

□ *Editor's note: A Nebraska Corn Board press release was used to compile parts of this story.*

By Sheri Hink-Wagner

The Wauneta Breeze

The Nebraska Corn Board announced Tuesday that Wauneta alum Kelly Brunkhorst will take over as executive director of the Nebraska Corn Board after the current director, Don Hutchens, retires July 30, 2014.

Hutchens has held the position for 27 years. As part of the organization's succession planning and options, the board of directors interviewed and selected Brunkhorst to fill the vacancy.

"There are no better people to work for than Nebraska farmers and ranchers, and I have truly enjoyed my years with the Nebraska Corn Board," Hutchens said.

"I am very supportive of the board's selection of Kelly Brunkhorst and I truly believe that Nebraska's corn checkoff program is in very good hands. His solid base of economics, research, production and sustainability of our industry, not to mention sound judgment, make him a natural selection. He not only has the respect of our board and staff, but also that of the other states and the national cooperators," Hutchens said.

Brunkhorst now serves as director of research for the organization, joining the staff in 2004.

His responsibilities have included research, grant writing, seed industry and first purchaser relations, and leadership on issues related to transportation, industrial uses of corn, domestic and international markets.

Brunkhorst has also represented the board on national research, production and stewardship committees, in addition to being chosen to participate in two national strategic planning initiatives.

He was raised on a diversified farm and ranch operation south of Wauneta. He said his upbringing in Wauneta gave him strong roots in agriculture.

"Whenever you grow up in a community with a solid foundation of support through all activities it sets you on a good foundation for success the in future," Brunkhorst said. "A lot of people in Wauneta and on the divide played a key role in where I am today."

Brunkhorst graduated from Wauneta High School in 1991 during the district's trial with Palisade. He was part of the first joint commencement ceremony with Palisade.

Brunkhorst was active with FFA and said FFA and other activities he participated in at WHS helped him transition into college and gave him a great balance, including a "broad view" of the ag world. Dan Andrews was his FFA sponsor and helped him earn his State and American FFA Degrees.

Brunkhorst went on to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in mechanized systems management and business.

After graduation, Brunkhorst managed a feed mill for a private swine operation in north central Nebraska. He then became a district sales manager for Crow's Hybrid Corn Company before becoming the vice-president of operations and education for the Nebraska Grain & Feed Association.

"Kelly has proven to be a thorough and dedicated advocate for Nebraska corn farmers and he is extremely well qualified to lead Nebraska's corn checkoff program," said Tim Scheer of St. Paul, Neb., chairman of Nebraska Corn Board.

"I am humbled and honored to be selected to serve Nebraska's corn farmers as executive director of their checkoff," Brunkhorst said.

“We have a great team on staff and I look forward to working with them, our board, other corn producing states, in-state and national cooperators, and all of Nebraska agriculture to strengthen and build upon the foundation that Don has established,” he added.

When asked how his job affects people around his hometown, Brunkhorst said his priority in his new position will be working on behalf of the state.

However, he added, “My roots will always be in Wauneta and I always have my connections with Wauneta in the back of my head.”