



TESTIMONY OF RICHARD OSWALD
MISSOURI FARMERS UNION

BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

TO DISCUSS THE 2011 MISSOURI RIVER FLOOD

NOVEMBER 30, 2011
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to share my experience with the US Army Corps of Engineers Missouri River inundation of 2011.

I am a fifth generation Missouri farmer from Atchison County Missouri. I have lived my entire life where I was born in the house built by my parents on our family farm in the Missouri River valley near Langdon.

Since it was built in 1939, our home has been touched by the Missouri River 3 times; first, when after a few days advance warning in the spring of 1952 rapid snowmelt caused unavoidable flooding along newly constructed levee L550. That flood did little damage to our farmstead. My parents, my sister, and I returned to our home within 3 weeks. Dad raised a good crop that year.

The second was in the summer of 1993 when heavy rains fell across the entire Missouri watershed. Following the late July flood my wife and I and our daughter returned in mid August; Most fields and roads were undamaged.

After several weeks advance notice, Levee L550 breached for the third time on June 23, 2011. We were told well ahead of time to expect a flood. The reaction among most was that if flooding could be anticipated so far in advance, why wasn't something done to prevent it?

The managed uninterrupted flow of this flood kept us away from home for more than 100 days until October. Unlike most homes in the valley today, ours is still habitable. FEMA insurance adjustors have placed the insured damage to our farmstead at over \$30,000. That is minor compared to my neighbors heavy losses.

Some of the most productive, valuable farmland in Missouri is on the river bottom in Atchison County. According to the satellite imagery study by Dr Scott Brown of the University of Missouri, at least 47,000 acres of crops were lost there. Local officials on the ground estimated over 60,000 in earlier estimates, due in part to an inundation map circulated by the Corps implying an unprecedented bluff to bluff flood from Gavin's Point to St Louis. But really, on our farm just as on so many others, final determination has not been made because crop insurance adjusters have not visited where much of the area remained inaccessible into November.

About 1400 acres of contracted seed soybeans and specialty food corn worth over one million dollars were lost on our farm. Close to half those acres were under irrigation.

Crop insurance based on my 10 year average yield will cover only part of my loss. Dr Brown estimated in his study that for most farmers, combined insurance and disaster payments are still insufficient. But no matter what the settlement, as a result of this flood our farm and many others have not grown food and energy crops America needs now.

Over the last several years, river management has made life especially difficult for bottomland farmers like me. Damage done by this flood to many productive fields is

irreparable. We have huge sand dunes and blowouts. Sandstone chunks from a 60 foot deep crater litter one field. Drainage ditches that should allow flood water to drain back to the main channel are plugged with silt and sand from the river; Fertile fields lay stark and barren.

Repairs to just 4 miles of highway 136, a major 2 lane river crossing in our county, cost over \$3 million. Jobs and commerce at the intersection with Interstate 29 were lost for months during the flood when the highway closed. Many local residents who work across the river, just 10 minutes away, were faced with 2 1/2 hour one way commutes.

Rural roads like the seven miles in Langdon Special Road District were left impassable by washouts and debris. Work to bring them back to normal continues. FEMA is helping, but only 75% of those costs are eligible for aid. The way things stand now, without levee protection all our work and money spent could be for nothing if the water returns.

But the estimated cost just to repair levee L550 is \$47 million. To date, less than half that is promised.

Land, our most valuable agricultural asset in Missouri faces lowered tax valuation in flooded areas placing a strain on basic local government services including rural schools. Millions of dollars in farm buildings and homes have been destroyed. Besides personal property, Missouri county assessors are required to reassess Ag land values up or down as situations change. Our county clerk estimated that with continued flooding, assessed values on river bottom land could drop from \$4.7 million to a little over \$238,000 costing local government hundreds of thousands in revenue and millions in productivity each year the flooding continues.

Property owners and farmers feel it first, but eventually the entire community takes the hit.

Because of the damaging length and severity of this flood and lack of funding for maintenance and repair, flooding again in 2012 seems certain unless Congress and the US Army Corps of Engineers make flood control their number one priority.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you and the committee for allowing me to be heard.

Richard R. Oswald
Langdon, MO

Appendix I

"View From the Flood Plain" by Richard Oswald
DTN Progressive Farmer, October 26, 2011
<http://www.dtnprogressivefarmer.com>

It never fails. Whenever I conduct interviews with farmers for DTN's View from the Cab, I learn something. Take last year for instance-

Early in 2010, while interviewing View from the Cab farmer Frank Zweber of Hoven South Dakota, he asked me where I live. "Near Langdon in extreme Northwest Missouri" I told him.

