

corn talk

Official Publication of the Minnesota Corn Growers Association • July 2020



Inside:

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- ▣ “Ag is Everywhere” week shines spotlight on Minnesota’s farmers
- ▣ Refinery exemptions again threaten ethanol market
- ▣ Advocacy efforts focus on additional COVID-19 relief

Corn Facts connects consumers to ag

The revamped Corn Facts page, available at mncorn.org, features general information about Minnesota's corn sector, production statistics, trade markets and how the state's corn crop is used.

For the non-farming public, the page serves as a resource to learn the importance of corn farming as an economic driver for our state. Corn Facts also features information about corn farming that might be unfamiliar to most, including the difference between field and sweet corn, how much corn is in a bushel, and the components of dent corn.

Watch for Corn Facts information as it is shared on MCGA social channels, including Facebook (@MinnesotaCorn), Twitter (@mncorn) and Instagram (@minnesotacorn).



Visit the Corn Facts page at mncorn.org/corn-facts.

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COVID-19 relief efforts continue on federal level

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) opened the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) for applications in late May. Funded through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the program was launched to offset market losses for the 2019 crop year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Corn farmers are eligible to apply if they suffered a price decline of 5 percent or greater from mid-January to mid-April due to the COVID-19 pandemic and faced increased marketing costs for inventories. Adjusted gross income (AGI) limits apply, unless 75 percent of AGI is derived from farming. Conservation compliance provisions also apply to CFAP.

Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices will accept applications through Aug. 28. As a reminder, FSA offices are open for appointment only, so farmers will need to call their local office once the application period opens.

A payment will be made based on 50 percent of a farmer's 2019 total production or the 2019 unpriced inventory as of January 15, 2020, whichever is smaller, multiplied by 50 percent and then be multiplied by a commodity payment rate. Unpriced inventory means any production that is not subject to an agreed-upon price in the future through a forward contract, agreement, or similar binding document.

For more information on payment structure, farmers are encouraged to visit info.mncorn.org/covid19.

As of July 13, nationwide there has been a total of \$5.87 billion in payments to nearly 410,000 farm operators. Payments to livestock producers account for about half of the total payments and payments to corn farmers are at \$1.05 billion nationally.

In Minnesota, there has been nearly \$375 million in total payments to over 33,000 farmers. Nearly 21,000 farmers have received a total of \$150.8 million in non-specialty payments, which includes corn. Payments to Minnesota livestock producers are the next largest share at \$152.6 million with an additional \$71 million in dairy payments.

Virtual Hill visits advocate for more relief

CFAP is a necessary first step to help farmers deeply impacted by COVID-19, but the program will not cover the entire 2019 corn crop price loss, nor does it account for continued losses in 2020.

Recent analysis commissioned by the National Corn Growers Association and conducted by the University of Illinois found Minnesota corn farmers experienced a 28-percent decline in the cash price for corn when comparing the average cash price in January and February through the first week of May. The same analysis projects a \$59 per-acre average revenue decline nationally from March through early June.

Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) grower leaders met with Minnesota's congressional delegation for virtual Capitol Hill visits in July to share the analysis and advocate for additional relief.

The conversation with each member of Congress focused on the fact that demand destruction in the ethanol and livestock sectors due to COVID-19 are expected to only add to 2020 market losses.

Projection for the 2020 Market Year Average price is \$3.20 per bushel, resulting in an \$89 per-acre average revenue decline, when compared to pre-COVID-19 estimates. Residual damage from the coronavirus is expected to persist through 2021 and potentially beyond as corn stocks grow and the recovery timeline for the ethanol and livestock sectors remains uncertain.

The analysis provided the foundation needed during each virtual Hill visit to advocate for additional federal assistance through the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) or direct appropriations to USDA for COVID-19 relief.

MCGA appreciates the time provided by each member of Minnesota's congressional delegation, and we look forward to continued conversation as we advocate for much-needed additional assistance. ■

MCGA worked with national partners to secure needed relief as planting hit full stride.



Special sessions, biofuel developments in St. Paul

The Minnesota Legislature convened for its second special session in mid-July with a number of impactful policy items left to be addressed.

At the time of publication, reaching an agreement on the public works construction bill was first on the agenda for policy makers. If an agreement is reached on the bonding bill, which requires a supermajority in the House and Senate, a tax bill will likely also be addressed. For the Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA), a tax bill that addresses Section 179 conformity continues to be a top priority.

The first special session called in late June ended without agreement on any of the major policy topics, including police reform. A police accountability package will be a major focus during the second special session, and it remains to be seen if agreement on that topic will break the logjam on bonding and taxes.

