Minnesota’s corn farmers came together in the past year to overcome record-breaking rain, trade instability and efforts to undermine the Renewable Fuel Standard. In the following pages, the characteristics that empowered farmers to overcome the multiple headwinds in 2019 will be highlighted as we share the many accomplishments of the state’s corn growers.
I hope you’ve enjoyed a holiday season that allowed you and your family to decompress from a difficult year. Mother Nature did us no favors in 2019, while federal issues continued to weigh down our most important markets.

But before we put the past year in the rear-view mirror, I want to take a moment to reflect on the great accomplishments we had in 2019, despite our headwinds.

While we fought back against efforts attacking the ethanol market in our nation’s capital, Minnesota’s corn farmers have made great progress to promote ethanol at home in 2019.

The highlight of the year for me was when Gov. Tim Walz traveled to the farm of Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) board member Brian Thalmann to announce the establishment of the Governor’s Biofuels Council. The 15-person council is tasked with forming a plan to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality with renewable fuels.

Thalmann will represent the state’s corn farmers on the council, and I couldn’t be more excited about their work to promote the role ethanol will play in accomplishing the environmental goals important to all Minnesotans.

The momentum for ethanol-blended fuels at the pump also continued in 2019. Sales of E15 in Minnesota will again set a new all-time high, and more locations than ever are offering E15. Fueling future growth, county corn organizations stepped up in a big way last year, hosting 33 events promoting the benefits of ethanol-blended fuels in their communities.

Minnesota’s corn farmers also spent a lot of time at the Capitol during the 2019 legislative session, helping to bring some relief to farmers in a depressed farm economy.

An increase in the Ag2School tax credit was a top MCGA priority. In the end, Gov. Walz signed a tax bill that included an escalating credit, delivering up to $10 million in property tax relief for farmers in fiscal years 2020–2021 and $44 million in fiscal years 2022–2023.

On the federal level, Minnesota’s corn growers submitted op-eds and participated in calls-to-action to protect the Renewable Fuel Standard and stop the destructive actions by the Environmental Protection Agency. Farmers also traveled to Washington, D.C., to push for ratification of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, which is now one step closer after the U.S. House passed the agreement in December.

I am eager to close the book on 2019, but that fight combined with our perseverance to get things done—despite the obstacles of today—has left me optimistic about the future.

I would like to begin by thanking the state’s corn farmers for their continued investment in the corn check-off. As chair of the Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council (MCR&PC), I have the honor of seeing the tremendous research and opportunities you are fueling daily.

With that, I look forward to sharing this progress in the pages ahead, and I hope each update is a reminder of how crucial your continued support is in building a brighter future on the farm.

Your investment has provided farmers access to the latest research in nutrient management. Nitrogen Smart is now in its fourth year offering free-to-attend seminars that help farmers make the most of their nitrogen investment. In 2019, the seminars were also offered online, increasing their accessibility.

Corn farmer-funded research is also uncovering insights that build a more sustainable future. Using the power of drones and sensors, we are close to identifying the genotypes that deliver stable high yields in northern climates. And researchers are using mesocosms at the University of Minnesota to identify practices that reduce nitrogen loss in a warmer and wetter climate.

Corn farmers are also helping shape the future of electrified vehicles. University of Minnesota research has identified E85 as an ideal fit for an internal engine that will maximize the efficiency of electric cars.

And speaking of ethanol, your investment in the check-off has fueled E15’s rapid rise in Minnesota. For the last five years, we have shattered previous record highs
in gallons sold. More consumers than ever are realizing the benefits of E15, recognized at the pump by its yellow 88 sticker, which is the result of increased marketing efforts around the ethanol-blended fuel.

Still, it remains critical we continue to battle ethanol misconceptions. With your support, MEG Corp. set out to address these myths with future auto technicians, presenting on the safety of ethanol at 12 technical schools in 2019 and reaching more than 500 students.

Consumer outreach has also helped raise awareness of the important contributions by Minnesota’s corn farmers. The Minnesota Corn Fairstalk was unveiled at the Minnesota State Fair this year, celebrating Minnesota agriculture and the vital role it plays in the growth of the state. And with your support, the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum will for the first time tell the story of modern agriculture to the Arboretum’s 500,000 annual visitors.

As you will read in the pages ahead, your support is driving research, fueling ethanol growth and promoting corn farming. Again, thank you for making each possible through your investment in the corn check-off.

Often when faced with challenging times, we turn to inspirational quotes such as these famous words offered by Joseph Kennedy: “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.”

These messages can provide short-term encouragement in the world of sports, but seem grossly inadequate in the face of the challenges that corn farmers endured in 2019.

Rather than inspirational words, farmers need real certainty and hope to ease the burdens of the past year.

Fortunately, agriculture is made up of a tremendous support network willing to provide help to those feeling overwhelmed. I encourage those in need turn to resources such as the Minnesota Farm and Rural Helpline at 833-600-2670.

Minnesota Corn is also a crucial part of that support network, offering hope that is grounded in our mission statement: “We are dedicated to identifying and promoting opportunities for corn farmers while enhancing quality of life.”

For MCGA this is accomplished by advocating for policies that protect and support the economic viability of corn farmers in Minnesota. For MCR&PC the mission is fulfilled through research into new uses for corn, including corn-based polymers. It’s also accomplished through the promotion of value-added products like ethanol where opportunities to expand market share continue both domestically and internationally.

