

Wauneta alum Kelly Brunkhorst will succeed retiring executive director of Nebraska Corn Board

Written by Wauneta Breeze

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Kelly Brunkhorst, a 1991 graduate of Wauneta High School, will succeed Don Hutchens as executive director of the Nebraska Corn Board after Hutchens' retirement becomes effective July 30. (Courtesy Photo)

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 of executive director with the Nebraska Corn Board for 27

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years. As part of the organization's succession planning and options, the board of directors interviewed and selected Brunkhorst to fill the vacancy.

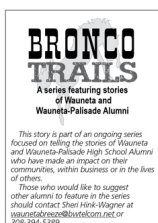
"There are no better people to work for than Nebraska farmers and ranchers, and I have truly enjoyed my years with the Nebraska Corn Board," Hutchens said. "I am very supportive of the board's selection of Kelly Brunkhorst and I truly believe that Nebraska's corn checkoff program is in very good hands. His solid base of economics, research, production and sustainability of our industry, not to mention sound judgment, makes 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."

Brunkhorst currently serves as the director of research for the organization. He joined the staff of the Nebraska Corn Board in 2004 and his responsibilities 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, Neb. 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 in the 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 districts' trial with

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Palisade. He was part of the first joint commencement ceremony with Palisade.

While walking the halls of WHS Brunkhorst was active with FFA. He said FFA and activities he participated in at WHS helped him transition into college and gave him a great balance heading into college, including a “broad view” of the ag world. Dan Andrews was his FFA sponsor and helped him to 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, chairman of Nebraska Corn Board, from St. Paul, Neb. “Agriculture and the corn industry are in a period of tremendous change and challenge—and our board felt it was critically important to ensure continuity in the leadership of the program and leverage the institutional knowledge that Kelly has gained to the advantage of Nebraska’s corn farmers. Kelly also understands the unique structure and environment of Nebraska’s corn checkoff. We are exceedingly pleased he has accepted the offer to serve as executive director.”

“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.”

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

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