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PUBLISHER

Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers
2600 Wheat Drive • Red Lake Falls, MN 56750
218.253.4311 • Email: mnwheat@mnwheat.com
Web: www.mnwheat.org

EDITORIAL

Doug Monson | Ag Management Solutions
151 Saint Andrews Ct. Suite 710 • Mankato, MN 56001
Ph: 507.388.1635
Email: dmonson@agmgmtsolutions.com

CIRCULATION

Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers
2600 Wheat Drive • Red Lake Falls, MN 56750
Ph: 218.253.4311
Email: mnwheat@mnwheat.com

ADVERTISING SALES

Sara Hewitt | Ag Management Solutions
151 Saint Andrews Ct. Suite 710 • Mankato, MN 56001
Ph: 507.995.5208
Email: shewitt@agmgmtsolutions.com

ABOUT PRAIRIE GRAINS

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Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers and Minnesota Wheat Council

2600 Wheat Drive • Red Lake Falls, MN 56750
218.253.4311 • Email: mnwheat@mnwheat.com
Web: www.mnwheat.org



North Dakota Grain Growers Association

2401 46th Ave SE, Suite 204 • Mandan, ND 58554
701.222.2216 • Email: danw@ndgga.com
Web: www.ndgga.com



South Dakota Wheat Inc.

116 N. Euclid, Box 667 • Pierre, SD 58501
605.224.4418 • Email: wheatinc@midco.net



Montana Grain Growers Association

P.O. Box 1165 • Great Falls, MT 59403 • 406.761.4596
Email: erobinson@mgga.org • Web: www.mgga.org



NORTHLAND

Northland Community and Technical College
1101 Highway One East • Thief River Falls, MN 56701
218.683.8800
Email: ron.dvergsten@northlandcollege.edu
Web: www.northlandcollege.edu

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Against the Grain

Springing ahead

Greetings, readers. We hope you're enjoying the new-look Prairie Grains Magazine. We're very excited for the year ahead with our redesign and new direction.

As I am writing this article, those of us here in the North Country have been experiencing a mild, somewhat dry, winter. Perhaps there is five to six inches of snow on the ground, and it has been staying in place. My farm is located near Grygla in northwestern Minnesota. For those of you who may not be familiar with the area, Grygla is located approximately halfway between Thief River Falls and Roseau. I am a cash crop farmer, raising generally equal acreages of hard red spring wheat and soybeans.

MAWG has been able to offer most of the educational programs as were available in past years. Of course, we've had to adapt to the "new normal" by



holding these events virtually. On Jan. 12, we hosted a virtual Small Grains Update session with six excellent presenters. I was asked to host the event. The number of members participating appeared to be about 230. I believe the program was quite successful. We also held the eighth annual On-Farm Research Summit virtually on Jan. 20, which was followed by The Best of the Best in Wheat and Soybean Research, held Jan. 25-26. I hope that you were able to participate and found these webinars entertaining and informative.

A strategic planning exercise has been undertaken by the MAWG board and staff, along with the Minnesota Wheat Research and Promotion Council. This will be a process that will continue for the next few months – we're planning to have it finished this spring – and it

should provide valuable information to aid us in providing future direction of the two organizations.

The hard red spring wheat acreage for the 2021 crop year will be a struggle to maintain planted area. The prices of competing crops, namely corn and soybeans, seem to be relatively more favorable at this time.

As you make your planting decisions for the upcoming spring, please take into account the value of maintaining a sensible crop rotation. Another consideration should be choosing a wheat variety with excellent milling and baking quality, so our wheat produced will continue to enjoy the sterling reputation of being a high-quality product.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary Anderson".

Gary Anderson
President, MAWG



TAKES ONE TO KNOW ONE

MAWG members are

part of a vast network of wheat farmers, industry experts, and stakeholders. A membership in MAWG means a wheat family who focuses on legislative issues such as crop insurance, the farm bill, wheat research funds, water quality and other environmental issues.

Choose the type of membership that is best for you and your farm operation.



Call the MAWG office at 218-253-4311 or visit mnwheat.org to join today.

TAMING THE BULLS



BY BETSY JENSEN



& BEARS

Time for Disney World

Most farmers look back at 2012 and smile. It was a great year for corn and soybean prices.

For spring wheat farmers, we look back to 2008. The elevator posted over \$20 cash for spring wheat. Durum hit \$20 first and spring wheat hit those levels

in February. It was a great time to be a wheat grower in the Northern Plains, if you had any bushels left to sell.

As a seed producer, I still owned spring wheat as it rallied. I was hoping to sell it for seed, but I quickly abandoned those plans. I did not have many bushels

to sell, but those bushels were keeping me up at night. I was checking the markets constantly, and I'd wake up at night and think, "Is it over yet? Did it already crash?"

We had a family trip to Disney World and I finally said enough. I had to sell



these bushels before we went to Florida. I didn't want to ruin our vacation by checking wheat prices several times an hour. I sold the bushels for \$18 and they hit \$20 while I was at the most magical place on earth.

By the time we came home, the rally was over. Wheat prices fell quickly and even though I didn't hit the high, I got rid of every bushel I could. I call it my Disney World sale. Going to Disney World made me money and I am the only person who can say that. I still would have owned those bushels all the way back down.

I have been pricing Disney World trips once again. I have very few corn and soybean bushels remaining, but they are stressing me out.

The market is moving quickly and I am paralyzed. I had a solid marketing plan for most of my bushels. It's this final sale that is keeping me up at night. Maybe I should book a trip, price the bushels and move on with my life. It worked well in 2008.

I create marketing plans every year, and rarely do I ever hit my top sales target. In fact, I rarely hit my third,

fourth or fifth target. The market never rallies that far, and I scramble to create Plan B, C, D and end up calling audibles for the rest of my bushels.

As you plan for 2021, I want you to do some math for your marketing plan. Do you know your average price for a crop sale? What is a typical sale price

“Maybe I should book a trip, price the bushels and move on with my life. It worked well in 2008.”

for you? Have you averaged more than \$5 for spring wheat? Maybe \$5.25? How often have you sold over six? Take your planned 2021 bushels and multiply it by

your historical average price. Compare that to what you will get with today's price.

Do not look at the difference in the price per bushel. Multiply it by the bushels to get the full dollar amount. A fifty-cent difference does not look like much. 50 cents times 50,000 bushels adds up to real money.

Our minds are not always rational about money and sometimes we need to see the number on a notepad to fully appreciate it.

If you don't have your historical averages, call your grain buyer. They have a good idea of your area average. A pencil, paper and calculator will help you better appreciate the marketing opportunities. Prices on a screen don't always tell the full story.

I did some math on my remaining 2020 corn and soybean bushels. The rally in soybeans is big, but when multiplied by my little bushels, it won't even pay for a trip to Disney World.

I need to stop worrying about my final sale. I want to brag that I sold soybeans at the high. I won't mention how many bushels I sold. 🌾



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SEED MONEY

Minnesota Wheat Growers helped
launch Red River Farm Network

By Drew Lyon, Ag Management Solutions



By the mid-1990s, Americans were just becoming intrigued by a new, interactive – and soon to be revolutionary – outlet called the World Wide Web. But radio rural remained a vital news source for farmers throughout rural America.

“Before you had internet, you relied on the radio, because you couldn’t look up what the markets were doing in too many places,” said Pete Kappes, a former director with the Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers (MAWG).