The latest from the Governor's Council on Biofuels

The Governor's Biofuels Council has continued to work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to produce policy recommendations that promote the use of biofuels to meet environmental goals. The Council is expected



The special session convened June 12.

to release its report in November, which will go to Gov. Tim Walz and the Minnesota Legislature for review.

The Council formally adopted the vision statement to make E15 the base fuel in Minnesota during a June meeting. Working under that goal, the group will recommend the adoption of policies and programs that foster robust development of biofuels in Minnesota, including an investment in infrastructure that supports mid-level ethanol blends. The policy recommendations aim to put Minnesota on a path to replace 30-percent of petroleum with biofuels.

MCGA chairman Brian Thalmann represents Minnesota's corn growers on the Governor's Biofuels Council. MCGA will continue working with the Walz administration to promote the role of biofuels in the goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. ■

Sharing the benefits of ethanol-blended fuels

The Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) launched the Better Fuel Initiative to further increase awareness, understanding and usage of biofuels in Minnesota. In addition to supporting biofuel policy, infrastructure and research, MCGA also continues to share the benefits of ethanol-blended fuels with consumers as part of the Better Fuel Initiative.

Marketing efforts launched in March with advertising on the radio, online and outdoors across the state to promote the cleaner burning and higher octane benefits of ethanol-blended fuels.

Radio messages were played on more than 10 stations in the Twin Cities alone, reaching millions of listeners interested in a lower-priced option at the pump with clean air benefits. Nearly 30 Metro Transit buses, the Green Line light rail and digital billboards across the Metro also feature ethanol-themed graphics promoting the benefits of higher ethanol blends.

These marketing efforts stretch to Greater Minnesota as well, connecting with consumers via targeted radio, traditional billboards and digital billboards. Additional online advertising will also continue to reach those Minnesotans statewide who, according to consumer research, would be most likely to switch to higher blends of ethanol fuel.

Beyond the paid campaign, MCGA also continues to promote the benefits of ethanol-blended fuels on its social channels, in addition to working with media on local stories promoting Minnesota's ethanol industry. MCGA recently posted a blog featuring an interview with the Renewable Fuels Association about ethanol plants stepping in to help fill the need for hand sanitizer, as one example.

Interested in past efforts by the state's corn farmers to build a brighter future for ethanol-blended fuels? Check out the "Rise of Ethanol in Minnesota" e-book: info.mncorn.org/ethanol. ■



Outreach efforts promote the cleaner burning, higher octane and lower cost benefits of ethanol fuels.

Refinery exemptions again threaten ethanol market

Earlier this month, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released that it received a total of 52 exemption requests from oil refineries that would remove nearly 2 billion gallons of biofuels from the nation's fuel supply. The requests, labeled as "gap year" exemptions, are only the latest attempt by oil refineries and the EPA to undermine the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS).

The exemption requests follow a court decision by the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals that concluded the EPA improperly granted exemption requests filed in 2016 and 2017 because the requests were not temporary extensions of prior-year request. If applied broadly, as it should be, the ruling would mean the majority of exemptions requested would not meet the criteria to be granted.

But instead of applying the court decision, oil refiners are asking the EPA to skirt the court decision and grant these "gap year" exemptions dating back to 2011 so they can form a continuous string of exemptions and continue to flout the law and Congressional intent, further decreasing the market for ethanol and corn demand.

The Minnesota Corn Growers Association has been working closely with the National Corn Growers Association and its biofuel partners to prevent another attempt to not follow the law set by the RFS. At the time of publication, the EPA had not addressed the exemption requests or made a formal announcement on when it would release its 2021 annual volume obligation (RVO) rule. It's possible the draft RVO would provide insight on how the EPA plans to address the "gap year" exemption requests.

Bipartisan voices speak out against 'gap year' exemptions

Since the EPA made these oil refiner requests public, a bipartisan effort by governors and members of Congress have urged EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler to outright reject these requests.

The Governor's Biofuels Coalition, chaired by South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem and vice-chaired by Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, sent a letter to Wheeler asking the EPA to reject the effort from oil refiners to circumvent the Tenth Circuit court decision.

Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar, along with Senators Joni Ernst (R-Iowa), Tammy Duckworth (D-Illinois) and Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) led a bipartisan letter, co-signed by 12 Senate colleagues, including Sen. Tina Smith, to Wheeler expressing concern and frustration about these retroactive oil refinery exemptions. The Senators also requested Wheeler respond in writing to several questions they posed regarding EPA administration of the RFS.

Finally, the House Biofuels Caucus, led by Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson (D-MN), sent a letter to President Trump urging him to direct the EPA to apply the Tenth Circuit decision nationally and quickly reject the retroactive exemption requests. The letter was signed by 32 members of the House of Representatives including Minnesota Representatives Jim Hagedorn, Tom Emmer and Angie Craig.

