

Swenson Seed Farm

By Kris Folland, Field Services Manager

Growing up near Oklee, MN, Ray and Barbara Swenson have always been close to agriculture and each other.

Ray's childhood was on the current family farm with livestock, and they raised about 30 acres of wheat allocation as allowed in the Farm Program at the time. They were always growing small grain seed. Barbara said they mostly had livestock growing up and everything seemed to revolve around hay. "Lots and lots of hay", she said. She was in charge of raking hay on a Cockshutt tractor and was always outside. Ray fondly tells of his first Massey Harris 60 combine and growing up with an Allis Chalmers pull type combine with a 6 foot header that he ran and still has today. The first seed cleaning was seed oats on a small fan mill cranked by hand. He loved building and improving equipment and the mechanics of farm and construction equipment.

Ray attended the University of Minnesota School of Agriculture and Barbara worked in the Twin Cities. Ray spent three winters in Richmond, Virginia working as a welder and his love for metal design and construction expanded.

Ray was drafted into the Army and did basic training at Fort Sam in Houston, Texas then was stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington.

Ray and Barbara were married and started their family while he was serving in the Army and the total cost of their first child born there was \$5.65; he proudly quipped. One course he was able to take in the Army that he really enjoyed was on Agriculture, and he set his sights on the future. After 21 months, Ray was given an early release to head home and help with harvest.

Once back home the farm steadily grew and growing certified seed was always a staple on the farm and all their seed was cleaned at the McIntosh Farmers Elevator. Ray was also busy custom swathing oats with his Owatonna swather and built a loader tractor from a Co-op #3 tractor chassis for custom pushing snow and all-around farm use and it is still used today.

Swenson's are long time MCIA members and having their seed custom cleaned worked out very well. However, the last year they cleaned seed and with tight margins, Ray set his

sights on constructing his own MCIA Approved Certified Seed Conditioning Facility. Ray purchased scrap metal, secondhand legs, and anything that he could weld and build into a seed plant. Much of the original construction is still nearly flawless today 40 years later. Facility upgrades have included a 70-foot scale, new gravity mill, and many more bins, including

refurbished hopper bins that look like new. A new office addition in 2023 gave added room for Ray and Barbara to continue to work side by side but "with a little more space between us" he said with a smile.

Ray has also embraced technology and has developed an elaborate record keeping system on his computer and he can be found as often at his computer as in the seed plant and farmyard. The attention to detail cleaning seed and with record keeping has served Ray and Barbara well.

Justin Rystad has worked with Swenson's for 26 years cleaning seed, moving grain, and keeping the entire facility spotless. Justin is well known to MCIA field staff as the annual facility inspection reveals the same quality results year after year. Ray and Barbara continue to run the seed business today and keep supplying their customers with quality seed with an impeccable reputation across the state.

Ray and Barbara's son, Keith, and grandson, Luke, run the home farm today and continue to grow the operation. Another son, Brent, and his family, also farm nearby growing certified potatoes.

Ray received MCIA's Premier Seed Grower award in 1994 and Swenson Seed received the Achievement in Crop Improvement award in 1999.

After 67 years of marriage, 6 children, 17 grandchildren, and 25 great grandchildren, there are few words left to be said that haven't been spoken about the Swenson's. They have a love for farming, the seed business, travel, building, customers, and most of all their family. They have been pillars of MCIA and the seed business in Minnesota. The office walls are adorned with thank you cards and notes from current and past customers. Ray summarized it quite well that "I've always said if we keep our customers happy, they will keep us in business."



Barbara and Ray Swenson - Brooks, Minnesota



There are moments in life when opportunities land in your lap that you never imagined would come your way. I had hoped that someday I would have the opportunity to serve on the MCIA Board of Directors, but I never imagined it would happen at this point in my career. When the opportunity came, I found myself asking a lot of questions: Was I really qualified? What skills, experience, or knowledge did I bring to the table?

What had I gotten myself into?

The only thing I knew when I agreed to serve was that it was going to be a learning experience. Sitting here now and looking back, I had no idea just how much I would learn.

Over the past five years, I've been nominated for committees I wasn't sure I had any business serving on. I've been asked to take on roles within the executive committee that I questioned whether I was qualified for. I've learned more acronyms in the last five years than I have in my entire 36 years of life—and I'm a millennial!