Led by then-Executive Director Dave Torgerson, MAWG hatched a big idea to spread regional farm news far and wide. With a small investment and big imagination, they boldly went where few, if any, commodity groups had gone before by investing in a radio station.

“Everyone was getting hung up about posting on the internet,” former MAWG President Jerry Nordick recalled. “It might be a good philosophy, but we needed to figure out a way to get (farm) information into the combines of the American farmer. That got the ball rolling.”

Continued on Page 10

Veteran farm journalist Mike Hergert picked up the ball and ran with it. In the early 1990s, Hergert was a farm broadcaster at the 1,000-watt KKXL radio in Grand Forks. His buddy Torgerson, known as “Torgy” to friends, approached him and casually asked Hergert how much it would cost to buy a radio station that supported a wider reach so he could share farm information with more wheat farmers.

“I kind of laughed at him,” Hergert said. “I told him, ‘Dave, you can’t, you don’t have that kind of money.’”

Torgerson persisted. He knew there was a farm audience to reach beyond the Grand Forks area; besides, growers respected Hergert as a reliable source of agriculture news. He also rightly had a hunch that Hergert also wanted to start his own farm network.

“Farmers wanted to hear Mike’s reporting,” Torgerson said. “He had a following, and he had built a lot of trust with growers that were listening to him.”

At the time, Minnesota wheat

growers were grappling with a scab epidemic. Radio was one method of communication to relay the latest research related to scab.

“(MAWG) realized the best way to be in contact with farmers was with a network of stations rather than a single station,” said Erik Younggren, a Minnesota farmer and past chair of the National Association of Wheat Growers. “Radio was the best way to transmit timely information.”

After just a few brainstorming sessions, Hergert, and his partners, John Vasichek

and Jerry Fiskum, sat together in a local diner. Over a meal, they scribbled an agreement on a flimsy napkin. Hergert quit his job at KKXL, and MAWG contributed enough seed money – about a 20 percent investment – to pay salaries and expenses for a few months. With MAWG on board, the Red River Farm Network was born, transforming farm broadcasting in the Red River Valley.

“You could say peanut butter met chocolate and a brilliant partnership was made,” Younggren said.

Continued on Page 12

Ready for the flood

During its 25 years on the air, RRFN has never missed a single scheduled broadcast, with one notable close call. A historic 1997 flood in Grand Forks and East Grand Forks forced more than 50,000 residents to evacuate, one of the country’s largest mass evacuations. Thanks to assistance from the Northern Ag Network in Montana, RRFN improvised a studio in the KZZ break room. Despite being removed from their home studio, RRFN stayed on the airwaves for two months as the flood receded.

‘A friend to agriculture’

In 2017, MAWG awarded Hergert with its Meritorious Service Award. In its 40-plus year history, MAWG had bestowed the award only five times. “Thank you for getting to work at 3 in the morning just so we could have the news that mattered first thing in the morning,” Erik Younggren said.





AGRICULTURE IN THE RED RIVER ERA

1995: Freedom to Farm provides farmers with fixed transition payments that are designed to decline gradually over the seven-year life of the farm bill.

1996: Roundup Ready soybeans are introduced by Asgrow and Pioneer. Wheat farmers hit with \$27 million loss after Orange Wheat Blossom Midge arrives in North Dakota.

1997: Markets collapse after farmers plant a record 70.8 million acres of soybeans.

1998: Wheat farmers continue coping with low prices and the scab epidemic. Roundup Ready wheat is in early development stage.

1999: Farm prices hit a 53-year low. Thousands of acres are lost because of rising water at Devils Lake.

2000: U.S. files case against Canada over the dumping of wheat and durum.

2001: Wheat is the talk of the town at National Association of Wheat Growers convention.

2002: Farm Bill makes soybeans a program crop. Minnesota and North Dakota visit with Fidel Castro during visit to Cuba.

2003: Millions of Americans adopt the high-protein "Atkins Diet," negatively affecting wheat and potato industries.

2004: Mid-August frost brings corn crop to early end. Asian Soybean Rust found in U.S.

2005: Ethanol production ramps up after corn prices drop. USDA unveils new food pyramid and dietary standards.

2006: Collin Peterson becomes House Ag



Chair. Ethanol production triples. World soybean production increases by 72 percent over the course of a decade.

2007: Corn prices reach record highs. CRP acres come back into production.

2008: President George W. Bush appoints former North Dakota Gov. Ed Schafer to USDA secretary.

2009: Agriculture legend and Nobel Peace Prize winner Norman Borlaug dies at 95.

2010: EPA allows the use of 15 percent ethanol blends in late-model cars and light trucks. President Barack Obama signs the Affordable Care Act.

2011: Weed resistance to glyphosate becomes hot topic. Canadian Wheat Board disassembles.

2012: Roundup Ready beets survive a USDA APHIS environmental assessment. 2008 Farm Bill is extended through Sept. 30, 2013.

2013: Two fertilizer plants are proposed in North Dakota. Sales of high-horsepower farm equipment reach record levels.

2014: Farm passes, with crop insurance the centerpiece of the legislation. BNSF reports record delays. Elevators are full prior to

harvest. EPA's Waters of the United States raises eyebrows among farmers.

2015: Bull market ends. North Dakota oil shipments increase by 350 percent. Mandatory country-of-origin labeling for beef and pork is repealed.

2016: Donald Trump elected president. Syngenta bought by Chinese company. Minnesota's proposed buffer law faces opposition from growers.

2017: Sonny Perdue named USDA secretary. Trump administration signals it will reverse Waters of United States Rule.

2018: U.S. enters into tariff war with China, causing drop in soybean prices. Market Facilitation Program is announced. Mexico and Canada agree to updated NAFTA deal (USMCA)

2019: Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers Executive Director Dave Torgerson retires; Charlie Vogel becomes new CEO. Nearly 20 million acres nationwide go unplanted; prevent plant acres soar. Midwest farmers struggle with weather conditions during harvest. African Swine Fever devastates China's swine industry.

2020: COVID-19 pandemic halts the nation's economy, closing meat plants and throwing a wrench in the nation's supply chain. New programs announced to assist farmers affected by pandemic. Joe Biden defeats Trump to win presidency.

Timeline information courtesy of Red River Farm Network



Red River Farm Network boasts a team of renowned farm broadcasters.

More than a quarter-century later, Red River Farm Network is still on the air, delivering 90 minutes of relevant news each day to not just wheat growers, but to an entire agriculture region. According to current President Don Wick, if RRFN's listening audience in northwest Minnesota, eastern North Dakota and northeastern South Dakota were outlined as a state, the station's reach would make up one of the country's most productive agriculture states across several commodities.

"We shared a dream," Hergert said. "Dave wanted to expand his reach, and so did I."

Making connections

In the mid-1990s, the Wheat Growers, to use Nordick's baseball analogy, needed to improve its communication and "get strong up the middle." MAWG was publishing a newsletter, later rebranded



RRFN has collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to highlight rural mental health issues through the "TransFARMation" podcast.

"In nearly 40 years of work in broadcasting, I don't think I've ever gotten such a phenomenal response from a project," Don Wick said. "We're proud of the resource we're providing and look forward to continuing to share the stories of farmers and ranchers and offering a message of hope."

TransFARMation is available via download for Apple and Android or at www.rrfn.com/transformation/.

as Prairie Grains Magazine, but was finding it difficult to better reach its diverse members and growers across the region.

Torgerson brought the proposal to partner with RRFN to its members. The board agreed and formed Prairie Ag Communications, which held MAWG's stock investment in RRFN and is still in operation today.

