2020 YEAR IN REVIEW

We began the year focusing forward with 2020 vision. What came next was something no one saw coming.
WE’RE THE RFA

Our Vision
Help the world breathe easier with the power of renewable fuels.

Our Mission
Drive expanded demand for American-made renewable fuels and bioproducts worldwide.

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In last year’s letter, I proclaimed 2019 to be “momentous.” This year, words fail me. There’s the COVID-19 pandemic looming over not just our national economy, but our way of life, from the way we greet our loved ones on the street to the way we enjoy a movie or a baseball game. At various times since last October, we’ve also had to deal with a continuing trade dispute with China, an oil price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia, Brazilian tariff negotiations, protests and rioting in the streets and bad weather—a derecho swept across the Corn Belt, leveling millions of acres of corn, and my home state is now on fire.

Today, we’re also facing a national presidential election that will be the most confrontational in generations, where “fake news” often gets more coverage than real and where the outcome will surely be disputed. It’s also a national election where ethanol has been in the headlines more than ever. If 2019 was momentous, what can we call 2020?

Despite all this, we’ve got a lot to be thankful for. We’ve had setbacks but also victories, including a major court decision that may very well put an end to the EPA’s abuse of small refinery exemptions under the RFS. RFA members should be especially proud of this legal victory, because it was our organization leading the way when others didn’t want to. And this is something I’ve seen with RFA time and again these past few years.

As I end my term as Chairman of the RFA, an organization I have been proud to belong to for more than 30 years, and retire as CEO of Pacific Ethanol, a company I cofounded and built from the ground up, I do so confident in the leadership and staff of the RFA and the future of the U.S. ethanol industry. My service to the board has been a lesson in how fortunate we are to have this particular group of dedicated members and staff working together at this specific time, for an industry so essential to our nation’s future.

Thank you, all, for the part you play.
THE TOP TEN

COVID-19 pandemic. The novel coronavirus and its severe impact on global fuel consumption presented the ethanol industry with its worst economic crisis ever. At the peak of the lockdown in late April, roughly half of the nation’s ethanol capacity was idled. Only 46 plants were running at normal output rates, more than 70 plants were operating at rates well below normal, and 78 facilities were completely idled. RFA led the way when it came to navigating this nightmare. We led the push for emergency relief for ethanol in federal stimulus packages and rapidly secured complex regulatory changes needed to help our members provide high-grade alcohol to the burgeoning sanitizer market.

Tenth Circuit Court decision. In January, RFA enjoyed one of the biggest court victories in the industry’s history when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth District unanimously overturned certain small refinery exemptions and ruled that EPA had abused its authority. The Renewable Fuels Association et al. v. Environmental Protection Agency decision established that small refinery exemptions can only be granted by EPA if the refiner has continuously extended exemptions every year since 2011. Many expect this to be the death knell for EPA’s abuse of the provision.

Gap-year waivers. Within weeks of the court decision, numerous requests for retroactive exemptions were filed by refiners in an attempt to rewrite history and establish a chain of continuous exemptions. Some of the so-called “gap-year” waiver requests were for compliance years going as far back as 2011. By September, 71 of these requests were pending with EPA for compliance years 2011-2018, representing more than 3 billion gallons of blending obligations. After intense pressure from RFA and our congressional champions, EPA denied 54 of the petitions in mid-September and committed to reject the remaining 17 upon completion of Department of Energy review.

RFS turns 15. In August, RFA marked the 15th anniversary of the signing of the original Renewable Fuel Standard by President George W. Bush. RFA produced a report showing the remarkable growth that took place in the U.S. ethanol industry during that time, providing economic and energy security as well as environmental benefits. Congressional champions like Rep. Collin Peterson and Sens. Dick Durbin, Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst joined RFA in the celebration by issuing statements about the importance of the policy.

National Ethanol Conference. In February, RFA held the 25th annual National Ethanol Conference in Houston, the Energy Capital of the World. The conference included a rare appearance by former President Bush, who sat for an interview with RFA President and CEO Geoff Cooper. The event theme of “Focus Forward” spoke to industry optimism about ethanol’s role in our world’s energy future.

Training Stresses safety. With support from TRANSCAER, the Federal Railroad Administration and the Department of Transportation’s Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, RFA held a series of award-winning in-person and virtual safety training programs reaching a total of nearly 2,000 people through September, representing 49 states and 21 countries.