As we turn the page on 2019 and look to the renewed hope found in a new crop year, corn farmers can find certainty in knowing Minnesota Corn will continue to strive to fulfill its mission, bringing with it better days ahead.
Another great MN Ag EXPO 2019

MN Ag EXPO returned to Mankato, and was once again the place to be for all involved in Minnesota’s ag sector. Farmers, researchers, policymakers and agribusinesses came together for the two-day event featuring networking opportunities, educational sessions, and a trade show floor full of great exhibitors.

Ag leaders honored at MN Ag EXPO

The Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) recognized advocates who built a brighter future for agriculture at MN Ag EXPO. Jerry Ploehn received the 2019 Golden Kernel Award for his tremendous leadership as a member of both MCGA and the Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council (MCR&PC). Ron and Valerie Jerich received the Friend of Agriculture Award for their tireless work at the Minnesota State Capitol representing the state’s corn growers.

MCGA sets priorities for 2019 Minnesota legislative session

In advance of the 2019 legislative session in St. Paul, MCGA grower leaders identified their priorities for the session: tax relief and federal conformity; responding to water quality and other environmental concerns; funding for agriculture research, and transportation.

MCGA welcomes two district field managers

Kennedy Janssen and Macy Petrowiak joined MCGA to work with farmers in District 3 and District 4, respectively. Both Janssen and Petrowiak grew up surrounded by agriculture and come to MCGA as recent graduates with degrees in agriculture-related fields.

Minnesota farmer recognized for soil health efforts

Buffalo Lake farmer Brian Ryberg was honored with the Seeds of Change Award at the Soil Health Partnership’s 2019 Soil Health Summit. Also a participant in the Minnesota Corn Innovation Grant Program, Ryberg received the Super Sprout Award for his tremendous contributions as a first-year member of the Soil Health Partnership.

MCGA launches first-ever statewide scholarship for future ag leaders

MCGA launched its scholarship program in 2019, providing $5,000 scholarships to two college students pursuing a degree in agriculture. Available exclusively to Young Adult Members of MCGA, the statewide scholarship supplements scholarships offered through local county corn organizations, as another way to support future ag leaders.

Innovation Grant Program funds

12 projects in 2019

The Minnesota Corn Innovation Grant Program returned for its fourth year in 2019, funding farmer-led, conservation-minded research projects. New projects included a look at cover crop strategies that reduce nutrient loss and replace post-emergence herbicide, evaluating tools for farmers that measure soil health, and the impact of strip-till on profitability.

Minnesota ethanol sales continue to climb in 2019

Released annually by the Minnesota Department of Commerce in February, the year-end station report revealed more than 59 million gallons of E15 fuel were sold to Minnesota consumers in 2018, nearly tripling sales from 2017. Sales of E85 reached 16.4 million gallons last year, surpassing 14.8 million gallons sold in 2017.
MCGA welcomes three to board of directors
Dana Allen-Tully, who lives in Eyota, was elected to represent farmers in District 3. David (D.J.) VanKlompenburg and Jim Kanten were elected to At-Large positions. VanKlompenburg resides in Montevideo, and Kanten lives in Milan.

EPA rule allowing year-round E15 released with cautious optimism
The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released a proposed rule allowing year-round sales of E15 in March – a tremendous accomplishment for ethanol supporters that was years in the making. But while the rule would finally give consumers access to E15 during the summer, a Renewable Identification Number reform package also included in the rule threatened the long-term health of the biofuel market (Learn more on page 14).

Free e-book details the remarkable rise of ethanol in Minnesota
Chronicling the increasing popularity of ethanol-blended fuels in the state, “The Rise of Ethanol in Minnesota” e-book produced by MCGA shares the multi-faceted effort that made Minnesota a national leader in ethanol-blended fuels. Free to download, the e-book is available at info.mncorn.org/ethanol.

MCGA Day on the Hill focuses on tax legislation, ag innovation
MCGA brought 16 grower leaders to the Minnesota State Capitol for MCGA’s annual “Day on the Hill” in March. The group discussed the importance of tax conformity and relief, ag innovation, and more with 25 legislators and Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) Commissioner Thom Petersen.

MCGA directors advocate for federal priorities in nation’s capital
MCGA directors traveled to Washington, D.C., to advocate for congressional approval of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, year-round E15, and protection of the Renewable Fuel Standard. The group met with members of Minnesota’s congressional delegation and other key House and Senate leaders, as well as important agencies.

MCGA advocates for year-round E15 sales in EPA hearing
MCGA President Brian Thalmann traveled to Michigan to provide testimony at a hearing for a proposed rule by the EPA allowing year-round sales of E15. On behalf of MCGA, Thalmann advocated for removing the outdated barrier to summertime sales of E15 while avoiding additional reforms that could impact the ethanol market.

TransFARMation shares stories of on-farm stress
MDA and the Red River Farm Network partnered to produce a new radio series called “TransFARMation,” which focused on the topic of on-farm stress. Supported by MCGA, the series uses farm radio, podcasts and social media to feature stories from farmers navigating today’s challenging times on the farm, while highlighting the resources available for help.

