Dahlco Seeds Receives Achievement in Crop Improvement Award

Kevin, Duane, and Craig Dahlman of Dahlco Seeds, Cokato, are the 2020 recipients of the Minnesota Crop Improvement Association, Achievement in Crop Improvement Award. The three brothers not only own and operate a well-respected seed production and conditioning business, but they have also dedicated much time and effort to their local community and other organizations. The award was presented at the MCIA Annual Meeting held January 8 in Fergus Falls.

The brothers are equal partners and are the third generation to own and operate the family seed business. Seed corn has been a cornerstone of the business since their grandparents, Albin and Frieda Dahlman, began producing Minnesota 13 corn in 1922. Working alongside their father, Stanley, the Dahlman brothers grew up producing certified seed. In addition to seed corn, the family also produced soybeans, wheat, oats, barley, and rye.

After attending college, each of the sons returned home to join in the farming and seed operation. In the late 1980s, they purchased the business from their father. Over the years, the brothers have focused on seed corn. Each one of them has specific responsibilities, but working together they produce a product of which the entire family can be proud.

In 2009, the Dahlmans sold the retail side of the operation to AgReliant Genetics to concentrate on the wholesale seed business. In 2019, they partnered with Western Integrated Seeds of Nebraska, which broadens the maturity range of the corn hybrids they can offer to their customers.

Today the Dahlmans grow, process, and package a wide variety of traited and conventional seed corn hybrids for the wholesale market. They continue to make improvements to their MCIA-approved seed conditioning facility to meet the demands of an ever-changing seed industry. The seed they produce is distributed in the U.S., Canada, and Europe.

Lifelong MCIA members, the Dahlmans have served the seed industry well throughout the years. Duane is a past board chairman and a long-tenured MCIA board member. Kevin has served as president of the Independent Professional Seedsman Association. The brothers have also found time to serve a variety of state and local ag related organizations.

All three—Craig, Kevin, and Duane—have supported area youth by dedicating time to 4-H clubs, local athletic programs, and the area FFA chapter. In addition to supporting community functions, they have also gladly served their local church in a variety of ways.

These three individuals have worked together their entire lives. First, to learn the art of seed corn production. Then, to continue to build and enhance their seed enterprise. The legacy of quality and integrity that was begun by their grandfather, and carried on by their father, is still an important part of this family business.

Upon accepting the award, Kevin, speaking on behalf of his brothers, noted that the involvement and support of their wives and children have been very important to the success of the Dahlco seed business. He ended by saying, “The Dahlman family have been proud to be seed producers and part of MCIA for many years. We thank you for this honor!”

The award was sponsored by the Farm Progress Companies, publisher of The Farmer magazine. Paula Mohr, editor of The Farmer magazine, made the presentation.
MCIA Presents Premier and Honorary Premier Seedsman Awards

Darius Thiel, of Wendell, truly enjoys producing and cleaning certified seed. For over 35 years, he has farmed and operated an approved seed conditioning facility in Grant County. Darius is the third generation to manage Thiel Seed Service, which was started in the 1940s by his father and grandfather. As a youth, he recalls fields as small as 5 acres of the newest varieties of barley, oats, and wheat. Today his seed production consists of wheat and soybeans.

For Darius, growing up in the seed business provided a variety of jobs. One of his first was to operate the hand crank on the manual tag printer. Then, he attached those tags to burlap bags of seed using the small metal seal from MCIA. Later, he could be found walking a foundation field of Era wheat pulling wild mustard. Another job was bagging seed after school. During the 1970s, there were days when two semi-loads of wheat would be cleaned every day.

Along with some very good help from his two employees and his wife, Terri, the primary bookkeeper, Darius is still running the seed plant. Most seed is now handled in bulk containers. However, when bagging is necessary, Darius is often the guy to do it. In the early years, much of the winter was spent custom cleaning seed for neighbors—cleaning varieties like Marshall wheat, Morex barley, and Swift soybeans. Today, there is very little custom cleaning, as much of their effort is spent conditioning certified wheat seed and contracted soybean production.

