AgriGrowth Chair Pat Lunemann speaks with U.S. Representative Collin Peterson and U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar

USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue visits with AgriGrowth Executive Director Perry Aasness

U.S. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt visits with AgriGrowth members on the Waters of the U.S. Rule.

Randy Doyal, AgriGrowth Board member and CEO of Al-Corn Clean Fuel testifying on environmental permitting reform legislation.
In 1968, leaders representing Minnesota agriculture and agribusiness recognized a need for an organization that would seek to convene, promote, and advocate for this important sector of Minnesota’s economy. It was under this vision that the Minnesota AgriGrowth Council was initially established. Despite the many changes that have occurred within Minnesota’s ag and food sector during AgriGrowth’s nearly 50-year existence, the core focus implied in our name remains the same – we are committed to supporting the continued GROWTH of Minnesota’s agriculture and food sector – a sector which remains a major contributor not just to our state’s economy and quality of life – but also has impact throughout the world.

During the past year, the AgriGrowth Board of Directors spent time evaluating the purpose and focus of AgriGrowth to help chart our future path as an organization. Part of this effort involved the development of an updated mission statement for AgriGrowth. Our new statement is bold and succinct, and the Board agrees this statement captures the aim, purpose and value AgriGrowth strives to provide for its members: “Advocating for Minnesota’s Agriculture and Food Sector”.

This Mission Statement, we believe, will be a good guidepost for the organization and our members in the years to come. This mission statement also puts the 2018 election into focus, as Minnesota will be electing a new Governor, and the Minnesota State House of Representatives will stand for election. As AgriGrowth has done the past two election cycles, we will be active in raising awareness of the critical importance of Minnesota’s ag and food sector with candidates and voters, and working to help elect candidates who support our goals and ideas.

AgriGrowth also seeks to raise awareness with media, policy makers and other influential audiences of the importance of Minnesota’s ag and food sector. In our current divided political climate, it’s hard at times to be heard through all the noise and clutter the public is bombarded with daily. AgriGrowth is an important voice with opinion leaders, media, and policy makers regarding critical policies and issues affecting our sector. Highlighting the critical importance of trade agreements such as NAFTA and the need to continue to reduce trade barriers and open markets for MN and U.S. agriculture is just one of many issues AgriGrowth focused on as part of our media outreach strategy in 2017. As was referenced during the AgriGrowth annual meeting, all of us involved in agriculture have a role to play in being advocates for the important issues and challenges facing our sector.

Labor and workforce challenges are a major deterrent to the continued growth of Minnesota’s agriculture and food sector. AgriGrowth will continue to highlight the need for federal immigration reform, and to promote and support initiatives such as the AgriGrowth Job Exchange to help better connect job seekers with ag-related employers.

Looking Forward
We also will be providing new opportunities for AgriGrowth members to engage in our advocacy work, including holding our first-ever AgriGrowth Day at the State Capitol on in conjunction with our annual legislative reception, scheduled for Tuesday, March 6th, 2018. One additional change you’ll also notice beginning in 2018 is a re-brand of AgriGrowth’s annual meeting and conference, which will now be referred to as the “Minnesota Agriculture and Food Summit.” The conference scheduled for Thursday, November 15th, 2018.

In closing, AgriGrowth is grateful for the continued support of our members, and the opportunity to work with, and on behalf, of our membership as we continue our work to help GROW Minnesota’s agriculture and food sector. We thank you for your continued investment and engagement in this work, and look forward to working with you over the next year.
In 2017, AgriGrowth was active on a number of state and federal public policy issues on behalf of its membership, both in promoting new initiatives and reacting to challenges. These priorities were developed based on AgriGrowth members’ interest identified through regional meetings around Minnesota and other membership interactions. This list does not reflect the entire scope of AgriGrowth’s public policy advocacy work in 2017 but highlights a few of our successes.

**Water Quality Issues**

AgriGrowth was active in modifications to the state buffer law, and was also instrumental in authorizing the establishment of local farm-led water councils. AgriGrowth also advocated for redirecting existing Clean Water funds toward on the ground conservation practices.

**Investments in Research**

AgriGrowth supported continued and new funding for agriculture productivity research at the University of Minnesota. In 2017, the state legislature provided agriculture research funding for the AGREETT program and new pollinator habitat research.

**Taxes**

AgriGrowth supported a tax system that improves business competitiveness, enhances job growth, and fosters economic growth. In 2017, the Minnesota state legislature passed agriculture property tax relief on school building referendums, beginning farmer program, and commercial industrial property tax relief.

**New Transportation Funding**

Significant investments were made in the state’s road and bridge system for moving agricultural and value-added commodities to market. AgriGrowth in 2017 supported long-term investments that provide targeted and sustained transportation funding. The 2017 legislature passed $5.9 billion two-year transportation funding bill.