Reaching consumers. In November, at the popular SEMA show for automotive enthusiasts, RFA and the legendary Kenny Hauk of Hauk Designs debuted the RFA flex-fuel Jeep Wrangler, sporting over 1,100 horsepower when running on E85. The Jeep has been featured at numerous events, from the National Ethanol Conference and Commodity Classic to the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. RFA also continued to educate consumers about ethanol’s benefits through our partnership with Crappie Masters fishing tournaments and a collaboration with Tidd Racing, an off-road racing team featuring an E85-powered Can-Am X3.

Policy and politics. All year long, RFA continued to ensure ethanol industry issues remained front-and-center in the eyes of policymakers in our nation’s capital. Even with the pandemic, a virtual “Day on the Hill” featured more than a dozen DC insiders and our political action committee held one of its most successful fundraisers, supporting our work for a very important election year. In addition, RFA interacted regularly with both presidential campaigns to ensure the candidates understood the importance of a healthy and growing renewable fuels industry.

High-octane advocacy. The September introduction of the Next Generation Fuels Act, establishing a low-carbon high-octane standard, was the culmination of RFA’s tireless and dedicated efforts going back to late 2018. We also made sure ethanol had a prominent role in important climate committee reports in the House and Senate, and continued work toward a Midwest Low Carbon Fuel Standard.

E15 coast to coast. RFA continued to lead the effort to secure approval of E15 in California, the single largest ethanol market in the country. Along with NCGA, automakers, and others, RFA developed a testing program for the state and provided data needed to speed future approval and deployment of E15. RFA also worked closely with state regulators and member company Western New York Energy to finally get E15 approval over the goal line in New York, the nation’s fourth-largest gasoline market.
No wavering on the RFS

The destructive impact of RFS waivers granted by the EPA to small refiners was a principal focus of debate throughout the last year, starting in early October 2019, when President Trump announced that his administration would act to begin reversing the damage inflicted on rural America by these exemptions, or SREs. RFA applauded the announcement and began vocally advocating for a plan that would prospectively reallocate any gallons lost to SREs. RFA took part in a field hearing and submitted comments to the EPA, and actively advocated on Capitol Hill and with the administration on this issue. While the final supplemental rule published in December took a modest step forward toward reallocation, it became clear that the door was still open for continued erosion of RFS volumes and demand destruction for American’s renewable fuel producers and farmers.

RFA’s ongoing litigation and Freedom of Information Act requests to the EPA continued to unearth important evidence showing the agency granted disproportionate economic hardship exemptions to small refineries whose previous exemptions had fully lapsed. RFA’s efforts also revealed that the EPA was granting full exemptions even in cases where DOE had recommended no exemptions or only partial waivers.

As we awaited a ruling in our litigation in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit, RFA led a coalition of renewable fuel and agricultural groups in petitioning the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. In this litigation, our groups challenged the arbitrary process by which the EPA exempted 31 unknown small refineries from their RFS obligations in 2018.

In late January, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit delivered a huge victory to the industry when it ruled unanimously in our favor and struck down three exemptions that were improperly issued by EPA to refineries owned by CVR Energy and HollyFrontier. The ruling was the result of a challenge led by RFA with support from the National Corn Growers Association, National Farmers Union and American Coalition for Ethanol. The decision has major implications that could significantly limit EPA’s ability to grant SREs moving forward. Fortunately, the administration ultimately decided not to join refineries on their appeal of the decision.

During separate Senate hearings in late spring, EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler and Department of Energy Under Secretary Mark Menezes disclosed that a number of refineries had filed for retroactive exemptions to circumvent the Tenth Circuit Court’s ruling. RFA was the first to recognize this new “gap-year” waiver scheme and responded quickly with a letter urging the EPA to swiftly deny new petitions submitted by refineries for previous compliance years.

On the one-year anniversary of President Trump’s June 2019 visit to Southwest Iowa Renewable Energy (SIRE), RFA published an open letter to President Trump in the Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil. The letter called on the president to end abuse
of the refiner loophole. A related op-ed by SIRE President and CEO (and RFA Board Member) Mike Jerke made the case in the *Des Moines Register*.

In response to RFA’s letter and calls for transparency from Capitol Hill in June, EPA finally disclosed it had received 52 gap-year petitions for the period from 2011 through 2018, a number that grew to 71 by September. Intense political pressure and a clear consideration of the facts prompted EPA to reject the bulk of these retroactive petitions, with the expectation that the remainder also would not stand.

In a Sept. 23 media conference call with nearly two dozen reporters, RFA and its coalition partners called on EPA to “finish the job” by extending the Tenth Circuit case nationwide, ruling on the outstanding petitions accordingly, rolling out the proposed 2021 renewable volume obligations and accounting for a court-ordered remand of 500 million gallons illegally waived in the 2016 compliance year.