An MCIA board member for the past four years, and a member of the Approved Facilities committee, Darius is very familiar with MCIA. His father, Robert, served as president of the MCIA board in the late 1960s. At that time, the annual family vacation was often part of the MCIA summer board meeting.

A member of the Minnesota wheat, soybean and corn grower associations, Darius values these organizations for their efforts in market development, promotion, and support of Minnesota farmers. He has also served his local community as a volunteer firefighter, secretary of the Wendell Farmers Elevator, and an elder in the local church.

Darius and Terri have two children, and, when not in the seed plant, they enjoy spending time with their eight grandchildren. Darius also enjoys gardening and growing apple, pear, and apricot trees. More recently he is trying his hand at brewing beer.

As someone who appreciates what it takes to produce high quality seed from the field to the bag, it is appropriate that Darius now joins his father as an MCIA Premier Seedsman.

In accepting the award, Darius said, “I grew up in a family that’s been involved with MCIA. My father worked with some your fathers. I am truly honored to receive this recognition today.”

Mike Zabel, of Plainview, is the third generation to operate Zabel Seeds. Mike’s grandfather Arnold and Arnold’s brother Clarence began producing seed in the 1940s, growing small grains. From an early age, Mike has participated in many activities relating to the seed business, from walking soybean fields to roguing grain fields. Today, he continues a family tradition of producing and conditioning high-quality, certified seed.

Encouraged to gain experience by working off the farm, Mike had a four-year stint at Best Buy and a little time selling radio ads. In 1992, Mike returned to the family farm, working with his uncle Edward and his father, David. His responsibilities in the seed business included operating the seed plant, seed sales, and record keeping. As his involvement grew, he looked for opportunities to improve the enterprise. One of Mike’s first goals was to computerize the seed sales records. By the early 2000s, Mike was taking care of most aspects of the seed business, as his uncle Edward had been battling cancer.

Over the years, Mike has made several changes to the seed plant, remodeling the building, adding a new, larger seed cleaner, and, recently, a new spiral separator. A big part of his operation is producing and conditioning oat and barley seed, nearly all of which is packaged in paper bags. Recognizing the need to increase efficiency and preserve his own health, he researched automated palletizing systems. In 2016, after doing much of the preliminary engineering, equipment procurement, and electrical work, a
robotic palletizer was up and running. Mike believes this to be one of the single best investments he has ever made.

Mike has found numerous ways to become involved with and serve agriculture, including a term as president and member of the MCIA Board of Directors. He is a member of the Southeast Minnesota Forage Council and the Minnesota corn and soybean grower groups. He is also a board member of his local corn growers’ organization and the Zabel farm has been a site for corn production research by the University of Minnesota and USDA. Mike also cooperated with Regional Extension Educators to evaluate the use of fungicides as a management tool for oat producers.

Mike is a very active member of his local church, including roles on various boards, and as a Sunday school teacher, website developer, musician, and singer. Locally, he also serves as a Township Supervisor, and on the High Plains Cooperative Board, and the Wabasha County Extension Committee.

Mike noted upon receiving the award, “I enjoy working in the seed business and being involved with MCIA. Thank you for this honor.”

Paula Mohr, Editor of The Farmer magazine, has spent over 30 years covering state and national agricultural issues. An award-winning writer, she has dedicated her career to informing, educating, and entertaining readers both on and off the farm.

As a youngster growing up on a dairy farm in Michigan, Paula didn’t envision a career in ag journalism. In fact, the journalism course she took in high school was selected so she could be in the same class as her cousins. With guidance and encouragement from her teacher, Paula began writing more and more. By the time she graduated, she was editor of the high school paper and destined for the writing profession.

Paula attended Michigan State University to pursue a journalism degree. After her sophomore year, she decided to take an ag journalism course. She was encouraged by her brother who said, “you could write for Hoard’s Dairyman,” an essential magazine on the family farm. The change in majors added more science and agriculture classes, and more time to complete her degree. While in college, she worked for the college newspaper and as photographer for the yearbook.