MCGA partners with Minnesota United for inaugural season at Allianz Field
Minnesota United FC kicked off its inaugural season at the all-new Allianz Field, and MCGA joined in the excitement. Since 2017, MCGA has partnered with the United as an opportunity to share the impact of the state’s corn growers with a young, enthusiastic fan base at matches. The United went on to make the 2019 playoffs for the first time in the franchise’s history.
Three re-elected to Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council

George Goblish, Gary Prescher and Chad Willis were all re-elected to the MCR&PC in April. Goblish, who farms in Vesta, was re-elected to represent District 7. Prescher (of Delavan) was re-elected to represent District 8. And Willis (of Willmar) will retain his position representing Districts 3, 5 and 6.

MCR&PC member Albin honored for work on U.S. Grains Council

The U.S. Grains Council (USGC) recognized MCR&PC member Doug Albin for five years of service during the organization’s 16th International Marketing Conference and 59th Annual Membership Meeting in May. Albin was honored for his many accomplishments with USGC, including his work to grow trade relationships throughout Asia.

MCGA partners with policy podcast, Beers with Blois

MCGA partnered with a new podcast titled “Beers with Blois,” hosted by Fluence Media founder Blois Olson, who holds candid conversations with Minnesota political leaders. The partnership is a great opportunity to share information on the impact of corn, and the contributions of corn farmers and their families to our state.

MDA Trade Impact mission brings Colombia, Peru into focus

An MDA Trade Impact mission brought representatives of the corn, beef, pork, poultry and soybean industries to meet representatives from the wholesale and feed industry in Colombia and Peru. MCR&PC member Jim O’Connor represented Minnesota’s corn sector on the mission.

Minnesota Corn partners with policy podcast, Beers with Blois

MCGA partnered with a new podcast titled “Beers with Blois,” hosted by Fluence Media founder Blois Olson, who holds candid conversations with Minnesota political leaders. The partnership is a great opportunity to share information on the impact of corn, and the contributions of corn farmers and their families to our state.

MCGA, corn farmers submit comments calling for year-round E15 sales

The latest in a number of efforts to remove the outdated barrier to E15, MCGA submitted comments to the EPA’s proposed rule allowing year-round sales of E15. The comments detailed the success of E15 in Minnesota to show the demand for year-round sales, while stressing the negative impact of modifications to the Renewable Identification Number (RIN) market.

MCGA returns to the ballpark with the St. Paul Saints

MCGA returned to CHS Field for another summer of collaborating with the St. Paul Saints. Fans of all ages were treated to corn-themed fun, including a new promotion for the 2019 season called the “Moment of Zen,” which gave fans an MCGA-sponsored break from the nonstop action that typically occurs during a Saints game (Learn more on page 20).

Station events offer discounts and raise awareness of ethanol-blended fuels

Throughout the summer, county corn organizations and MCGA partnered with the American Lung Association and Twin Cities Road Crew to host a number of fuel promotion events in Greater Minnesota. Beginning in May, each event was an opportunity to offer discounts on E85 and E15, while raising awareness of ethanol-blended fuels with consumers.

Consumers had a chance to save at the pump and learn more about E85 and E15.
Science of Ag Challenge highlights next generation of ag leaders
Supported by MCGA, the Science of Ag Challenge is an annual event that challenges school-aged children to come up with problem-solving ideas in ag. The winning team in 2019 developed a curriculum to teach elementary school students about GMOs and gene editing to address misconceptions.

CommonGround unites women in ag, metro moms
CommonGround Minnesota once again partnered with Twin Cities Moms Blog for an evening of cooking and conversation with women in agriculture and Twin Cities moms. The event, held at Cooks of Crocus Hill in St. Paul, was an opportunity to connect with an influential metro audience to discuss modern farming and food production.

Winslow elected to MCR&PC chair
MCR&PC elected Scott Winslow as its chairman for 2019-2020. Winslow is a farmer from Fountain, who grows corn and soybeans and raises swine. He was elected to MCR&PC in 2015. Winslow succeeds Delavan farmer Gary Prescher as MCR&PC chair. All newly elected officials began their one-year terms on July 1.

MCGA invests in developing corn-based plastics
As part of its efforts to find new uses for corn, MCGA announced in July it would be investing more than $460,000 in research by the University of Minnesota’s Center for Sustainable Polymers focused on the development of plastics made from renewable sources like corn.

Dale Busch inducted into MCGA Recruiter Hall of Fame
MCGA inducted top recruiter Dale Busch into the MCGA Recruiter Hall of Fame in July. Busch is a Watonwan County Corn and Soybean Growers Association board member and a past regional representative for MCGA. In the past 20 years, Busch recruited more than 700 members.

Minnesota Corn advocates for top priorities in Washington
Minnesota Corn farmer leaders returned to Washington, D.C., to meet with fellow directors from other state organizations during the National Corn Growers Association’s (NCGA) Corn Congress. The group also spent time on Capitol Hill meeting with members of Minnesota’s congressional delegations, agriculture committee leaders and key federal agencies to advocate for policy priorities important to all Minnesota corn farmers.

As fewer Minnesotans have a connection to the farm, the state’s corn farmers have taken to social media and newspapers to amplify their voice on key issues.

This was most evident in their efforts to stop EPA actions undermining the Renewable Fuel Standard.

Numerous farmers penned op-eds and submitted them to their local newspaper stressing the impact EPA waivers have had on corn farmers, while countless others took to social media and posted videos sharing how important the ethanol market and RFS is to their farm operation.
MCGA director Tom Haag re-elected to NCGA Corn Board
MCGA board member Tom Haag was re-elected to the NCGA Corn Board during Corn Congress. Haag, who farms in Eden Valley, will serve a second term as a Corn Board member, after he was first elected in 2016.

