

# Delivering opportunities for corn farmers: The Minnesota corn checkoff



# What is the corn checkoff?

The Minnesota corn checkoff is the state's farmer-supported, farmer-led program that aims to increase the productivity and efficiency of corn farming while identifying opportunities for producers and rural economies.

First established in 1990, the Minnesota Corn Growers Association worked to pass a statewide producer referendum that established the Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council. Through the referendum, Minnesota corn farmers voted to collect ½ cent per bushel at the first point of sale for the promotion, communication, and research to advance priorities for the state's corn industry. In 2009, Minnesota's corn farmers voted to increase the state checkoff rate from ½ cent to 1 cent per bushel. The effort was targeted at creating more opportunities to increase profitability for the state's corn farmers.

Learn about the many ways Minnesota corn checkoff investments create opportunities for corn farmers while enhancing quality of life.



*Working closely with the Minnesota Corn Growers Association Board of Directors, the Minnesota Corn Research & Promotion Council invests corn checkoff dollars in research, promotion, and outreach aimed at increasing opportunities for corn farmers.*



*By investing in the corn checkoff, Minnesota's 24,000 corn farmers create opportunities for the state's agricultural economies while increasing the productivity and efficiency of corn production.*

# Creating Demand

Through the Minnesota corn checkoff, Minnesota's corn farmers raise awareness of ethanol-blended fuels, invest in critical ethanol infrastructure, and promote corn, ethanol, DDGS, and corn-based meat to international buyers.

**The rise of Unleaded 88 in Minnesota:** In 2024, 142.88 million gallons of Unleaded 88 (E15) were pumped by consumers in Minnesota, setting a new record. Minnesota drivers saved an estimated \$25 million in fuel costs by using Unleaded 88 in 2024, all while spurring additional demand for ethanol-blended fuels.

The growth was driven in part by an investment by the state's corn farmers in infrastructure. More than 500 stations offer the cleaner-burning fuel today, compared to 2014 when only 14 retailers offered it. The MCR&PC has also increased efforts to raise awareness of the many benefits of Unleaded 88, including a partnership with the Minnesota Bio-Fuels Association reaching metro area consumers via station events, digital ads, radio ads and more.



*In 2024, Minnesota drivers saved 18 cents per gallon on average by filling up with Unleaded 88 over regular unleaded.*

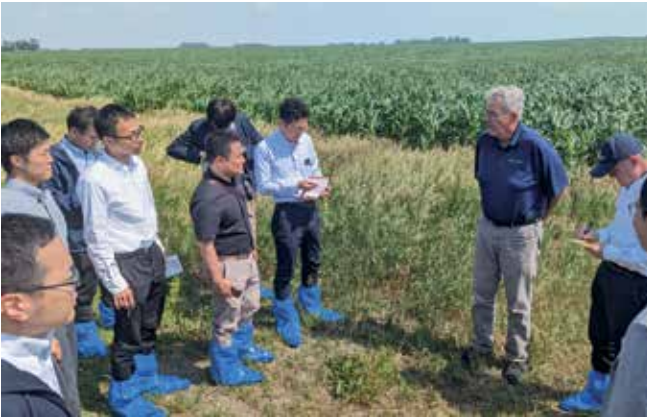


*With support from Minnesota Corn, the Minnesota Bio-Fuels Association holds events at Twin Cities fuel stations that highlight the benefits of biofuel blends to local drivers.*

**Expanding Global Markets:** Corn farmers' investment in the checkoff supports efforts by the U.S. Grains Council (USGC) to promote corn, DDGS, and ethanol around the world.

USGC recently reported a record year for ethanol exports, up from 800 million gallons in 2014 to more than 1.75 billion gallons in 2024. Corn farmers' support of USGC ethanol promotion efforts are helping grow that demand.

Additionally, through the checkoff, the MCR&PC is partnering with our livestock friends through investments in red meat exports to Japan and South Korea, in collaboration with the US Meat Export Federation (USMEF). According to USMEF, red meat exports contributed 14% of the value of corn in 2024.



*As part of the MCR&PC's longtime partnership with the U.S. Grains Council, the organization's farmer-leaders proudly host trade missions to promote American corn to international buyers.*



*With support from U.S. corn farmers, including farmers from Minnesota, the U.S. Grains Council holds informational seminars about American crops across the world.*

# Enhancing Research

Through corn farmers investment in the Minnesota corn checkoff, the MCR&PC invests \$2.2 million annually in research that increases the productivity and efficiency of corn farming while identifying new markets for the state's corn crop.

## **Developing corn-based polymers:**

Minnesota corn checkoff supported research at the University of Minnesota's Center for Sustainable Polymers (CSP) aims to replace petroleum as a feedstock for plastics with renewable sources like corn. In doing so, the environmental impact of plastic would be drastically reduced, and corn farmers would have a new market with tremendous potential for their crops. The MCR&PC is also a member of BioMade, a Department of Defense-sponsored Manufacturing Innovation Institute that aims to enable domestic bioindustrial manufacturing.

