FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Minnesota Crop Improvement Association Presents Awards

FERGUS FALLS, MINNESOTA, January 12, 2023  Minnesota Crop Improvement Association (MCIA) today presented its highest honor, the Achievement in Crop Improvement Award, to Paul Kjolhaug, part-owner of the MayerSeedLine company, located in Willmar, Minnesota. The award, presented annually since 1972, recognizes exemplary service to the seed industry as well as outstanding leadership in agriculture. In addition to his many years of involvement in seed production, Paul Kjolhaug has found time to give back to the seed industry and to his community, bringing a focus on the future, a commitment to upholding high standards, and a passion for helping others.

MCIA also recognized four Premier Seed Grower awardees, Lon Baldus of Grand Meadow, Kurt Flegel of Benson, and Dean Johnson and Kurt Aakre of Karlstad. Each year since 1928, MCIA has presented this award to recognize individuals or partners involved in quality seed production, active in MCIA, and who provide excellent service to the seed industry.

The recipients of MCIA’s Honorary Premier Seed Grower Award this year were Denise Thiede, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Plant Protection Division, Section Manager, responsible for seed, noxious weed, hemp, and biotechnology, and Dave Grafstrom, a researcher at the University of Minnesota’s Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics. This award recognizes individuals not directly involved in seed production but who have actively supported the seed industry, MCIA, and their local community. MCIA has presented this award annually since 1930.

The awards were presented at the Minnesota Crop Improvement Association’s 120th Annual Meeting. The event was held at the Bigwood Event Center in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, January 12, 2023.

Achievement in Crop Improvement Award

Paul Kjolhaug, of Willmar, has spent most of his life involved in agriculture. As a youth in Springfield, Minnesota, he worked on area crop and livestock farms. After earning a degree in agronomy from the University of Minnesota, he joined the staff of Northern Farm and Garden (the predecessor of Norfarm Seeds). He later worked for Interstate Payco, where he managed seed production of hybrid corn, sunflowers, and soybean seed. At this time, Paul became more familiar with MCIA, requesting field inspection and seed testing for OECD exports. For the last 21 years, Paul has been part owner of the MayerSeedLine, a seed production and brokerage company in Willmar. Over the years, Paul has been involved in many seed trade organizations—nationally, regionally, and locally. He served six years on the MCIA Board of Directors, including a term as board chair. Paul has also been active in his local church and the local chapter of the American Red Cross. Commenting on receiving the award Paul said, “I have enjoyed my years in the seed industry and being able to work with many great people,” adding, “I am truly humbled and honored to receive this award.”
Premier Seed Grower Awards

Lon Baldus, of Grand Meadow, grew up on a livestock and crop farm. He started farming on his own shortly out of high school. Lon also did some off-farm work in construction, building grain elevators and seed conditioning plants. Lon was an early grower of non-GMO soybeans and was one of the first to clean industrial hemp seed. His business ventures grew to include seed conditioning and the export of food-grade soybeans. As a member of MCIA, Lon has participated in the seed certification, identity preserved, and the approved facility programs, and his conditioning plant was certified organic by MCIA.

Kurt Flegel, of Benson, has been in the seed business for 40 years. Currently, he is the plant manager at Syngenta in Danvers. He grew up on a livestock and small grain farm near Kulm, North Dakota. After earning a degree in ag economics from North Dakota State University, Kurt took a position at Stauffer Seeds, where he was very involved with the sunflower program. He developed many strong and enduring relationships with growers, helping facilitate the regional transition to soybean production. Kurt worked closely with MCIA though his work on OECD certification of seed for export. He has been active in MCIA as a committee member and as a board director, serving as board chair for three terms. During his tenure, Kurt led MCIA’s management through a continuity and succession planning process.

Dean Johnson and Kurt Aakre, of Karlstad, have been farming together since 1989. The Lloyd Johnson farm has been in the family since 1887. They have been producing high-quality seed for many years. All their acres of wheat and soybeans are for seed production. Well respected as producers of high-quality seed, they have worked with several regional seed conditioners, including the late Ron Peterson, Lake Bronson Elevator, CHS Greenbush, Weinlaeder’s and Capistran’s. Dean and Kurt have been very active in their local community and seed industry. Both have served on their church and local county crop improvement boards.

Honorary Premier Seed Grower Awards

Dave Grafstrom, of Roseau, is a key member of the University of Minnesota team addressing crop production issues at the Magnusson Research Farm. Much of Dave’s work involves grass seed production research. Dave created a weekly e-newsletter that addresses the particular interests and concerns of grass seed growers. He also shares information during summer plot tours, the annual Grass Seed Institute, and the UMN Turf Seed website. He currently serves as secretary of the Turf Seed Council.

Denise Thiede has worked with seed and plants her entire career. She is currently part of the Plant Protection Division at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, serving as section manager, responsible for seed, noxious weed, hemp, and biotechnology. Previously, during her time at BioDiagnostics, she collaborated with MCIA’s staff to provide seed testing services to MCIA’s members. Her association with MCIA has spanned nearly twenty years, with multiple terms on its board of directors. She has worked closely with MCIA on a variety of issues, including PVP enforcement.

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 wippl002@umn.edu.