By late September, EPA still reported that 33 small refinery exemption requests for 2019 and 2020 remain pending, and 17 of the gap-year petitions had not yet returned from DOE.

**Promoting ethanol’s high-octane, low-carbon benefits**

In September, after two years of hard work and leadership by RFA, legislation by Rep. Cheri Bustos (D-IL) was filed in the House of Representatives to establish a high-octane, low-carbon fuel standard. The Next Generation Fuels Act of 2020 would establish a certification test fuel with a research octane number (RON) of 98, along with a requirement that the source of the octane boost reduces lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions by an average of at least 30 percent compared to a 2018 gasoline baseline.

A high-octane, low-carbon fuel standard has been a centerpiece of the RFA policy agenda since late 2018, and a significant topic in both the 2019 and 2020 “State of the Industry” addresses at the National Ethanol Conferences those two years.

“By establishing the roadmap for an orderly transition to high-octane, low-carbon fuels, this landmark legislation begins an exciting new era in transportation fuels policy,” RFA President and CEO Geoff Cooper said. “As the world’s top supplier of clean, affordable, low-carbon octane, the U.S. ethanol industry proudly and enthusiastically supports this legislation.”

Meanwhile, regional and state approaches toward low-carbon fuel standards have also been important. The Clean Fuels Policy initiative in the Midwest continued to make progress, and RFA played a central role in assembling a group of important stakeholders to discuss a model framework for a state or regional program. The coalition celebrated a significant milestone with the completion of a white paper and policy recommendations, the culmination of two years of discussions and research. The publication is intended to inform further discussion of new and existing clean fuels policies and how they could be tailored to benefit the Midwest.

In late February, RFA submitted comments in support of the Transportation & Climate Initiative’s draft proposal for a clean fuel standard for 2022 implementation across twelve Northeastern
and Mid-Atlantic states and the District of Columbia. In our submission, we strongly advocated for the use of the DOE Argonne National Lab’s most recent GREET model for performing life cycle analyses of transportation fuels. RFA also submitted comments to the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency in February on its draft Clean Fuel Standard and advocated for an inclusive policy that would support ethanol’s participation in the region’s fuel mix.

**Seeking free and fair trade**

RFA continued to work with the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) and U.S. Dept. of Agriculture to pursue open markets and free trade policies for ethanol. Unfortunately, major markets like Brazil and China did not share in our industry’s desire to create a level playing field for ethanol trade in 2020.

After strongly advocating for the inclusion of ethanol and DDGS in the Phase 1 trade agreement with China, we were pleased to see the products listed when the agreement was announced in January. We expected the agreement could open the door to “meaningful” exports of U.S. ethanol, but so far shipments have not materialized. RFA has engaged tirelessly with USTR, USDA, and the Department of Commerce to reopen the Chinese market.

Despite our dogged efforts to scrap Brazil’s ethanol import tariff and overly restrictive tariff-rate quota, the country let its TRQ expire at the end of August. After intense negotiations and the threat of reciprocal tariffs from President Trump, Brazil eventually reinstated the TRQ for 90 days. While the TRQ extension temporarily keeps a small fraction of the Brazilian market open to U.S. ethanol, it is not the long-term solution sought by RFA and our partners.

Undaunted by these barriers, RFA continued to charge forward with the U.S. Grains Council and other partners to expand existing export markets and open new ones.

In other trade news this past year …

- RFA co-sponsored the Global Ethanol Summit in October 2019, where RFA staff and members were featured speakers throughout the program.
- After working with groups to advocate for a strong trade partnership with Colombia, RFA was disappointed with the new Colombian duties announced in May. RFA is continuing to work closely with the U.S. government, U.S. Grains Council and others to push back on the move.
- The long-awaited United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement was finally ratified in the first quarter of 2020. RFA was part of the coalition supporting the agreement and celebrated its ratification. USMCA maintains duty-free access to Canada (the second-largest importer of U.S. ethanol) and Mexico (the largest importer of DDGS).
Sound science, robust analysis, and technical expertise have been—and will always be—the hallmark of the RFA. We put substance over style, and that’s what has made RFA the most trusted voice on ethanol issues for 40 years.

As market conditions deteriorated and several plants idled in the fall of 2019, RFA Chief Economist Scott Richman completed a case study that focused on the local economic impacts of idling an ethanol plant, even if for a brief period. The study found that local corn prices can fall by as much as 15-25 cents per bushel, resulting in significant financial losses for area farmers, and the results underscore the devastating impacts of the increased small refiner exemptions from their renewable volume obligations. This research laid the groundwork for many of our efforts during the subsequent pandemic, as numerous plants idled in the spring.