But perhaps the biggest lesson I've learned is the value of having experienced and supportive people at the table. I have been fortunate to serve alongside people who were willing to guide me, answer my questions, share their experience, and push me beyond my comfort zone. Their willingness to help made the learning curve much less intimidating and gave me the confidence and support I needed to grow into each new challenge.

When I first joined the board, I honestly figured I would serve my two terms, contribute where I could, learn a lot about MCIA and its services, and meet some new people along the way. Becoming Chair of the Board of Directors was nowhere on my list of expectations.

So, once again, I found myself asking that same question: Was I really qualified for this opportunity?

I went back to Paul Adam's "Chairman's View" from the Summer 2015 edition of the Seed Grower, where he talked about "Big Shoes." There are always big shoes to fill, and we owe it to those who came before us to do our best to fill them.

Taking on the role of Chair of the Board of Directors came with an additional distinction I never anticipated: I am the first woman to serve as Board Chair in the history of the organization. I am incredibly honored by the opportunity, but I also know that I didn't get here alone. Some of the "big shoes" I want to recognize belong to the women who are currently and have previously served on MCIA's Board of Directors. While the list is short, the impact these women have made is significant. Nancy Ehlike, Denise Thiede, Bev Durgan and Mary Hanks. I am

grateful for the example they have set, the contributions they have made and the value they brought MCIA.

Being the first woman to serve as Chair is something I am proud of, but I also see it as a responsibility. I hope to fill the big shoes left by those who came before me, while also helping make the shoes a little easier to fill for those who come next.

Looking back, I may not have felt qualified when the opportunity first came my way. What I have learned, though, is that sometimes leadership isn't about being completely ready for the next opportunity. It's about being willing to step up, learn, listen, ask questions, and trust the people around you.

And sometimes, you just have to be willing to put on the big shoes and see where they take you.

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 Kris Folland at 1-800-510-6242 or by e-mail at kris.folland@mncia.org.

Royalty and Variety Development Fund Fees:

Variety assessment fee billing has been mailed to the appropriate members; payment is now due.

If you haven't yet done so, please complete and return the forms to MCIA as soon as possible.

Remember, even if you discarded or carried over seed and the balance due is \$0.00, please return the forms to MCIA, indicating the disposition of the seed.

Fifty years is a long time, but when I look back on my journey with the Minnesota Crop Improvement Association, it is hard to believe how quickly those years have passed.

My relationship with MCIA began as a **member**. At the time, I never imagined that my involvement would eventually take me through several different roles within the organization. MCIA was an important part of my work in agriculture, and over the years I came to appreciate not only the services it provided, but also the people, relationships, and purpose behind the organization.

As I think back on those many years as a member, one thing I would really like to know is **just how many samples I have submitted to MCIA over the past 50 years**. I am sure the number would be impressive if they were all added together.

Those samples represent much more than numbers on a piece of paper. They represent crops grown, fields inspected, seed tested, decisions made, and countless seasons of working together to produce and maintain quality seed. In many ways, those samples tell the story of my agricultural career and my relationship with MCIA.

From being a member, I was given the opportunity to serve as a **member of**

the MCIA Board of Directors. That experience gave me a much deeper understanding of the organization and the responsibility we have to our members and for the agricultural industry we serve.

Eventually, I had the privilege of serving as **Chair of the Board**. Sitting in that position gave me an even greater appreciation for MCIA's history, the dedication of its employees, and the responsibility that comes with helping guide an organization that has served Minnesota agriculture for generations.

Today, I find myself in a role I could never have imagined when I first became an MCIA member—**Executive Director of MCIA**.

The journey from **member, to director, to board chair, and now to Executive Director** has given me a perspective that is unique. I have experienced MCIA from the perspective of a member receiving its services, a board member helping govern the organization, a board chair helping provide leadership, and now as the Executive Director responsible for helping lead the organization forward.

What makes this journey especially meaningful is that MCIA has never simply been an organization to me. It has been a part of my life and my career in agriculture. Along the way, I have met countless

people, built lasting relationships, learned from those who dedicated their careers to MCIA, and witnessed firsthand the impact this organization has on Minnesota agriculture.



I am also reminded that while I have been a part of MCIA for more than 50 years, I am only one chapter in a much larger story. Many people came before me who helped build this organization, and many will come after me who will help carry it forward.

As I look forward to the future, I am grateful for the opportunity to give back to an organization that has given so much to me. My goal as Executive Director is to respect the foundation and history that brought MCIA to where it is today, while also helping prepare the organization for the next generation.