With a BS degree in agricultural communications she began her career as a reporter/photographer for the local newspaper in Cadillac, Michigan. Paula then moved to Minnesota where she became associate editor for Farm Journal’s Dairy Today magazine. After 20 years reporting on issues related to the dairy industry, Paula became editor of The Farmer magazine.

She didn’t realize at the time what an important publication The Farmer was to many Minnesotans. Throughout her tenure as editor she has heard from people who recalled the magazine and its importance to their farm family. For well over 100 years The Farmer has provide news and information on a wide variety of agricultural issues.

From Hallock to Harmony, Paula has traveled to all corners of Minnesota to tell the varied stories of agriculture. Numerous times, she has shared stories about MCIA and its members. She most enjoys the opportunity to visit the farms and hear farmers tell their stories of success and inspiration, failure and persistence. She believes everyone has a story to tell if you just take the time to listen.

Learning has been a constant in her career and she truly enjoys opportunities that broaden her knowledge of agriculture. She is a graduate of the Minnesota Ag and Rural Leadership program and is involved with the Farm Bureau and Farmers Union organizations.

In her free time, Paula volunteers at the Oliver Kelly Farm and serves on the Minnesota FFA Foundation board. She also enjoys quilting, biking, ringing handbells at church, and traveling.

In recognition of her strong support of MCIA and agriculture, we add Paula Mohr’s name to the list of honorary Premier Seedsman.

After receiving the award, Paula thanked MCIA and those attending, saying, “I enjoy being involved in agriculture and this award means a lot to me as it comes from my readers.”

The Honorary Premier Seedsman Award, presented annually since 1930, recognizes individuals not directly involved in the seed industry but who have actively supported the seed industry, the Minnesota Crop Improvement Association, and their local community.
MCIA Board of Directors Election Results

At the 117th MCIA Annual Meeting, convened in Fergus Falls on January 8, 2020, two new members were elected to the MCIA Board of Directors: Brent Benike, General Manager, Northern Excellence Seed, of Williams, Minnesota, and Grant Mehring, Technical Product Manager, WestBred Wheat, Bayer Crop Science, of Fargo, North Dakota. Benike represents District 1; Mehring fills a related industry seat. Matt Bohn, related industry, Nancy Ehrike, University of Minnesota, and Darius Thiel, District 2, were reelected.

The board directors subsequently re-elected all of the incumbent officers to serve another one-year term leading the board.

A complete list of current board members follows:

OFFICERS
Kurt Flegel, Benson, Chairman
Bob Ehlers, Barrett, Vice Chairman
Duane Dahlman, Cokato, Secretary
Darius Thiel, Wendell, Treasurer

DIRECTORS
Brad Barth, Thief River Falls; Brent Benike, Williams; Matt Bohn, Breckenridge; Nancy Jo Ehrike, UMN; Nat Forster, Hastings; Grant Mehring, Fargo, ND; Denise Thiede, St. Paul

Benike and Mehring Join Board

Brent Benike and Grant Mehring were elected to the MCIA Board of Directors at the MCIA Annual Meeting on January 8, 2020.

Brent Benike is general manager at Northern Farmers Co-op Exchange and Northern Excellence Seed, LLC, in Williams, Minnesota. A graduate of the University of Minnesota, Crookston, with a degree in agronomy/soils, Brent also farms 700 acres in Birchdale, Minnesota, with his brothers Ross and Kent. They produce spring wheat, perennial ryegrass, and soybeans. Prior to moving back to northern Minnesota, Brent worked two years for Interstate Payco Seed Company as production agronomist and four years as area production manager for Garst Seed Company. Brent has previous experience on the MCIA board, last serving in 2013.

Grant Mehring has over eight seasons of field experience working in the cereals of durum, barley, spring wheat, and winter wheat in the northern plains. He is currently the WestBred Wheat technical product manager at Bayer Crop Science, in Fargo, North Dakota. Grant holds a bachelor’s degree in biology from the University of Jamestown and a master’s degree and PhD from North Dakota State University. His experience includes time at NDSU as an assistant professor and a research specialist working on various agronomic trials, including variety performance, fertility, seed placement, and fungicides. Grant works closely with the winter and spring wheat seed industry in Minnesota, where WestBred seed associates grow foundation, registered, and certified seed. He understands the value of clean, pure, quality seed for the advancement of farmers and breeding programs.