MCGA would like to thank Gov. Tim Walz and each member of the Minnesota congressional delegation for their strong support of the RFS and continued efforts to stop actions that undermine the law. ■



Additional refinery exemptions would deeply impact ethanol plants still reeling from decreased production due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

feature story

Ag is Everywhere

The summer months are a time for the state's corn farmers to connect with their communities and peers during fairs and trade shows. Plans have changed with the arrival of COVID-19, requiring many to connect with Minnesotans in new ways. The Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) is doing just that through the inaugural "Ag is Everywhere" week set for Aug. 3-7.

Throughout the week, MCGA will celebrate the impact of Minnesota's ag sector and elevate the issues that are important to farmers. For the state's corn growers, it will also be an opportunity to share the many ways they are working toward a brighter future, benefitting all Minnesotans.

"Ag is Everywhere" week will be a multi-faceted effort, including forums and candidate debates airing on WCCO Radio, a statewide awareness campaign, and the launch of a website featuring the latest developments from MCGA.

Forums and candidate debates

In advance of the November elections, MCGA will be focused on raising awareness of the issues important to the state's ag sector and rural communities.

In partnership with Fluence Media and WCCO Radio, candidates for the U.S. Senate will hold a debate that will air on WCCO Radio as part of "Ag is Everywhere" week. Incumbent Democratic candidate Tina Smith and Republican candidate Jason Lewis will tackle the topics that are most important to Greater Minnesota, during what will be the first debate held between Senate candidates.

Forums will also be held throughout the week featuring members of the state's ag sector and political leaders discussing the opportunities and challenges in agriculture. Interviews and forums will air live during the "Dave Lee in the Morning Show" and as part of the evening broadcast on WCCO Radio, reaching a statewide audience.

Each day, WCCO Radio will tackle a new ag-focused topic, ranging from biofuels to agriculture co-products. Leading voices from the state's ag sector, like Minnesota Department of Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen, will be part of the week's guest lineup for in-depth conversations about the challenges and opportunities in farming today.



"With the cancellation of events like Farmfest, we lose a valuable opportunity to not only share the work of our organization, but also the importance of our ag sector," MCGA President Les Anderson said. "Ag is Everywhere" week will allow us to still make those connections by shining a spotlight on Minnesota agriculture in new and innovative ways, and I couldn't be more excited."

Sharing how MN Corn Grows MN

MCGA launched the "MN Corn Grows MN" campaign to share the key role the state's corn farmers play in building a more sustainable future for all Minnesotans. The campaign will again take center stage during "Ag is Everywhere" week when the impact of corn farming will be broadcasted statewide.

Billboards spanning the state, radio advertising on local dials and online ads directed at the non-farming public will not only elevate the importance of corn farming, but also raise awareness of the issues impacting our ag sector. The "MN Corn Grows MN" campaign will also reach new audiences via streaming cable services, like Sling.

The message via each medium will be the many ways corn farmers benefit the state: economically, environmentally and sustainably. Minnesotans will be directed to mncorngrowthsmn.org to see videos from corn farmers discussing their focus on stewardship and issues affecting

their operation. The site will also feature blog posts with examples of how corn growers are fostering innovation on and off the farm, protecting water quality, building relationships abroad and more.

MCGA's Twitter (@mncorn), Facebook (@MinnesotaCorn) and Instagram (@MinnesotaCorn) accounts will further promote the "MN Corn Grows MN" message, and all are welcome to join the conversation using the hashtag #MNCornGrowsMN.

A virtual booth for would-be Farmfest attendees

With the cancellation of Farmfest, MCGA will launch a virtual booth during "Ag is Everywhere" week for the would-be attendees who can no longer chat with MCGA grower leaders in person. The "booth" will feature highlights from the past year in policy, ethanol, research and connecting with the non-farming public, along with videos from directors discussing the highlights MCGA members need to know.

The virtual booth opens for visitors on Aug. 3. Available at mncorn.org, the virtual booth will also feature an opportunity to win a \$100 Amazon gift card from MCGA as a thank you for checking out the virtual booth, so don't miss it. ■



Adding precision to manure application creates a more sustainable nutrient management plan.



Innovation Grant Spotlight: Getting the most from manure

Manure provides a rich meal for your crops, but farmers are often left guessing the amount of nutrients included in each serving.

Trimont farmer A.J. Krusemark launched a three-year study through the Minnesota Corn Innovation Grant Program to get a better handle on the crop nutrition he was providing through injecting swine manure across several hundred acres that will grow corn the following year.

Krusemark's hypothesis was he could maintain yield and stretch his manure resource by trying to hit a specific phosphorous rate, and then coming back and doing a small nitrogen side dress application to make up any shortfall. To consistently hit a phosphorous rate, he needed a better way to test manure on the spot.

