FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Minnesota Crop Improvement Association**
**Presents Honorary Premier Seed Grower Award to Dr. Kevin Smith**

**ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA, January 12, 2022**  Minnesota Crop Improvement Association (MCIA) today recognized University of Minnesota Professor Kevin Smith with the Honorary Premier Seed Grower Award. The award, presented annually since 1930, recognizes individuals not directly involved in seed production but who have actively supported the seed industry, MCIA, and their local community.

Dr. Kevin Smith received the award, along with fellow Honorary Premier Seed Grower awardee Andrea Johnson, during the Minnesota Crop Improvement Association’s 119th Annual Meeting. The virtual event was hosted at MCIA’s office in St. Paul, Minnesota, January 12, 2022.

Dr. Kevin Smith joined the University of Minnesota, as barley breeder, in 1998. His breeding work has expanded over the years to include winter, two-rowed, and hulless barley as well as oats and silflower. For most of its 100-plus year history, the emphasis of Minnesota’s barley breeding has been on six-rowed spring malting barley. Dr. Smith’s research has investigated the genetics of disease resistance and malting quality. His research group has developed and evaluated breeding methods that leverage current DNA sequencing technology to predict trait performance using genetic markers.

The Smith research team has worked closely with MCIA through the years. Every spring, his group plants the MCIA small grain variety grow-outs as part of MCIA quality control activities. A new variety, MN-Equinox, is a recent release. It was developed through the Forever Green Initiative and is the first winter barley from Minnesota. MN-Equinox is a facultative variety that does not require cold to vernalize and flower, meaning it can be planted in either the fall or spring.

The two-rowed barley program is the result of the expansion of craft brewers and the industries preference for two-row malts. New two-rowed malting barley varieties are nearing the end of the breeding pipeline.

About six years ago, Dr. Smith rebooted the UMN oat breeding program that had been dormant since former breeder Deon Stuthman retired. Those efforts resulted in the MN-Pearl variety, released through MCIA. Current breeding efforts are directed toward improving milling quality and resistance to crown rust.

Dr. Smith’s most recent efforts now include breeding a newly domesticated crop, silflower (*Silphium integrifolium*), as a perennial oilseed. This is another endeavor associated with the Forever Green Initiative.

In his research, he enjoys projects that solve practical problems. This includes ways to use genetics and DNA marker technologies. In addition to his research work, Dr. Smith teaches and advises graduate students.

Very active within the university and the research community, Dr. Smith serves on the University of Minnesota Crop Variety Review Committee, various other academic committees, and the U.S. Wheat and Barley Scab Initiative, along with several other organizations.

Since 1903, Minnesota Crop Improvement Association (MCIA) has provided programs and services to meet the needs of an ever-changing agricultural world. These services include seed certification, organic certification, foundation seed production, and a variety of customized third-party verification programs for seed and identity-preserved grains. MCIA operates from facilities on the University of Minnesota’s St. Paul campus with field staff located throughout Minnesota.

If you would like more information on this topic, please contact Roger Wippler at 612-625-7766 or wipp002@umn.edu.