**Agriculture Technology Restrictions**

AgriGrowth believes that laws and regulations need to be based on data and science, not activism. AgriGrowth opposed efforts that would ban or restrict agriculture technology that puts our producers at a competitive disadvantage. No restrictions were implemented to the application of crop protection (neonics) through verification of need or additional authority by state agencies to regulate treated seed.
Immigration Reform
Providing a sustainable workforce for Minnesota’s agriculture sector is critical to our state and nation’s economic prosperity. AgriGrowth continued to advocate for federal immigration reform to help address labor shortages in the agriculture and food sector. AgriGrowth also continues to collaborate on immigration reform efforts through the Minnesota Business Immigration Coalition.

Waters of the United States
Minnesota has extensive water protection programs and regulations. Our agriculture industry is dedicated to protecting the natural resources of our state. However, the 2015 Waters of the United States rule was an unprecedented expansion of federal authority that offers little benefit to the environment. AgriGrowth opposed this rule because it requires new permitting, increased regulation, and places new financial burdens on Minnesota agriculture producers and businesses. In 2017, AgriGrowth hosted a meeting with EPA administrator Scott Pruitt and key AgriGrowth members to discuss concerns over the current WOTUS rule. In addition, AgriGrowth submitted comments to EPA supporting repeal or modification of current the WOTUS rule.

Trade
As a result of trade agreements such as NAFTA, Minnesota’s agriculture and food sector has seen tremendous benefits in increased market access and reductions of trade distorting barriers. AgriGrowth continues to highlight the risks for Minnesota agriculture if the U.S. withdraws from NAFTA, and the critical need for the U.S. government to engage with its trading partners to enhance existing agreements and negotiate new ones.

AgriGrowth was featured in a Star Tribune op-ed on the importance of trade to Minnesota’s economy and agriculture sector and sponsored a WCCO Radio forum on Ag and Trade.

Federal Tax Policy/Reform
AgriGrowth supports Congressional efforts to reform and simplify the federal tax code to improve the competitiveness of our farms and agribusiness. AgriGrowth will engage with Minnesota’s Congressional delegation as this legislation moves through congress.
Advocating for Minnesota’s Agriculture and Food Sector

AGRIGROWTH MEMBERS HAVE ACCESS TO:
INFORMATION, ENGAGEMENT, ADVOCACY

• Access to state and national experts on agriculture policy.
• Monthly Legislative Webinars providing updates to members during the Minnesota Legislative Session.
• Regional Workforce meetings that took place across the state allowed AgriGrowth members and others participate in learning about strategies and labor tools associated with attracting, recruiting and retaining quality talent.
• Annual Meeting gathered experts from policy, economics, and geopolitics to share insights on the biggest challenges and opportunities that US agriculture will face in the coming decades.
• In 2017, AgriGrowth launched the AgriGrowth Job Exchange, a matching technology designed to transform the candidate recruitment process and streamline how employers and candidates connect with each other during the job search process.

ACCESS TO:
ADVOCATES AND A PLATFORM TO ADVOCATE FOR YOUR ISSUES

Public Policy Team
AgriGrowth’s Lobbyist, Cory Bennett, Director of Government and Member Relations, Gary Kay, and Executive Director, Perry Aasness, all work to help express our member’s interests on federal and state policy issues.

Member Engagement
AgriGrowth engages with our membership through the legislative luncheon series, the Annual Public Policy Member Survey, Regional Meetings, the Annual Legislative Reception and, new to 2018, the AgriGrowth Day at the Capitol.

AgPAC
MN AgPAC is a Minnesota political action fund, affiliated with the MN AgriGrowth Council, organized by individual supporters across Minnesota to promote the election of pro-agriculture candidates.

Legislators at Luncheon Series: Representative Hamilton, Representative Poppe, Senator Eken, Senator Weber
Board of Directors

Executive Committee

Chair:
ADAM BIRR
Executive Director, Minnesota Corn Growers Association

Immediate Past Chair:
STEVE PETERSON
Owner & Manager, Peterson Farms & Retired Director of Sourcing Sustainability at General Mills

Vice-Chair:
ROD HEBRINK
President and CEO, Compeer Financial

Secretary:
TOM WEGNER
Director of Economics and Dairy Policy, Land O'Lakes, Inc.

Treasurer:
MARK JIRIK
Commercial Manager, West Fargo, Grain and Oilseed Supply Chain North America, Cargill Inc.

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JOE STRICKLAND
Vice President, Agribusiness Food & Beverage North America, Ecolab

GLENN STOLT
President and CEO, Christensen Farms and Feedlots, Inc.

DAN TJORNEHOJ
Executive Director and CEO, Minnesota Veterinary Medical Association

DON WICK
Farm Broadcaster and Partner, Red River Farm Network