Another great Farmfest in the books
Thousands stopped by the MCGA tent in 2019 to learn about research investments, conservation practices and advocacy efforts by the state’s corn growers. MCGA continued its efforts to share the many ways “MN Corn Grows MN” and hosted a number of state and federal policymakers over the three-day event.

MCR&PC member Chad Willis elected to U.S. Grains Council secretary-treasurer
MCR&PC member Chad Willis was newly elected as U.S. Grains Council secretary-treasurer in August. Willis farms corn and soybeans near Willmar with his wife, Krista. They have two children, Cooper and Amber, who work in agribusiness. Willis has been a member of MCR&PC since 2007.

Grassroots efforts demand action in response to EPA waivers
Minnesota’s corn farmers submitted more than 700 comments to President Trump and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), demanding actions be taken to protect the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). The response followed news the EPA would approve small refinery waivers removing an additional 1.43 billion gallons of U.S. biofuels from the nation’s fuel supply.

Minnesota’s corn growers, pollinators spotlighted at MCGA Night with the Saints
As part of its season-long partnership with MCGA, the St. Paul Saints celebrated the great work of the state’s corn farmers during an Aug. 30 home game. To celebrate MCGA Night, fans received a free packet of pollinator seeds from MCGA, promoting corn farmers’ commitment to pollinator habitat in Minnesota.

Minnesota Corn Fairstalk is the latest at the State Fair
Debuting this year, the Minnesota Corn Fairstalk celebrates Minnesota agriculture and the vital role it plays in the growth of our state. MCGA and MCR&PC proudly partnered with the State Fair to bring the Fairstalk to attendees as part of a larger renovation of the fairgrounds’ North End.

Minnesota Corn directors meet up with U of M researchers for evening of conversation
MCGA directors and MCR&PC members met with University of Minnesota researchers and officials as part of a meet-and-greet at the Bell Museum. The annual get-together is a great opportunity for Minnesota’s farmers to discuss research needs and ideas that will shape the future of agriculture.
‘Farm at the Arb’ brings modern ag to the Arboretum
The Minnesota Landscape Arboretum debuted a new farm exhibit that will for the first time tell the story of modern Minnesota agriculture. Supported by MCGA, the “Farm at the Arb” provides the arboretum’s more than 500,000 annual visitors an up-close look at how food is grown today (Learn more on page 19).

MCGA applauds Governor’s actions to support biofuel production
Gov. Tim Walz visited the farm of MCGA President Brian Thalmann to sign an executive order establishing the Governor’s Council on Biofuels. The announcement was a first step to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality through renewable fuels, helping Minnesota reach its environmental goals, while benefiting rural communities (Learn more on page 13).

Middle East and African officials go on tour of Minnesota’s ethanol industry
Following the Global Ethanol Summit, 15 Middle Eastern and African high-level officials visited Minnesota in October for a comprehensive tour of Minnesota’s ethanol industry led by MCGA. The group toured everything from the farm to the pump as they explore ethanol as an option to meet biofuel goals in their home countries.

U.S. Grains Council Global Ethanol Summit highlights homegrown biofuels
The Global Ethanol Summit, held in Washington, D.C., brought more than 400 attendees from 60 countries together to promote the environmental, human health, and economic benefits of ethanol. The event was an opportunity to hear from thought leaders, including MCGA Biofuels Director Mitch Coulter, and to build partnerships with industry leaders.

The idea that farmers are resistant to change does not hold true with Minnesota’s corn growers, as they constantly look for new ways they can become more sustainable on the farm.

Corn farmers in the state have recognized the potential of cover crops, and funded research that will help farmers overcome the challenges of a northern climate for growth.

And conferences like the Conservation Tillage Conference continue to increase in popularity as farmers embrace other conservation practices.

7th Annual Ag & Food Day takes over Gopher tailgate
The University of Minnesota’s Ag & Food Day put agriculture in the spotlight, prior to the Golden Gophers football win over the Nebraska Cornhuskers. A number of agribusinesses and commodity organizations, including MCGA, shared information about the state’s food and ag sector with fans.
Anderson elected to serve as 2019-2020 MCGA president
The MCGA board of directors elected Les Anderson as its president for 2019-2020. Anderson farms corn and soybeans in Cannon Falls. He was first elected to the MCGA board in 2012 and has previously served as vice president and treasurer.

Minnesota United bring soccer skills to MN farm country
MCGA teamed up with the Minnesota United to host a sold-out youth soccer clinic in Minnesota farm country. Taking place at Farmington High School, the event brought together Greater Minnesota youth and United professional staff for an afternoon of building soccer skills (Learn more on page 19).

A harvest to forget
Following a spring planting delayed by rain, Minnesota's corn farmers ran into more of the same during harvest. An October blizzard plagued northern fields while endless rain and record low temperatures slowed down farmers in the south. A propane shortage also impacted farmers who needed to dry corn.

Farmers tell EPA once again to follow the law set by the RFS
Minnesota corn farmers had to once again band together and make their voices heard to protect the RFS. More than 350 farmers reached out to the EPA and demanded the Renewable Volume Obligations rule accounts for the actual gallons of ethanol waived through small refinery exemptions to ensure RFS volume goals are met.

Pre-resolutions meeting
Corn farmers showed grassroots engagement and leadership in action by gathering for MCGA’s annual pre-resolutions meeting. There was good discussion on state and federal legislative policy and priorities.

