Those three little words describe how AFAN accomplishes our goal of building the livestock industry in Nebraska: Expand operations and influence; connect the right people; and grow all aspects of the livestock industry.

Expansion is the first step in overall growth and probably the easiest to accomplish. Existing companies and producers know the lay of the land and have connections, so they usually know who to turn to first. However, sometimes there is a new need, and this is where AFAN can help—finding new suppliers for processors or helping businesses expand into new territories.

There have been significant expansions in the past few years as well as transitions in ownership that give rise to new opportunities. The change in ownership from Hormel to Wholestone in Fremont is providing new opportunities for independent swine producers. Who would have imagined when the ban on packer ownership was changed that a group of independent hog farmers would buy a packing plant?

Our sphere of influence is expanding. We are fully staffed, which allows us to be in more places and talk to more people about the importance of the agriculture industry. Not only are we doing our core work of helping producers, but now we can find new audiences to spread the message of the importance of agriculture.

We live in a connected world. The Internet, social media and cell phones put us in close touch with people all around the globe. AFAN is working with many partners to spread the message that what we do in agriculture is working with many partners to spread the message of the importance of agriculture.

Growth in rural Nebraska is driven by agriculture. To continue to provide opportunities for generations to come there must be growth. The status quo equates to slow death when it comes to economic opportunity. This is not only growth on the farms and ranches, but growth in small town businesses that serve farmers and ranchers.

When we grow the livestock sector, we know that we are growing opportunities for everyone from row crop farmers to main street business owners. AFAN celebrates the addition of new businesses as it makes our rural communities vibrant and alive. It creates a place where young people want to live, work and send their kids to school. That is growth we all want to see.

2020 will be AFAN’s fifteenth anniversary and we look forward to expanding, connecting, and growing agriculture all year and into a very bright future.

Steve Martin
HIGH DEMAND FOR PORK, POULTRY OPERATIONS IN THE STATE

Interest in contract livestock production continues to grow in Nebraska. An influx of new pork and poultry barns continue to be constructed throughout eastern and central Nebraska. Demand is high with a growing number of integrators considering future expansions within the state. As farm balance sheets and cash flows remain tight for many operations primarily involved in row crop production, AFAN looks to contract feeding of livestock as a pathway to diversification of farm income while negating the marketing risk associated with independent production. Integrators such as Cactus Farms, The Maschhoffs, Haverkamp Brothers, Schwartz Farms, Lincoln Premium Poultry, and others have partnered with AFAN to actively recruit growers in Nebraska. Not only do we see these opportunities as an avenue for diversification of farm income, but also an entry way for young or beginning producers to get involved in agricultural production. Many of the contract production scenarios available work well within the confines of FSA and/or SBA guarantees. We have seen young producers with limited capital (who are otherwise credit sound) be successful in financing these facilities when working with lending institutions willing to use these guarantees to shore up what otherwise could be a deficiency in the loan.

Looking to 2020, AFAN will continue to work with producers and companies considering livestock production opportunities within Nebraska. AFAN has the resources, knowledge, and connections to assist with every step of the process from the initial planning phase, to securing zoning/regulatory approval as needed. If you know of an existing or beginning farmer in your community who may be interested in livestock production, AFAN would love the opportunity to consult with them.

1:1 Service
AFAN’s free One-On-One consulting service is the perfect resource for producers considering expansion or modernization of livestock facilities. AFAN continues to provide individual consultation with producers considering expansion or addition of a new livestock enterprise to their farming operation. In 2019, AFAN assisted dozens of producers across the state with regulatory, zoning, site feasibility, and financing questions. AFAN has the connections across the state to open lines of communication with state agencies, agricultural groups, local governing bodies, and the communities in which farmers are interested in building and stands ready to be an advocate throughout the approval process.

On July 17, 2019 AFAN, in partnership with the Nebraska Pork Producers, Northeast Community College, and the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, hosted the first annual Nebraska Swine Summit in Norfolk, Neb. This day-long event featured industry speakers and producer panels presenting information geared for new and prospective swine producers. Industry technological advances, financing, regulatory, and production opportunities were all topics of discussion during the day.

Bill Winkelman, senior vice president of the National Pork Board in Des Moines, was the keynote speaker to conclude the inaugural event. Bill provided an update on African Swine Fever, along with U.S. efforts to prevent a possible outbreak. Bill also took time to extoll the opportunities available to producers looking to grow or expand in the swine industry, specifically here in Nebraska.