"We're not afraid to take chances and we have a real entrepreneurial spirit," said Tim Dufault, a former MAWG board member and current director with the Minnesota Wheat Research & Promotion Council. "It was easy to make the connection for our farmers."

The Wheat Growers

investment in RRFN was only temporary; they sold parts of their stock to individual growers in the Red River Valley. But their legacy as radio investors remains intact.

"Everyone was happy with how it turned out. It took off quickly," Torgerson

said. "We all knew what we had in Mike Hergert."

Communications may have changed – some interviews for this article were conducted virtually due to a once-in-a-century pandemic – but for many wheat farmers, radio is still the king. It's just transmitted differently. Today, many growers have found the best of both worlds by downloading the RRFN app on their smartphones and streaming the day's broadcast via – you guessed it – the internet.

"We were kind of the forerunners to the change, I guess," Nordick said.

"We always wanted to be in front of the eight ball, not behind the eight ball." 🌾



RED RIVER FARM NETWORK

A lay of the land: A conversation with Charlie Vogel

By Drew Lyon, Ag Management Solutions

Before 2020, Charlie Vogel rarely participated in a virtual meeting. Of course, the past year changed how businesses are run, and it was no different for the CEO of the Minnesota

Association of Wheat Growers and the Minnesota Wheat Research & Promotion Council.

But Vogel found sunshine among the dark clouds last year, and he's looking to brighter days ahead. In mid-January, Vogel sat down for a virtual Q&A session for a look back at 2020 and a forecast for the year ahead.

Can you tell your readers about what's new with your award-winning magazine?

Marlene (Dufault) ran the magazine for many years. She did an amazing job and we appreciated her work. She reached a point where she wanted to step back, so we reached out to Ag Management Solutions, which manages Soybean Business Magazine. In addition, the world's different now. We look at how COVID-19 has changed a lot of things, and we're looking at what we're sharing with our members and growers and trying to find the content that brings the most value and deliver that to farmers across the region.

What can readers expect from Prairie Grains Magazine in upcoming issues?

We're going to continue the tremendous trajectory we've been on.

The heritage here is amazing, and we don't want to lose what has been built. But at the same time, we want to be progressive and adapt to changing times and conditions. We want to make an effort to highlight more of our membership and board of directors so growers and industry can get to know them. We're



always going to make an emphasis on this being a regional magazine: Prairie Grains covers Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana. We want to make a more collaborative effort on what all these industries have to offer.

Looking back on the last year, can you share how your organizations adapted to the changing business landscape COVID-19 created?

First off, a shout-out to our team. They have done a tremendous job of adapting and rolling with the punches of what 2020 threw at us and delivering some really good traditional content in a nontraditional year.

We've reached people we normally haven't. People who don't have time for meetings, a lot of them have participated

and been involved in these virtual activities. At the same time, in-person events have truly been missed, and we see the value of those in-person relationships. By no means are we going to replace in-person meetings. I do see potential for hybrids. Not all was bad in 2020; there were definitely some learning curves and some new audiences reached.

What were some of the toughest challenges the organization faced in 2020?

The obvious one was COVID, of course. The subtle challenge was this was going to be the year we pushed on membership drives. Especially on the growers' side, we're going to see, going forward, how to be an advocate for Minnesota and nationally.

What were some of the positives you took away from 2020?

We realized what a great team and what great partners we have in the industry. It really showed the relationships that have been built and how we can work together as a wheat industry and as an ag industry to really get through these difficult times and continue to bring value to our membership.

Many economic concerns from last year remain. How are the Wheat Growers approaching 2021?

What we're really looking at this year is that wheat is an incredibly important crop in this part of Minnesota. The farmers today aren't "wheat farmers" – they're farmers. The No. 1 concern right now is farm profitability, so we want to work with our fellow commodity groups and organizations to duplicate and leverage our efforts to work



Charlie Vogel, third from right, is optimistic that Minnesota Wheat will experience continued success in 2021.

together. We're only 2 percent of the population, so we've really got to utilize our voices and amplify our megaphone to tackle these big issues, whether that's climate change, regulations, carbon credits. We need to unify.

What are some of the benefits of being a member of MAWG?

The No. 1 benefit is having a voice. When it gets difficult as far as having access to the Capitol, it's even more critical. As the rural-urban divide has increased, we're going to need to get more active as rural Minnesotans, wheat producers and farmers in general.

Which issues will the Wheat Growers look to prioritize this year?

It's going to be figuring out the lay of the land with COVID. But we're looking for opportunities – we had some huge wins last year with Section 179 tax

conformity and at the national level, too. We're going to continue to work to find areas where we can find some of the wins that will help farmers or farms remain economically sustainable.

“We really realized what a great team and what great partners we have in the industry.”

— Charlie Vogel, MN Wheat CEO

On the Council side, what are some of your main objectives in 2021?

We're about 25 percent through a strategic planning process that we're planning to have done by April 1, before planting season, to identify what avenues of research will bring the most bang for the dollar to wheat producers.

What will a successful year look like to you?

Hopefully COVID is in the rearview mirror, and now that we're back to in-person meetings, what are the efficiencies we learned from having to be shoved into a virtual world? How can we leverage our larger audience and really deliver impactful content the way our growers want to consume it?

COVID-19 is going to have a long tail, so dealing with the educational and business drawbacks is a real concern. There's also a real optimism on the MAWG and markets rallying. Empty store shelves brought a lot of attention to how important ag is that frankly people hadn't thought about in a long time. That was probably the biggest silver lining of 2020 – it highlighted to the public that this can't be taken for granted.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity purposes. 🌾

TRACEABILITY IS KEY IN IP FOOD GRAIN

By Shane Frederick
Ag Management Solutions





If you've heard the term "farm to table" or maybe even "farm to fork," you know that it's likely guided many people in their decision-making when it comes to making food choices.

Consider reversing that notion. Follow it back.

Go "fork to farm."

As more and more consumers around the world want to know where their food and the ingredients in their food are coming from – how they got to market, where they were processed, how they were shipped, where they were grown – producers, including food-grade grain growers, are responding to their customers' demand for traceability.

According to a survey conducted last year by the International Food Information Council, 55% of consumers say knowing where their food comes from is very/somewhat important in their food purchasing decisions, while 42% say understanding how their food is produced is very/somewhat important in those decisions.

Traceability – being able to follow a food's path through the value chain all the way back to the farm from any customer in the world – ensures that safe, healthy, high-quality food products have a market. That consistency depends on knowing, with certainty, the source of the ingredients used throughout the process of production, processing,

transportation and distribution and being able to verify that those ingredients were segregated from the time they were planted until they reached the food manufacturer – or, yes, even the fork.

A chief tenet of the growers, producers, processors and shippers of U.S. identity-preserved (IP) products, traceability means suppliers are listening to their customers and meeting their needs. And the conversations taking place throughout the value chain are creating opportunities for growers and in trade.

"Traceability," Specialty Soya and Grains Alliance (SSGA) Executive Director Eric Wenberg said, "is the value that adds value."

Buyers of specialty grains – for instance, those who purchase malting barley – depend on IP varieties with specific, grown-to-order characteristics in order to manufacture consistent, high-quality food products. They need to be assured that they're getting what they ordered and that it's worth paying a premium for. Because of that, growers and producers are willing to take the extra steps and put in the extra time it takes to clean equipment, segregate specific varieties and collect the necessary data, knowing they'll be earning a premium for their products.