MCGA welcomes new staff
MCGA welcomed two additions to the office in Shakopee in December. Multimedia Specialist Suusen Ng and Public Policy Specialist Alex Trunnell both come to Minnesota Corn with great experience that will elevate MCGA’s communications and policy efforts.
During a challenging growing season from beginning to end, Minnesota corn farmers showed their resolve and determination to not only persevere, but also build a brighter future for Minnesota’s ag sector.

Fighting for the issues impacting the farm, investing in tomorrow, engaging the public and cultivating the next generation of ag leaders were just some of the ways the state’s growers displayed their collective strength in 2019.

These efforts elevated the state’s ag sector in a way that benefits all Minnesotans.

Connecting with metro families
As fewer Minnesotans have a connection to the farm, connecting with metro audiences is more important than ever. Events led by farmers who engage influential metro audiences help tackle misconceptions about agriculture today and build vital connections.

A key driver of this cause, continued its efforts to connect women in agriculture with metro moms for conversations around food and farming in 2019. CommonGround volunteers, who come from farms across Greater Minnesota, hosted a sold-out cooking event in June with members of the Twin Cities Moms Blog network in St. Paul.

The evening of conversation was a great opportunity to share personal experiences and information about how food is grown and raised in our state.

Engaging the next generation of ag leaders
Minnesota’s 52 county corn organizations took their youth engagement efforts to the next level, as they hosted and participated in numerous events with future ag leaders.

A few highlights from 2019 include:

- Nobles County Corn and Soybean Growers and Benton/Sherburne County Corn Growers hosted separate agriculture education events, introducing middle schoolers to livestock, crops and all that goes into raising both.

- Lyon and Murray County Corn and Soybean Growers sponsored the Ag Bowl, which brought more than 800 FFA students to participate in ag-focused competitions at Southwest Minnesota State University.

- Lincoln County Corn and Soybean Growers hosted a scholarship auction that raised more than $20,000 for local scholarships.

- Polk, Pennington/Red Lake and Marshall County Corn and Soybean Growers donated agricultural education books to elementary schools across Northwest Minnesota.

- Yellow Medicine County Corn and Soybean Growers sponsored MCGA Young Adult Memberships for its local FFA chapter.

These efforts elevated the state’s ag sector in a way that benefits all Minnesotans.
Investing in forward-thinking research

The Innovation Grant Program was launched by the Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) to support farmers who have a conservation-minded idea they would like to test on the farm. In its fourth year, the program funded its 40th farmer-led research project in 2019.

Reaching the milestone was a testament to not only the innovative mindset of the state’s corn farmers, but also their commitment to conservation.

Innovation Grant participants are developing state-of-the-art irrigation methods, identifying optimal methods to plant cover crops, evaluating variable-rate nitrogen programs and more – all to improve the sustainability of Minnesota agriculture and become better stewards of the land.

Building grassroots in the county

Minnesota’s county corn organizations meet multiple times each year to discuss how they can build a better life for farm families in their area.

This engagement on the county level makes up the lifeblood of MCGA and its efforts to build a more sustainable future on the farm.

In 2019 alone, county organizations met more than 150 times. Each was an opportunity for county directors to come together and discuss how they can better help area youth, address policy issues, host community events, and fuel grassroots efforts on the state level.

Protecting the RFS

As the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) continued to grant small refinery waivers, the state’s corn farmers let it be known they would not quietly accept these repeated attempts to undermine the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS).

Minnesota corn farmers participated in numerous calls-to-action led by MCGA, where they contacted the EPA, their legislators and President Trump to demand the RFS is protected.

In all, thousands of comments were delivered, requesting the EPA stop its repeated attempts to destroy the ethanol market. The state’s corn farmers also submitted op-eds and recorded videos to share on social media to make their voices heard.
The Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) continued advocacy efforts in 2019 that promote profitability on the farm. The first legislative session under Gov. Tim Walz produced positive outcomes for corn farmers. On the federal level, MCGA grower leaders continued to work with policy makers to emphasize the importance of the Renewable Fuel Standard and stabilizing the trade market.

**Property Taxes**

A top priority for MCGA during session was an increase in the Ag2School credit, which helps offset the property tax burden placed on farmers. The credit is currently at 40 percent and applied to the tax on property attributable to school district-bonded debt levies. The Ag2School credit will now increase to 50 percent in tax year 2020, followed by 55 percent in 2021, 60 percent in 2022 and 70 percent in 2023.

It is estimated the Ag2School credit increase will deliver up to $10 million in property tax relief for farmers in fiscal years 2020-2021 and $44 million in fiscal years 2022-2023.

The final tax bill also conformed Minnesota tax law to federal tax law for Section 179 capital equipment expensing and bonus depreciation, applicable to the 2018 tax year. Partial state conformity on Section 179 provides certainty for farmers.

**Ag research funding**

MCGA also worked with other members of the state’s ag sector to successfully secure funding for the Agricultural Research, Education, Extension and Technology Transfer Program (AGREETT) at the University of Minnesota. The program will continue to receive $9.3 million per year for the next two years, with $5 million maintained in undesignated appropriations.

Three years in, AGREETT has led to several key hires at the University of Minnesota that will benefit the long-term health of Minnesota agriculture.

**Governors Biofuels Council**

Gov. Tim Walz visited the farm of MCGA President Brian Thalmann in mid-September to announce an executive order establishing the Governor’s Council on Biofuels. The announcement was a first step to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality through renewable fuels, helping Minnesota reach its environmental goals, while benefiting rural communities.

