

Turfgrass Seed Production Research in Northern Minnesota

By **Eric Watkins**

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My grandfather was born in 1922 near Warroad, Minnesota, on a farm his father had settled shortly before. In the 1930s, a New Deal program called the Beltrami Island Project resulted in the relocation of his family, along with several others, from their property. Some of the displaced stayed nearby, others left. My grandfather’s family, along with their house and barn, moved to Kerkhoven in west-central Minnesota. When I was growing up, my grandfather spoke fondly of his time in Warroad—adventures involving bears grabbed most of our attention. My grandparents would make the trek north to Warroad almost every summer to visit old friends from his youth, pick wild blueberries, and hack their way through the woods to find the foundations of the farmhouse and barn my great grandfather built.

As a turfgrass researcher, I am also a regular visitor to Roseau County, Minnesota, the same county where my grandfather was born. The cold, unforgiving winters combine with just the right amount of daylight and rainfall during the summer to provide an excellent environment in which turfgrass seed can be produced. Grass seed fields now cover vast acreages near Roseau and Warroad. Seed production in this region is somewhere in the range of 30,000-40,000 acres (this still pales in comparison to Oregon and Washington where grass seed production is much higher).

The first major production of grass seed in Minnesota was ‘Park’ Kentucky bluegrass beginning in the mid-1950s. During the 1990s, research at the University of Minnesota resulted in the introduction of perennial ryegrass seed production, which is now the dominant species produced in Roseau and Lake of the Woods Counties. In recent years, we’ve seen



Research trials at the Magnusson Research Farm.

PHOTO: JOAN BARRETO ORTIZ

some tall fescue seed production and our team at UMN has explored fine fescue seed production.

Each June, researchers from the University put on a grass seed field day where they highlight completed and ongoing research for grass seed growers. The field day is held at the Magnusson Research Farm near Roseau, a facility that provides space for important grass seed production research.

The grass seed producers, represented by the Minnesota Turf Seed Council, are great supporters of research at the University of Minnesota. Research in Roseau has been ongoing for decades, and every year results are summarized in an annual research report; these reports can be found at <https://turf.umn.edu/research/seed-production>. Turfgrass seed production research at Roseau is currently focused on perennial ryegrass and the fine fescues.

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Recognize a Deserving MCIA Member!

MCIA members are encouraged to submit nominations for the Honorary Premier Seed Grower, Premier Seed Grower, and Achievement in Crop Improvement awards, which will be presented during the MCIA Annual Meeting in January.

If you know a producer, seed conditioner, or supporter of MCIA deserving of recognition, or if you have questions about nomination requirements, please contact Roger Wippler at 1-800-510-6242 or by e-mail at wippl002@umn.edu.



Chairman's View

Brad Barth, Board Chair

Fall is my favorite time of year, not only for the cooler weather but also because it is the time to harvest the fruits of our yearly labor. For the past year, we have been planning and researching crops, inputs, and markets.

Harvest is the culmination of all the decisions made during this past year. Did I make good decisions or poor decisions? Will I learn from these decisions? Whether they were good or bad decisions, they are always a learning opportunity.

If you are like me, you probably make as many poor decisions as you do good ones. Sometimes the poor outweigh the good, but it usually takes only a few good decisions to overcome and forget about all the bad. Babe Ruth was a home run king, but he also was a bigger strikeout king, but no one remembers him for that. It seems best to relish the wins and learn from the losses.

Fall is a busy time on the farm, and I just want to remind all of you to be extra vigilant and extra safe this harvest season. Nothing is more important than safety for you, your loved ones, and your employees.

MCIA is planning the 2024 Annual Meeting and it should be an excellent one. Save the date: January 24, 2024. There will be a new venue, a new schedule, and some great speakers and panel discussions. If you haven't been to one of these meetings in the past, this will be the year to attend.

I would like to take a little time to welcome the staff members recently hired at MCIA: Sarah Lindblom and Tessa Parks in Organic Services, and Kate Sinnott in the Seed Laboratory. I am sure you will find working with the members and staff of MCIA to be rewarding.

2023 was a challenging year for all and I am sure we all made a few mistakes, but I hope everyone also hit a few "home runs" and had a prosperous year.

Staff News

Minnesota Crop Improvement Association is pleased to announce three recent additions to our staff.

Sarah Lindblom joined the Organic Services department in June in the role of organic certification specialist/inspector. Sarah holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, with a double major in management and human resources and international business. Sarah has been a farm owner since 2015, and for nearly ten years had a 40-member CSA. She regularly implements innovative soil health practices, including cover cropping, no-till, crop diversification, and perennial planting over a one-acre production area.