"We're trying to understand how much variability is there, from one tank load to the next, when you are drawing the manure from the same pit," Krusemark said. "We take 40 to 50 samples from successive loads, to understand how stable the analysis is, from beginning to end."

As an Innovation Grant participant, Krusemark was able to collaborate with Melissa Wilson, a manure nutrient management Extension specialist and assistant professor at the University of Minnesota, on identifying a testing strategy.

Wilson worked with Krusemark to implement a procedure where an operator screens solids from the manure storage using a 1-millimeter mesh, and then relates the volume of the solids back to the total volume of the sample to get an estimate of the phosphorous contained in the sample.

To date, Krusemark has seen an excellent correlation between the rapid test and conventional lab tests from the same sample. He has reduced his application rate to between 2,500 and 2,750 gallons per acre—down from closer to 3,800 gallons. In the various tests, it appears that manure he once used to cover 190 acres can be used to cover 240 or even 300 acres, without a loss of yield.

"It comes back to what we want out of our operation, that we are really trying to do the best we can," said Krusemark. "It's an environmental stewardship conversation. It also comes from a business profitability perspective."

In addition to the savings and the reduced environmental impact, Wilson touts the soil health benefits of Krusemark's strategy.

"The other aspect is that manure has been shown for a lot of reasons to improve soil health, especially on fields that might not be as healthy as they could be," Wilson said. "By applying manure at lower rates and using it across more acres, that can hopefully spread that soil health benefit further." ■

Research evaluates soil health benefits of combining manure and cover crops

In addition to supporting a farmer-led Innovation Grant Project, University of Minnesota Assistant Professor Melissa Wilson is an overall manure expert whose research is supported by the Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA). One of these projects has been the potential of pairing up manure application with another soil health-promoting practice: cover crops.

Wilson is now in the second year of a research project to assess the benefits of this approach.

"The aim of the project is seeing if we can integrate liquid manure and cover crops to hold onto nutrients longer and to improve soil health," Wilson said.

She is looking at the best timing of planting the cover crop, how the timing of liquid manure application impacts the system, and whether to use oats or winter rye—two of the most popular choices for cover crops in Minnesota.

"Fall is the time when most manure is applied in Minnesota," Wilson said. "So, another question is, do cover crops give the farmer added flexibility?"

Such flexibility would be much welcomed in Minnesota, where in recent years farm operators have had an average of seven days that were fit to complete field work.

The research is comprehensive, both geographically and agronomically, to ensure that it will be useful to farmers across Minnesota—whoever has

access to manure and wants to incorporate cover crops. Wilson has developed the project at locations in Morris, Nicollet, Waseca and Trimont, consisting of two scientific plots and two on-farm plots. Across these locations, Wilson is testing four different treatments: manure and cover crops, cover crops only, manure only, and conventionally cultivated ground with neither manure nor cover crops added.

She is also testing different rotations: soybeans into corn, continuous corn silage, and sweet corn into corn. With soybeans, she is testing planting the cover crop seed just before leaf drop, to see if the layer of shed leaves creates a beneficial environment for germination. With the silage experiment, Wilson is trying interseeding—planting the cover crop when the corn is still small, at V4 to V5 to give it another several weeks of growing degree days.

To assess improvements in soil health, they will examine increases in the bulk density of the top several inches of soil, increases in microbial biomass, and other factors.

For updates on Wilson's research and other research projects funded by Minnesota's corn farmers, visit mncorn.org/research. ■



Melissa Wilson, PhD.

Webinar series provides marketing insight following USDA crop reports



The webinar offers real-time insight on marketing decisions following 92 million acres of corn being planted in 2020.

The Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) partnered with Kluis Commodity Advisors to provide farmers with quarterly marketing webinars, following the release of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Crop Reports.

A commodity advisor and broker since 1976, Al Kluis hosts each webinar providing valuable insight on how the crop report impacts price projections and marketing decisions for Minnesota's corn farmers. With the continued volatility in the grain markets, only further impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the webinars will help farmers navigate the economic headwinds of today.

The first webinar was on July 1, following the June crop report from the USDA. You can view a recording of the webinar at mncorn.org. The September crop report will be analyzed during a Sept. 15 webinar at 2 p.m.

"Following a great planting season for corn farmers nationwide, we are seeing USDA projections of a near-record corn crop in 2020," MCGA President Les Anderson said. "As we face challenging decisions in the year ahead, each webinar will bring together decades of experience to help farmers make the right marketing decisions."

Stay in the loop on future webinars and registration information by subscribing to Leader Update, the official e-newsletter of MCGA, at mncorn.org/LeaderUpdate. ■

Join us for the next Kluis Commodity Advisor webinar on Sept. 15 at 2 p.m.