In November, it was announced Thalmann would join the 15-member council tasked with recommending actions to foster growth in the production and use of biofuels. Thalmann will represent Minnesota corn farmers in the shared mission to expand the use of biofuels to reduce harmful emissions.
Environmental Protection Agency continues to undermine Renewable Fuel Standard
In August, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved an additional 31 small refinery waivers. That brought the total number of waivers approved to 85 since 2017, removing more than four billion gallons of biofuels – mostly ethanol – from the nation’s fuel supply.

Minnesota corn farmers banded together and participated in multiple calls-to-action led by MCGA, reaching out to the EPA, President Trump and representatives, demanding these actions undermining the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) are stopped. MCGA President Brian Thalmann also testified in two separate EPA hearings, and MCGA directors made two trips to Washington, D.C., to stress the importance of the ethanol market.

Following the outreach, President Trump announced a biofuels package that included supplemental 2020 RFS rulemaking that would account for the volume waived by waivers on the front end, ensuring the EPA meets the 15 billion gallons of biofuels that are mandated by the RFS. However, details revealed the EPA would account for future exemptions based only on recommendations by the Department of Energy (DOE), not the actual number of gallons waived under the RFS. The EPA has historically waived more than double the gallons recommended by DOE.

More than 350 corn farmers participated in a call-to-action calling for the use of actual gallons waived to account for refinery waivers. In December, the final RVO rule was released stating it would continue to use DOE recommendations – a disappointment for the nation’s corn farmers. MCGA will continue to hold the EPA accountable in meeting volume goals.

Year-round E15 sales approved by EPA
The EPA established a rule in late May that will finally allow for year-round sales of E15. The rule removes an outdated barrier that prevented retailers from selling E15 to non-Flex Fuel Vehicles during the summer months. The National Corn Growers Association, MCGA and thousands of corn farmers nationwide submitted comments in April to press the need to ensure there would not be an interruption in E15 sales between June and September.

Positive trade developments from Far East
MCGA directors made two trips to the nation’s capital in 2019 to meet with representatives and key members of the White House to stress the need for dependable trade markets.

In October, a trade agreement was signed between the United States and Japan, bringing stability to the second largest export market for corn farmers. Japan purchased more than $2 billion in corn produced in the last marketing year. Japan is also a high-value market for the livestock industry and, therefore, also a major purchaser of U.S. corn through exported meats.

The agreement is one phase in a two-phase process that focuses on market access. MCGA eagerly awaits the second phase of negotiations, which is expected to be more comprehensive and provide clarification on trade rules that are also important to corn farmers.

USMCA passes in U.S. House in 2019
Another point of emphasis during Capitol Hill visits and a top federal priority for MCGA was the ratification of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) before the end of the year. Following a final visit by MCGA President Les Anderson in December with each member of Minnesota’s Congressional delegation, the U.S. House passed USMCA, and a U.S. Senate vote is expected in early 2020.

Stabilizing export markets for American corn continues to be a top priority in Washington.

More than four billion gallons of biofuels were removed from the nation’s fuel supply since 2017.
The Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) works with researchers and farmers to develop innovative on-farm practices and new uses for corn that increase profitability for farmers. Through their investment in the corn check-off, the state’s corn farmers have supported the following projects, chosen for their potential to shape the future of agriculture:

**Extended research through the Innovation Grant Program**
The Minnesota Corn Innovation Grant Program funds farmer-led research increasing sustainability on the farm. The following extended-duration projects funded through the program wrapped up in 2019 after three years of on-farm research:

- **Brian Velde** installed an irrigation system on his farm that spoon-feeds his crop with the necessary amount of nitrogen and water – not too little, nor too much. While returns on yield have been tremendous, he will soon report the overall results from these replicated trials over a 58-acre test plot.

- **A.J. Krusemark** wrapped up year three of research to improve the precision of application rates of injected liquid hog manure for meeting phosphorus needs while minimizing the risk of nitrogen losses.

- **Sam Peterson** finished his third season evaluating which variable-rate technology program leads to the highest nitrogen use efficiency and profit. Results are expected in February 2020 and will be posted at mncorn.org/research.

**Nitrogen Smart grows in fourth year**
University of Minnesota Extension Nitrogen Smart continued offering its free-to-attend seminars

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Minnesota’s corn farmers have a forward-thinking approach in identifying research investments that will make the biggest impact on the farm.

Focusing on future innovation that brings a new use for corn, the state’s corn farmers invested in the University of Minnesota’s Center for Sustainable Polymers (CSP) and its mission to develop the next generation of bioplastics.

MCGA-supported research aims to replace petroleum as a feedstock for plastics with renewable sources like corn. In doing so, the environmental impact of plastic, both in its making and disposal, could be drastically reduced while opening up a new market for the state’s corn supply.
throughout Minnesota, bringing farmers the nitrogen fundamentals for maximizing economic return while minimizing nitrogen losses. New in 2019, farmers can now complete Nitrogen Smart from home with an online interactive training program. In-person seminars will continue in February. The courses are currently offered online at z.umn.edu/nitrogensmart.

Minimizing nitrate leaching and water loss in irrigation
Vasudha Sharma, a professor in the University of Minnesota’s department of soil, water and climate, launched a study that will evaluate four irrigation scheduling methods for total water volume used, nitrate leaching and yield. With that information, Sharma will develop irrigation strategies that minimize both water loss and nitrate leaching, as well as identify tools that help with irrigation management.