Approximately 90 attendees were on hand for the event, in addition to nearly 20 commercial vendors exhibiting in the trade show. In 2020, we will expand the programing to include increased sessions with pertinent management topics for seasoned producers, along with continuing the “growth” theme of 2019. Stay tuned for further details.

AFAN is excited to announce the return of the Nebraska Confined Cattle Symposium after a one-year hiatus. The symposium will be held on December 16 and 17, 2019 at the Younes Convention Center in Kearney. Two full days of programming highlighting management considerations and facility design specific to confined cattle operations are in store for attendees of this event.

Troy and Stacy Hadrick, agricultural advocates from South Dakota, will deliver an inspiring keynote address during the evening reception on Monday. Matt Rush, former CEO of the New Mexico Farm Bureau, and New Mexico State Fair Director, will provide the keynote during the closing luncheon on Tuesday. See the AFAN website for the full agenda and registration information.

SWINE AND CATTLE CONFERENCE SHOWCASE ADVANCES IN INDUSTRY TECHNOLOGY, AID GROWTH:

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WHAT A YEAR IT HAS BEEN FOR THE POULTRY INDUSTRY IN NEBRASKA! The Costco project has been in the making for four years and it has finally come to fruition. The processing plant, located in Fremont, officially started production on September 9. By next fall there will be a total of 520 houses producing birds for Lincoln Premium Poultry (LPP). AFAN has been involved with this project from the beginning. As the project developed, members of our team met with many of the LPP growers, provided support and testimony at sometimes contentious zoning hearings, and celebrated the completion of barns by co-hosting open houses.

The Costco project has provided many families in northeast Nebraska with the opportunity to diversify their operations, provide a sustainable fertilizer source for row crop operations, and return family members back to the farm full-time. With commodity prices being lower than average, some producers in Nebraska were seeking options to diversify their operations. For some, the solution came from growing chickens for Lincoln Premium Poultry.

An added benefit to producers growing for Lincoln Premium Poultry is the value of the natural fertilizer these barns are producing. Chicken litter is an extremely high-quality nutrient source for row crop producers. Many of the LPP growers are utilizing the litter for themselves or selling it to neighboring operations.

Most importantly, this project has given family members the option to return to a family operation to raise a food source that will be distributed across the country. Springback Poultry in Allen, near Wakefield in northeast Nebraska, is a good example. Hannah Borg, whose family added a poultry operation, says it has given her the opportunity to return to the farm for her career. “My parents decided to expand and diversify our crop/cattle farm operation by building barns for Lincoln Premium Poultry,” she said. “This allowed me, the sixth generation, to return to the family farm after college with a full-time job. I could only dream of returning to the farm before chickens, but now it’s a reality. My mom and I now manage Springbank Poultry and we are proud to be a part of growing chickens for Costco.”

This summer we were able to co-host 15 open houses across northeast Nebraska. It has been gratifying for our organization to come beside these families, like the Borgs, to support them throughout the process and celebrate with them as their barns came to completion.
AFAN HELPS LIVESTOCK OPERATIONS WITH COMPLEX REGULATORY ISSUES

The tangled web of regulations can be challenging, to say the least. For livestock operations, this usually involves state and county regulations that have requirements on where and how a facility can be built. A service that AFAN offers is assistance and support with the process.

State regulations through the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) are well established and NDEE has worked hard to make the permitting process as seamless as possible, which is a good thing. They have developed tools to help producers know when they need a permit, and which permit to apply for. They also developed a one-stop process that brings applicants through one staff person to ensure that the application gets in front of all the right people. The overall goal of NDEE is for producers to follow the law and if a producer does get out of compliance, to get them back to compliance, rather than to bring the hammer down. AFAN has a great relationship with the NDEE staff and sees them as a vital resource to continuing to grow the livestock industry in a responsible manner.

County regulations can be a bit more of a challenge in that every county does things just a bit differently. This is where AFAN can be of assistance. Through our involvement with the Nebraska County Officials Association (NACO), membership in the Nebraska Planning and Zoning Association (NPZA), and work in front of many county boards, we are well connected. AFAN’s one-on-one service includes going through county regulations to ensure correct location of a facility as well as helping the producer plan for hearings. We can present facts at board meetings that substantiate why a facility for hearings. We can present facts at board meetings that substantiate why a facility can be built. We can present facts at board meetings that substantiate why a facility can be built. AFAN also works with counties as they contemplate updating or changing zoning regulations. Our experience across the state adds depth to the conversation and identifies best practices that other counties have adopted to make the process smoother.

