“Being a member of AgriGrowth has great benefits for us. AgriGrowth is a big tent and allows all of us from different aspects from agriculture to come together to work jointly to grow more healthy food for more people. Consider AgriGrowth, we’re sure glad we did.”

— Kate Leavitt  DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL SALES AND MARKETING, SUNOPTA

“Food and agriculture is truly a global enterprise. Minnesota’s farmers, producers and agribusinesses need to work together to strengthen our position in this competitive environment. AgriGrowth provides unequaled opportunities to network and build relationships that can help all of us, and our state, be even more successful.”

— Pat Lunemann  OWNER, TWIN EAGLE DAIRY
Minnesota is blessed with an incredibly diverse food and agriculture sector, which is represented in the wide variety of members, like you, who make up the Minnesota AgriGrowth Council (AgriGrowth).

On behalf of the AgriGrowth Board of Directors, we extend our sincere appreciation for your support of AgriGrowth’s mission. Our Board of Directors and staff take your investment seriously and are committed to delivering value to all of our members. Every day we strive to build an even stronger AgriGrowth as our industry faces new and complex challenges.

This past summer, the AgriGrowth board developed three new strategic focus areas to guide the organization in the months and years ahead; they are:

- Advocate for a positive business climate for Minnesota’s agriculture and food sector;
- Build awareness, trust and support for our sector with “key influencer” audiences; and
- Serve as convener, collaborator, and thought leader on issues relevant to the future growth and prosperity of our sector.

AgriGrowth wants to expand its ability to develop solutions to some of the most pressing challenges facing our sector. For example, AgriGrowth recently launched a Working Lands Conservation Pilot Program in partnership with AGree that seeks solutions that are producer-led, watershed based, and supply chain engaged.

History has shown us that state election results directly impact the future of food and agriculture in our state. With all 201 Minnesota legislators up for re-election in 2016, AgriGrowth will work to ensure that the voice of our industry is heard by candidates and voters. We will be involved again with the “A Greater Minnesota” Coalition to elevate issues important to Minnesota’s agriculture and food sector. AgriGrowth will also be forming a new independent expenditure political committee to help amplify our ability to support pro-food and ag candidates for offices.

Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to working on behalf of our membership in 2016.

Sincerely,

Steve Peterson
Chair, Minnesota AgriGrowth
Board of Directors

Perry Aasness
Executive Director,
Minnesota AgriGrowth Council
**FIVE REASONS FOR MEMBERSHIP IN AGRIGROWTH**

1. We have been a *positive public voice* for Minnesota's agriculture and food systems industry since 1968.

2. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan member association which serves as a *trusted resource* for policymakers, media, key industry stakeholders, consumers and our members.

3. We provide opportunities for networking, relationship building, and collaboration among our *diverse membership* of agriculture and food systems businesses and the service sectors that support them.

4. We have a public policy director *dedicated to watching issues* affecting the broader agriculture and food systems industry on behalf of our members.

5. We *foster dialogue* between agribusiness, producers, farmers, state and federal agencies, higher education and policymakers.
**GEOPOLITICS, ECONOMIC TRENDS AND MILLENNIAL IMPACTS HIGHLIGHT 2015 ANNUAL MEETING & CONFERENCE**

AgriGrowth’s 48th Annual Meeting & Conference was held on November 12, 2015 at the Minneapolis Convention Center. More than 500 attendees joined, including leaders from across the spectrum of Minnesota’s diverse food and agricultural sector as well as from academia, state and federal government and more.

A member favorite, Dr. Michael Swanson, Wells Fargo Senior Vice President, kicked off the conference with a presentation on agriculture’s economic outlook. To drive his point home, Dr. Swanson used a famous Mike Tyson quote: “Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.” Dr. Swanson suggested the ag and food sector does more strategic thinking as business operators to prepare for the inevitable punches.

Following Swanson, geopolitical strategist Peter Zeihan described the worldwide economic outlook for agriculture, briefing the audience on trade, production and foreign policy and behavior. Zeihan largely bases America’s prosperity on “accidental” factors of the U.S.’s terrain (navigable rivers and rich farmland), resources (abundant shale gas and oil), demography (a relatively young, vigorous population), location (oceans that guard against invasion), and economics (vast consumer markets and cheap capital). The morning program ended with U.S. Representative Tom Emmer highlighting the state’s competitive advantages. “Trade is what this state is all about,” said Congressman Emmer.