RFA Senior Analyst Ann Lewis completed an annual review of vehicle owner’s manuals and warranty statements and findings reveal that nearly all 2020 vehicle models are explicitly approved by the manufacturer to use E15; however, fewer Flex Fuel vehicles are being offered than in 2019.

During the January crisis in Iran that resulted in higher Brent crude oil and U.S. gasoline futures, RFA showcased a study we commissioned that documents ethanol’s ability to dampen gasoline price shocks that come from disruptions in the oil market. Richman also issued an analysis during the Iran crisis that dispelled the common Big Oil talking point that the United States has achieved energy independence.

RFA published two reports detailing 2019 exports of both ethanol and distillers grains. The statistical summaries were used throughout the year as the industry’s go-to document for U.S. trade information.

Despite policy and economic setbacks, the ethanol industry continued to make a significant contribution to the U.S. economy. An RFA-sponsored study found that the ethanol industry supported nearly 350,000 jobs and generated almost $43 billion in gross domestic product in 2019. This study was published in February and the data is featured in RFA’s 2020 Ethanol Industry Outlook and related pocket guide.

Record E15 sales were achieved in 2019, as was determined in an RFA analysis that found that nearly 500 million gallons of E15 were sold—proving that the Trump administration’s elimination an obsolete regulatory barrier that summer has been effective.

Richman recently conducted an analysis of the economic impact of the 31 small refinery exemptions granted in August 2019 for the 2018 compliance year. The analysis is being used in connection with the lawsuit that RFA has filed as part of a coalition in the D.C. Circuit Court challenging the exemptions.

As detailed elsewhere in this report, RFA also provided two reports on the impact of COVID-19 on the ethanol industry, in April and July.
Mid-March brought the beginning of extremely difficult times for the ethanol industry, as the COVID-19 pandemic destroyed fuel demand and world energy markets were heavily impacted by the ongoing Saudi-Russia oil price war. As the administration and Congress started putting together relief packages for American businesses and family households, RFA went to work. We made sure policymakers understood the challenges facing the industry. And, considering the numerous relief measures designed to help oil and gas producers, RFA called for “equitable” relief for all liquid fuels industries—a request that continued through spring and summer and into fall.

RFA also conceived a proposal, and rallied support behind it, to allow USDA Commodity Credit Corp. (CCC) funding to be used to provide emergency relief assistance directly to ethanol producers. This proposal ultimately served as the foundation for biofuel relief provisions inserted into the House-passed HEROES Act and a Senate bill. Those measures remained under consideration by Congress in late September.

RFA recognized how important it was to accurately represent the hardships the ethanol industry is facing as the Administration and Congress considered COVID relief packages. In March, RFA CEO Geoff Cooper and members Randy Doyal, Jeanne McCaherty, and Chad Friese spoke about the impacts of the pandemic on the renewable fuels industry with over three dozen reporters on a media call that included reporters from Reuters, Bloomberg and elsewhere. Subsequent calls would be held in the following months to provide updates to media.

As the pandemic began to ravage fuel markets, RFA Chief Economist Scott Richman prepared an analysis demonstrating the potential economic losses resulting from COVID-19. The analysis found the industry could experience a $10 billion loss and found the industry’s GDP contribution could drop by nearly one-third if circumstances did not change quickly. The analysis was an instrumental tool used by the entire industry to convey the extent of economic devastation to policymakers and the public. Members of Congress relied on the RFA analysis as they argued for inclusion of emergency relief in COVID-19 stimulus legislation. RFA issued an updated analysis in July, which focused on the actual economic impacts of the pandemic to date. Richman also prepared an authoritative analysis on the impacts to corn basis prices when an ethanol plant shuts down.

These analyses were cited extensively in September by economists from the University of Florida and Arizona State University, who determined ethanol producers will experience roughly $8 billion in losses this year due to the pandemic’s impact on world fuel markets.

In April, RFA hosted a webinar to assist members in understanding provisions of the new CARES Act, such as small business loans, paycheck protection and tax relief. Presenters included U.S. Small Business Administration Region Administrator Tom Salisbury and experts from Christianson PLLP and K-Coe Isom. New data from the SBA shows that dozens of ethanol plants utilized the Paycheck Protection Program to help retain their highly skilled workers.