Official Minutes of the 2020 Annual Business Meeting

Chairman Kurt Flegel called the 117th annual business meeting of the Minnesota Crop Improvement Association to order at 11:20 a.m. on January 8, 2020, at Bigwood Event Center, Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

Flegel confirmed that proof of proper notice of the meeting had been published in the winter 2019 issue of the Minnesota Seed Grower and determined that a quorum was present. Flegel introduced the members of the MCIA Board of Directors to the membership.

The following agenda items were addressed:

• Secretary’s Report and Minutes of the 2019 Annual Meeting—Bob Ehlers moved and Mory Rugg seconded that the minutes, as published in the Spring 2019 issue of the Minnesota Seed Grower, be approved. Motion passed.

• Treasurer’s Report—Flegel indicated that a Statement of Activities and Financial Position for the fiscal year ended May 31, 2019, was included in the meeting registration folder. The board accepted the report at its November 2019 meeting.

• Chairman’s Report—Chairman Flegel thanked MCIA’s staff, the board of directors, and meeting attendees. Flegel noted the financial position of MCIA was stable, and a new building lease was signed with the University of Minnesota. Staffing is ongoing within the organization with three positions currently open: laboratory technician, organic certification specialist, and field supervisor. MCIA’s Seed Laboratory is working on accreditation and Sam Banks is working on becoming an RST. Roger Wippler is working closely with the University of Minnesota. Jody Prudhomme is settling into her new position. Currently, two of the biggest challenges for the organization are the number of potential PVP varieties being sold uncertified and brown bagging. MCIA is working with MDA on how to control these issues. Overall, MCIA as a business is in good shape, working closely with the membership to provide services. Flegel encouraged attendees to bring forth their issues to MCIA and to other local organizations and to advocate for their businesses and the industry.

• Nominating Committee Report—Flegel presented the following slate of candidates submitted by the Nominating Committee: District 1—Brent Benike, Baudette; Related Industry (2 positions)—Matt Bohn, Breckenridge, and Grant Mehring, Fargo, North Dakota; Category B position—Dr. Nancy Ehrike. Flegel then called for nominations from the floor. There being no further nominations, Duane Dahlman moved and Mike Zabel seconded to cast a unanimous ballot and accept the nominees presented. Motion passed.

• President’s Report—Dr. Fawad Shah introduced the MICA staff members present and provided a brief history and overview of MCIA. Overall, the past year has been solid for Field Services and Organic Services experienced steady growth.
MCIA signed a building lease with the UMN for the next nine years. Administration focused on human resources activities, such as no harassment training, wage theft law, and position descriptions. There were several staff departures, including Eli Gindele, Anthony Schumacher, and Bob Huffman, as well as the retirement of Cindy Wippler in August. Shah announced Susan Stewart’s upcoming retirement in June of 2020 and the hiring of Carl Anfinson as Seed Production Coordinator with Foundation Seed Services and Cherry Flowers as Organic Certification Specialist. MCIA was represented at various conferences over the year. Future plans for 2020–21 include continuing a Capacity Building Initiative with respect to training for inspections, seed testing, and certification. MCIA continues to work with FYI, MDA, UMN, and USDA to educate seed buyers and sellers about the legal sale of PVP-protected varieties.

Chairman’s Report

Thank you to all those that came to the MCIA annual meeting held in January. We had a very good event with an informative program. There was also some very good interaction with other members, staff, and vendors throughout the day.

An update on the MCIA financial report shows we are in good shape, paying the bills and keeping the lights on, as they say. As always, if you want more detail on the annual financial reports, please contact the office in St. Paul. We have renewed our building lease with the University of Minnesota. So, MCIA won’t be moving in the short term.

