

North Dakota newspapers thankful for legislative votes

By Cecile Wehrman, NDNA Executive Director

On the whole, North Dakota legislators understand the importance of newspapers and their actions during the 2025 legislative session show it.

Legislators protected the publication of county minutes in newspapers voting down a bill that would have given the option to post them only on county websites; voted to keep highway bid notices in newspapers rather than only posting them on trade or government agency websites; restored the historic practice of spreading publication of insurance abstracts across all newspapers in the state instead of just eight; passed a postal resolution asking for better delivery service for newspapers and consumers alike; and on Wednesday passed a bill that gives legal weight to www.ndpublicnotices.com, a website maintained by the North Dakota Newspaper Association.

SB 2069 was the first bill I testified on back on Jan. 9, and the last of the five bills passed among those we were most concerned about. The bill provides two backstops for legal notices in the rare instance a newspaper fails to publish a notice, counting a notice at ndpublicnotices.com as well as a notice on a state agency website, as fulfilling legal notice -- while leaving requirements for publication of print notices in place.

Because I wrote on this topic earlier in the session, it's important to let people know what is NOT happening.

The state will NOT be developing a public notice website capable of cutting newspapers out of public notice placements at some future point. It was, however, a discussion among some legislators who saw this bill as a way to take a step toward eliminating the costs of publishing notices in newspapers.

When you know there are people in government who feel notices in newspapers have no value, it can seem like your house is on fire.

But the votes on some of the bills I men-

tioned above show that, by and large, legislators support upholding newspapers as the vehicle for delivering public notices.

Just look at some of these tallies: HB 1380, the county minutes on the web bill failed in the House 80-13; HB 1398, restoring the historical abstract publication process, passed in the House 86-6; and SB 2069, though it had a closer vote in the Senate -- possibly due to some confusion since we opposed it originally -- passed in the House 72-17; SB 2062, taking highway bids out of newspapers failed 89-4.

That feels, to me, like an incredible showing of support for the importance of public notices in newspapers.

Now, 73 privately owned businesses operating newspapers can breathe a sigh of relief, along with voters.

We know citizens give overwhelming support to the concept of a trusted third party like newspapers having oversight of public notices.

SB 2069 as passed will now solve the issue of a public hearing needing to be rescheduled because one out of a dozen or more papers required to publish it had a miss.

I wish I could say newspapers are perfect, but every business occasionally has a hiccup due to illness, death, employee turnover -- heck, even a cyber attack -- which can cause highly consequential notices to be missed.

You'll still never convince me that a website alone is where public notices should be placed because the mechanism for people to see them is much different than for people sitting down with a newspaper delivering news about their community along with notices about the government actions that may impact them.

However, in the end, SB 2069 is a good compromise -- providing an alternate avenue for people to learn of a pending hearing when unforeseen disruptions impact newspapers, while leaving alone the printed newspapers' supremacy as the trusted place to access public notices in North Dakota.

THE EXTENSION CONNECTION

Commodity Trade Impacts



By Megan Vig
NDSU Extension --
Steele County
Agriculture & Natural
Resources
megan.vig@ndsu.edu

With big changes happening in international trade policy, it's important to look at what that means for U.S. agriculture and the overall economy. This week I share an article from Frayne Olson, NDSU Extension Crop Economist on the uncertainty of the short and long-term impacts of tariffs on U.S. trade strategy. The proposed shifts to trade policy have been changing very rapidly, with no historical reference points that can be used as a guide for potential market adjustments and changes in economic behavior. This makes developing crop marketing plans and managing farm and ranch operations very difficult.

Corn -- Corn is the largest U.S. crop when ranked by planted area, total bushels produced and value of production. Exports account for approximately 15% of total corn use each year. While this is a relatively small percentage compared to soybeans and wheat, exports significantly impact short-term price movements. Mexico, Japan, Columbia and South Korea are typically the top four buyers of U.S. corn, with exports to Mexico growing steadily over the past decade. Trade relationships with these countries will be important for supporting U.S. prices. U.S. corn exports to China have been very sporadic and peaked during the 2020/21 marketing year because of the Phase One trade agreement. China has the capacity to purchase large volumes of U.S. corn, but Mexico, Japan, Columbia and South Korea are the more stable buyers.

Soybeans -- Soybeans are the second-largest U.S. crop ranked by planted areas, bushels produced and value of production. Exports account for 40-45%

of total use and play a significant role in determining market price levels. China is the single largest buyer of U.S. soybeans, followed by Mexico, Indonesia and Japan. We have experienced significant drops in Chinese imports during the 2018/19 and 2019/20 marketing years due to the previous trade war with China. Soybean export sales to China recovered in the 2020/21 marketing year because of the Phase One agreement. In contrast, soybean exports to Mexico, Indonesia and Japan have been relatively stable over the past 24 years. The greatest challenge with diversifying U.S. soybean exports is the need to sell soybeans to countries with sufficient oilseed processing capacities. The status of U.S. trade relations with China will be critical for determining U.S. soybean prices.

Wheat -- Wheat is the third-largest U.S. crop ranked by planted area, total bushels produced and value of production. Exports account for approximately 40% of total wheat use in recent years. Exports play a significant role in short-term prices and changes in global wheat supply and demand conditions can shift U.S. prices quickly. Mexico has been the largest buyer of U.S. wheat for the past six years. The Philippines has been a very consistent long-term buyer of U.S. wheat, but Japanese purchases have slowly been declining over the past decade. In contrast, export sales to Egypt and China have fluctuated significantly. Egypt was once the largest buyer of U.S. wheat but has shifted a significant amount of its purchases to Ukraine and Russia over the past 10 years. Trade relationships with Mexico, the Philippines, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan will be important for supporting U.S. wheat prices. Canada, Australia, Argentina, the European Union, Ukraine and Russia are all major competitors in supplying wheat to the global market.

Spring Wheat -- Spring wheat prices are closely tied to U.S. winter wheat and global wheat prices. Export accounts for 45-50% of total spring wheat use. Spring wheat is considered a specialty wheat in the global markets and usually maintains a price premium over other wheat classes. However, this price premium can only reach about \$1.00-\$1.25 per bushel before domestic and international buyers begin looking for alternative sources of wheat flour protein. The Philippines is the largest buyer of U.S. spring wheat. Spring wheat exports to Mexico have risen rapidly in the past several years, and it is now the second-largest buyer. Exports to Japan have slowly declined in the past 10 years, while exports to Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam have been relatively stable. Trade relationships with Mexico will be watched very closely by the spring wheat markets. In addition, changes in port fees and ocean freight costs can have a significant impact on the relative prices of U.S. and Canadian spring wheat in global markets.

Each country impacted by changes in U.S. trade policy will likely respond differently. Some countries may apply targeted retaliatory tariffs on U.S. products. In this case, U.S. grains and oilseeds may or may not be included. Other countries may agree to negotiate new trade agreements with the U.S. This usually takes time, and it is unclear if existing tariffs will remain, be reduced or be eliminated. It is unlikely that crop prices will recover until a new trade agreement is implemented. Country-by-country trade responses will need to be monitored to understand crop price movements.

For more articles related to trade and the region's agricultural economy, please check out Agriculture by the Numbers at www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/ag-hub/ag-topics/farm-management/agriculture-numbers

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There's a thin line between common sense and trouble.

If you try to steal copper wire you'll find more trouble than you bargained for. Stealing material from an electric substation or utility pole can cause serious injury or death. And it's against the law.

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A message from **ESA** Energy Safety Association of South Dakota