RFA’s advocacy resulted in 15 senators sending a letter to USDA Sec. Sonny Perdue urging him to use CARES Act funds to assist ethanol producers suffering from the devastating impacts of COVID-19. We also helped to ensure champions in the House were weighing in, as the House Biofuels Caucus also sent a letter to Sec. Perdue with a similar message. Despite the best efforts of RFA and our champions, USDA announced its $19 billion CARES Act aid program would not include support for renewable fuel producers.

As members of Congress continued to debate and craft a potential new aid package for those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, RFA provided...
members and supporters of the ethanol industry with an opportunity to urge their elected officials to support legislation which prioritizes aid for the ethanol industry.

RFA was instrumental in ensuring emergency aid for ethanol producers was included in the House’s version of a fourth COVID-19 stimulus package, dubbed the HEROES Act, which passed in mid-May. RFA worked closely with the House members responsible for drafting and securing inclusion of the 45-cent-per-gallon Renewable Fuels Reimbursement Program. This program would provide the vital relief to the ethanol industry as it faced market devastation due to COVID-19. RFA strongly endorsed the renewable fuel producer emergency relief measures and encouraged members and supporters to weigh in with their elected officials in support of the measure as well.

Just days after the HEROES Act passed the House, Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA) together with Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) introduced the bipartisan Renewable Fuel Reimbursement Act of 2020. Like the program included in the House-passed HEROES Act, the bill is meant to provide relief for ethanol producers hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. RFA was very active in advocating for introduction of this language and vocally supported the legislation.

RFA also worked behind the scenes with a group of Governors, led by Governors Kristi Noem (R-SD) and Tim Walz (D-MN), to secure a letter from the Governors’ Biofuels Coalition to House and Senate leadership calling for emergency relief for the renewable fuels industry in the next COVID-19 stimulus package.

"Sooner or later, the nation will put this pandemic behind it. The economy will recover. Our industry will bounce back. And when we look back at this terrible crisis, we will be proud of the instrumental role the U.S. ethanol industry played in getting through it. Once again, our industry’s true character will have been revealed to a grateful nation."
- RFA’s Geoff Cooper, June issue of Ethanol Producer magazine

**Virtual reality**

Like every organization, company and even many families, RFA relied heavily on the use of technology to get around the inability to meet face-to-face. RFA offices were closed from Mid-March through Mid-May, with staff and member meetings taking place via Zoom. Likewise, several key events staff would have normally attended in person were either canceled, postponed or moved online.

RFA’s April and July Board of Directors meetings were held virtually, and the July meeting included more than a dozen virtual Capitol Hill visits via Zoom.

In September, RFA hosted a “virtual tour of the Heartland” for congressional and agency staff in lieu of the normal in-person tour of the Iowa biofuels industry we co-sponsor every August with the Iowa RFA. The virtual tour included background videos and Q&As from farmers, ethanol producers and one of the country’s top fuel retailers. On the plus side, this gave RFA the opportunity to let them hear from key players not just in the Midwest, but also in California and New York.

**Hand sanitizer ‘insanity’**

Since the start of the pandemic, dozens of ethanol producers have successfully produced ethyl alcohol for use in hand sanitizer. RFA worked diligently with regulatory agencies to secure relaxed permitting requirements typically required for alcohol to be used in hand sanitizer, including the DOT’s Alcohol & Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau and the Food and Drug Administration. RFA Vice President of Government and External Affairs Jessica Bennett and Vice President of Regulatory Affairs Kelly Davis worked extensively with individual companies to assist them throughout the regulatory process, including helping expedite DSP permit requests and interacting with the FDA.

After the FDA appeared to lift barriers for fuel ethanol producers to produce ethanol for hand sanitizer, RFA hit the ground running in assisting members with navigating the operations and regulatory landscape. But FDA muddied the waters in mid-April with revised guidance. RFA responded by requesting that FDA adopt an unambiguous temporary standard for alcohol destined for hand sanitizer. In response to RFA’s request and similar requests from our friends in Congress, FDA in June published revised guidance that finally provided some clarity and included specific limits for certain impurities. However, the new temporary limits remained overly restrictive and created new roadblocks for many producers who were standing ready to supply the hand sanitizer market. In turn, much of the hand sanitizer now being sold is imported from places like China and Mexico.
Reaching nontraditional audiences

From fishing boats to off-roaders, RFA has continued to promote the high-octane, low-carbon benefits of ethanol to nontraditional audiences.

At the SEMA Show, an annual trade show that attracts more than 70,000 attendees and is the premier automotive specialty products trade event in the world, RFA and Kenny Hauk of Hauk Designs unveiled our one-of-a-kind custom Flex Fuel Jeep Wrangler. With more than 1,100 horsepower, the JL Wrangler showcases the versatility of E85 fuel as a performance fuel and other benefits including reduced emissions and lower price per gallon.