Regarding staffing, there are some new faces in the office. They are settling in well and learning their responsibilities. Management is still working to fill three open positions: southern field supervisor, seed lab technician, and organic certification specialist.

The effort to achieve USDA accreditation for the MCIA seed lab is being led by Seed Laboratory Manager Chase Mowry, a Registered Seed Technologist (RST). Also, Seed Technologist Sam Banks is working to obtain his RST. Having two RSTs will be a real plus for our lab and getting accredited is also a very positive move.

Michelle Menken leads the organic program, which continues to grow and provides a great service to that industry. As always, Roger Wippler, who manages our foundation program, Kris Folland and Seth Dagoberg, who lead field services, and Jody Prudhomme, who manages seed certification, keep things progressing. Efforts are underway to upgrade and improve the Pure Harvest database to make it more efficient and useful to our members.

We are fast approaching another growing season, giving everyone another chance to improve their processes. Hopefully everything aligns this spring to set up everyone for a prosperous year. In the meantime, enjoy March Madness and have a safe season!

Kurt Flegel — Chairman, MCIA Board of Directors

Thank You, Exhibitors & Sponsors!


Achievement in Sign Improvement

Staff members recently completed a project to refurbish MCIA’s previously nondescript lobby sign. The idea to create the MCIA logo as seed art arose out of informal discussions among staff members over the winter. Once the project was approved by management, three colors of soybean seed were chosen to make the sign: yellow, black, and green, roughly corresponding to MCIA’s brand colors. Organic Certification Specialist Cherry Flowers coordinated the project, with many other staff members lending a hand during break times. It took just under two months to glue all the seeds onto a 2 x 3-foot sign board. After all the seeds were in place, the sign was sprayed with a UV inhibitor to minimize fading, installed in a frame, and hung in the office lobby. Next time you visit MCIA, please take a look at our team-built masterpiece. Although the sign isn’t eligible for the State Fair Seed Art Competition, we plan to display it in the MCIA booth where fair-goers can view it!
**Staff News**

MCIA welcomes **Carl Anfinson**, who was recently hired as seed production coordinator in the Foundation Seeds Services department. Carl earned a B.S. degree in agricultural economics and an M.S. in international agribusiness and applied economics from North Dakota State University, where he subsequently worked as a research assistant. He has a family farm background and work experience in both industry and government. Most recently, Carl worked as an operational planning analyst/supply chain planner at Syngenta Seeds. Prior to that, he served in various capacities with Land O’Lakes, the Scoular Company, and the U.S. Department of Commerce.

In December, 2019, **Kris Folland** was promoted to Field Services manager. In his new position, Kris will manage the entire Field Services department, including out-of-state inspections. He will be the point of contact for all inquiries and matters related to Field Services. Additional responsibilities include the development and/or revision of seed certification standards and ensuring their uniform application. Kris will, as well, be responsible for supervising Field Services’ staff. Kris has been employed with MCIA since 2006 and holds a B.S. degree in plant industries management from the University of Minnesota, Crookston.

**Seth Dagoberg** has also been recently promoted. In his new role as special services manager in the Field Services department, Seth will be responsible for such special programs as Approved MnDOT Seed Vendors, Identity Preserved Grain Certification, Native Seed Certification, Noxious Weed Seed–free Forage and Mulch, Seed Quality Assurance, and Sod Quality Assurance. He will be the lead trainer for Field Services staff, and he will be involved in the development of new programs and services. Seth has been employed with MCIA since 2012 and holds a B.S. in agronomy from the University of Minnesota, Crookston.

**Kris Folland**

**Carl Anfinson**

**Seth Dagoberg**
President’s Corner
Fawad S. Shah, MCIA President/CEO

Former General Electric CEO Jack Welch once stated that, “Any company trying to compete with competitors should figure out a way to engage the mind of every employee.” The mantra for success for the employer is to “take care of your employees, who will in turn take care of your business.” As an organization, Minnesota Crop Improvement Association fully understands that the relationship between customers and employees is symbiotic. High quality work delivered in an efficient and cost-effective manner adds value to the businesses we serve. MCIA’s continued success depends on quality employees doing exemplary work.