Indonesia opens door to ethanol imports

The fourth-most populous country in the world has opened its door to ethanol imports.

Indonesia announced in July that it would now allow pre-blended ethanol to be imported into the country at 3 percent for regular grade fuel (88RON) and 7 percent for premium grade fuel (92RON). The change creates a potential market of more than 200 million gallons for ethanol, equivalent to 71 million bushels of corn.

The U.S. Grains Council (USGC) reports Indonesia is expected to grow to the sixth largest global gasoline market within a decade. The key to the growth is rising incomes in the country's middle class, fueling an increased investment in four-wheeled vehicles. At the same time, Indonesia has set goals to meet 23 percent of its energy needs from renewable fuels by 2025.

With demand increasing and environmental goals declared, the USGC brought Indonesian officials to Minneapolis in May 2018 for the Ethanol Summit of the Asia Pacific to show how ethanol can help reach those goals while providing cost savings.

Prior to the summit, the Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) worked with USGC to organize a tour of Minnesota's ethanol operations with representatives from Indonesia and other Asia Pacific countries. The group toured blender pumps at Minnoco and Coborn's, as well as Al-Corn Clean Fuel, a POET biorefinery and the Flint Hills Resources refinery. MCGA then hosted the Indonesian embassy two months later for a tour of family corn farms, agricultural businesses, and a co-op to demonstrate the quality and breadth of Minnesota's ag sector.

For USGC Director of Global Ethanol Market Development Brian Healy, the tours were a valuable piece in the puzzle. Healy said the visits allowed government officials to see ethanol up close and talk with members of the supply chain to see how the process has worked—knowledge that can be translated back to Indonesia.

"The Minnesota tours moved what was an abstract idea to the recognition that this is a real thing," Healy said. "It wasn't too long ago when the United States wasn't at 10-percent ethanol, so we are able to



Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council member Brandon Fast hosted the Indonesian embassy on his farm.

talk through the policy and the infrastructure, and show each stage of how it has been implemented here."

The local efforts accompany work by USGC field staff based out of Kuala Lumpur to strengthen relationships with Indonesia's oil supplier, department of energy and foreign ag services. Stateside tours and connection building abroad work together to show ethanol is available globally for trade and communicate its economic and environmental benefits.

Healy said the next step in Indonesia is to help the country reach its aspirational goal of E10. The latest development opens the door for gasoline pre-blended with ethanol. One of the larger obstacles in moving to 10 percent is a 30-percent tariff on imported ethanol. A five-year goal for USGC will be to lower that tariff and open the door for ethanol to be blended with oil produced domestically. ■

MCGA Director Brian Thalmann elected to National Corn Board

Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) board member Brian Thalmann was elected to the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) Corn Board during July Corn Congress, which was held virtually.

Thalmann, who farms in Plato, will begin serving his three-year term on Oct. 1. He joins MCGA directors Tom Haag (Eden Valley) and Harold Wolle (Madelia) on the Corn Board. Thalmann previously served as MCGA president and is a three-year member of the board. ■



Brian Thalmann

Biofuels leader retires from MN Dept of Agriculture



The Biofuel Infrastructure Partnership (BIP) is often credited for propelling the growth of biofuels in Minnesota, as the number of retailers increased from 40 in 2015 to more than 350 today. A key figure in the program's success and a pivotal biofuels

advocate, Kevin Hennessy recently retired as the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's (MDA) bioenergy manager.

In his role with MDA, Hennessy spearheaded efforts to form a coalition of biofuel advocates starting in 2013, including the Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA), to invest in ethanol infrastructure. With Hennessy's leadership, the group's investment resulted in more than 40 Minnesota stations installing about 120 flex pumps by 2015.

MCGA would go on to work closely with Hennessy in the implementation of the BIP program when it was announced in 2015. Hennessy played a key role as the connection between the biofuel coalition and the retailers.

Looking back on his career with MDA, Hennessy points to the implementation of the BIP program as an achievement he is most proud of. While the program is looked at as a great success for Minnesota, he admits there were some speed bumps along the way. He credits the great partnerships for seeing BIP through.

"I have to admit, BIP almost looked like a failure at one point, but it was one of those things," Hennessy said. "Like in hockey, you got to keep your head up. We just kept our heads up and took it one day at a time. When you work with great people who don't give up, good things happen."

With a successful implementation of BIP, federal and state officials attended a celebration at the Plymouth Holiday Superstation store in December of 2018. Hennessy saw the fruits of his labor as Minnesota passed 400 E85 stations and 350 E15 stations, growing E15 sales from 42,000 gallons in 2013 to 78.5 million gallons in 2019. ■

CommonGround Minnesota debuts interactive website

CommonGround Minnesota is a group of farm women who volunteer their time to share information about food and farming. To more effectively promote those conversations, the group debuted a new website earlier this month.