Frank zeroed in on the problem; "Near the river?"

"Within about 2 miles" I said.

That's when Frank passed along this bit of wisdom; "You're going to have trouble".

Frank was right, because all of us along the river had trouble.

While Frank doesn't live near the Missouri, he spends a good bit of time fishing on the lakes formed by flood control dams in South Dakota. He said he had never seen the lakes so full, and with heavy snows that winter, the lakes could only get fuller.

Up and down the Missouri Valley there was trouble holding back the river in 2010. In 2011 it got worse. In fact, where I live here in Atchison County, the last 4 years have been challenging for farms along the river. Record flows up and down the Missouri have meant flooding, poor drainage, and constant threat of levee failure.

This year proved to be too much.

Flood preparations began here last winter when a Corps of Engineers grant to our levee district was used to build up weakened areas of the 62.5 mile long federal system. Gumbo back roads were improved at Corps expense when they covered them with matting and crushed rock so trucks and heavy equipment could do their work. Crushed rock was hauled and spread on rutted levee tops, and rip rap was placed on eroded slopes.

First built to offer relief from sand boils and blow outs, seep wells were restored to working order, and plastic sheeting weighted with sand bags was laid on freshly worked dirt where new brome grass couldn't grow quickly enough to shield it.

Work was barely completed before the spring rise arrived.

Roads can be muddy from rain or seep water, grain elevators might only be open for regular hours, equipment can break down. Veterans of river floods learn to move grain first because that's what takes the most time. It's slow going without a fleet of trucks and an army of shovelers waiting to help.

By May, most grain stored on land we knew could flood was gone to town.

Warnings began to filter out that the levees could never hold what was coming. So we started looking around the farmstead to see what else there was to move.

Farmers are no strangers to getting dirty, but if you've never cleaned up after a flood, you don't know what dirty is. We chose to clean up what we could...before.

It's interesting the things we all have but never see. Most of us have sheds packed with things we forget we have and never look at. We learned in 1993 to look hard, because the water leaves behind mud and smell and filth. Anything not picked up and moved before the flood weighs twice as much and smells three times as bad after. Feed or seed sacks, cardboard boxes, scrap boards, old tires, all the things people keep but never use--we threw it all away.

All the crops were planted in good time, but not too early. With planting over all eyes turned to the river--and weed control. My son sprayed our soybeans, then it was time to post the corn. Before I left to attend a week of meetings in early June, I suggested to him that he should hold off spending anything on weed control on our bottomland corn. "Save the money" I said, "this time it's going to flood".

When I got home he told me he had sprayed all the corn. I asked why. "It needed it" he said. If it didn't flood the weeds would take the crop.

He didn't have to worry about that.

By June, water releases from the river's surge tank known as Gavin's Point, were crawling up the sides of levees like ants on the way to a picnic. Neighbors up and down the valley took machinery to high ground where it wasn't unusual to see million dollar rainbows of planters, tractors, combines and grain trucks on colorful hill side parking lots.

Groups of volunteers gathered to lay more plastic sheeting and sand bags. Emergency Management issued daily appeals for sandbaggers and fillers.

News reports and the Corps were calling us "the basin".

An inundation map was released showing potential record flood depths, perhaps exceeding 1952 and 1993 levels by 6 to 8 feet or more. Army Corps of Engineers representatives held meetings in the area. They warned Hamburg IA residents that water would be ten feet deep at the flag pole in the middle of main street. At Rock Port

MO, they informed the town their water wells were in jeopardy. Corps representatives placed a mark on an outside wall of the water plant at 902 feet above sea level, 6 feet deeper than 1993.

A few days later they returned and raised the mark even higher.

Based on the second mark, a friend and I calculated a potential water flow of 550,000 cubic feet per second. That is about the same amount that emergency tunnels built into the dams release when fully opened. At that rate, the river could be flowing across parts of our land at almost 15 miles per hour.

That much water flowing that fast would probably sweep away everything in its path; homes, outbuildings, irrigators, grain bins, trees...even the largest federal highway bridges. An op-Ed in the St Louis Post Dispatch warned of impending disaster.

From here it looked like the river might be out of control.

City emergency management called for help and an emergency levee was built at the Rock Port wells using city and county resources and volunteer labor. A group of convicts from the correction facility at Cameron Missouri worked side by side with citizens of Atchison County for weeks. Up in Hamburg, a massive effort to save the town was underway. Eventually a levee was built west of town that would protect it from the river. But with no time to file an environmental impact statement, officials were told the levee violated protocol and would have to be removed by fall.

As of today, it remains in place.

