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 Minnesota AgriGrowth Council Board of Directors, we want to thank you for your continued support for the mission and work of AgriGrowth.

In looking back on some of the key work of AgriGrowth in 2016, we continue to focus our efforts that align and help accomplish the objectives of our organizations’ 3 strategic priorities:

Advocate for a positive business climate for Minnesota’s agriculture and food sector

A key priority in 2016 for AgriGrowth was to develop and implement an election engagement strategy to elevate the “Grow MN Food Plan” with candidates running for the state legislature. As a member of the A Greater Minnesota (AGM) coalition, AgriGrowth was successful in building awareness with candidates regarding the importance of Minnesota’s agriculture and food sectors. Over 140 legislative candidates responded to the Grow MN Food Plan. The AGM effort, along with AgriGrowth’s new independent expenditure political action committee (the AgFood Alliance), helped AgriGrowth to make a positive difference in electing pro-ag candidates to the state legislature.

As we head into the 2017 legislative session, AgriGrowth will once again be working with legislators on ways to improve the business climate for agriculture and agribusiness.

Serve as a convener, collaborator, and thought leader on issues relevant to the future growth and prosperity of our sector

This year, we initiated and continued several strategies to inform and engage our membership on relevant topics to agriculture and agribusiness. Highlights include:

- Hosting monthly legislative webinar updates during the legislative session plus events and webinars on other relevant topics including communicating transparency to consumers and cybersecurity for businesses
- Communications outreach to members with regular Member Bulletins and social media updates
- Collaborating with organizations whose goals align with AgriGrowth’s mission, including the Center for Food Integrity, A Greater Minnesota, RealTime Talent, Field to Market and the Minnesota Business Immigration Coalition

“Ecolab works in the space between food producers and food processors and believe our support for AgriGrowth helps us create and enhance partnerships throughout the sector. These partnerships allow us to better help supply food to our markets in a more efficient and sustainable way.”

— Joe Strickland VICE PRESIDENT FOOD AND BEVERAGE, NORTH AMERICA, ECOLAB; AGRIGROWTH BOARD OF DIRECTORS
AgriGrowth was also actively involved in seeking collaborative private-sector led solutions to help address agriculture’s contributions to water quality, while ensuring continued productivity and long-term profitability of the agriculture sector. The issue of agriculture’s contribution to water quality has received heightened focus over the past few years. While AgriGrowth will continue to work to ensure state and federal public policies on water quality that don’t place Minnesota agriculture at a competitive disadvantage with other states, we believe it’s also incumbent upon our sector to be “for” something that demonstrates agriculture’s commitment to protecting water quality and our natural resources.

With the help of a grant from the Meridian Institute, AgriGrowth initiated a Working Lands Conservation Project Pilot Program. This effort evolved throughout the year, and AgriGrowth recently became a member of Field to Market (FTM), a national consortium focused on sustainability and the continuous improvement of agriculture. Several key AgriGrowth members are currently members of FTM, and AgriGrowth is hoping to help identify and initiate a select number of FTM projects in Minnesota beginning in 2017.

**Build awareness, trust and support for our sector with “key influencer” audiences**

With 6 in 10 Minnesotans (7 in 10 in the Twin Cities metro area) having no connection to a farmer, informing and engaging consumers and key influencers on questions regarding today’s food systems is more important than ever. In 2016, AgriGrowth established the Minnesota AgriGrowth Foundation, a tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is: “To provide for constructive dialogue, objective analysis, and innovative approaches that inform and build greater awareness with the general public regarding Minnesota’s agriculture and food systems.” An initial foundation board has been established, and we look forward to sharing additional details in 2017 regarding the goals and objectives of this foundation and ways AgriGrowth members and others can engage and invest in the work of this new organization.

As we head into 2017, we recognize segments of AgriGrowth’s membership are going through some challenging economic times. While AgriGrowth’s strategies and focus may be somewhat different than when AgriGrowth was first established in 1968, our overall mission to advocate for and promote Minnesota’s agriculture and food sector is as important now as it has ever been.

Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to working with, and on behalf of, our members in 2017.

Sincerely,

“Agriculture needs a central organization. AgriGrowth serves that role and gets us all moving in the same direction. The organization provides one common voice at the Capitol in St. Paul and in other issue-oriented situations.”

— Sheryl Meshke Co-President and CEO, Associated Milk Producers Inc. (AMPI)
Each November as I look across the room at the AgriGrowth Annual Meeting and Conference and see hundreds of dedicated and passionate professionals who tirelessly support the ag and food industry, I am struck by how remarkable our organization is in Minnesota. Our member companies represent every aspect of the ag and food sectors in the state – from academia and government, to Fortune 500 food companies to farmers and cooperatives. It is an honor to work on behalf of all AgriGrowth members.

AgriGrowth members play two key roles within the organization: first, the organization relies on the revenue generated from membership dues to sustain our work. AgriGrowth wouldn’t exist without our members. Second, and equally as important, is the role members play as subject matter experts & sources of information and ideas.