From the grower to the processor to the manufacturer to the consumer, traceable IP crops are a win-win-win-win. 🌾





PLAYING DEFENSE

Wheat Growers look to protect wins in 2021

By Drew Lyon

Ag Management Solutions

After a turbulent year at the state Capitol – one marked by a pandemic, an economic downturn, civil strife and multiple special sessions – the Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers (MAWG) is keeping its legislative expectations in check for 2021.

“My gut tells me this is going to be a bit of a defensive year because the budget is going to suck out all of the oxygen in the room at the state level,” MAWG CEO Charlie Vogel said. “But we also see a chance for opportunities.”

The session started on Jan. 5 and runs through May 17. It’s expected to be conducted mostly, if not all, virtually. Advocacy figures to look a lot differently in 2021, much to the chagrin of those accustomed to face-to-face interactions.

Normally, MAWG would be plotting its annual advocacy bus trip to St. Paul. Not so this year.

“We’re in the people business,” MAWG lobbyist Bruce Kleven said. “We’re all looking forward to getting back to in-person interactions at the Capitol. Until then, we’re just doing the best we can and using the technology tools we have.”

Lawmakers will have to contend with setting the projected \$50 billion biennium budget and closing a forecasted \$1.27-billion budget shortfall for the next two fiscal years. Unlike the federal government, most state legislatures, including Minnesota, must balance their budgets.

“The budget is going to be front and center at the Capitol this session,” Kleven said.

In late 2020, MAWG and farm advocacy groups worked in unison to urge legislators to pass full Section 179 tax conformity. In the final special session before the Nov. 3 election, the collaboration among farm groups paid off – big time. Full Section 179 conformity passed in a bipartisan

fashion, and Gov. Walz signed the measure into law as part of the bonding bill.

By closing the loophole, rural Minnesotans will see more than \$100 million in tax relief. MAWG will also work to protect the ag school bonding credit for local referendums and join other commodity groups in watching the details of the proposed “Clean Cars” rule.

“Those tax wins aren’t at great risk,” Kleven said, “but if we have a budget deficit and the Legislature starts talking about finding revenue sources, we will defend them because we don’t want those to go away.”

MAWG will also advocate for funding for agricultural research in the biennium budget and monitor any potential legislation related to water quality, wetlands and drainage. Kleven said he and his farmer-led board will also look to protect any measures against crop protection products.

“Those attacks seem to come every year,” Kleven said.

One transportation policy Kleven said he’ll be looking closely at is legislation that would prevent the Minnesota State Patrol from stopping farm trucks during harvest season without probable cause. MAWG has worked for several years with other farm organizations to advocate for this legislation.

“We need some protocol to prevent this from happening randomly, for no reason,” said Kleven, who is also an attorney. “Probable cause for the initial cause needs to be established, rather than just pulling people over to see if they’re breaking the law.”

The ongoing effects of the pandemic will cast a long shadow over the session.

“COVID is also going to be prominent during the session,” Kleven said, “not just in how they operate the building but how federal funds are distributed and the extent of the governor’s powers going forward. All of that will be in the mix this year.” 🌾

NAWG 2021 Priorities

In December 2020, the National Association of Wheat Growers, which represents 20 states, penned a letter to the incoming Biden administration highlighting the organization's policy priorities for 2021:

1. Recognizing the urgency in fighting COVID-19, NAWG implored Congress to appropriate \$1 billion in U.S. international food aid programs to help address an international food crisis not seen since World War II
2. NAWG urged the Biden administration to continue to seek assistance for growers through the USDA's Wildfires and Hurricanes Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) to help farmers who experienced yield loss from excessive moisture.
3. NAWG encouraged the administration to continue working with producers to grasp the changes in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) following the 2018 Farm Bill.
4. More than half of the nation's wheat supply is exported, and NAWG urged Biden to continue enforcing policies against trade-distorting domestic support policies and bring other countries into compliance.
5. NAWG urged the administration to resolve a dispute between the European Union and Airbus-Boeing after the EU imposed tariffs on non-durum wheat. The tariffs essentially closed wheat purchases, costing U.S. wheat farmers 400,000 metric tons sold annually – most of which affect hard red spring wheat grown in the Upper Midwest.



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INGRAINED IN MONTANA

By Shane Frederick
Ag Management Solutions

During her first day on the job working for U.S. Sen. Steve Daines of Montana in the spring of 2015, Alison Vergeront was touring the city of Great Falls, Mont., when a colleague insisted that she meet an important figure in the state's agricultural community.

"My co-worker was like, 'You need to meet Lola Raska. She's head of the state grain growers,'" Vergeront said.

The two indeed met that day, but little did they know that, within six years, Vergeront would be succeeding Raska as executive vice president of the Montana Grain Growers Association.

"When Lola called me last summer and told me she was retiring, I was almost in tears because I was like, 'You're such an integral part of agriculture, not just with the grain side but agriculture in general,'" Vergeront said. "She's very well respected in the ag community and just a wealth of knowledge with all ag policy."

During that phone call, Raska, who had been with MGGA for 21 years, including 14 as executive vice president, asked Vergeront to think about potential replacement candidates, but she might have been dropping a subliminal hint, too.

"It kind of just reverberated and stayed in my head: Is that something I would want to do? Would I even be qualified?" Vergeront said. "I really prayed about it and talked to my

husband and a few coworkers about it. So when I brought it up to Lola, she was like, 'This is music to my ears. As soon as I saw your name pop up on my phone, I was hoping that's why you were calling.' It felt like I always had her blessing from the beginning."

In November, MGGA announced Raska's retirement and Vergeront's hiring together, and after a few weeks of transition, Vergeront took the association's reins.

Vergeront says she never would have guessed she'd be in a position like the one she currently holds, although, she admitted, her high school friends often tell her she's exactly where they thought she'd be.

Embracing the challenge

Vergeront grew up on a farm near Polson in northwestern Montana. Homesteaded in 1910, her family's farm raised wheat, barley, alfalfa and cattle. Vergeront was active in 4-H and showed horses and hogs – "all the things that really just instilled that agriculture way of life," she said.

"Growing up, some of my best memories are on the back of a horse or in a combine or a tractor," she said.

But Vergeront eventually gravitated toward the policy side of agriculture. Her jobs included working in administrative support in the Montana state legislature, and in 2015 she joined Daines' staff as an agricultural liaison and field representative for central Montana. Daines had assignments on the ag and

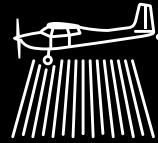


I love a good challenge, and I love learning and doing new things. I kind of feel like I'm back in college in that first month, drinking water out of a fire hose.



\$4

Montana's agriculture industry is valued at \$4 billion annually, driving the state's economy.



58.1

Montana is ranked second behind Texas with 58.1 million acres of farms and ranches.

finance committees, which offered Vergeront opportunities to work on the 2018 Farm Bill as well as trade policy.

"It just kind of expanded and deepened my already embedded love of agriculture," she said.

Vergeront spent most of her time on the ground in Montana instead of Washington, D.C., and that put her at many of the same events as Raska and the state's grain growers.

"So we were working on the same policy stuff," Vergeront said, "especially with the Farm Bill and various other programs – disaster relief, as well as other events with dignitaries being in the state, putting on round tables and really just bringing Washington to Montana and making sure the Montana voice was heard."

In many ways, her job hasn't changed all that much; she's just approaching things from a slightly different angle.

"In legislative talk, it was, 'Get it in before the cake is baked,'" Vergeront said. "I was there for the experience before the cake was baked and when the cake was baked. Now I'm serving the cake."