The E85 Jeep made its official unveiling to the ethanol industry at the 2020 National Ethanol Conference and was also featured at Commodity Classic a few weeks later, where farmers and agriculture advocates were able to get an up-close look at the off-road vehicle and learn about the performance benefits of E85. In addition to the E85 Jeep, RFA’s booth in the exhibition featured an E85-powered Can-Am UTV driven by Tidd Racing around the country.

Despite COVID-19, our Jeep also made its way to June’s “Florida Jeep Jam” in Panama City and the world-famous 80th Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, where RFA also took advantage of a 1,000-bottle donation of hand sanitizer from our friends at Southwest Iowa Renewable Energy (SIRE). As in the past, RFA also sponsored the Legends Ride, Free Fuel Happy Hours and more around the rally at the Buffalo Chip Campground.

The E85 Jeep has been an ongoing opportunity to share the benefits of ethanol in on- and off-road vehicles and demonstrate the versatility of the fuel.

Ethanol likewise continued to fuel winners of Crappie Masters tournaments in a program co-sponsored by RFA and the National Corn Growers Association. RFA’s sponsorship of the 2020 Crappie Masters Tournament Trail began in January at the St. Johns River in Florida, and ran through late September’s national championship in Louisiana, where the winner was again fueled by ethanol.

A significant development from this year’s Crappie Masters Tournament Trail is that it expanded from 16 to 86 events and the competition now includes state-level tournament trails in Oklahoma, Kentucky, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Florida, Arkansas, Alabama, Tennessee and Louisiana. RFA has consistently used this opportunity to elevate the use of E10 in marine engines, often sharing interviews with Crappie Masters tournament winners who vocally advocate on our behalf. We encourage participants to use E15 or E85 in their tow vehicles and E10 in their boats.

RFA also continued to sponsor Tidd Racing. Driver Derek Tidd uses his platform to share information about the use of E85 in off-road and racing engines and sets up a “Fueled with Pride” tent at each race. The E85-powered Can-Am X3 also features ethanol on the door and in the fuel tank. Tidd Racing has enjoyed four wins this year, along with seven Top-5 finishes.

Reaching traditional news media

In November, RFA’s Geoff Cooper, Robert White and Ken Colombini attended the annual meeting of the National Association of Farm Broadcasting, which provides an opportunity for dozens of farm radio interviews in one place. This year, RFA found a lot
of interest by reporters in what’s going on in the ethanol industry, and the ramifications for the rural communities the broadcasters serve. In about three dozen interviews, the pair stressed the many challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, such as the EPA’s refinery waivers, the spread of higher blends, and the need to bolster ethanol trade around the world.

Our editorial partnership with Ethanol Producer continued with articles by Geoff Cooper in the October, December, February, April, June and August magazines and essays by Cassie Mullen in its monthly retailer newsletter. Other significant media placements included:

- In November, an opinion essay on the Morning Consult website and an op-ed in the Columbus Dispatch focused on refinery waivers;
- In February, an op-ed in the Des Moines Register on the importance of the Renewable Fuel Standard;
- In June, an op-ed—this time, by Board Member Mike Jerke—in the Des Moines Register, commemorating the anniversary of President Trump’s visit to his plant;
- In July, an op-ed in the Washington publication The Hill, about the need for specific COVID-19 aid for the ethanol industry.

The Columbus Dispatch op-ed was part of a broader outreach effort in Ohio that included supporting a Morning Consult poll of likely voters, released by Ohio Corn & Wheat, that found that more than half the people there opposed Trump/EPA actions on the RFS. We also supported a news conference in Lima, Ohio with that city’s mayor and a representative of the local Guardian Energy ethanol plant.

The June op-ed mentioned above was also part of a larger campaign to use the anniversary of Trump’s visit to draw attention to the ongoing problem with small refinery exemptions. We also placed a full-page ad in the local newspaper and held a media conference call to mark the occasion.

When The Atlantic published a screed by an anti-ethanol pundit shortly before Thanksgiving, we responded with a blog post calling him out as a Big Oil shill: While it may be true that some data can be distorted in the presentation, the preponderance of data clearly demonstrates the value of renewable fuels to our lives, our communities, and our planet.

A letter sent from us to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch responding to an anti-ethanol op-ed was published in December. As someone put it on Twitter: "As I guessed, there was no way @EthanolRFA was going to let an anti-ethanol letter in their hometown newspaper go unanswered.”