AgriGrowth’s credibility and influence is only as strong as our network of members. When members engage in the conversation, AgriGrowth learns what issues are most important to Minnesota’s food and ag-related businesses. By listening to and having conversation with members in the various sectors represented in our organization, we are better able to identify industry-wide risks, trends, and opportunities.

“The better we know our members, the stronger and more credible our voice becomes on your behalf.”

We look for opportunities to leverage your expertise and strengths for the benefit of the entire membership, and we plan member events centered around the topics members want to discuss.

For example, in July, representatives from Lockton Companies shared their detailed knowledge of the new federal overtime ruling changes through a webinar. Those members who participated responded favorably and asked for additional information on that and other HR topics. In October, AgriGrowth partnered with three member companies; Baker Tilly, Dorsey & Whitney, and Lockton Companies to convene a panel discussion on cybersecurity and information management.

Feedback from these events tells us that over 90% of participants said they look to AgriGrowth for current industry information and training. Based on that information, AgriGrowth will continue to offer similar information and opportunities for partnerships in 2017. If you are interested or want to learn more about partnering with AgriGrowth to produce an event, let’s grab a cup of coffee and talk it over.

In the new year, you will be invited to share your thoughts with AgriGrowth in a survey to help us better understand your member experience and how we can best remain relevant and valuable to your organization and the industry. It is through your engagement in partnerships, prospective member referrals and regular communication with our board of directors, and staff, that we are better together.

I look forward to continuing to serve you and grow our working relationships in the coming year. Thank you for your membership.
AgriGrowth had success this past year in advocating for Minnesota food and agriculture industries both in Saint Paul and Washington, D.C.

The 2016 Minnesota Legislative Session convened on March 8th and legislators emphasized that the main priorities for the year would be transportation, taxes, bonding and a supplemental appropriations package. However, in the end, lawmakers fell short of those goals, passing only a tax and supplemental budget bill before session ended. They failed to strike agreements on transportation and bonding bills. Governor Dayton vetoed the tax bill, leaving only one of the legislative leaders’ priorities passed into law.

Key issues that AgriGrowth actively engaged in during the 2016 Legislative Session:

SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS

Key provisions related to agriculture in the supplemental budget bill include funding for veterinary diagnostic software and laboratory equipment, increased broadband access in Greater Minnesota and an additional $1.0 million to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture for the Agriculture Emergency Fund in case another animal or plant disease occurs that requires quick action on the part of the agency.

TAXES

The legislature passed a compromised tax bill including $260 million in tax cuts and credits in 2017 and $500 million in the next fiscal biennium. The package was a mix of agriculture and business property tax relief, buffer aids to counties, tax credit for college graduates with loan debt and increases state aid to local governments. This bill was vetoed by Governor Dayton.

TRANSPORTATION

For the second year in a row, House and Senate leaders failed to reach a compromise on a sustainable long-range transportation funding plan. Each of the caucuses highlighted transportation as a priority in the previous two legislative sessions.

AgriGrowth supports long-term investments that provide targeted and sustained transportation funding without raising taxes, but instead relies on more efficient use of existing Minnesota Department of Transportation resources, general fund spending, bonding, and dedication of existing transportation-related revenues. We will continue to advocate for transportation in the 2017 session.

BONDING

In the closing hours of the legislative session legislative leaders in the House and Senate tried to pass a nearly $1 billion bonding bill, but time ran out before they were able to reach a compromise. The bill would have authorized $818 in total bonding as part of a $1.1 billion bonding package for projects such as higher education, water infrastructure improvements, and local roads and bridges.

BUFFER LAW REVISIONS

Over the summer and fall we heard from AgriGrowth members who were greatly concerned with the buffer law that was passed in 2015. Agriculture groups, including AgriGrowth, pushed hard on the legislature to take action and clarify the law. We were pleased to see lawmakers act quickly and in a broad bipartisan manner on legislation that exempts private ditches and compensates local water authorities who decide to administer the state’s buffer laws. The bill they passed was signed into law by Governor Dayton.

The 2017 Legislative Session is scheduled to begin on January 3, 2017.

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY – FEDERAL ISSUES

AgriGrowth advocated for a number of issues on the federal level, including a national standard for labeling GMO products. A compromise GMO labeling bill was passed by congress and signed into law by President Obama in July. Additionally, AgriGrowth advocated for the passage of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, which is unlikely to get approval in the lame duck session, though we will continue to advocate for trade agreements that reduce barriers and provide new market opportunities for Minnesota’s agriculture sector.
ECONOMIC TRENDS, CREATIVE CHALLENGES AND AN ‘UNCONVENTIONAL LOOK AT THE GLOBAL ECONOMY’ HIGHLIGHT THE AGRIGROWTH 2016 ANNUAL MEETING

AgriGrowth’s 49th Annual Meeting and Conference was held on November 10, 2016 at the Saint Paul RiverCentre. More than 400 individuals attended, including leaders from across the spectrum of Minnesota’s diverse food and agricultural sectors as well as from academia, state and federal government and more.