Vergeront comes to the MGGGA at a busy time. The Montana state legislature, which meets for 90 days every other year, is in session, and there's important information to relay to grain producers about COVID-19 and natural-disaster relief.

There's also membership recruitment and education as well as the MGGGA website and monthly magazine to update.

"It's a lot," she said. "But I love a good challenge, and I love learning and doing new things. I kind of feel like I'm back in college in that first month, drinking

water out of a fire hose."

Although she's hitting the ground running, she's also trying to take some time to stop and look around a bit. She wants to spend much of her first 90 days on the job getting the lay of the land, talking to officers and grower-directors and collecting as much information as she can to make sure she has the organization on the right path.

"By no means do I want to reinvent the wheel or steer us in the opposite direction," she said. "I hope that I can learn what the organization has already been doing and how we can strengthen that and deepen that, whether that's supporting research or education or

working with that next generation or any sort of membership benefit that we can do to support Montana's No. 1 industry?"

Even though she's not working on a farm, like the one she grew up on, she says she's come full circle.

"It takes all sorts of people to make agriculture work," Vergeront said. "From researchers to agronomists to mechanics for the all the machines to ag policy to membership recruitment and education, there's a job for anybody within agriculture."

"I've just been blessed from one opportunity to the other to be able to stay in this industry. It doesn't always pan out that way." 🌾

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Research Roundup

By Drew Lyon
Ag Management Solutions

The 2021 On-Farm Research Network Summit shifted to a virtual format, but researchers and farmers still managed to communicate their latest timely data across various phosphorus commodities. A full agenda delivered the latest in on-farm research covering flag-leaf fungicide, elevated P (Phosphorus) and K (Potassium) fertility, N (Nitrogen) losses in tile drainage, cover crops and more.

Agronomist and On-Farm Research Coordinator Melissa Carlson served as de-facto host and ran through slides showing 2020 wheat yield results and varieties, bringing real-world data to Upper Midwest growers. The Red Lake Falls location showed different yields among treatments at 90 percent, which Carlson attributed to greater weed pressure. Wheat protein didn't vary between varieties, she said.

"There was variation in responses but as far as the individual location, we didn't have significant differences (besides Red Lake Falls)," Carlson said.

Kyle Jore, a University of Minnesota research assistant, presented an economic analysis on how seeding rate affects tilling and yield. According to Jorge's research, estimates show an estimated increase of 100,000 seeds results in 7,000 fewer plants. The reliability of the research depends on the number of locations, he added.

"We got some interesting results," Jore said.

University of Minnesota Research Agronomist Dave Grafstrom presented on long-term elevated P and K fertility in a multi-year spring wheat crop rotation using data from his research farm. According to 2019 data, about 75 percent of the samples from northwest Minnesota sent into AGVISE were short on P. For K, closer to the Red River it was about 32 percent, and further east it went up to 81 percent.

"That information tells me that we do have some



Did you know?

Wheat production in NW Minnesota increased by 25% from 2007 to 2017, rising to an average of 65.8 bu/ac.

Northwest Minnesota soils: What we know

- Glacial Lake Agassiz is the origin of area soils
- Cold soils reduce nutrient uptake
- High pH soil can limit nutrient uptake
- A 50 bu soybean crop removes: 40# P205 and 70# K20
- An 80 bu soybean crop removes: 50#P and 30# K
- A 70-30-30 will not supply needed P&K, so plants will have to 'mine' soil to obtain P&K for high-yield goals



challenges with P and K with the soils we have here in northwest Minnesota,” Grafstrom said.

Plant growth is limited by the most-scarce elements, Grafstrom said.

“The goal is to provide both macros and micros in order to maximize yield and growth,” he said, adding, “but the pocketbook can get in the way.”

Grafstrom also advised growers to consider rotating soybeans into their wheat rotation, citing improvements in genetics and management. His research will continue in 2021.

“We know soybeans in the rotation improve yield,” he said, “There’s a lot of pluses from that rotation.”

Talking cover crops

The second half of the Summit consisted of a cover crop panel featuring three growers: Mikayla Tabert, Joe Breker and Robin Brekken. The trio discussed why they’re passionate about proponents of soil health. The panelists suggested farmers interested in cover crops should identify

“ This has been a wild ride. It’s a constant state of learning. Lots to learn, but it’s intriguing and fun. ”

—Robin Brekken, Grower

their goals, maturity levels and how much time they want to invest.

“Start small,” said Tabert, whose first seeded cover crop was only 35 acres. “You don’t have to plant the whole farm.”

Breker has farmed no-till for 40 years and said he’s enjoyed experimenting and watching his soil health flourish over the decades. Brekken, a Crookston grower who farms about 3,000 acres, has been growing organic crops for 20 years. He also hosts a research farm.

“This has been a wild ride,” he said. “It’s a constant state of learning. Lots to learn, but it’s intriguing and fun.”

The in-person On-Farm Research Network Summit is set to return in 2022. A full recap and recording of this year’s webinar are available at mnwheat.org. 🌾

Saluting our sponsors

The OFRN was sponsored by several farm groups, including the Minnesota Wheat Research & Promotion Council, the Minnesota Soybean Research & Promotion Council, the Agriculture Fertilizer Research and Education Council (AFREC) and Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Growth, Research, and Innovation Program (MDA-AGRI), respectively.

2021 OBJECTIVES FOR CROP AGRONOMIC EVALUATIONS

Grant Mehring, WestBred® Technical Product Manager, Northern Region

As a WestBred Wheat Technical Product Manager, I must be as prepared as I can to extract as much knowledge as I can from this season so I can provide sound agronomic advice to our growers. What types of notes or activities am I really looking to do in 2021 to keep moving forward?

Five Key Activities Planned for 2021

- **Variety Performance** – Foundational work for me in my role is taking notes on small- and large-scale plots on the varietal performance of WestBred wheat varieties and competitors.
- **Ergot** – I have plots all over, and with those plots brings the opportunity for more observations of ergot. I am targeting many diverse activities to improve my knowledge of ergot in 2021.
- **Bacterial Leaf Streak** – BLS notes are a cornerstone of my summer. For this year, I am planning to track infections earlier and watch the reaction of the disease through time at locations I can get to frequently.
- **Seed Treatment and Plant Stands** – We cannot predict what type of environment we will plant into. I plan to have a look at stand counts versus target-planting populations on more early-seeded wheat that is treated or untreated and track stand loss.
- **Yield Components** – On a few select trials, I want to have a look at variety yield components more in depth. Per each variety, I will count initial stand, number of heads (tillers) and seeds per spike. After harvest, I will get 1,000 kernel weight, trying to discover which yield component varieties are using to reach their yield potential.

Knowledge I gain from these evaluations in 2021 will be developed into sound management practices to help our growers remain productive and profitable. I look forward to working with you this season.

For additional information, contact Grant Mehring at 701-373-1591 or grant.mehring@bayer.com.

 WestBred

Performance may vary, from location to location and from year to year, as local growing, soil and weather conditions may vary. Growers should evaluate data from multiple locations and years whenever possible and should consider the impacts of these conditions on the grower’s fields. Bayer, Bayer Cross, WestBred and Design® and WestBred® are registered trademarks of Bayer Group. ©2021 Bayer Group. All Rights Reserved.