She is also the board chair of the Crow River Chapter of the Sustainable Farming Association (SFA). In that role, Sarah advises farmers on how to improve soil health and sustainability practices, speaks at SFA events, and creates farmer-facing informational materials. Sarah's prior work experience includes teaching middle school math. [QR](#)



Sarah Lindblom

Also in June, the Organic Services department welcomed an additional organic certification specialist/inspector, **Tessa Parks**.

Tessa and her spouse have a small cattle and hay operation in southeast Minnesota where they raise steers from calf to butcher for direct market retail. They rent just over 25 acres of certified organic pasture and hay ground, which has given Tessa first-hand experience with organic regulations and the inspection process.



Tessa Parks

Tessa holds a bachelor's degree in chemistry from St. Olaf College. Her prior work experience includes employment as a chemist at Aurora Pharmaceutical. Tessa serves as a board member of the Just Food Co-op in Northfield and is the current Rice County Vice President of the Minnesota Farmers' Union. [QR](#)

Kate Sinnott joined the staff of the MCIA Seed Laboratory in August in the role of seed technologist. Kate's education includes a bachelor's degree in linguistics from Macalester College, undergraduate coursework in biology at the University of Northern Iowa, and an M.S. in ecology from Utah State University. Her master's research was on increasing capacity for the restoration of submerged and floating aquatic plants in the Intermountain West. Kate worked as a research assistant at Utah State University and the Tallgrass Prairie Center in Iowa, where she gained experience in seed-based ecosystem restoration. She has also performed seed germination and tetrazolium tests.

Kate has a special passion for native seed species. She has propagated over 30 native prairie species from seed and cuttings. At the Tallgrass Prairie Center, she assisted in maintaining dozens of native prairie plants in grow-out plots. [QR](#)



Kate Sinnott



President's Corner

Fawad S. Shah, MCIA President/CEO

Twelve Days of Fun

The Minnesota State Fair is one of the oldest traditions in Minnesota and is still thriving.

The history of the Minnesota State Fair dates back to 1859, when the inaugural fair was organized by the Minnesota Agricultural Society. The fair's primary purpose was to champion Minnesota's agriculture, featuring a diverse range of activities, exhibitions, and events. Today the fair spans twelve days and is often referred to as the "twelve days of fun." Throughout its evolution, the fair's location changed, each time highlighting various facets of Minnesota's agricultural heritage in different cities. In 1885, the fair found a permanent home in Saint Paul when Ramsey County generously donated a 210-acre farm that came to be known as the "fairgrounds." This marked a significant step in establishing the fair's lasting presence.

The Minnesota Crop Improvement Association traces its origin back to the Minnesota State Fair where, in 1903, the first organizational meeting of what would become MCIA was held. Serving as the state's sole seed certifying agency, MCIA engages in a wide range of services, including seed and organic certification and foundation seed production. Collaborating closely with the University of Minnesota's Agricultural Experiment Station, the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resources and other Minnesota state agencies, MCIA's programs and services contribute directly to both the state and national economies.

Recognizing the unique opportunity presented by the Minnesota State Fair, the MCIA staff and the MCIA Board of

Directors perceives it as an ideal platform to showcase certified seed, raise awareness about MCIA and its offerings, and facilitate educational engagement. At the heart of this effort is the Minnesota Certified Seed booth, which features a display of diverse seed crops alongside educational materials and engaging trivia focused on seeds and agriculture. The most rewarding experience of this endeavor is MCIA's direct interaction with fair attendees who visit the booth and gain firsthand insight into certified seed and an understanding of the food supply chain.

MCIA's involvement in the state fair extends further by encouraging growers to submit samples of the certified seed they have produced and conditioned. These samples are part of the certified seed contest. A panel of judges with diverse backgrounds reviews lab test results and visually evaluates the seed samples to determine top honors. MCIA proudly serves as both a member of the judging panel and a sponsor of this competition.

Participation in the Minnesota State Fair allows MCIA to enhance its visibility. With approximately 2 million visitors attending the State Fair each year, the event presents a unique opportunity to engage with fairgoers and provide insights into seeds, food production, and agriculture. Overall, it raises awareness about MCIA, its various programs, collaboration with state and regional organizations and its efforts to advance Minnesota's seed and agricultural industries. For all these reasons, MCIA's staff and its Board of Directors are dedicated and committed in their support of this great Minnesota tradition.

ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE

MCIA will hold its Annual Meeting on Thursday, January 24, 2024, at the Holiday Inn and Suites in St. Cloud. Official proceedings will all occur in one day. The business meeting, informational presentations, trade show, and awards luncheon will begin in the morning and conclude in the afternoon.

