

Agriculture now part of political mainstream

By WHITNEY COLE
AgriNews Publications

INDIANAPOLIS — Some candidates and supporters expected to hunker down for a long one on election night. But it didn't take long for the Indiana governor's race to be called.

Mitch Daniels had won his second term as the state's leader fairly smoothly. He and his lieutenant governor, Becky Skillman, gave their acceptance speech early in the evening.

"The fact that Mitch Daniels won as handily as he did shows voters embrace what he has done in the last four years," said Bob Kraft, Indiana Farm Bureau state government relations director. "I think a lot of voters probably looked at what's happened in the state and didn't see a reason to change."

The Daniels-Skillman ticket received substantial support in rural areas of the state, in particular. Kraft said he believed



Bob Kraft

that was due to the Daniels administration's public support of agriculture.

"Mitch Daniels and the lieutenant governor have done a lot for agriculture in the last four years," he said. "They have real-

ly elevated the industry in the public's eye."

"We've become a part of the mainstream, as opposed to an asterisk off to the side," Kraft explained.

He said the governor's administration has done a great job of recognizing agriculture is a big part of the economy in Indiana and, in turn, is using that to the state's advantage.

In the new term of state government, will Mitch Daniels still be agriculture's man? Kraft said he has no reason to believe anything different.

"There may be other things that will demand his attention — but, as he pointed out, Indiana is not in the situation as many other states," Kraft said. "But we can't assume we are the only issue on his plate, either."

He offered suggestions of other industries, such as biotechnology, that also have thrived and expanded under Daniels' first term.

Kraft said it will be interesting to see who stays on Daniels' team at the statehouse and who decided to move onto different opportunities.

"It is not unusual, after an election, for there to be significant changes in administration," he said.

"A significant number of his department heads and senior administrators have had productive careers outside of government."

Daniels can attract those high-caliber people to help him lead the state, but Kraft said some may be ready to move on, and the governor will need to fill those vacancies.

The General Assembly also will have some new faces in it, and a few of agriculture's supporters will not be returning for the next session.

"There will be a numbers of members of the General Assembly who were not there after 2006 or moved over (to the other chamber)," Kraft said.

He said there will be 32 players that either switch chambers or are completely new to the General Assembly.

Some of agriculture's friends — such as Sen. Bob Jackman, R-Milroy, and Sen. Tom Weatherwax, R-Logansport — retired. Kraft said he is confident the new people will have agriculture backgrounds just as they did.

"I am also expecting a shakeup in committee assignments," he said. "There still will be a core of pretty strong advocates in each of the four caucuses."

As far as issues for the General Assembly to sort through, Kraft said property taxes still will be a big-ticket item for Indiana Farm Bureau, farmers and landowners.

"We (at IFB) are still very concerned about the proposal of amendments to the constitution (for property tax caps)," he said.

Kraft said IFB feels it is

irresponsible to lock those into the constitution before they can fully know what the consequences could be.

"It is healthy that not one party will control the General Assembly or the governor's office," he said.

Also, the upcoming assembly is a budget session, and anytime there's a budget session there are issues that deal with agriculture.

Kraft said IFB also will be watching any annexation legislation very closely to "retain the voice of rural residents after local restricting."

All in all, Kraft said he feels the entire election process ran rather smoothly and, he offered his congratulation not only to the winners, but the losers, too.

"As a public policy organization, we appreciate everyone who stepped forward to run for any office," he said. "We appreciate the service provided by all those who run for office — both state and local."

Carroll County ag association presents unified voice

By WHITNEY COLE
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DELEPHI, Ind. — There's a buzz about Carroll County spreading across the state.

The Carroll County Agriculture Association has been in existence for less than a year, but it already is being used as an example for other Hoosier counties interested in forming a unified agriculture voice.

It all started with the county's pork producers. Over the years, the group had cooked countless pork burgers, worked numerous hours and earned quite a bit of money all in the name of helping out local communities across the county.

As time wore on, the time individual producers could commit dwindled, but the needs of the county didn't.