THE LOOK AHEAD

AG LEADERS OFFER 2021 OUTLOOK AT SMALL GRAINS UPDATE

By Drew Lyon and Kaelyn Platz
Ag Management Solutions

----- FEATURED PANELISTS -----



Tommy Grisafi
Risk Management Advisor



Joe Smentek
MSGA Executive Director



Amanda Bilek
MCGA Senior Public
Policy Director



Dr. Jared Goplen
UMN Extension Educator



Jim Anderson
UMN Spring Wheat Breeder



Dr. Grant Mehring
Wheat Technology
Product Manager

While corn, soybeans and wheat have their differences, there are many common aspects bringing these three commodities together. Most importantly, all are grown in Minnesota and share interests on many topics such as policy, weed resistance and crop rotations.

With this in mind, the Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers hosts its annual Small Grains Update Meeting to bring the three commodities together.

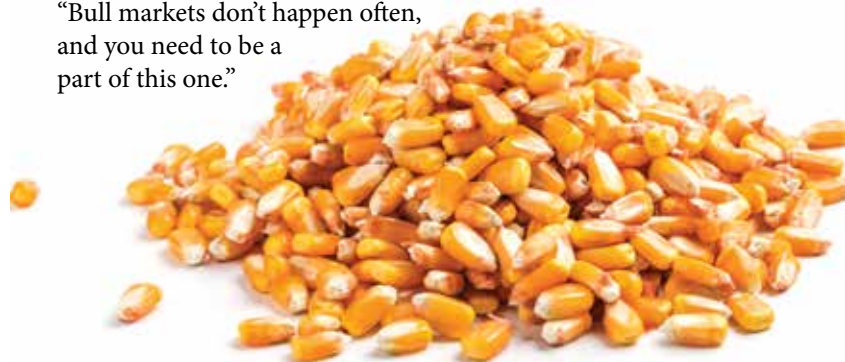
This year's meeting explored politics, markets and management practices – all common entities that affect these commodities. For the first time, this year's meeting was held virtually due to ongoing gathering restrictions. However, the virtual option gave many people the flexibility to be able to attend, and nearly 300 attendees participated in the meeting.

Bull rush

Following years of depressed commodity prices, Risk Management Adviser Tommy Grisafi said producers are

entering a “new modern bull market.” Since August, buoyed by favorable weather conditions and record exports following trade deals, soybean prices spiked nearly 60 percent and by mid-January stood at a seven-year high. Commodities across the board also are seeing price increases at the Board of Trade.

“It’s an interesting time to be in agriculture,” Grisafi said. “Bull markets don’t happen often, and you need to be a part of this one.”



Continued on Page 26

NW MN CURRENT 2021 CROP BUDGETS (PROJECTED)

Crop	Yield	Price	Gross Return	Expenses	Projected net return (NW MN)
Corn	165	\$3.70	\$633	\$545	\$88
Soybean	38	\$10.88	\$433	\$345	\$88
Wheat	65	\$5.84	\$391	\$362	\$29

The past year – one marked by a pandemic and a signed trade deal, among many other events – dramatically altered and improved the forecast for agriculture.

“Things have changed and the world is changing,” Grisafi said. “The demand picked up because the world has changed. The dollar has changed. Supply has changed. We have good demand and low supply, and that is the story of 2020.”

Grisafi advised producers to keep an eye on interest rates, which are at record lows but could rise in 2021 with little notice. Farmers should look into refinancing loans if eligible, he said.

“No one can help you more than you can help yourself,” he said. “In the end, it’s our job to feed the world. The future of ag is great, but you need to be great along with it.”

If past is prologue, Grisafi predicted the high prices won’t last forever. Growers should act accordingly, he said.

“I’m scared for long, sustained prices,” he said. “The party will be fun, but the hangover could be awful.”

A view from the Capitol

On the policy side, Minnesota Soybean Growers Association Executive Director Joe Smentek and Minnesota Corn Growers Association Senior Public Policy Director Amanda Bilek each gave updates on what to expect on the legislative front this year in St. Paul.

Following the start of the 2021 Legislative Session, Smentek presented an overview of the legislative structure in St. Paul, along with MSGA’s priorities for the year. After the 2020 election, Smentek said the rural-urban divide has grown even starker. Once again, Minnesota is the only state in the country with a split legislative body (Democrats control the House, while the Republicans maintain a Senate majority).

“Red is getting redder and blue is

getting bluer,” Smentek said.

Smentek said St. Paul’s farming representation has decreased steadily throughout the decades. In 1962, when MSGA was established, 63 state legislators also farmed. This session, only eight farmers (all in the House minority) make up part of the legislative body.

MSGA has a roster of legislative priorities this session. Topping the list is protecting agricultural interest in the state’s budget, given ag is the state’s second leading economic generator and accounts for roughly 25 percent of the state’s GDP.

“We’re also looking at making sure the state’s noxious weed programs remain funded, along with other Department

Corn Growers Association in its efforts to move to E15.

With COVID-19 still the primary focus in St. Paul, legislative meetings will resume with hybrid, in-person and virtual meetings for committee meetings. With a \$1.3 billion deficit for 2022-23, economic concerns are at the forefront during the legislative session.

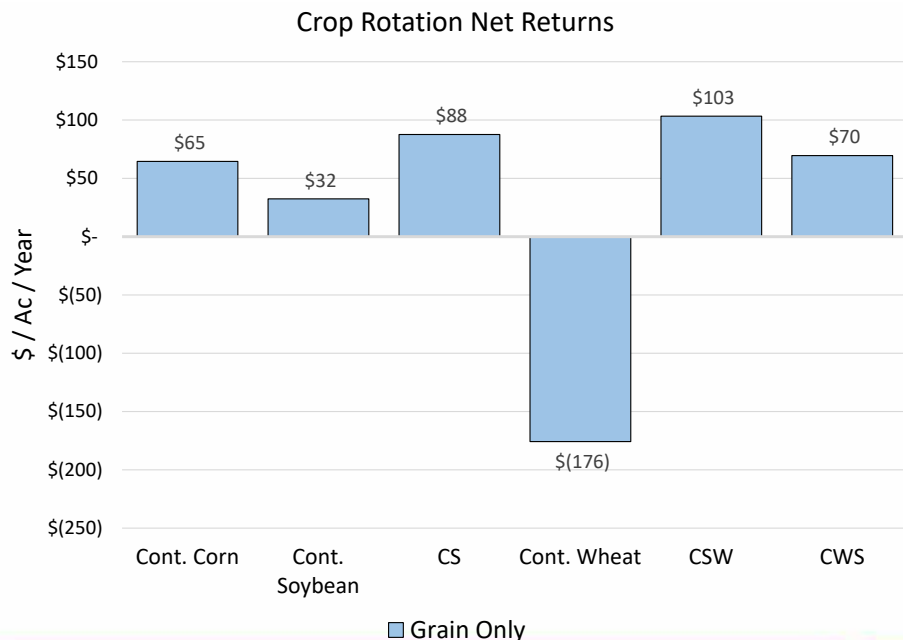
Crop rotation

University of Minnesota Extension educator Jared Goplen discussed the topic of crop rotation. He urged the audience to consider the benefits of implementing crop rotations.

Crop rotation reduces disease pressure as most diseases can survive on crop residue. Additionally, crop rotation can reduce insect pressure.

“Resistance isn’t going away,” Goplen said. “We need to think about how we can battle the resistance.”

From studies shown, corn only needs a one-year break to maximize yield; soybeans could benefit from more than a



of Ag programs that help our farmers,” Smentek said.