The website now features a blog sharing topics from modern agriculture that would be of interest to the non-farming public, a Q&A addressing common topics consumers have about their food, videos that introduce CommonGround volunteers and more.

Visit the new website at CommonGroundMinnesota.com, and follow CommonGround on Instagram (@commongroundminn) and Facebook (@CommonGroundMinnesota).

MyTalk107 partnership

CommonGround Minnesota has teamed up with MyTalk 107, the top radio station among women in the Twin Cities, to share food and farming information. CommonGround will again be featured on the station's "Weekly Dish" program, which is hosted by Mpls.St.Paul Magazine Food and Dining Editor Stephanie March.

In addition to advertisements and interview opportunities with March, CommonGround will be featured during the program as a resource for Twin Cities listeners in search of information about modern agriculture. New this year, CommonGround will also be a featured partner on March's new podcast, 'Weekly Dish', where she and fellow Twin Cities foodie Stephanie Hansen take a more in-depth look at the Twin Cities food scene.



Twin Cities Mom Collective

CommonGround Minnesota partners with TC Mom Collective to reach its expansive audience of urban and suburban women. Most recently, the blog network has been sharing information about CommonGround with its Instagram (@twincitiesmomcollective) and Facebook (@TwinCitiesMomCollective) followers, which together exceed 60,000 people. CommonGround volunteers will be participating in a takeover of both social channels in the coming weeks to share information about food and farming. ■

Come see our virtual Farmfest booth

While it doesn't come with sweet corn ice cream, the Minnesota Corn Growers Association virtual booth still provides the annual updates Minnesota's corn farmers need to know.

Find the virtual booth at mncorn.org starting on Aug. 3 to hear directly from MCGA directors about the latest in policy, ethanol, research and more. The booth is also a great place to learn about events you can attend from home during the week of Farmfest, including forums and candidate debates held for "Agriculture is Everywhere" week. ■



MN Ag in the Classroom adjusts to bring teachers to the farm

As fewer Minnesotans have a connection to the farm, Minnesota Ag in the Classroom's (MAITC) mission to improve ag literacy in our schools is as important as ever. In addition to providing curriculum materials, one of its best tools for success is the opportunity to bring teachers on tours where they can see the state's ag sector up close.

Each summer, MAITC Executive Director Ann Marie Ward would work with her team of regional specialists to bring teachers to a farm for a multi-day tour in agriculture covering a variety of experiences. Teachers would then translate what they learned to their K-12 students. Since beginning in 2014, the popularity of each tour grew, with waiting lists becoming the norm.

With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ward and MAITC regional specialists focused on how they could bring the immersive in-person tour experience to the virtual world. The MAITC team found that not only could they carry over many of the aspects adored by the teachers, but also introduce parts of agriculture they might not be able to see in person.

"With biosecurity or safety concerns associated with an in-person tour removed, now we have more of an opportunity to show the diversity in our ag sector," Ward said.

The 2020 Summer Teacher Tour included four-stops. The first, held on June 23, brought teachers into the world of "Farm to Fork," showing the farms that work with local restaurants and the chefs who focus on fresh, locally grown produce. On June 30, the tour travelled to a metro school with a focus on the important role school gardens can play in ag education. On July 14—a stop that wouldn't be possible in person due to safety concerns—educators virtually visited a Minnesota tree farm for a look at the state's forestry sector. The final stop took attendees to Martin County to tour a honey farm, followed by visiting a crop farm to discuss precision agriculture.

Each stop featured a live tour, mixed in with pre-recorded footage when necessary. Teachers received a packet prior with lesson kits and resources that are applicable to each stop. And to encourage discussion, teachers participated in a private video chat, followed by breakout meetings after the tour where teachers were grouped, based on grade level, to discuss how they can translate the tours into the classroom.



Minnesota Ag in the Classroom staff hosted a virtual tour from a school garden at Bruce Vento Elementary School in St. Paul.

Each participating teacher was also added to a private Facebook group for follow-up conversations down the road.

"We want to make sure we continue to have the great conversations, and these breakout rooms allow that to happen. Kindergarten teachers can talk about how they break down this topic for children who can't read, for example," said MAITC Education Specialist Sue Knott. "The Facebook private group then provides a home where teachers can continue to come back and connect."

The teachers' enthusiastic response to the tour exceeded MAITC's expectations. The initial 80-person tour sold out in less than a week, leading to MAITC increasing registrations to just over 100. For Ward, the initial excitement around the tours has been a highlight and one that opens up the possibility to more virtual events.

