean producer join ASA.

A group of farmers recently had a discussion to try to define a "large" farmer. After many hours of discussion and debate, they could only agree that a "large" farmer is anyone who has more acreage than



*ASA membership was an important factor when ASA President Bart Ruth (right) and past President Marc Curtis were invited to testify before Congress and answer questions about a new Farm Bill. (ASA photo by Karen Edwards)*

you do! The point is, acreage is relative and doesn't matter when it comes to membership. Anyone that has a vested interest in the profitability of soybean production needs to support the policy efforts of the ASA.

And what if you do farm 100 acres of soybeans? At USDA's national average yield of 38.1 bushels in 2000, 100 acres of soybeans represents more than \$20,000\* of revenue. Isn't

it worth \$60 to protect \$20,000 worth of revenue?

**EXCUSE 6:** Lately, recruiters are hearing that producers don't want to join ASA because the farm economy is depressed. At a time when producers most need effective representation to press for adequate farm supports and competitive trade policies, these growers think they will somehow help the situation by not supporting the only organization that exclusively represents soybean farmers in Washington.

There are many reasons why producers currently face historically low prices, but joining ASA is not one of them. Soybean prices are subject to fluctuations in supply and demand just like any other agricultural commodity. But despite tremendous market competition from South American growers, U.S. soybean exports again set a record sales volume for 2000/01 with whole soybean exports reaching just over 1 billion bushels.

Not an easy accomplishment, but it was made even tougher due to currency devaluations of the Argentine Peso and the Brazilian Real. This record-setting year was made by ASA-supported domestic policies giving farmers planting flexibility and by ASA international marketing and trade policy actions that expanded market opportunities for U.S. soybeans.

All ASA members, leaders and staff pitch-in to sign-up new members, but the majority of new

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# ASA Urges Senate to Complete New Farm Bill

ASA has been urging the U.S. Senate to complete floor action on the new farm bill as quickly as possible. In January, ASA President Bart Ruth, a soybean producer from Rising City, Neb., communicated to Senator Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) and Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott (R-MS) the urgent need for farm bill action as U.S. producers began making planting decisions for 2002 with no idea of what farm programs would be in place at harvest.

"Early enactment of a new farm bill effective for 2002 crops will end producer's uncertainties about planting and avoid another year of ad hoc economic loss assistance," Ruth said.

Last October, ASA and other farm organizations endorsed a deliberative approach for addressing the farm bill in the Senate that could enhance prospects for writ-

ing balanced and equitable legislation. It was understood that this process would likely extend into early 2002, but assurances were received from the Administration that additional funds provided in the current Budget Resolution would continue to be available for the new bill, and that marketing loan rates for 2002 crops would be announced in early December.

As Congress adjourned in late December, the Administration affirmed its commitment to support full funding of new farm legislation in a letter from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Shortly thereafter, Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman announced that the promised decision on loan rates would be deferred and called on Congress to complete action on the bill.

Soybean prices are at 30-year

historic lows and the outlook for improvement is not positive. The U.S. continues to face sharp foreign competition due to the high Dollar and to wholesale currency devaluations by South American countries.

In recognition of these critical factors, ASA has repeatedly urged USDA to maintain the soybean loan rate for the 2002 crop at \$5.26 per bushel — its level since 1997.

"The only way to end the uncertainty over this year's safety net for producers of soybeans and other commodities is for Congress to complete a bill as expeditiously as possible that is effective for 2002 crops," Ruth said.

## Don't Bury Your Head in the Sand — continued

memberships is generated by a group of more than 500 dedicated volunteer recruiters. These soybean producers believe so strongly in the goals of the ASA that they are willing to devote their time contacting other farmers about membership.

Now it's up to you. You can be like an ostrich, or you can help ASA represent you. Take the first step now by contacting one of the State Membership Chairs listed on this page.

**Footnote:** \* This example is based on \$16,764 in revenue at an average price paid to farmers of \$4.40 per bushel, plus \$3,276 at 86 cents per bushel in Loan Deficiency Payments to equal a total price per bushel of \$5.26. Actual revenue figures will vary by grower.

## ASA State Membership Chairs

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