Paul Marcellino, the then-Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service educator for the Carroll County, said there had been talks about forming some kind of agriculture association to unify the voice of farmers from around the county, but even he was surprised as the Carroll County Agriculture Association came to life.

"We felt the entire agriculture community needed to be pulled together — the livestock farmers, grain farmers, organics and agribusinesses," he said.

Over the course of a few months, there were steering committee meetings to figure out just what exactly this CCAA would do, who would make it up and what it would look like.

Eventually, by-laws and a mission statement were written and a board of directors was elected. Local attorney and fifth-generation Carroll County grain farmer Miriam Robeson joined the CCAA as a legal advisor and non-voting board member.

"Farmers had been talking, and they felt there was a need for a more public awareness of agriculture," Robeson said.

Marcellino said the group had four basic purposes: to be a service group, an education group, a group to promote best management practices and a group that wanted to be involved in county and state government action to support the industry.

The mission statement charges the CCAA with promoting agriculture through best management practices and to enhance and sustain the Carroll County community.

The CCAA's goals include promoting Carroll County agriculture and developing a better understanding about modern agriculture in the community.

Dean Scott, farmer and current CCAA board president, said he felt fortunate the group had a great turnout of interested farmers and businessmen during the first meetings.

"I feel like we have some pretty highly respected farmers belonging to the organization," he said, adding he feels it helped boost the credibility of the association while it is in its infancy.

Robeson and Marcellino compiled a handbook for the CCAA members and government officials. She said the book includes numerous facts and statistics about Carroll County agriculture, as well as proven and verified information about modern day agriculture production.

"Today's agriculture is so far removed from what most people think of," she said.

The handbook can be used to present officials with correct, truthful information about agriculture when the industry might be questioned.

"We are good stewards of the land," Robeson said. "This is a business, but it's about producing food, and we care very much about what we do."

"Everything we put in front of the public, we try to be sure is verifiable and true. We don't want to risk our own credibility by putting out bad information."

Robeson said many of the people who come to county meetings to oppose a particular agriculture issue are misinformed, and she doesn't want the officials to have untrue information.

"We want to be proactive and present a place for officials and the public to go and get information," she said. "The county officials appreciate an official voice from agriculture and they appreciate having the other side of the story with the facts to back it up."

By giving rule-makers at the county and state levels the information they need to make the best decisions for everyone, it allows the results to be based on science and facts — not based on emotion.

"If you give them all the information available, you are also giving them the confidence they need to make the right decisions," Scott said.

Marcellino said it also is important for the CCAA to be transparent. That means presenting all the information, even if it doesn't reflect brightly on agriculture.

"We need to be transparent to gain the trust of the consumers," he said. "After all, if we don't have any consumers, we don't have much business."

The CCAA board of directors has a wide range of representatives, one each from beef, dairy, swine, corn, soybean and agribusiness, one at-large seat, a non-voting student seat and a non-voting seat for the current county extension agent.

Robeson said the seats on the board will have rolling elections to prevent an entire new board from being elected any given year.

The attorney added she has been impressed with the board and their approach to tasks.

"They have really stepped up and they all really want to get things done," she said.

So far, members of the CCAA have cooked food at various events to raise money for the community, such as the

Carroll County Junior Leaders and the Carroll Manor Home. "We can be more effective as a

group than several individuals," Robeson said.

The CCAA will eventually give scholarships to help students attain higher education, too.

Overall, Marcellino, Scott and Robeson agreed the reaction to the founding of the CCAA has been positive.

"This is a great way for us to network the agriculture community and make them aware of the issues they are facing as well," Robeson said.

Also, the trio encouraged other counties to pursue forming their own agriculture association. Robeson said she would be more than willing to help a county get an association started, and she may be contacted at lawlady1@gmail.com.

"The Carroll County Agriculture Association will be a 501 (c)(6)," Marcellino said.

He also said the CCAA handbook could be made available if anyone is interested. The most up to date information about the association — including contact information and news — can be found at www.carrollcountyag.com.

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