

## Communication, future changes highlight annual meeting

Written by Chris Lee

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Communication and change seemed to be the two words used the most during the Grainland Cooperative annual meeting Tuesday, June 8.

Both president/CEO Rick Unrein and board of directors chair Bob Schaefer stressed how important it is for everyone involved with Grainland to communicate with one another to make things run smoothly.

### CEO reviews year

“I can’t say how important it is for Grainland being able to hand out \$1.3 million in cash,” President/CEO Rick Unrein said referring to the approved returns. The figure is almost 100 percent of Grainland’s local savings.

Total cash approved to be returned to patrons was \$1,261,888. A 100 percent cash refund of \$649,076 was returned with \$612,812 approved for payment which includes estates, patronage by age and by year acquired.

Unrein recognized a number of special guests as well as sincerely thanking and recognizing Grainland’s 120 employees.

“It is hard to stay on the same page day to day and the word communication is such a big word and with 120 people it is almost unimaginable,” Unrein said.

“This spring was a great example of the cooperative system and what can be accomplished when we work together,” Unrein said. He added he had heard a lot of good things from patrons about the employees and vice versa.

He reported work is busily underway repairing and preparing for what is expected to be a great

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wheat harvest. The CEO also noted goals have been set to increase both storage and speed in which grain is handled.

The first phase includes adding an additional 380,000 bushels of storage at the east site in Holyoke. They also plan to increase the leg from 7,500 bushels an hour to 20,000 bushels an hour.

“Everything we do from here forward to increase, we are going to increase at that kind of rate,” Unrein said. An extra scale will be added to accomplish that.

Another phase will include adding more storage space and increase bushels per hour at the Haxtun facility.

Unrein reported in light of the tighter credit environment and slowly recovering economy, Grainland was advised to change its billing policy. “It is one we feel we need to make to ensure we’re able to remain competitive in terms of the fertilizer and chemical business.”

The CEO said a newsletter will explain how members can access their bills and grain open storage listing. “We’re very excited about offering this service,” Unrein said.

“There are many things coming towards us,” Unrein said. “I assure you your cooperative is keeping a very close eye on this atmosphere and will be willing to make the adjustments necessary to protect your assets.”

The CEO assured the members that the board of directors is dedicated to protect their equity.

Before Unrein ended, he asked everyone to keep an eye on issues at the national level related to the U.S. Department of Justice and the Department of Agriculture. “Please take time and educate yourself on these issues,” he added.

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“It’s been a pleasure helping to lead this organization over the past year. I know we are making some tough changes, but I know that what we’re doing is what we need to do to make this organization capable of serving our patrons in the future.”

“Let’s keep talking to each other about the changes we are making and those we still need to make.”

Board of Directors chair Schaefer said in the three and a half years since the creation of New Grainland, things have changed at a much faster pace.

“As the changes come about, the board of directors remains focused on their mission and vision for providing for the needs of the members while maintaining the overall integrity of your company,” Schaefer said. “We continue to focus as well on many various ways of communication to monitor our members’ needs.”

At the 2009 annual meeting, the board announced their desire to hold small focus groups to provide an opportunity to discuss various producer business models and give everyone the chance to get to know one another.

Schaefer reported at last Tuesday’s meeting they have held two focus groups thus far and they were well attended and considered a success. “Many questions were answered and many concerns were addressed,” he added. They plan to continue holding the small focus groups with members.

“Communication is the key to success on every level,” Schaefer said. He noted the members help the directors better understand and appreciate the members.

“Everyone has a stake in Grainland’s success. As member owners, we each have a responsibility to support and patronize your coop. As we look to the future, we ask that you keep an open mind as all of us try to imagine all the possibilities and all the changes that must take

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place to ensure that Grainland and all it has to offer will always be here for you.”

Newly elected board directors are David Carlson in District 1, Mark Gueck in District 2 and Bob Schaefer in District 3. The board is in the second year of downsizing and will go from 13 directors in 2007 and will drop one per year until there are nine in 2013. Rick Wernsman is stepping down from District 3 to allow for the downsize.

Brad Young was recognized for his eight years of service to the Amherst board and his most recent position on the Grainland board of directors.

Rick Wernsman spent a total of 21 years as a director. He spent eight in Fleming, 10 with Old Grainland and three on New Grainland and was recognized last Tuesday.

John Erickson was praised for his 35 years of dedicated service to Grainland and the Amherst Coop Elevator by a standing ovation and presentation of a plaque.

Following the business portion of last Tuesday’s meeting, Michael Carducci entertained audience members with a magic show and door prizes were given to members and employees. A meal was served prior to the meeting.