Dr. Robert Johansson, Chief Economist at the USDA, kicked off the conference with a detailed and comprehensive economic outlook for the farm economy, both on the local level in our region, as well as globally. Dr. Margaret Zeigler, Executive Director of the Global Harvest Initiative, followed with a challenge to the audience to think creatively about how agriculture can feed the world and mitigate climate change.

LUNCHEON & DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

The luncheon program began with a heartfelt and much deserved tribute to the 2016 Distinguished Service Award winner, Dr. Bill Hartmann, Minnesota’s State Veterinarian. A video tribute from colleagues and co-workers shared the depth and breadth of his positive and ground breaking work over his 27 years, 15 as state veterinarian, of service on the state Board of Animal Health. This annual award, which has become an AgriGrowth tradition, is given to an individual who has dedicated his or her professional career to improving agriculture and agribusiness in Minnesota.

The luncheon keynote address was given by Carl Casale, CEO of CHS, Inc., the nation’s largest farm cooperative. While acknowledging the current downturn in the ag economy, Casale was optimistic about the long-term outlook for U.S. agriculture due to global population trends in emerging markets. He also shared with the audience the important role CHS and its cooperative system provides to help promote and implement environmentally and economically sustainable agriculture production practices with their member patrons.

AgriGrowth Annual Meeting attendees were also fortunate to hear from two of Minnesota’s top political leaders, U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar and Minnesota House Speaker Kurt Daudt. Continuing the impressive AgriGrowth tradition of bi-partisan speakers and high-level leadership, Senator Klobuchar and Speaker Daudt offered their individual perspectives on the 2016 election results, a preview of some of the possible agenda items in the next congress and legislative session, and both assured the attendees they understood how important agriculture and agribusiness is to the constituents they represent in St. Paul and Washington, D.C.

AFTERNOON PROGRAM

Dr. Vikram Mansharamani, author and Yale Lecturer, was the keynote speaker for the afternoon program. His address, “The Global Economy: An Unconventional Outlook”, was engaging and gave AgriGrowth Annual Meeting attendees a unique perspective on global economics, current trends and future markets that have not fully developed.

The formal program concluded with a panel discussion on the results of the 2016 elections, moderated by Twin Cities Public Television’s Mary Lahammer, and featuring Blois Olson of Fluence Media, former Dayton Campaign Manager Katharine Tinucci and former Speaker of the House Kurt Zellers, both of MZA+Co.

A new feature at this year’s AgriGrowth Annual Meeting was the inclusion of WCCO Radio’s live broadcast from the Annual Meeting. Individual AgriGrowth members conducted live interviews with WCCO host John Hines and received many positive comments from listeners across Minnesota.

Networking receptions bookended the conference and provided members with great opportunities to catch up with established business relationships, as well as meet new AgriGrowth members.

We hope you will plan to join us on November 9, 2017 at the Minneapolis Convention Center for AgriGrowth’s 50th Anniversary Annual Meeting.
We asked members, "What is the primary Reason you are a member of AgriGrowth?"
MINNESOTA AGRIGROWTH COUNCIL STAFF

PERRY AASNESS
Executive Director
MARY KAY DELVO
Director of Membership & Development
KURT ZELLERS and
KATHARINE TINUCCI
MZA+Co; Communications
CORY BENNETT
Bennett Government Consulting; Public Policy Director
DANA ELLIS
Ellis International; Event Production

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Executive Committee
CHAIR
STEVE PETERSON
Peterson Farms
VICE-CHAIR
PAT LUNEMANN
Twin Eagle Dairy
SECRETARY
LINDA TANK
CHS, Inc
TREASURER
MARK JIRIK
Cargill, Inc
IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR
KRISTIN WEEKS DUNCANSON
Duncanson Growers

Board Members
ADAM BIRR
Minnesota Corn Growers Association
BRIAN BUHR, PH.D.
College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, University of Minnesota (ex officio)
MARK DAVIS
Davis Family Dairies
RANDALL J. DOYAL
Al-Corn Clean Fuel
DAVID FREDERICKSON
Minnesota Department of Agriculture (ex officio)
JEFF GREV
Hormel Foods Corporation
ROD HEBRINK
AgStar Financial Services
BRIAN INGULSRUD
America Crystal Sugar Company
MARC KNISELY
United FCS
SHERYL MESHKE
Associated Milk Producers Inc.

DARCY PAWLIK
Syngenta Seeds, Inc.
ALAN POFF
Schwan Food Company
LEXANN REISCHL
GHP Company
TOM ROSEN
Rosen’s Diversified, Inc.
GLENN STOLT
Christensen Farms
JOE STRICKLAND
Ecolab
DAN TJORNEHOJ
Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association
MICHAEL TODD
SunOpta
TOM WEGNER
Land O’ Lakes, Inc.
DON WICK
Red River Farm Network

@mn_agrigrowth
info@agrigrowth.org