While we all complain about regulations, we also recognize that if there are common sense, science-based reasons for the regulations, and our livestock producers are complying with them, we can then provide that as evidence that we are raising livestock in a sustainable, responsible manner. In that sense, regulations and the regulators that enforce them become our greatest allies.

One of the challenges in county zoning is that the hearings can often get emotional and there can be misinformation provided by people in opposition to a site. We work with the producer to ensure that accurate information is provided to dispel myths and set the record straight. These hearings can be difficult for producers since anyone can attend and basically say whatever they want. But at the end of the day the decisions the board makes are supposed to be based on the facts of the facility and the regulations on the books. AFAN works very hard to ensure that those tenets are followed.

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We Support Ag weighed in on several bills this past legislative session. While this was a slower session for WSA, we were able to positively influence legislation for beginning farmers. The NextGen program (beginning farmer), administered by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, went through a legislative audit in 2018. The results of the audit suggested a stricter adherence to the beginning farmer statutes. LB560 was introduced to support the audit findings. This bill would have greatly restricted the program. WSA opposed this bill.

At the same time LB560 was introduced, a competing bill (LB623) was introduced to support the NextGen Board of Directors past practices and recommendations. This bill allowed the flexibility that landowners and producers alike need to fully utilize this important program. WSA fully supported this bill.

Both bills were assigned to the Revenue Committee. In the end the Revenue Committee worked to support the language and impact of LB623. Ultimately the language of LB560 was amended to incorporate the language of LB633. LB560 was approved by Governor Ricketts on May 17, 2019. This was a solid win for the NextGen program and for beginning farmers.

Going forward, we intend to work with the legislative staffs of our partners, and continue to inform and educate legislators on issues important to agriculture.
The Leopold Conservation Award recognizes farmers and ranchers who exemplify the concept of land conservation, doing well by and for their land. AFAN is proud to partner with the Sand County Foundation in support of the award in Nebraska, which includes a Leopold crystal, $10,000 monetary award, and appearances across the state by the winners to share their conservation knowledge and practices. This partnership allows AFAN to celebrate the recipients and continue to share the amazing stewardship of agriculture and livestock producers in Nebraska.

Russ, Angela, and Cheyenne Sundstrom, recipients of the 2019 Nebraska Leopold Conservation Award®, own and operate Broken Box Ranch in Moorefield, Nebraska.

The Sundstroms are land stewards committed to productive, restorative and sustainable conservation practices on one of Nebraska’s biologically unique landscapes.

Some of the conservation methods the Sundstroms practice include the following:

- Proactive use of prescribed burning
- Innovative rotational grazing techniques to purge the land of invasive species, thus nursing back native vegetation during rest periods.
- Participation as a Rangeland Health Demonstration Ranch, collecting data and monitoring the effects of strategies on wildlife, beef production and soil and plant health.
- Enrollment in the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s Open Fields and waters Program, helping manage wildlife population in certain areas, while protecting endangered wildlife in other areas.
- Establishment of a 20-acre flowering pollinator habitat

The Sundstroms devotion to leaving the landscape better than they found it is making a positive impact on their ranch and far beyond the Loess Canyons.

We’re Here to Help You Grow

AFAN Works to support and facilitate growth of Nebraska Livestock by connecting producers, communities and companies to sustain a thriving Nebraska. Since 2005 we have been working one-on-one with Nebraskans who want to add livestock production to their business – or expand an existing operation. AFAN connects producers and resources together to provide the right people, the right answers and the resources to navigate the process. Agriculture expansion is a critical part of sustaining and growing Nebraska’s rural communities. Let’s grow Nebraska together.

Please join us in this mission by becoming an AFAN Member today. Fill out the form in our membership brochure or visit becomeafan.org to sign up for a one-year membership. You can join online with a credit card.

AFAN/WSA 2019 ANNUAL REPORT
NEBRASKA AGRICULTURE AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS

NEXT ANNUAL MEETING: NOVEMBER 23, 2020