Minnesota Crop Improvement Association is going through a unique and most exciting time in its history. The recent retirement of key personnel coupled with a few staff departures has created challenging circumstances. MCIA is working to turn this challenge into an opportunity and has initiated a talent search. In addition, MCIA is looking into ways to attract quality candidates as well as retain the existing staff. The MCIA board of directors and its senior management are focused on equity in compensation and succession planning, among other things, and have plans to identify and address gaps in compensation. A competitive salary structure will provide the ability to hire and retain quality employees who will propel the organization to new levels of success in the future. Furthermore, MCIA believes in encouraging employee growth by providing them the necessary training, appropriate equipment, and oversight to succeed in their roles. These efforts will translate into the short- as well as long-term success of MCIA and its members.

Regarding our marketing and outreach activities, MCIA held its 117th Annual Meeting in early January in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Highlights of the meeting included a well-attended Cover Crop Seed Roundtable and question and answer session. Speakers from state and federal government and seed certification agencies, along with a patent lawyer, discussed the need for and importance of the legal use of Plant Variety Protected (PVP) seed. To help maintain a level playing field for all growers, MCIA recently partnered with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the University of Minnesota to educate the public and promote enforcement of the PVP Act. The annual meeting was attended by growers, state officials, researchers, and professionals from the seed industry.

We would appreciate receiving your feedback on the kind of topics that you would like to learn more about at next year’s annual meeting, making the event both fun and educational for you, our members.

Organic Corner
Michelle Menken, Organic Services Manager

It seems the 2020 crop year may start early with the spring-like weather we are now having. That would be a relief after last year’s late start. Maple syrup and produce applications are due back March 15 and crop and livestock applications are due April 1. If you decide not to certify this year, please contact the office as soon as possible. We are looking forward to another busy season.

MCIA Organic Certification Specialist Karen Gjelhaug attended the Accredited Certifier Association-NOP training in January. One of the topics addressed there was “The Role of the Inspector.” The inspector’s job is to verify that your Organic System Plan, Material List, Field History Sheets, and maps are complete and accurate. The inspectors are the eyes and ears for MCIA. MCIA is the certifier. MCIA makes all the certification decisions, approves changes to your Organic System Plan, and reviews and adds materials to your Material List. The inspector and the certifier work together, but they have different jobs. When you want to make changes, or add an input, or have other questions, you should be contacting MCIA office staff, not the inspector. We are happy to take your calls and answer your questions.

Hemp was a new crop for many last year. We would like to put out a few reminders for you based on issues that arose last growing season. Some states no longer provide direct verification to us that an operation is licensed, but we are still required to verify that you are compliant with state programs. This means you will have to send a copy of your license to MCIA with your application. If you are buying hemp seedlings, they must be organic. (Only the Secretary of Agriculture can provide a waiver to this requirement, which is not going to happen!) If you are buying organic seedlings, or having someone growing the seedlings for you, they must be listed on the grower’s certificate. You must have a receipt listing organic seedlings and get a copy of the grower’s certificate. These should be available for the inspector to review.
The Minnesota Seed Grower
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Tel: 612-625-7766 Fax: 612-625-3748

Fawad Shah..................President and CEO
Kurt Flegel..................Chairman
Bob Ehlers..................Vice Chairman
Duane Dahlman..................Secretary
Darius Thiel..................Treasurer
Brad Barth..................Director
Brent Benike..................Director
Matt Bohn..................Director
Nancy Jo Ehike..................Director
Nat Forster..................Director
Grant Mehring..................Director
Denise Thiede..................Director

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

APRIL

22–23 AOSCA Northern Region Meeting, Lafayette, IN

MAY–AUGUST

Iowa State University—Seed Conditioning Workshops
Register by phone: 515-294-4011
or online: https://www.regcytes.extension.iastate.edu/seedscience/

JUNE

13–17 ASTA Policy & Leadership Development Conference and AOSA/SCST Annual Meeting, Indianapolis, IN
21–24 AOSCA Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA

For more information on these and other events visit www.mncia.org.