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Monday, September 11, 2006

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THE RIDGEFIELD GROUP
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A "coo" for Harrison Ethanol

9/11/06

By AMY GAREIS

News-Herald Staff Writer

A LONGTIME agricultural expert with ties to Washington has joined the ranks at Harrison Ethanol LLC as its new chief operating officer.

Gary Weber, who was named the company's COO at the beginning of this month, was introduced during the annual Ohio Cattlemen's Association Fall Roundup in Morristown on Sept. 9. He spoke to a crowd of more than 300 people at Union Local High School and explained that his prior experience was not too different from his new position.



Elizabeth Harsh of Ohio Cattlemen's welcomes Dr. Gary Weber as COO and General Manager of Harrison Ethanol

"My career has been spent working for you and with you. As we move into this new and exciting phase of having Harrison Ethanol ready to start construction very soon, it's going to provide a really great opportunity for me to continue on where I've been with my career," Weber said.

His resume includes a three-year stint as a Michigan-area extension agent and adjunct professor with Michigan State University, followed by seven years with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, DC. There he served on the High Technology Commercial Agriculture Implementation Task Force, the Biotechnology

Task Force, Beef Improvement Federation and the American Society of Animal Science Strategic Planning Team. In 1994, Weber accepted a post as executive director with the National Cattlemen's Association in Washington but moved on two years later to serve as executive director of regulatory affairs with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. His latter work led to cooperation with the USDA, the federal Food and Drug Administration, Environmental Protection Agency and Congress and he testified numerous times regarding research, food safety and Mad Cow disease. Weber has been recognized for the development of regulations to prevent the spread of the disease in the U.S.

The Indiana native received his undergraduate and master's degrees in animal science from Purdue University, as well as a doctorate in philosophy from Michigan State. Part of his Ph.D. research led to the development of a farm-scale ethanol production system, including the utilization of byproducts in cattle diets.

"I have been working with cattle producers and people in rural communities to enhance business opportunities and profitability, and to make sure there are jobs for them and their kids with stability. That's what I've dedicated myself to doing and I did that in Michigan, at the USDA, NCA and NCBA. It fits in my agenda of helping you," he quipped. "Harrison Ethanol is really a part of a lot of changes going on, not just in the United States but in the world [with] the energy crisis and the need for alternative fuels and renewable fuels."

Weber told the crowd that there was a commodity in corn and biomass and farmers played a key role.

"The synergies here that we want to create here in Ohio are a win-win situation for all of us. It will continue to add value to your cattle. Will it take all of the cattle produced? Absolutely not. This region has 300,000 or 400,000 heads of cattle almost within a stone's throw from here. We are going to set the stage for resurgence. We need these cattle here to be just as competitive as anywhere in the United States. We're going to be able to set up a facility that is as green as you can get, producing methane from the manure, biogas that's going to be used to create green energy," he said. "There is no discharge, no environmental impact. That will continue to stabilize the condition of the cattle industry in this part of the country and add value to grass and value to cattle, value to grain. It's going to be an exciting opportunity. We want to have a partnership and continue to make it win-win."

Meanwhile, heavy excavation and other land modifications are set to start in October at the 276-acre site on Dickerson Church Road south of Cadiz. Actual building may not occur until later this year or early 2007 and requires three phases starting simultaneously on the plant, dairy and livestock facilities. Marion Gilliland, chief communications officer for Farmers' Ethanol, parent company of Harrison Ethanol, has said the plant would take approximately 14 months to complete while the others could finish earlier. Officials have been waiting for the concrete foundation to cure before proceeding with construction. Steel erection could likely happen during the winter months with the plant potentially operational in the third quarter of next year.

Roughly 400 construction jobs are being created during the construction phase, but upon completion the facility would employ 107 on-site workers and 60 contracted

drivers. Hirings are expected to start shortly after the heavy construction commences. If all goes according to plan, the biorefinery could be operational during the third quarter of next year.

Gilliland and company co-manager Wendel Dreve welcomed Weber into the fold, saying he was an asset to the operation.

“Ohio agriculture and Harrison Ethanol LLC will greatly benefit from Dr. Weber’s distinct combination of local and national level agricultural and ethanol experiences,” said Gilliland.

Others concurred, including beef producer Mike Bumgarner, who called Weber’s move “tremendous for the industry” in Ohio.

“We’re getting to the point where the rubber meets the road,” said steering committee member Gary Wilson. “You need someone to drive the bus. Gary brings a tremendous list of accomplishments and is known nationally and internationally.”

OCA Executive Director Elizabeth Harsh said her organization looks forward to working with Weber and Harrison Ethanol.

“It’s tremendously positive news for the Ohio beef producers. It’s win-win,” said Harsh. “The company will purchase things locally and help build the economy. This area stands to benefit from it.”

Consequently, Weber said his experiences made for a good fit as COO.

“Obviously this interface between ethanol and cattle led the steering committee to me because I am aware of a lot of Washington policies and programs and initiatives and things, and because they are NCBA members we’ve worked with them any way we could. Everything we do helps add value to cattle and it is good for the cattle industry. This is a great opportunity to help folks add value to their animals and help keep them in business, so that was very consistent with what NCBA is about.”

He concluded that coming to Ohio was really coming home.

“I am excited to be in Ohio. The Midwest is home for me, so it’s good to do my tour of duty in Washington and it is good to be home.”

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