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FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Fred Woods

As economists, we know that the better our knowledge (both qualitative and quantitative) the better the market works. Just coincidentally, the same applies to our political systems.

Increased knowledge and improved understanding of the implications of free trade among our countries is not a goal of all our compatriots. Not all want to dispel the "Fear" of Al Loyns' dispute resolution model. Dan Summer's reference to the "Grain Disputes Industry" is a telling one.

But what can a group such as ours accomplish? Can we contribute to harmonization, convergence and compatibility? Obviously we can, as long as we recognize that these are part of a political process. We can, and have, identified research and education needs, recognizing that issues are not all economic, but nearly all have economic elements. Perhaps we could make an even more basic contribution if we could just get our farmers, politicians and media to understand that free trade applies equally to imports as well as exports.

Our next most important contribution may well be to an increased awareness and understanding on the part of our collective producers of the three countries agricultural sectors. We have increased our own understanding during this and the previous two workshops, and I think we have had some positive impact on policymakers in the United States and Canada through distribution of the proceedings of the earlier workshops. This represents a good start, but we need to go the next step in increasing understanding.

All three of our countries are democracies, and as I mentioned first, the more informed our citizens, the better our governments function.

Thomas Jefferson, third U.S. president and framer of our constitution, wrote:

I know no safe depository
of the ultimate powers of the society
but the people themselves;
and if we think them not enlightened enough
to service their control with a wholesome discretion,

the remedy is not to take it from them,
but to inform their discretion by education.¹

The typical U.S. extension education model we have used successfully in many past instances to educate about issues such as these consists of a comprehensive basebook (published proceedings of this and earlier workshops have given us the basebooks); and non-technical popular style leaflets dealing with issues and problems discussed in depth in the basebooks to be used as the basis for educational programs with farmers, ranchers and others. We have not, as yet, been able to secure the resources for this broader educational step.

For the workshops themselves, we have seen that the involvement of producers, agribusiness and their representatives stimulates discussions and improves understanding of issues. We must also continue to seek greater Mexican involvement.

Antonio Yunez has made a good contribution to this workshops and represents an important first step in securing Mexican involvement.

Improved knowledge and increased understanding of issues relating to agricultural trade among our countries will lessen tensions and contribute toward a smoother, more efficient North American free trade area.

¹ Jefferson's letter to William C. Jarvis, September 28, 1820.