Measuring phenotypes for corn traits that thrive in colder weather
Measuring phenotypes is at the core of corn breeding, but these efforts have only focused on end-of-season traits like plant height and yield. Candice Hirsch, a professor in the University of Minnesota’s department of agronomy and plant genetics, is using drones and sensors to evaluate expression of genotypes within and across different environments throughout the growing season. The data will help breeders determine what variation will be more resilient toward stable high yields across highly variable growing environments.

A future use for E85: Electric vehicles
Will Northrop, a professor at the University of Minnesota’s department of mechanical engineering, is leading a research project maximizing the efficiency of an internal combustion engine using thermochemical recuperation to optimize for E85 as the fuel. The engine will charge an electric vehicle’s battery rather than link directly to the drive train, acting as a range extender for the vehicle. E85 is an ideal fit for this process because it more easily converts to hydrogen and carbon monoxide to feed the thermochemical recuperation process upon entry into the engine, using ethanol-blended fuels to power the transportation system.

Making the most of each kernel
Padmanaban Krishnan is a professor in the University of South Dakota’s dairy and food science department and an expert on applications for dried distillers grains (DDGS). His research previously focused on food-grade DDGS that can be used in baked goods. Now, he is broadening his focus to extraction of pigments, metabolites, vitamin precursors and more with economic value from DDGS. The applications in pigments could be especially valuable as the food and health industries continue to move away from synthetic pigments and health supplements.

Reducing nitrogen losses from corn
Tim Griffis, a professor in the University of Minnesota’s department of soil, climate and water, uses mesocosms to simulate what growing corn looks like as our climate continues to get warmer and wetter. One of the side effects of a changing climate is an increase in reactive nitrogen losses. His team is evaluating management techniques that have the potential to reduce nitrogen losses under these changing conditions, including through manure management and the use of soil microbial communities.

Best management practices integrating cover crops and manure
While cover crops are shown to improve soil health and water quality, adoption in Minnesota is slow due to the short growing season. Melissa Wilson, a professor in the University of Minnesota’s department of soil, climate and water, is evaluating how fall manure application and interseeding cover crops can work together to make cover crops more successful.
Minnesota grew as a national ethanol leader in 2019, as sales and stations offering ethanol-blended fuels continued to climb.

At the time of publication, gallons of E15 sold at the pump exceeded 2018 totals with two months remaining in the year. The number of retailers offering the fuel throughout the state also surpassed 350.

The Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) continued its efforts to grow the momentum for ethanol-blended fuels in 2019.

**Fuel Promotion Events**
MCGA worked with county organizations to hold fuel promotion events at their local gas stations to promote the benefits of ethanol-blended fuels and offer discounts on E85 and E15. In all, 33 fuel promotion events were held over the spring and summer months, resulting in nearly 7,000 gallons of E15 and more than 13,000 gallons of E85 pumped.

Each event was a great opportunity to raise awareness of lower-priced, homegrown options at the pump and speak directly with consumers about the many benefits of ethanol-blended fuels.

The American Lung Association was at events to promote the clean-air benefits of ethanol-blended fuels. Twin Cities Road Crew, who has long partnered with MCGA to promote corn farming at metro schools and special events, helped answer consumers’ questions about E15 and E85.

**Ethanol marketing**
MCGA also continued marketing the benefits of ethanol-blended fuel with metro consumers via a multi-faceted advertising campaign.

The recognizable “88” sticker was visible on more than 20 Metro Transit buses across the Twin Cities, raising awareness of the benefits of E15. Advertisements also ran on the most popular radio stations in the Minneapolis-St. Paul region and beyond.

New print materials were created in 2019 to share how ethanol is made, its benefits, misconceptions, and what vehicles can use different ethanol blends. Distributed at events throughout the year, the marketing materials drove consumers to MNFuels.com, which was recently revamped with a station locator and a blog regularly updated with ethanol-related news.
MEG Corp continues to reach technicians
Fuel consulting company MEG Corp continued its mission to address ethanol misconceptions with future auto technicians currently attending a technical school.

With support from MCGA, MEG Corp Founder Hoon Ge has been traveling to technical schools to present a fuel-focused curriculum for more than seven years. During the 2018-2019 school year, he presented at 12 technical schools, reaching more than 500 students. Each is an opportunity to focus on fuels—a topic not covered extensively in auto programs—and address the safety of ethanol-blended fuels and emphasize the benefits.

Each educational session includes explaining the process of how crude oil becomes gasoline before transitioning into introductory ethanol topics, including its production from corn, blended fuels and flex fuels. The objective is to keep the lesson straightforward for the students early on in their education.

By reaching technicians, MEG Corp is developing a future workforce that understands ethanol-blended fuels.

Minnesota Corn goes global
MCGA continues to work with the U.S. Grains Council (USGC) to grow export markets for corn farmers. Minnesota was once again a popular stop for trade delegations exploring importing American corn products, and Minnesota Corn directors made trips abroad to promote their products.

Highlights include:

Colombia & Peru
Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council member Jim O’Connor traveled to both Colombia and Peru with a Minnesota Department of Agriculture trade delegation in 2019. The tour was an opportunity for O’Connor to meet the wholesale and feed industry people in both markets.