CALL FOR RESOLUTIONS

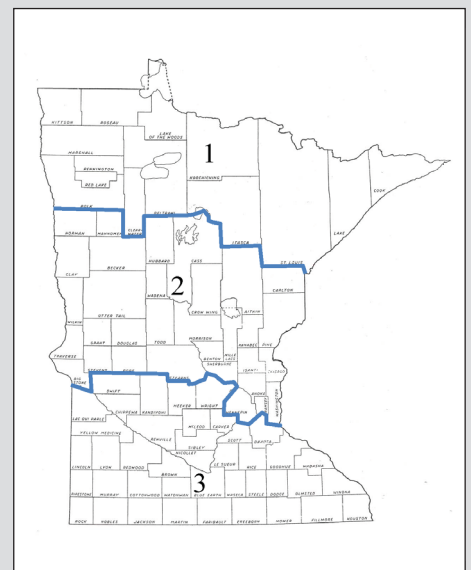
A draft of any resolution to be considered by the MCIA Legislative and Public Affairs Committee and forwarded to the floor of the annual meeting must be received by MCIA no less than 14 days prior to the meeting.

MCIA BOARD POSITIONS OPEN

MCIA is seeking candidates for three positions on the MCIA Board of Directors. The following seats are open: District 2, District 3, and Related Industry. The District 2 seat is currently vacant; two years remain on the term. The District 3 seat is currently held by Kelsey Henke, who is seeking re-election. The Related Industry seat is currently held by Denise Thiede, who is not eligible for re-election.

To propose agenda items or resolutions for the annual meeting, or to nominate someone to serve on the board of directors, or to inquire about serving on the board, please contact Fawad Shah at fawad.shah@mncia.org or call the MCIA office.

MCIA BOARD DISTRICTS



Lab Report

Chase Mowry, Seed Laboratory Manager



For us at the Seed Laboratory, as for many of you, I'm sure, the summer months seemed to just fly by. We have been busy this summer conducting training, calibrating lab equipment, participating in proficiency testing, and stocking supplies for the upcoming season.

Grass samples submitted for testing have remained steady these past few months, with the number of samples about two weeks ahead of last year. This has

kept us quite busy and has provided the opportunity to do some more hands-on training. We have also received several germ updates on small grain crops, and more recently winter grain samples submitted for completing certification. Preliminary germ tests have shown some *Fusarium* (scab) infection, to varying degrees, with the most significant presence found in rye.

In the upcoming months, we will continue staff training in the laboratory as well as on campus with soybean field inspections and the evaluation of soybean grow-out plots. There are also several accreditation items in need of completion before the influx of samples this fall.

As a reminder, please complete a Sampling Report when submitting your samples. Be sure to provide all pertinent information, including crop year, as this will dictate if a prechill is necessary for certain species.

Field Notes

Kris Folland, Field Services Manager



Friendly reminders for soybean growers: Soybean inspections are conducted when the field has 75 percent leaf-drop or greater. Communication with your MCIA field supervisor is very important. We will certainly be in contact with growers to ensure timely and accurate inspections.

If you have any information you would like to share regarding your seed production fields or if you are getting close to harvest and have not received confirmation of the status of your field inspection, please give your field supervisor a call. We enjoy hearing from you, and it helps us keep up with the maturity of the many seed fields across the state.

There is still time to apply for soybean field inspections for all classes of certified seed and for any soybeans needing inspection to company field and seed purity standards.

As always, we sincerely wish you a safe and bountiful harvest.

2023 Minnesota State Fair Certified Seed Champions



WHEAT

Conditioner: **C & S Habstritt**, Roseau
Grower: **Chuck and Scott Habstritt**, Roseau

OAT

Conditioner: **Falk Seed**, Murdock
Grower: **Jim Falk**, Murdock

BARLEY

Conditioner: **Capistran Seed**, Crookston
Grower: **Wayne Capistran**, Crookston

TURF & FORAGE

Conditioner: **Northern Excellence Seed**, Williams
Grower: **Hagen Farms**, Gatzke

SOYBEAN

Conditioner: **Werner Seed Company**, Dundas
Grower: **Paul and Martin Werner**, Dundas

Winter Grains Directory Published

MCIA has published the 2023 edition of our annual *Winter Grains Directory*. Growers can use the *Winter Grains Directory* to identify sources of certified and registered rye, triticale, winter barley, and winter wheat seed. The *Winter Grains Directory* includes crop variety descriptions as well as producer location and contact information.

Additionally, the *Winter Grains Directory* includes information on the availability of rye and winter wheat foundation seed from Minnesota and our neighboring states.

To view or download the digital edition of the *Winter Grains Directory*, visit the Publications page of the MCIA website: www.mncia.org/publications. To request a printed copy, please contact the MCIA office.



Organic Corner

Michelle Menken, Organic Services Manager



We are busy finishing the last of this year's crop and livestock inspections. We have about 25 files left to send out to inspectors and plan to get those out in the next two weeks. We will also be working on getting handler files out to inspectors so they can start setting up fall handler inspections.