Smentek also said increasing the state’s use of biofuels and defending the biodiesel mandate, which helps add nearly \$1.7 billion to Minnesota’s economy, will remain a high priority. MSGA also supports the Minnesota

year break.

The ideal formula that came from the study was a rotation starting with corn, going to soybeans and the last rotation would consist of wheat. This resulted in a 7 percent yield increase in soybeans.

“As crop prices get better, you’re going to be able to make money without getting

fancy,” he said.

Another benefit of crop rotation was for livestock producers, as it would work out to spread manure during the summer months and serve as a cheap forage opportunity.

Yield potential

Jim Anderson, UMN spring wheat breeder, presented on the various breeds of wheat. The main components of each breed Anderson touched on were yield and protein content. He compared the yield data from these varieties in a scatter plot to help demonstrate what farmers should be looking for when planting.

Additionally, he compared straw strength, diseases, bacterial leaf streak, pre-harvest sprouting and picks utilizing different charts and graphs to help the audience analyze each variety.

On top of the discussion of comparing traits, Anderson highlighted the drop in wheat consumption.

“Wheat consumption is on the decline, and people are

avoiding gluten,” Anderson said.

With 1 percent of the population having celiac disease and others being sensitive to wheat, Anderson conducted advanced research analyzing genetic markers to help identify the causes to the sensitivity.

To close the meeting, Grant Mehring, wheat technology product manager at WestBred, presented about management considerations.

“Are you under-shooting your yield potential goal?” he asked. “Are you leaving yield on the table and are there practices you should be trying?”

He said these ideas are relatively inexpensive and give the opportunity to think strategically about your farm’s management decisions.

While this year’s Small Grains Update Meeting couldn’t be held in-person, it did bring insight to farmers and others across the state on how to work together, learn more about the commodities and increase one’s knowledge of management decisions that can benefit one’s farm. 🌾

“In the end, it’s our job to feed the world. The future of ag is great, but you need to be great along with it.”

— Tommy Grisafi, Risk Management Adviser

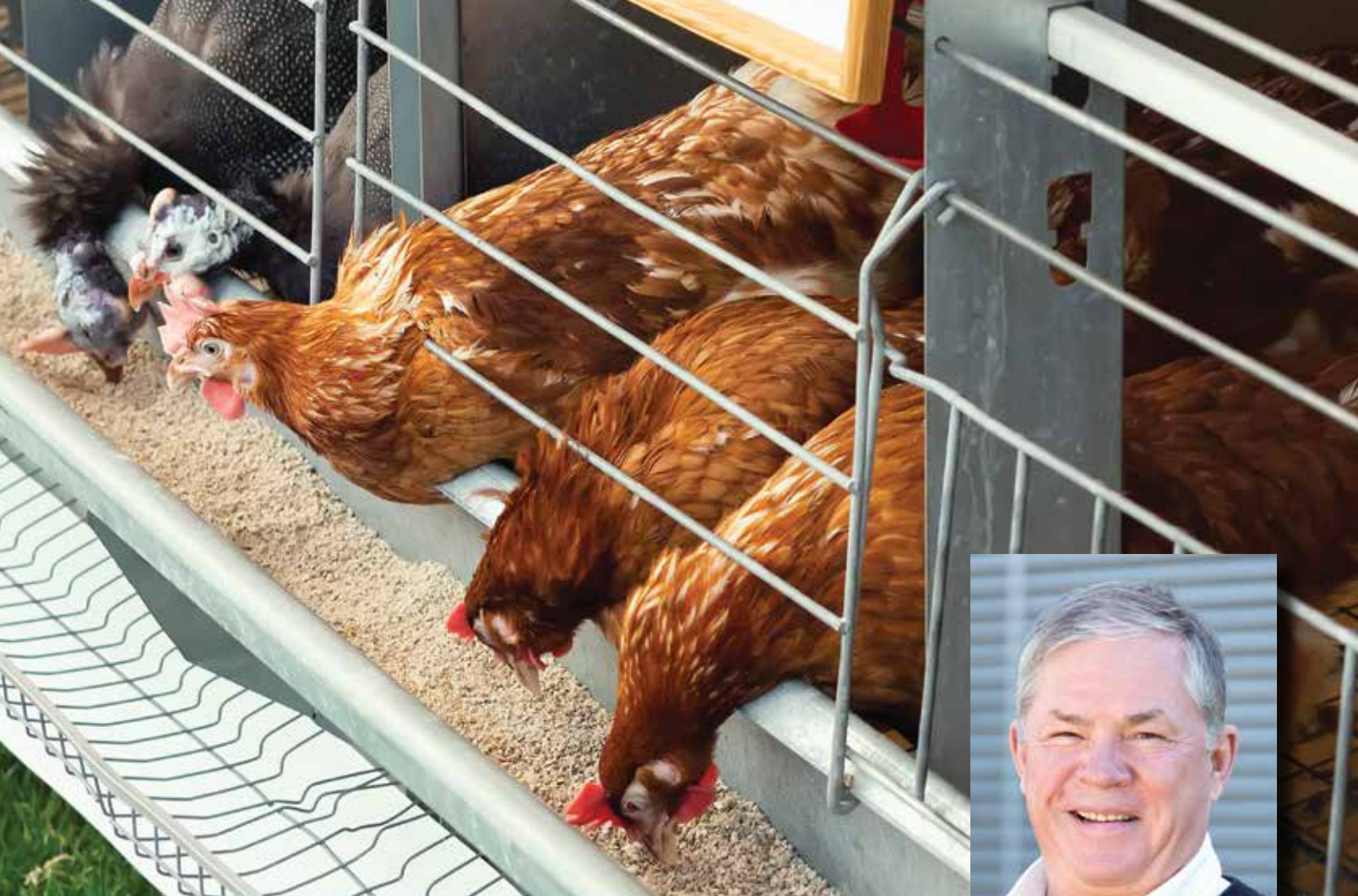
----- 12 WAYS TO INCREASE ONE’S WHEAT YIELD POTENTIAL -----

TOP 12

1. Plant certified seed
2. Plant the right variety
3. Treat seed with fungicide + insecticide, helping hedge against that planting environment
4. Check seed depth and calibration at planting
5. Use starter fertilizer to get seed off to the best possible start
6. Plant on seeds/acre not pounds/acre
7. Practice crop rotation
8. Aim for the optimal planting date
9. Soil test and fertilize to your yield and protein goals
10. Control weeds to avoid moisture, nutrient loss and diseases
11. Scout and apply fungicides and insecticides as needed
12. Keep wheat erect and not lodged

To view a recap, visit: mnwheat.org/growers/2021-small-grains-update-meeting/





NSM NUTRITIONIST HAS ‘WALKED THE WALK’

By **Shane Frederick**
Ag Management Solutions

Mike Langseth sounded like a coach whose roster received a boost from a midseason trade or free-agent signing.

“We’ve got a good team,” the Northern Soy Marketing board chair said. “They each bring something very different to the table, and Bob’s going to fit in well.”

Bob is Bob Swick, an expert in animal nutrition hired by Northern Soy Marketing (NSM) in the organization’s efforts to promote the benefits of soybeans grown in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota for animal feed.

Swick joins Peter Mishek, a marketer from Mishek Inc. & Associates, and Seth Naeve, an agronomist from the University of Minnesota, as NSM contractors.

“We’re excited to bring Bob on board,” Langseth said. “I think he’ll be able to help us better convey our soy quality message to our customers’ nutritionists. He can speak their language, and he will connect the soy quality work that Seth has done for us with the marketing that Peter has done.”