This past year, RFA leadership also took part in eight news media conference calls, reaching on average more than two dozen reporters each time and leading to scores of headlines on such topics as COVID-19 aid, small refinery exemptions, the anniversary of the Renewable Fuel Standard and other hot issues.

Special opportunities

A partnership between RFA, Renewable Fuels Nebraska, Nebraska Corn, and Pheasants Forever formed to launch an ethanol industry pollinator habitat pilot project in February. Participating ethanol plants will provide an educational showcase for local farmers in the area by hosting pollinator workshops to increase awareness of these conservation practices.

In celebration of both Earth Day and Pollinator Week, RFA featured the efforts of member company Trenton Agri-Products, which is now home to the first demonstration site for the nationwide pollinator habitat project. The pilot project establishes pollinator habitat and demonstration sites in collaboration with Nebraska ethanol plants and RFA hopes to eventually expand the project into different states.

RFA marked the occasion of International Women’s Day in early March with a blog and social media posts featuring board members Jeanne McCaherty and Dana Siefkes-Lewis. The blog post, by Vice President of Government and External Affairs Jessica Bennett, showcased the strengths that women bring to the ethanol workforce and why their unique perspective serves the industry well.

Robert White, RFA’s Vice President of Industry Relations, spoke at the Kansas Corn-Fed Ethanol Seminar in March about connecting to the consumer. He outlined RFA’s efforts in marketing and raising awareness about the benefits of ethanol and higher blends.

The Iowa Renewable Fuels Summit in January featured Geoff Cooper as its keynote speaker, who provided predictions for our industry in 2020 and summarized our progress and setbacks in 2019. In addition to the speaking engagement, RFA also participated in the trade show and net-
Leading the way for retailers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s announcement of a new Higher Blends Infrastructure Incentive Program (HBIIP) served as a catalyst for action for RFA, which helped many retailers take advantage of the new program. HBIIP is making $86 million available to transportation fueling facilities to expand the availability and sale of higher blends of ethanol like E15 and E85/Flex Fuel.

With support from the National Corn Growers Association, RFA Director of Market Development Cassie Mullen worked with Christianson PLLP and others to assist three dozen retailer companies in the grant process prior to the August application deadline.

Submitted applications assisted by RFA cover more than 1,100 fuel dispensers and 128 storage tanks at 222 locations across 21 states. Combined, these locations sell more than 250 million gallons of gasoline annually. RFA provided services and assistance for $21 million in grant requests, which would be matched with another $31 million in private funding for a total investment in higher blends infrastructure of more than $52 million.

RFA’s work included outreach to retailers via paid and earned media and through a series of educational webinars with a reach in the hundreds. The association also created a password-protected website for sharing documents and other digital tools for them to use in the grant application process. Technical reports were prepared for each company, each covering up to 50 pages in length, and site-specific environmental reports were submitted, covering more than 2,200 pages.

Focusing on safety

In October, RFA was granted a new round of funding for our safety education efforts with TRANSCAER. Two grants, one from the Federal Railroad Administration and another from the DOT Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, will support 20 ethanol safety seminars, four “train the trainer” webinars for first responders, and an update to our Ethanol Safety Tour video.

RFA Director of Safety and Technical Programs Missy Ruff assumed her role as chair of the executive committee of the National TRANSCAER Task Group on January 1. For eight years running, RFA received the TRANSCAER National Achievement Award for its national outreach efforts to prepare for and respond to hazardous material transportation incidents. In April, RFA received the award for 2019 after hosting 27 ethanol safety seminars in 10 locations and four “Train-the-Trainer” webinars.

Attendance continued to remain high for all of RFA’s web-based safety training. In the week of June 22 alone, RFA trained 300 webinar participants through the Train the Trainer webinar series and the Emergency Response webinar series, including attendees from the United States, Mexico, Venezuela, Canada, and even Zimbabwe. A few months later, again within the course of one week, RFA provided ethanol safety training to nearly 600 participants across the United States and nine other countries.

Representing the industry

RFA Vice President of Regulatory Affairs Kelly Davis continues to actively serve on the Association of American Railroads Tank Car Committee. As
part of the 24-member Committee, Davis joins representatives from railroads, rail car owners/manufacturers, and hazmat shippers.

RFA Director of Market Development Cassie Mullen went to Villahermosa, Mexico in November to attend ExpoGas 2019 and speak with Mexican retailers about preparing their fueling stations for the sale of E10. This technical/regulatory conference drew all major Mexican stakeholders—well over 100 fuel manufacturers, distributors, retailers, and regulatory bodies, plus a heavy press presence.