We also continue working through final reviews and certificates for 2023. If you have received a bill for the inspection, please pay as soon as possible. We do start final reviews on those who have paid first. Let us know if you need a certificate or Letter of Good Standing to make a sale. Remember, if you have a 2022 certificate, it is still valid, and you can make sales using it until you get the 2023 certificate. Certificates are valid until they are surrendered, suspended, or revoked. If you or your buyer have questions about this, contact the office.

The Cost-Share rebate program is now accepting applications. You can apply to get 75 percent of the certification costs back, up to \$750 per scope. You can apply through the Minnesota, Wisconsin, or North Dakota departments of agriculture, or through your local FSA office. The rebate is offered on costs paid for certification between October 1, 2022, and September 30, 2023.

Our new staff members, Tessa Parks and Sarah Lindblom, have taken the IOIA (International Organic Inspectors Association) basic inspector training and will be going out on some inspections this fall for additional training. Lauren Martin and Shauna Ilse will be taking the basic processor inspector training at the end of September. We still have to collect more samples and complete more unannounced inspections, so you may see us on your farm yet this fall. We collect samples from 5 percent of our clients each year.

We appreciate your cooperation throughout the year and if you have any questions, please let us know.

For more information about the Minnesota Organic Cost Share Program, including eligibility requirements and applications, please visit the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's webpage on the topic: <https://www.mda.state.mn.us/orgcertcostshare>.

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Perennial ryegrass

Perennial ryegrass is a major focus of the research program at Roseau. Led by Dr. Nancy Ehlke and Donn Vellekson in the Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics, researchers work to determine best management practices for perennial ryegrass seed production. Growers are interested in learning more about fertilization, plant growth regulation, and new pesticides. Several UMN-developed cultivars are grown for seed in northern Minnesota, including 'Arctic Green,' 'Green Emperor,' and 'Royal Green.'



PHOTO: UMN TURF GRASS SCIENCE

Research at the Magnusson Farm includes studies to determine the optimum time to swath ryegrass for maximum yield and seed quality.

Fine Fescues

The fine fescues are a group of fine-leaved grasses that do well in shade or sun, and generally have fewer input requirements than more commonly used grasses like Kentucky bluegrass. There are five primary fine fescues: strong creeping red fescue, slender creeping red fescue, Chewings fescue, hard fescue, and sheep fescue. For the past several years, we have been working on a new potential variety of hard fescue we refer to as 'MNHD.' In addition to variety development, other ongoing research includes how to best establish hard fescue in northern Minnesota seed fields.

The decades-long collaboration between the turfgrass seed producers and the University of Minnesota has been a true partnership. I look forward to continuing this work and seeing this region continue to have a growing impact on the turfgrass industry.

Editor's note: This article is adapted from a previously published University of Minnesota blog post. For more, visit turf.umn.edu.

Save the Date: January 24, 2024



Annual Meeting
Holiday Inn & Suites, St. Cloud

www.mncia.org/annual-meeting



THE MINNESOTA SEED GROWER Vol. 95 No. 3
 Fall 2023 (Pub# 352240) is published quarterly by
 MCIA, 1900 Hendon Ave, Saint Paul MN 55108.
 Periodical postage paid at Saint Paul, MN and
 additional mailing offices.

PERIODICAL

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO
 THE MINNESOTA SEED GROWER
 1900 HENDON AVE
 SAINT PAUL MN 55108

The Minnesota Seed Grower
 quarterly newsletter of the
 Minnesota Crop Improvement Association
 1900 Hendon Avenue, Saint Paul, Minnesota

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Mission Statement

Minnesota Crop Improvement Association is an organization dedicated to improving the productivity, profitability, and competitive position of producers, processors, and distributors of agricultural products by providing services to enable them to provide high-quality products to Minnesota, the United States, and the world.

Improving your process • Enhancing your products • Increasing your profits

CALENDAR

OCTOBER

24–26 National Organic Standards Board Meeting, Sacramento, CA

NOVEMBER

1 ASTA Forage, Turf, and Conservation Seed Conference, Kansas City, MO
 9 Minnesota Ag & Food Summit, Minneapolis
 15 MCIA Board Meeting, Saint Paul
 17–18 South Dakota Local Foods Conf., Sioux Falls, SD
 23–24 MCIA Office Closed
 26–27 Iowa Organic Conference, Iowa City, IA

DECEMBER

5–9 ASTA Crop Seed Conference, Orlando, FL
 13–14 Prairie Grains Conference, Grand Forks, ND
 25–26 MCIA Office Closed
 29 MCIA Office Closed

JANUARY

1 MCIA Office Closed
 15 MCIA Office Closed
 24 MCIA Annual Meeting

For more event information visit www.mncia.org.