

MCIA and the Minnesota State Fair

BY ROGER WIPPLER

It's not the big agricultural extravaganza that it used to be, but the Minnesota State Fair may be the only place where non-farm folks still see and learn a little bit about farm crops and animals.

MCIA and the State Fair

History between the Minnesota Crop Improvement Association and the Minnesota State Fair goes back over 100 years. In fact, the first organizational meeting for what would become MCIA was held during the 1903 State Fair. Since that time, MCIA has always participated in the State Fair in some way—whether it be the Certified seed show or educational displays.

That tradition continued in 2018. Several MCIA members participated in the Certified seed show and the MCIA display helped educate visitors about crop and seed production, native seeds, and organic certification. Our hands-on seed display features 14 crops grown in Minnesota, including well-known crops, such as corn and soybeans, as well as a few lesser-known crops, such as buckwheat, canola, and bluegrass. Plant samples grown from these seeds are also presented. The seed display generates many questions and comments from visitors.

Heard at the Fair

As you might imagine, the questions and comments we get are as varied as the people attending the fair. They come from those directly involved in agriculture, visitors from other countries, and folks whose only view of ag is from a car window or a computer screen.

Many visitors look at the seeds and ask how they are used: "What do you do with soybeans?" Or, "Is that where canola oil comes from?" They are surprised to learn that Kentucky bluegrass is the most common lawn grass and even more surprised to learn that we have 50,000 acres of turf grass seed production in Minnesota. With the recent proliferation of local breweries and distillers, there is greater awareness that barley is used for making beer and rye can be used to make whiskey. Overall, many learn a little more about the crops that produce food.

Most appreciate the importance of agriculture, but a few have strong opinions about how things would be better if we went back to growing ancient grains like emmer and einkorn. Others believe that all seed is owned by one company, it is all genetically modified, and farmers have no choice. When informed that there are non-GMO options, that public universities are still



Paul Mickelson (MCIA retiree) has spent 50 years helping set up the MCIA display and visiting with guests at the Minnesota State Fair. Joining Paul are MCIA staff members Roger Wippler and Anthony Schumacher.

developing varieties, and that there are many family-owned seed companies, some still walk away unconvinced.

Whether visitors stop to express their opinions, ask a question, or grab a handful of seed, the hope is that they leave a little better informed about Minnesota crops. MCIA members still stop by and occasionally one will add their personal experience to the conversation with a fair visitor. Overall, the audience at the Minnesota State Fair has changed, but the role MCIA serves in educating visitors remains the same.

Recognize a Deserving MCIA Member!

MCIA members are encouraged to submit nominations for the Honorary Premier Seedsman, Premier Seedsman, and Achievement in Crop Improvement awards, which will be presented at 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.

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PHOTO: SETH DAGOBERG



Agriculture continues to have its challenges! With tariffs, prices, and new traits, planting decisions will be more difficult next spring. However, with harvest now under way in most areas, monitoring performance on the farm and regionally will help us evaluate this year's crops and our efforts. But what is going to bring the best return on investment in 2019? Right now, there are probably as many opinions out there as options.

As MCIA continues to monitor the ag industry and the direction it will take, we are asking ourselves how to best serve our members in their endeavor to insure seed integrity and quality. Which tests, inspections, or services are needed to help insure success in your farm or business operation?

As MCIA's mission statement says: "MCIA 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."

Those big statements need continual monitoring to make certain the association is delivering what the membership and other MCIA clients need. A few of the issues facing MCIA, as well as the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, are cover crops, labeling and testing of seed that may contain Palmer

amaranth or other problem species, new testing requirements for our lab, and the integrity of organic inspections. The list continues to change and grow!

As Paul Kjolhaug, former board chair, stated in 2016, "MCIA is your association. The real question is, What are we going to do? This organization has great potential. What it needs is your broader input and direction to keep it strong and valid. I invite and encourage you to participate—get involved and help your association as it continues to identify and meet the changing needs of agriculture." As the agricultural landscape changes and evolves, these words continue to ring true. Now, maybe even more than in 2016, member engagement in MCIA is crucial.

In the meantime, keep producing great crops with environmentally sound practices so that we can continue to feed the world.

In Memoriam

Seed man **George Ehrhardt** died peacefully at his home in Albert Lea, Minnesota on August 8, 2018. He was 91.

George was active for many years in the agricultural seed production industry, having served as a board member of the Minnesota Crop Improvement Association (from 1993–1996) and on many committees. He helped organize the Minnesota Public Seed Promotion Association and served as board secretary.

George began working for his father, Louis Ehrhardt, at the Albert Lea Seed House in the early 1950s. George eventually took over the business. Two of his children, Tom and Mac, currently own and operate Albert Lea Seed.

ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE

The MCIA Annual Meeting will be held January 9, 2019 at the Bigwood Event Center in Fergus Falls. 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 late 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 should be received by MCIA 14 days prior to the meeting.

MCIA BOARD POSITIONS OPEN

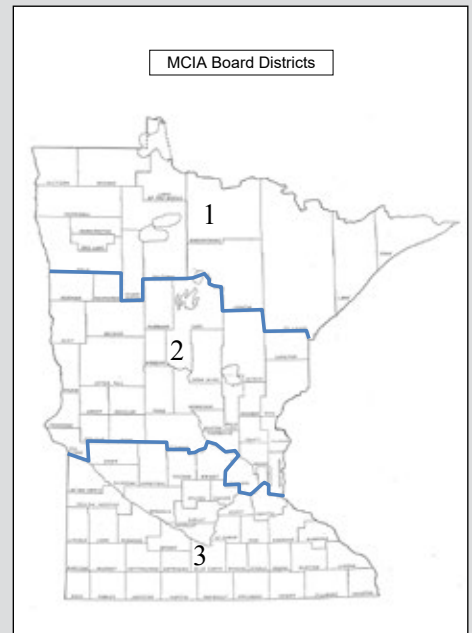
MCIA is seeking candidates for positions on the MCIA Board of Directors.