In November, MCGA hosted a team of buyers and nutritionists from Peru’s livestock and poultry industries for a tour of the dried distillers grains (DDGS) production process and feed usage in poultry and cattle diets. The group toured a corn farm, ethanol plant, beef and poultry producers, and participated in a DDGS nutrition short course at the University of Minnesota.

![U.S. Ethanol Gallons Exported Abroad](source: U.S. Energy Information Administration)

Ethanol
400 representatives from more than 60 countries made the trip to Washington, D.C., in mid-October to learn about ethanol and the role it could play back home. The USGC Global Ethanol Summit featured a number of education sessions and expert speakers, including MCGA Commodity Marketing and Biofuels Director Mitch Coulter, who moderated sessions on the policies for future renewables and global decarbonization of fuels.

Following the Global Ethanol Summit, 16 Middle Eastern and African officials came to Minnesota to tour the full scope of Minnesota-made ethanol, from the corn field to the plant to the blending site, fuel retailer and refinery. Hosted by MCGA, the tour was another opportunity to promote U.S. ethanol.

Ethanol remains a bright spot for Minnesota’s corn farmers, as demand abroad increases. MCGA will continue its efforts to promote Minnesota’s ethanol industry globally.

**Colombia**
- Population: 45.5 million
- Number 4 import market for U.S. corn
- Number 15 export market for DDGS
- U.S. corn has 97% market share in the country

**Peru**
- Population: 32.6 million
- Number 5 export market for U.S. corn
- 60% of total corn demand is imported
- DDGS imports continue to grow as poultry sector begins to consume DDGS

Source: U.S. Grains Council
The Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) builds relationships with media in the Twin Cities and beyond to share the efforts of the state’s corn farmers. Highlights include:

**Star Tribune: Minnesota farmers need D.C. to restore ethanol market**
MCGA President Brian Thalmann penned an op-ed for the Star Tribune calling out actions by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that are undermining the Renewable Fuel Standard. Following news an additional 31 small refinery waivers were granted by the EPA, Thalmann stressed that enough is enough:

“While we will never be able to undo all the damage caused by the EPA’s waivers, President Donald Trump and federal officials can take action today to begin the recovery,” he said.

**Star Tribune: University of Minnesota researchers get grant to develop better corn-based plastic**
MCGA and the Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council (MCR&PC) announced it would be supporting research at the University of Minnesota’s Center for Sustainable Polymers with a $460,000 grant. The research partially funded by the state’s corn farmers helps build a future of greener plastics made from renewable sources like corn, replacing the petroleum-based alternative.

“While our mission is to build a more sustainable future on the farm, this research has implications that would help address a number of the major environmental concerns we are facing globally,” Thalmann said in the article.

**West Central Tribune: Kerkhoven farmer gets grant to study strip tillage**
The Innovation Grant Program entered its fourth year of supporting farmer-led research increasing sustainability on the farm. Kerkhoven farmer Harmon Wilts’ project comparing the benefits of conventional tillage and strip tillage was one of 12 projects funded in 2019.

**Rochester Post-Bulletin: International leaders tour the state’s ethanol production chain**
MCGA brought high-level government officials from the Middle East and North Africa on a comprehensive tour of Minnesota’s ethanol industry. One of the stops was the Kwik Trip blending site and fuel retailer in Eyota. The group saw a corn farm, ethanol plant and fuel distributor during the two-day tour exploring the role ethanol could play back home.

**Landscape Arboretum opens ‘Farm at the Arb’**
The Minnesota Landscape Arboretum can now tell the story of modern Minnesota agriculture in a new farm exhibit, which opened in September. Supported by MCGA, the Farm at the Arb provides the Arboretum’s more than 500,000 annual visitors an up-close look at how food is grown today. Plots line the exhibit showing visitors how and what crops are grown in Minnesota and the conservation practices used by farmers statewide.

**Minnesota United take skills to farm country**
As part of MCGA’s continued partnership with the Minnesota United, the state’s corn farmers had a constant presence during the Major League Soccer team’s inaugural season at Allianz Field. In addition to messages promoting the state’s corn farmers at each sold-out match, the United also held a soccer camp at Farmington High School in partnership with MCGA. The sold-out event was an opportunity for Greater Minnesotans to learn new skills from the team’s professional staff.
MCGA introduces new promotion with St. Paul Saints
MCGA partnered with the St. Paul Saints to promote the work of Minnesota corn farmers with metro families in attendance at beautiful CHS field. In addition to the corn cob foul poles and other corn-themed traditions, fans were treated to a new promotion from MCGA this year—the “Moment of Zen.”

During the break between innings and continuing into the opposing teams’ time at the plate, the crowd was treated to relaxing visuals and music, as well as the soothing voice of the CHS Field public address announcer. Yoga and other zen-like poses were demonstrated atop the dugout by the Saints “ushertainers,” adding to the moments of tranquility at each home game.

Farmfest receives national attention for ag policy discussion
The Wick Building on the Farmfest grounds was abuzz with forums and listening sessions diving into the topics that are front-of-mind for corn farmers in Minnesota and beyond. MCGA was proud to sponsor a forum that brought nine state commissioners to the Wick Building. Hosted by Fluence Forum’s Blois Olson, the forum was a unique opportunity to discuss how the state’s ag sector can better work with state agencies.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue also held a listening session at Farmfest where frustrations around trade and the Renewable Fuel Standard were discussed with farmers in attendance. MCGA President Brian Thalmann made national headlines when he voiced his concern around the impact each issue has had on family farms. ■