**LUNCHEON & DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD**

Lt. Governor Tina Smith listed numerous examples of the value the food and agriculture industry brings to Minnesota, including several companies within AgriGrowth’s members. The Distinguished Service Award, an annual AgriGrowth tradition, was awarded to Dr. Marla Spivak, MacArthur Fellow, Distinguished McKnight Professor, entomologist and advocate for honeybees and other pollinators.

Luncheon speaker Christine Fruechte, CEO of Colle + McVoy, highlighted key points from a survey on Agriculture, Millennials and Sustainability. The study found three key takeaways: ag millennials consider sustainability local, emotional and collaborative; they define sustainability in different ways; and there is pressure from this generation to make sustainability a high priority.

**AFTERNOON PROGRAM**

Michael Reuter, Director of the North America Freshwater Program at The Nature Conservancy discussed the foundations of freshwater systems and led a panel discussion on water sustainability solutions. Political analyst Michael Barone wrapped up the conference with national political insights from what he described as a “puzzling election year.”

Networking receptions bookended the conference and provided members with greatly requested time for cross-sector connections. We hope you will plan to join us on November 10, 2016 at RiverCentre in St. Paul for AgriGrowth’s 2016 Annual Meeting & Conference.
AgriGrowth experienced success on behalf of our membership both in promoting new initiatives and reacting to challenges at the State Capitol and in Washington, DC in 2015.

While the Minnesota legislature and Governor Mark Dayton required a brief Special Session to complete their work in 2015, the final product was an approximately $42 billion two-year state budget. We've highlighted key issues from the 2015 legislature of particular interest to our membership:

**EMERGENCY FUNDING FOR AVIAN FLU RESPONSE**

Approximately $21 million was appropriated to provide emergency funding for responding to the avian flu epidemic in Minnesota. Included in this appropriation was $10 million for the Department of Agriculture’s RFA Loan Program to help poultry producers repopulate flocks that were lost due to the avian flu.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REFORM**

The Omnibus Environment and Natural Resources Bill contained a number of positive environmental policy changes as they relate to producers and agri-businesses. Those items include:

- Elimination of the MPCA Citizens’ Board;
- Changing state regulations so that a feedlot operator isn’t required to get an additional permit to store and land-apply wastewater from the operator’s private truck wash;
- Requiring the Commissioner of Management and Budget to contract with a nonstate entity for an analysis of costs of recently adopted or proposed changes to water quality standards and rules; and
- Notification to project proposers by the DNR and MPCA commissioners at least 14 calendar days prior to ordering a discretionary EAW or EIS.

**AGRICULTURE PRODUCTIVITY RESEARCH**

$13 million in new funding over the biennium was appropriated for agriculture productivity research, rapid response for animal and plant diseases, agriculture education programs, and farm business management.

**CAPITAL INVESTMENTS**

Key projects of note include $18 million toward the replacement of a University of Minnesota veterinary isolation facility and $8.5 million for the Willmar Poultry Testing Laboratory.

AgriGrowth members have spent the past several months working on policy issues for the 2016 legislative session. Among the topics that will be on the agenda at the State Capitol in 2016 are:

- Water quality issues;
- Environmental regulatory reform;
- Transportation infrastructure and funding; and
- Tax Reform.

The 2016 legislative session is scheduled to begin on March 8, 2016.

**LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY – FEDERAL ISSUES**

AgriGrowth engaged on a number of issues at the federal level. Issues of priority in 2015 included support for Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) which was passed by Congress and signed by President Obama. AgriGrowth also worked to support congressional passage of the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act, and to oppose the EPA’s Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) rule.
Member events in 2015 included: A roundtable discussion with US Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack regarding Trade Promotion Authority, a legislative reception, four legislative policy luncheons, a legislative wrap-up luncheon, a Mississippi River Cruise, a Center for Food Integrity event in Moorhead, a climate change luncheon featuring former Cargill CEO Greg Page, and the Annual Meeting & Conference.

New this year, AgriGrowth held six statewide member outreach sessions designed to more directly involve members in the development of AgriGrowth’s policy priorities. AgriGrowth also convened monthly webinars during the legislative session to keep our members informed on activities at the State Capitol.
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