Here at Langdon we decided to clean out our 74 year old house. Flood waters have never touched our ground floor, but if predictions proved correct the house would be in 10 feet of water. Even the second story would be in jeopardy. So in mid-June a friend offered us the use of a 53 foot refer trailer where we could store our furniture for a month or so until flood dangers were past.

In the end our furniture, including my favorite recliner, would be in his trailer for 16 weeks.

This past Sunday we finally unloaded.

A levee west of Hamburg began to leak. The Corps declined further repairs saying flooding was inevitable. A group of farmers made repairs themselves. Before long another breach occurred. This time there was no fixing it.

It's hard to admit, but when a levee breaks north of us we feel relief because someone else is taking the water that might flood our own farms. We felt badly for the people in West Atchison where the break happened, but it dropped our water level, only just for

awhile. After a few days the flood plain filled and water broke through the tributary Nishnabotna River levee where it returned to the main channel.

Our stretch of the river began to rise again.

Flooding north of the Missouri state line in Iowa caused interstate 29 to close at exit 110 on highway 136. Northbound traffic was forced to exit. Travelers were confused. Filling stations and restaurants at the intersection were inundated with people looking for directions on how to get north. It got so bad that businesses printed reams of giveaway maps giving directions out of the area.

In late June the levee began to overtop north of the Brownville bridge on Highway 136. Surprisingly it held for days. A morning ritual for local farmers became a drive to the levee at dawn to see foot and a half deep water cascade over the top. Rapids turned the levees white with foam. From a half mile away it looked like snow.

Rising rivers are high in the middle.
Observers could actually see the river surface above the top of the levee.
There was no let up. Wear began to show.
Levee slopes started slipping under the onslaught.

Even without a breach, flood water was accumulating from overtopping.

On the river bottom, water follows the contour of the land. Along the Missouri we lose about one foot of elevation from north to south in every mile. When the river is high drainage water piles up against levees.

Lowest areas were already flooded because there was nowhere for the water to go.

Missouri Governor Jay Nixon sent the National Guard to protect property and stop unnecessary traffic. When the Corps said additional efforts at sandbagging would be futile, the Missouri Guard commanded by General Steve Danner used their Blackhawk helicopters to place sandbags on the most precarious spots along the levee. A levee in southern Atchison County was saved by Guard helicopter drops. Its stands today.

Farmers protected by that levee were harvesting last week.

On June 23 a huge portion of levee collapsed west of the village of Watson MO pushing water east and south toward my farm. Evacuation was ordered.

"Second bottom" is accreted soil piled onto alluvial plains by ancient floods. Before the levee system was built, second bottom was generally above the spring runoff. Our home is situated on second bottom. Ordinarily it would take days for any normal flood to reach it.

My wife and daughter returned there a day after the levee breach to rescue flowers from the front yard. When my son couldn't locate them he drove to the farm and found them casually loading flower pots. Upset by what he thought was carelessness on their part, he shouted at them, "Get out of here now". In the short time they had been there water had already covered the last road, their only exit.

As they drove out it was 18 inches deep and rising.
The great flood of 2011 was on.

Richard Oswald is a 61 year old fifth generation Missouri family farmer with over 44 years of farming experience. He lives with his wife Linda and grandson Ryan in the house Richard's parents built, the same house where he was born in the Missouri River valley near Langdon. Richard's crops are specialty corn, seed soybeans, hay, and pasture. Richard is a Missouri Master Farmer and a rural blogger whose writings may be seen at www.DailyYonder.com. He is a special correspondent for DTN/Progressive Farmer. He is the current president of Missouri Farmers Union, and serves on the board of directors of National Farmers Union, and on the board of directors of Organization for Competitive Markets.

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
Truth in Testimony Disclosure

Pursuant to clause 2(g)(5) of House Rule XI, in the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include: (1) a curriculum vitae; and (2) a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness. Such statements, with appropriate redaction to protect the privacy of the witness, shall be made publicly available in electronic form not later than one day after the witness appears.

(1) Name:

RICHARD R OSWALD

(2) Other than yourself, name of entity you are representing:

MISSOURI FARMERS UNION

(3) Are you testifying on behalf of an entity other than a Government (federal, state, local) entity?

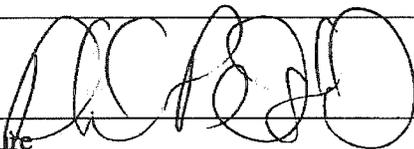
YES

If yes, please provide the information requested below and attach your curriculum vitae.

NO

(4) Please list the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by you or by the entity you are representing:

Signature



Date

11/30/2011