So it’s a Dream Team, of sorts?

“I think they’re really good,” Langseth said.

Mishek said with Swick, NSM has brought aboard one of the most-experienced nutritionists who knows Southeast Asia, having conducted feed trials and spoken to and developed relationships with buyers in that important market region for northern soybean growers.

“He’s kind of a star, if there was such a thing in terms of a nutritionist,” Mishek said. “He’s walked the walk. He knows

what’s involved and has tremendous credibility with customers. ... I don’t think you’d find anybody with more credibility.”

Originally from Chicago, Swick has lived abroad for the last 30 years, working for Novis International and, later, the American Soybean Association in Singapore for 20 years before being hired as a professor of animal nutrition at the University of New England in Armidale, Australia.

Armidale, where he still resides, is located about halfway between Sydney and Brisbane but three hours inland from the country’s east coast.

Swick, who has retired as a full-time professor, is still employed part time at the university, working with graduate students, and is the industry research coordinator for Poultry Hub Australia, an initiative of an Australian

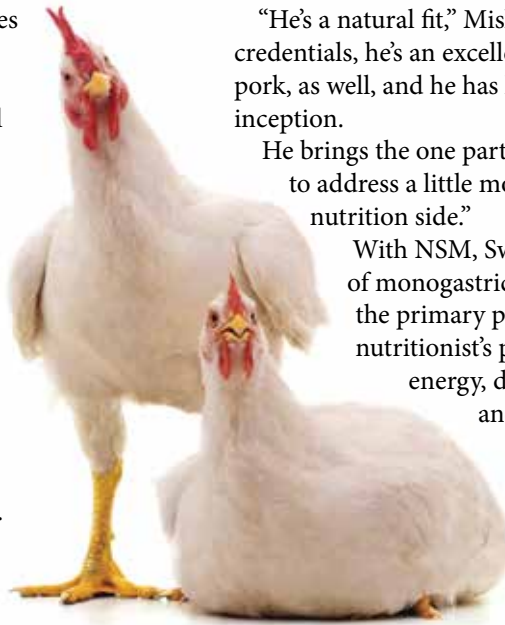


cooperative research center in which resources and information about commercial poultry production can be shared.

His current research interests are in animal energetics, protein and amino acid nutrition, nutrient metabolism and gut health.

“Throughout my whole career, I’ve focused mainly on poultry,” Swick said, “and to a lesser extent, pigs and aquaculture.”

Swick, who holds a bachelor’s degree in biology from Northern Illinois University and a master’s and doctorate in animal nutrition and toxicology from Oregon State University, began his career in the Nutrition Chemicals Division of Monsanto in St. Louis. Later, he moved to Singapore to become a product development manager for Novus before becoming ASA’s Technical Director for Poultry and Livestock. Swick has been a consultant with feed and livestock producers, oilseed crushers and nutritional chemical suppliers in Asia, South American and the United States. He has published more than 300 technical papers, bulletins, reports and journal articles and holds a patent on a novel grain preservation system.



“He’s a natural fit,” Mishek said. “He has impeccable credentials, he’s an excellent speaker, he knows poultry and pork, as well, and he has known about our project since our inception.

He brings the one part of the project that we probably need to address a little more aggressively, and that is the animal nutrition side.”

With NSM, Swick will help research the formulation of monogastric animal feed rations with soymeal as the primary protein source. He will give an animal nutritionist’s perspective on the economics of energy, digestible amino acids, sustainability and other items of feed value.

Swick said he’s already had conversations with Mishek and Naeve about the sucrose content of northern-grown soybeans and the potential value that might be there as well.

“We want to formulate different feed and see what value adds to the feed

cost,” Swick said.

“Now I’ve got a bit of work to do.”

For more information on Northern Soy Marketing, go to its website, soyquality.com. 🌾



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Regional Rival

Ag Innovation Campus breaks ground in NW Minnesota

By Shane Frederick
Ag Management Solutions

A first-of-its-kind crush facility under construction in northwest Minnesota could be a boon to the identity-preserved (IP) soy and specialty grains industry.

Ground was broken for the Ag Innovation Campus in October 2020, a 67,000-square-foot complex that will serve as a hub for the next generation of value-added processing. That could include IP field crops. The Campus, which will be located in Crookston, Minn., is on an ambitious schedule to begin production in late 2021.

Ag Innovation Campus (AIC) officials say the facility could be used to process IP soybeans and specialty grains, or to develop specific products for their farms and companies to offer.

“There are opportunities that this facility can bring the IP industry,” said Tom Slunecka, CEO of the Minnesota Soybean Research & Promotion Council, one of the AIC’s three founding members, along with the Minnesota Soybean Growers Association and

the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI). “The plant will serve as an incubator for agricultural innovation, with a goal to foster new and novel products.”

“There will be a lot of synergy that will come out of this facility.”

— Jim Lambert, AIC Project Manager

AIC will feature a specialty crushing facility that will allow public and private ag groups, such as commodity organizations, universities and seed developers, access to affordable processing that aims to lower costs while promoting growth of value-added products.

“AURI is excited to see the Ag Innovation Campus advance and become a resource for the agricultural industry and innovation ecosystem,” AURI Executive Director Shannon Schlecht said. “AURI has had a 30-year presence in Crookston and plans to have an office and laboratory presence at this new facility upon completion to capitalize on the synergies of the Ag Innovation Campus goals and AURI’s mission of fostering long-term economic benefit to MN through value-added agricultural products.”

No place like it

The aim is for the AIC to produce about 64,000 tons of soybean meal per year (240 tons per day), crushing approximately 28,000 bushels of soybeans per day. That adds up to 2.5 million bushels a year. The 15,600-square-foot crush facility will support three separate crushing lines that can be operated all on organic,

non-GMO or GMO soybeans as well as separately for different types of soybeans, such as the premium IP specialty crops contracted to food manufacturers in the U.S. and abroad.

Each line can be completely cleaned to avoid cross contamination with other lines, allowing for the segregation and



full traceability that U.S. IP producers take so much care to ensure. The AIC will also set aside time for processing small quantities of “research” soybeans.

“Having a facility that’s larger than just a testing crusher but smaller than building one’s own facility – if you run a small- to medium-sized business – can be very beneficial to IP growers and processors,” Specialty Soya and Grains Alliance’s Executive Director Eric Wenberg said, “especially those located in the Red River Valley region, which

is home to one of the largest supplies of food-grade soy in the world.”

In 2018, the Council invested checkoff funds in a feasibility study to support a regional soybean crush and research facility in northwest Minnesota. The 11 counties in and around Crookston harvested more than 50 million bushels of soybeans in 2019.

That same year, the Minnesota Legislature approved \$5 million in state funding toward the AIC in a bipartisan omnibus agriculture finance bill signed by Gov. Tim Walz. Funds were released to the AIC in September of 2020, and the official groundbreaking took place in a ceremony on the AIC’s 10-acre site on Oct. 28.

Walz, who attended the groundbreaking, called the AIC “bold,” adding, “There’s no place in the world that has something like this.”

Once fully in operation, the AIC is projected to support 60 jobs and feature state-of-the-art laboratory and classroom space for hands-on agriculture production and technology training, and will be open for tours with a biosafe observatory from which visitors can see

processing in real time.

“There will be a lot of synergy that will come out of this facility,” AIC Project Manager Jim Lambert said. “(The AIC) is really more of an agricultural business incubator than anything. ... There are a lot of good things going on here.”🌾



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