Continued on next page

ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE

MCIA will hold its Annual Meeting on Wednesday, January 27, 2027, 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

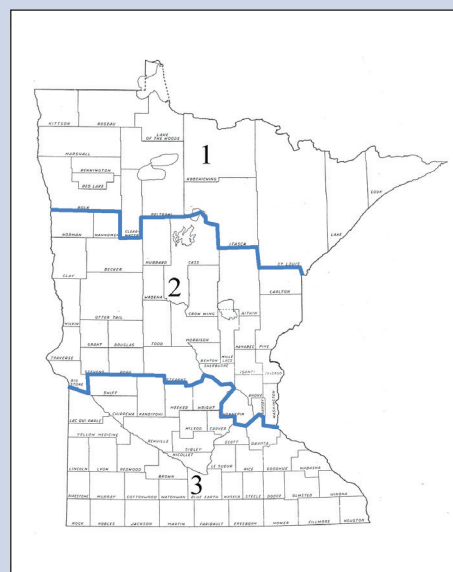
A draft of any resolution to be considered by the MCIA Legislative and Public Affairs Committee and forwarded to the floor of the annual meeting must be received by MCIA no less than 14 days prior to the meeting.

MCIA BOARD POSITIONS OPEN

MCIA is seeking candidates for three positions on the MCIA Board of Directors. The following Category A Director seats are open: District 2 (Gabel Hoseth), District 3 (Kelsey Henke), and Related Industry (Anthony Cortilet). Having served two terms, Kelsey Henke (Chair) is not eligible for re-election. The term of office for Category A directors is three years.

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 Duane Dahlman at duanedahlman@mncia.org or call the MCIA office.

MCIA BOARD DISTRICTS



Director's Brief

Continued...

After more than 50 years, I have learned that organizations change, leadership changes, and agriculture changes—but the importance of **people, integrity, relationships, and commitment to serving our members** does not.

I am proud of the journey, grateful to the people who have been part of it and humbled by the opportunity to help lead MCIA into its next chapter.

When I first became an MCIA member, I never could have imagined where that journey would take me. Looking back now, I am thankful for every step along the way—and I am excited about what the next chapter will bring. §



Photo by Jazlynn Folland



Field Notes

Kris Folland, Field Services Manager



Overall seed production in Minnesota this year appears to be adequate for most species. The perennial crops had a nice year of good quality overall. Early spring wheat reports are fair to excellent with slightly lower test weight in some areas and higher seed count (smaller seed) due to dry conditions and higher temperatures during the growing season. A preliminary germination test is always a good idea a few weeks after harvesting small grains. Corn seed production is consistent year after year in most areas with warm temperatures moving the crop along quickly, being the biggest challenge.

Certified forage and mulch is listed on the MCIA website as “Noxious Weed Seed-Free Forage and Mulch Availability” and many producers have product available year after year.

Soybean seed production fields are hanging in there and later season rainfall will be the deciding factor on yield and seed size. Soybean seed quality should not have many disease issues due to the warm and dry conditions in most areas. Use caution harvesting soybeans as they may dry down fast. Try to start harvesting soybeans at 15% moisture and be willing to start harvesting with some leaves in areas of the field while getting a clean and quality sample in the bins. Let your MCIA Field Supervisor or the seed company you work with know about 7 days before harvesting soybeans to ensure field inspection is completed prior to harvest.



Lab Report

Chase Mowry, Lab Services Manager



As always, the summer months have come and gone quicker than expected. With that, winter grain samples for certification and various cover crop programs have been arriving for testing. So far, grain size has appeared a little smaller in general. However, disease in germination tests has been rather minimal.

Throughout the summer, lab personnel have been working on various accreditation items, such as scale, thermometer, and

divider calibrations, in addition to routine maintenance / housekeeping tasks such as cleaning germinators and discarding samples from cold storage. Sean has replaced sections of our vacuum pump system used for planting to reduce leaks, Claire has conducted flower color inspections on soybean grow out material, and Amy is currently testing newly purchased germination media for the upcoming year to ensure that there are no toxicity issues which could impact test results.

They have also logged most of the species in the MCIA seed herbarium as the first step in replacing old vials and labels. The summer months have also provided the opportunity for purity training and attending AOSA-SCST sanctioned webinars.