"In addition to being able to show more of the diversity in our ag sector, I love the idea that people can engage without having to worry about taking a couple days out of their summer," Ward said. ■

O'Connor elected to chair of Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council, two new members elected

Jim O'Connor was named chairman by members of the Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council during a joint board meeting held in June.



Jim O'Connor

O'Connor farms in Blooming Prairie, where he grows corn and soybeans as well as raises hogs. He was recently re-elected to his second term as a member of MCR&PC, representing District 8.

O'Connor succeeds Fountain farmer Scott Winslow as chair. Also at the joint board meeting, Brandon Fast (Mountain Lake) was named vice chairman, Doug Albin (Clarkfield) was elected to treasurer, and Gary Prescher (Delavan) was elected to Secretary.

David Vipond (Districts 1, 2 and 4) and Rodney Moe (District 9) were newly elected to MCR&PC during the April election. ■

State FFA Convention goes virtual

A highlight of spring for Greater Minnesota students is the FFA State Convention. It was first postponed due to COVID-19, then moved online to meet social distancing guidelines and the limitations placed on large, in-person gatherings. Minnesota FFA's first-ever virtual state convention was held in May.

Val Aarsvold, executive director of the Minnesota FFA Foundation, said the decision to shift to a virtual convention wasn't made overnight. Organizers took into account that some rural areas would be at a disadvantage due to broadband issues. And competitions would need to be rescheduled until FFA students can again meet in person.

Aarsvold credits the adaptability within each group for making the process manageable. She said ag educators across the state were eager to quickly band together to brainstorm how they can adapt and remain interactive in an online format.

"Within hours of the government shifting us to distance learning, our ag educators were already having conversations talking about how they can rally, both in producing content and with supporting each other."

For FFA students, the transition online also appeared seamless. Episodes of the Minnesota FFA Weekly Show still premiered in mid-April on

YouTube, offering FFA students a sense of community during the time of isolation.

The determination to adapt to the "new normal" was on display during the Minnesota FFA Convention. The full convention schedule featured 45-minute sessions that recognized the work of FFA students over the last year, honored retiring state officers and provided a number of interactive education opportunities. Social activities, including a talent show and trivia, took place each evening. And students had an opportunity to train to be an FFA ambassador through a virtual program, including timely tips like conveying your message in a more online world.

In the planning of each session, Aarsvold said organizers kept the most important aspect of an FFA convention front-of-mind.

"Throughout all of this, we have always said we will not compromise in celebrating the students, and the material we have worked on reflects that," she said. ■



The first-ever virtual FFA Convention was held May 19-21.

4-H Science of Ag Challenge brings out best and brightest

Students ranging from seventh graders to college freshmen confronted some of the thorniest challenges in the world of agriculture as part of the sixth-annual Minnesota 4-H Science of Agriculture Challenge, held in June.

The top award went to sisters Addison and Sydney Mitchell, who competed as the LeSueur County "Beyond The Farm" team. They addressed the issue that fewer students have exposure or understanding of the diversity of careers in agriculture.

The duo developed a 15-minute presentation that showed students that agricultural production may be the foundation, but ag careers extend into science, technology and business. The award came with a \$1,000

scholarship for each of them, provided by the Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA).

"We did 59 presentations, which were seen by well over 1,000 students," said Addison, who credited YouTube as the top medium for sharing their message.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was the first time the competition was held entirely online. For the students, the virtual world prevented them from being able to meet in person with mentors, a critical part of the competition. The students started in November by picking a problem or question to address, and their work culminated in the presentations offered to a panel of industry and academic judges.

Top teams also tackled the challenges of COVID-19 as their project. Finishing second in the competition, the Big Stone County team delved into the crisis in the Pork industry when COVID-19 shut down packing plants. Brothers Arnold and Ernest Jibben and Kevin Casper devised a survey to create a statistical picture of the closures and the impact it had on livestock farmers.

When flooding disrupted the supply of rabbit food from Illinois, sisters Emma and Ellie Donnay of Meeker County proposed an alternative that they called "Rabbit Cakes," which blended a typical rabbit ration of alfalfa, clover and dandelions, with other possible ingredients, including garlic, oats, and kelp, all mixed together and baked. They reported great results feeding it to their own brace of lop-eared rabbits. The project finished third in the competition.

The Science of Ag Challenge is supported each year by MCGA as part of its efforts to promote the next generation of agricultural leaders. ■



The "Beyond the Farm" team finished first, taking home a \$1,000 scholarship.

county highlights

While many of their efforts have been put on hold or cancelled due to COVID-19, Minnesota's county corn organizations have continued to make an impact in their local communities.

In the May edition of Corn Talk, the philanthropic efforts by county grower leaders to help local food banks and healthcare workers was on display. The work to both help those in need while advancing the grassroots efforts of the Minnesota Corn Growers Association has continued into the summer.