Davis continued to represent RFA and the ethanol industry at ASTM meetings, where important standards and specifications that affect motor fuels are developed. By participating on the ASTM Committee for Petroleum Products, Liquid Fuels, and Lubricants, RFA ensures that specifications are developed in a way that facilitates growth in the industry. She also attended ASTM meetings in December in New Orleans and joined numerous meetings held virtually in 2020.

In December, Davis traveled to Kansas to take part in an EPA “Smart Sectors” roundtable event to better inform EPA regional environmental protection programs. There, the group discussed the conditions necessary to expand biofuels distribution infrastructure, the impacts of State Implementation Plans on E15 production and use, and compliance assistance needed to help facility operators meet state and federal requirements.

Late January was a busy time for Davis as she attended the 2020 National Conference on Weights and Measures (NCWM) Interim Meeting in Riverside, California and also visited the University of California Center for Environmental Research & Technology, where an E15 exhaust emissions research study is taking place as part of the process for E15 approval in the state. She then made her way to Fort Worth, Texas for the American Association of Railroads Tank Car Committee Meetings.

In June, Davis ended her six-year appointment with the International Trade Administration’s Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Advisory Committee with a joint submission of recommendations to Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross. Davis has played a key role in highlighting U.S. ethanol as a principal renewable energy export product.
National Ethanol Conference

Taking place February 10-12 in Houston, RFA’s 25th annual National Ethanol Conference was a huge success, featuring such outstanding speakers as former President George W. Bush, USDA Under Secretary for Trade Ted McKinney and many more. Geoff Cooper called on the industry to “Focus Forward” in his address, citing three keys to future ethanol industry growth: “Clean Octane. Carbon Reduction. Consumer Choice.” Southwest Iowa Renewable Energy received the coveted Industry Award for its significant contribution to the industry’s success in 2019, including hosting an important visit by President Trump. Nearly 1,000 industry leaders attended the conference, including two dozen reporters representing Bloomberg, Reuters, OPIS, Argus Media, Agri-Pulse, S&P Global Platts, DTN/Progressive Farmer, ICIS, Ethanol Producer Magazine and more.

Held at the conference, the annual RFA Political Action Committee auction was one of our most successful PAC fundraising events yet, with more than 40 auction items and active participation in the raffle. Proceeds from the auction allow the RFA PAC to support the members of Congress who support us, and the PAC remains a powerful and effective tool for advocacy. At the auction, members were given the opportunity to purchase donated items such as a Lynyrd Skynyrd autographed guitar, a 2020 Ryder Cup package, and a helmet signed by the Super Bowl LIV Champions, the Kansas City Chiefs.

Supporting members

RFA welcomed Ringneck Energy as its newest Producer Member. Located in Onida, SD, Ringneck completed start up in the summer of 2019, and plans to use 29 million bushels of corn to produce 80 million gallons of ethanol each year. Several Associate Members also joined the organization this past year: Barchart, Bion, ClearFlame, Grain Densification International (GDI), Orion Oil, and the Tennessee Corn Promotion Council.

To meet the needs of an evolving workforce in the ethanol industry, RFA has launched the Young Professionals Network, a new program geared toward members of the ethanol industry and stakeholder industries who are 39 years old and younger, regardless of RFA membership. The YPN is a community of young leaders who have a common goal to develop their professional skills, grow their network in the renewable fuels industry, advance their respective businesses forward and support the national agenda of the U.S. ethanol industry.

RFA Manager of Member Relations Jackie Pohlman designed the YPN to bring together innovative and dedicated young professionals to build new relationships and work with one another to identify new opportunities that grow and strengthen the renewable fuels industry. The RFA YPN will host virtual and real events year-round that focus on networking, leadership, improving operations, and finding new and innovative approaches to building the market for ethanol.

2020 also brought a new member benefit with the rollout of two directories, a Board Member Directory and an Associate Member Directory that features company descriptions, services, and contact information. The purpose of these directories is to encourage RFA’s ethanol producer members to shop first with its associate members, and to facilitate that connection.

The National Ethanol Conference has become the perfect opportunity to make fast connections in the ethanol industry, providing nearly 1,000 people the ability to build strong business networks stretching across the country and around the world.
In mid-April, RFA launched a blog series—designated #RFACommunityPartners—that highlights our members’ commendable responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The association has been using this as a tool more broadly to showcase the various ways ethanol industry workers have been assisting their local communities and the entire nation. Leaders in the ethanol industry are helping their communities with donations of PPE and hand sanitizer as well as leveraging their knowledge to help producers navigate the new challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Check out the RFA website for their stories of innovation and resilience.
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