Since 2014, MCR&PC has invested over \$4 million in the development of new corn uses at CSP and in research to support commercialization at spinout companies Låkril and Valerian Materials. Together, Låkril and Valerian Materials have the potential to capture a market that, if filled with corn-based products, could require more than 1 billion bushels of corn each year.

Additionally, the MCR&PC is supporting University of Minnesota research that aims to develop a new strategy to create more easily degradable versions of PLA plastic and other bioderived polyesters. Although PLA is compostable, that operation needs to be conducted in an industrial high temperature composting facility to proceed at a viable rate, and the material does not degrade readily in the environment.



*MCR&PC-funded research at the University of Minnesota Center for Sustainable Polymers aims to increase opportunities for corn-based plastics.*



*Låkril CEO Chris Nicholas (pictured here) is leading his company's efforts to commercialize technology that produces acrylic acid derived from corn sugars. The MCR&PC has supported the effort as part of its mission to spur additional market opportunities for farmers.*

**Expanding biofuel uses:** Research supported by the Minnesota corn checkoff examines the conversion of a heavy-duty diesel engine to a flex-fuel engine, with potential applications including agriculture, construction, and mining. In addition, the checkoff continues to explore the use of biofuels through sustainable aviation fuel and methanol.

**Improving on-farm nitrogen management:** With support from MCR&PC, University of Minnesota Extension developed the Nitrogen Smart program, which provides farmers with information on how to become more efficient with their nitrogen use. Over 1,200 farmers managing nearly 1 million acres have participated in the program to date, learning about the fundamentals of nitrogen management. Learn more about the program at [z.umn.edu/NitrogenSmart](https://z.umn.edu/NitrogenSmart).

Additionally, MCR&PC has invested in field-based research by University of Minnesota Professor Fabian Fernandez that aims to balance profitability with minimizing impacts to the environment. The MCR&PC also supports University of Minnesota research into nitrogen management in northwestern Minnesota and how soil health practices affect a corn crop's nitrogen needs.

**Increasing on-farm efficiency:** Through the checkoff, the MCR&PC also supports a range of projects that aim to increase input use efficiency and reduce pest and disease pressures. That includes a long-term effort to survey corn insect pests in Minnesota and a study of how insecticide seed treatments affect corn rootworm. It also includes a project that aims to develop an enzymatic spray to combat Goss' Wilt.



*A scene from a spring 2025 University of Minnesota nitrogen management seminar.*

# Connecting Communities

With support from Minnesota corn farmers' checkoff investment, consumer outreach efforts make an impact. Programs like the wide array of county association events share the story of agriculture with consumers. Additionally, through partnerships with college and professional sports programs, including the Minnesota Gophers and St. Paul Saints, the MCR&PC increases positive perceptions of farming in the state. Thanks in part to these efforts, 89% of Minnesota residents say they have trust in the state's farmers to produce high-quality, safe food, according to a recent survey.

## **Scholarships and Sponsorships:**

Minnesota Corn sponsors dozens of programs and initiatives, including Minnesota Agriculture & Rural Leadership (MARL), Minnesota Ag in the Classroom (MAITC), FFA and 4-H, that engage grassroots farmers, increase member awareness, and shape consumer perceptions of the organizations. Scholarships are also offered to Young Adult members who are pursuing an agricultural career.

**CommonGround:** CommonGround Minnesota is a group of women in agriculture who volunteer their time to share information about food and farming. With support through the Minnesota corn checkoff, the group hosts events that bring together farmers and consumers for discussions about modern agriculture. CommonGround continues the conversation year-round through social media, virtual events, and other digital connections reaching thousands of consumers. The program has been vital in building trust and addressing misconceptions about agriculture today.

Their website is: **CommonGroundMinnesota.com**, and the program is also on Instagram (@**commongroundminn**) and Facebook (@**CommonGroundMinnesota**).

**County Sponsorship Program:** The Minnesota corn checkoff supports more than 300 county-led initiatives per year in local communities. These initiatives, managed and coordinated by county corn grower associations, promote agriculture and corn farming in local communities across the state.



*Participants in the MCR&PC-supported Minnesota Agriculture & Rural Leadership Program build skills that help them support the state's agricultural communities.*



*CommonGround Minnesota volunteers (pictured here) help reach the nonfarming public with fact-based, unbiased information about modern agricultural practices.*

# Stay Informed. Stay Connected.

Research, market development and outreach made possible through corn farmers' investment in the Minnesota corn checkoff extends far beyond the initiatives highlighted here.

Stay connected to the many ways the Minnesota corn checkoff investment is building a brighter future on the farm:

- Subscribe to our free weekly e-newsletter, Leader Update:  
[mncorn.org/LeaderUpdate](https://mncorn.org/LeaderUpdate)
- Subscribe to CornTalk, a free quarterly publication mailed to the state's corn farmers. If you're a corn farmer and do not received CornTalk, email us at [info@mncorn.org](mailto:info@mncorn.org).

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