County leaders dropped off a \$200 check at each food bank in Pennington and Red Lake counties.

Pennington/Red Lake County Corn and Soybean Growers

The corn and soybean growers in Pennington and Red Lake counties donated \$200 to each food bank located in both counties. The donation was another way to help their local communities impacted by the economic slowdown due to COVID-19. And with county fairs cancelled, it was an opportunity to connect with local residents.

Nicollet/Sibley County Corn and Soybean Growers

Members of the county organization donated \$200 each to county food shelves in both counties. With the economic hardship caused by COVID-19, the donation will help provide food to those members of the community who were most impacted.



The annual golf event in Nobles County had a great turnout on a beautiful day.

Nobles County Corn and Soybean Growers

County directors from the Nobles County Corn and Soybean Growers, in partnership with the Nobles-Rock Cattleman's Association, held their annual golf tournament in June. While the event adapted to follow social distancing guidelines, it was a great opportunity to bring together members and supporters of the grassroots efforts of both organizations.



Swift County farmers helped distribute food to residents in need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Swift County Corn and Soybean Growers

Members of the Swift County Corn and Soybean Growers helped their local food shelf distribute food to community members impacted by COVID-19. While the county organization regularly donates to the food shelf, the extra effort to hand out food to those in need was an opportunity to make an even bigger impact.

Have an event that you would like featured in County Highlights? Contact your local district field manager at mncorn.org/staff.

Keeping the social media conversation productive

Social media provides a powerful and valuable tool to help keep people connected. For Minnesota's farmers, it provides a stage to have conversations about agriculture and share their passion for growing and raising crops and livestock. But social media can sometimes open up users to challenging conversations as well.

Roxi Beck works with the Center for Food Integrity in helping farmers and others involved in agriculture better connect with consumers. Social media is a great avenue to make those connections, but it's important to recognize that it takes some caution, care and empathy to keep the conversation on track.

In all conversations, Beck stresses the need to first approach it with the right mindset.

"I can't reinforce this enough: Do not confuse a concerned public with something you are being attacked for," Beck said. "Sometimes curiosity from consumers can feel like criticism, but you have to be grateful they are asking these questions. It is a privilege to be able to answer them."

Beck also recommends keeping the following in mind when starting a conversation online:

- What is the issue and what values are being expressed? People are very concerned about the

health and safety of their loved ones during this time and may lash out. Then ask if it is worth a response. If so, continue a conversation by sharing your values about the issue and relevant information.

- Engage with values: The goal with any conversation is to help the person understand where your values align—that there are goals you share. Arguing will get you nowhere. It only deepens the divide.

- Engage others to comment on the issue: Consider enlisting allies who would be willing to provide support.

- Agree to disagree: After a few exchanges, you may be able to determine that this person doesn't recognize your right to be involved in agriculture and food production. Or take your conversation offline by offering to connect via email or a phone call.

For more information from the Center for Food Integrity, visit FoodIntegrity.org.



Roxi Beck

Become a member today

As a grassroots organization, the strength of the Minnesota Corn Growers Association (MCGA) stems from its members. They are pivotal in our work advocating for the interests of corn farmers and their families, and building connections that create opportunity for growers. In short, we need your help to be at our best.

Thankfully, it's easier than ever to join MCGA. Visit mncorn.org/join and become a member of MCGA using the partial refund program or credit card, check or cash. One and three-year memberships are available.

And for future agricultural leaders, MCGA offers the Young Adult Membership for individuals aged 16 to 24 who want to participate in grassroots advocacy today. Along with reduced member dues, Young Adult members will stay up to date on the latest in Minnesota's corn sector, and gain exclusive access to MCGA scholarships and leadership opportunities.

Join MCGA today
at mncorn.org/join.

thanks to our allied partners



Crop Science



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calendar of events

august
3-7

“Ag is Everywhere” week
Visit Mncorn.org for more info

august
19

MCGA – MCR&PC joint council meeting

sept
7

MCGA offices closed for Labor Day

sept
9

MCGA – MCR&PC joint council meeting

sept
10

MCGA Night with the St. Paul Saints
Location TBD

sept
15

Kluis Commodity Advisors Webinar
Visit Mncorn.org for more info

sept
15-17

Big Iron Farm Show
Fargo

Don't toss it out – pass it along!

When you're finished reading Corn Talk, why not pass it along to a friend, colleague or neighbor. This publication is one of the best ways to stay up to date with the news that is important to the state's corn growers, whether it is related to policy, research or outreach to all Minnesotans.

Know someone who should be on the Corn Talk mailing list or notice an error with your subscription? Please contact us at 952-233-0333.