In July, Dr. Neil Anderson (Department of Horticultural Science, University of Minnesota) and colleagues published a journal article titled "Seed Germination Protocols (Standard, Accelerated Aging) and Plant Growth Traits for Wild Schoenocaulon texanum Scheele, Texas Feathershank (Melanthiaceae)", in which some of the testing was conducted in the MCIA Seed Laboratory. I was honored to be included as a coauthor by Dr. Anderson. The journal article can be found at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2223-7747/15/15/2323> (Plants 2026, 15(15), 2323).

My focus as of late has been revising, creating, and rearranging documents of the Seed Laboratory's Quality Manual. Perhaps a miniscule task upon reading, the 144 documents that currently comprise the manual have been a rather cumbersome project in terms of reorganization, revisions, and updating version numbers.



Organic Update

Kris Olson,
Organic Services Manager

As we move into fall, we want to share a few timely updates to help you plan ahead and stay informed. As always, our team is here to answer questions and support you throughout the certification process.

Temporary Variances

This year has been a dry one, and a number of our operations are in areas impacted by drought, especially dairy operations with livestock that must receive an average of at least 30% of their Dry Matter Intake from pasture over the grazing season. We want to remind everyone that a temporary variance may be available if weather conditions make it difficult to meet these regulatory requirements. Under the National Organic Program, operations may request a temporary variance through MCIA when natural disasters, severe weather events, or other qualifying conditions outlined in §205.290 affect compliance. Temporary variances are limited in scope and duration and do not waive requirements related to prohibited substances or other core organic standards. Please contact MCIA as soon as you become aware of a situation that may warrant a variance so we can review your options with you before management decisions are made.

If you believe your operation may qualify for a temporary variance, please remember that approval must be obtained before you deviate from certified practices. Keep documentation of weather impacts, production challenges, and corrective actions, as these records are essential when requesting regulatory flexibility. Reaching out to MCIA early gives us the best opportunity to explore available options with you, support continued compliance, and help you navigate unexpected circumstances.

Fall NOSB

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) will hold its Fall 2026 meeting virtually October 27-29, 2026. The NOSB serves an important advisory role to USDA and provides stakeholders with opportunities to submit written comments and oral testimony. Meeting materials can be found at www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/organic/nosb.

MCIA Updates

MCIA is preparing to implement a new certification database, with full deployment scheduled for 2027. As part of this transition, you may notice changes in the appearance and format of renewal packets, applications, certificate addendums, and other certification documents. Although these forms and materials may look different, our commitment to serving you efficiently and maintaining the integrity of the certification process will remain unchanged. We will share additional information and guidance as implementation progresses and will be here to help make the transition as smooth as possible.

2026 Minnesota State Fair Certified Seed Champions



BARLEY

Grower: Brian Jensen

Conditioner: Jensen Seed Co, Stephen

BLACK BEANS

Grower: Keith Chisholm

Conditioner: Star of the North, Gary

OATS

Grower: Steve Tobolt

Conditioner: Tobolt Seed, Moorhead

ORGANIC GRAIN

Grower: Jonathan Olson

Conditioner: Clements Seed, Cottonwood

PERENNIAL RYEGRASS SEED

Grower: RL Growers / South 89

Conditioner: The Seedhouse Co, Roseau

SOYBEAN

Grower: Donnel Williamson

Conditioner: Falk's Seed Farm, Murdock

WHEAT

Grower: Carl Gaukerud

Conditioner: The Seedhouse Co, Roseau

BEST OF SHOW

Grower: RL Growers

Conditioner: The Seedhouse Co, Roseau

**Thank you to those of you who came out
to the MN State Fair and stopped by the
Certified Seed Show in the Ag Hort Building!**



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I certify that the statements made above are correct and complete. *Janet Daninger*

CALENDAR

OCTOBER

- 15-18 Western Seed Association Convention, Kansas City, MO
- 27-29 National Organic Standards Board Mtg, Virtual

NOVEMBER

- 18 MCIA Board Meeting, Rosemount
- 26-27 MCIA Office Closed

DECEMBER

- 7-10 ASTA Field Crop Seed Convention, Chicago, IL
- 9-10 Prairie Grains Conference, Grand Forks, ND
- 24-25 MCIA Office Closed
- 31 MCIA Office Closed

JANUARY, 2027

- 1 MCIA Office Closed
- 7-8 MN Organic Conference, St Cloud
- 18 MCIA Office Closed
- 27 MCIA Annual Meeting, St Cloud

For more event information visit www.mncia.org.