The following seats are open: Bob Ehlers, District 2; and Jim Kukowski, District 1

Jim Kukowski is not eligible for re-election. Bob Ehlers is eligible for re-election.

The MCIA board districts are shown here. Related Industry is a state-wide position. Directors are elected by and from the members at the annual meeting to a three-year term of office.

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





It is the goal of every business to increase its visibility, especially within its defined market. Businesses want to keep their customers informed about their products and services, maintain and increase market share, and stay competitive. They rely on many avenues—print, internet, and social media—to capture their customers' attention.

Minnesota Crop Improvement Association, too, strives to remain visible and relevant. MCIA is regularly asked to participate at

regional, national, and international conferences. Such events present opportunities for MCIA to inform and educate attendees about its many services. This summer, MCIA presented at two events, one regional, and one international.

Practical Farmers of Iowa hosted the Small Grains Conference in Mankato this July. This tri-state education and promotion endeavor included Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. MCIA, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, and a crop producer participated in a panel discussion. I spoke about the importance of seed certification and the quality of cover crop seed, as well as the steps involved in the seed certification process. A number of good questions were raised by the audience. The discussion was informative and very beneficial.

In August, the U.S. Soy Global Trade Exchange Conference was held in Kansas City, Missouri. Over 700 people from 30-plus countries attended. MCIA was asked to talk about its Identity Preserved programs that support soybean exports.

Some background: The Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies (AOSCA) developed an Identity Preserved (IP) Pro-

gram in the 1990s to help growers market their niche products under AOSCA's validation systems approach. The AOSCA IP logo identifies food and agricultural products that meet specified product quality standards, and provides verification that an effective system for the production, handling, and/or processing of grain, food, or other agricultural production is being used. IP programs are administered by AOSCA-accredited, third-party agencies, such as MCIA.

In addition, MCIA recently developed a Non-GMO Grain Traceability Program that focuses on process verification. The program has protocols in place covering each step of the process—grower training, use of eligible seed source, inspection, handling, and storage. This program was developed in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, which issues a certificate of compliance based on a successful audit.

MCIA's presentation at the Global Trade Exchange Conference was followed by a panel discussion to further explain the added value of IP products. A participant from China asked, Is there a way to track the product back to the grower? I responded affirmatively: Not only can the IP product be traced back to its original grower, many grain companies gladly offer foreign buyers the opportunity to visit the farm and meet the grower.

American farmers may not have sufficient funds to advertise their products, but they do want to make their products known to consumers, no matter where they live. Hosting foreign buyers and traders to their farms may be their most effective and practical marketing tool. American farmers have repeatedly demonstrated high-quality production and they stand behind their products. Certification agencies have an important role to play in showcasing the integrity of products verified through IP programs.

Through its print and online publications, field days, and participation in conferences, MCIA continues to engage the agricultural community and increase its own visibility.



Organic Corner

Michelle Menken, Organic Services Manager

We just issued the 70th new client certificate for this year! We have spent the last weeks getting files out to inspectors, so all remaining inspections will be scheduled soon. Many of our contract inspectors have said, "No more," which is a sure sign that summer is ending. Soon, the entire Organic Services staff will be working on final reviews and

certificates. If you need your certificate to make a sale, be sure to contact us and we will finish up your certificate or write a Letter of Good Standing.

This year, the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program is again offering rebates. You can get a rebate of 75 percent of the certification costs that your business incurs between October 1, 2017 and September 30, 2018. The maximum rebate is \$750.

The program is administered slightly differently in each state. In Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin, you can apply to your state's agriculture department or to your county's Farm Service Agency (FSA) office. In other states, you have to apply to the local FSA office. We will send out a letter shortly with more information. If you still have payments to make, you may want to pay them by the end of September so that they are eligible for the rebate.

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) will meet in St. Paul, Minnesota, October 24–26. The NOSB reviews substances and make recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture about their use in organic production and processing. It also recommends standards for the National Organic Program. The public is invited to attend the meeting. Check the USDA website for the agenda and meeting information: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/event/national-organic-standards-board-nosb-meeting-st-paul-mn>. The Iowa Organic Conference will be held November 18–19 at the University of Iowa, Iowa City. They always have interesting talks and great organic meals.



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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

NOVEMBER

- 1–3 South Dakota Local Foods Conference, Brookings
- 14 MCIA Board Meeting, Saint Paul
- 15 Minnesota Ag and Food Summit, hosted by AgriGrowth, Minneapolis
- 18–19 Iowa Organic Conference, Iowa City
- 22–23 MCIA Office Closed

DECEMBER

- 3–6 ASTA CSS 2018 & Seed Expo, Chicago IL
- 12–13 Prairie Grains Conference, Grand Forks, ND
- 24–26 MCIA Office Closed

JANUARY

- 1 MCIA Office Closed
- 9 MCIA Annual Meeting, Fergus Falls
- 10–11 Minnesota Organic Conference, Saint Cloud
- 21 MCIA Office Closed
- 23–24 MN Ag Expo, Mankato
- 24–26 Northern Plains Food & Farming Conference Fargo, ND

For more event information visit www.mncia.org.