

# MINNESOTA PORK CONGRESS

2025  
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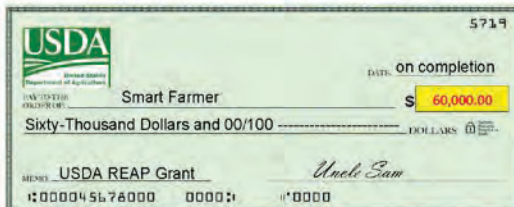


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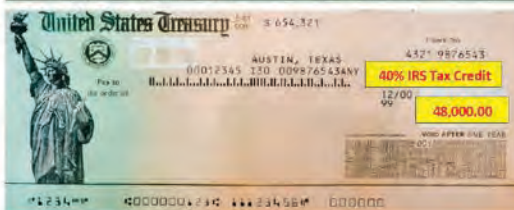


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The Minnesota Pork Producers Association (MPPA) publishes the Minnesota Pork Congress Magazine. For more information on future tradeshow and exhibiting opportunities, contact the MPPA office at (507) 345-8814 or email [mnppork@mnppork.com](mailto:mnppork@mnppork.com)

Graphic design services by Lime Valley, Mankato, Minnesota. For more information on Lime Valley services, telephone (507) 345-8500 or visit [www.limevalley.com](http://www.limevalley.com)

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[www.mppainsider.org](http://www.mppainsider.org) | [www.mnppork.com](http://www.mnppork.com)

## On the Covers

### Front:

*Top:* Dave and Tracie Mensink,  
Environmental Stewards of the Year.

*Bottom, left to right:* Lee Johnston,  
Distinguished Service; Myrna Welter, Pork  
Promoter; Senator Nick Frentz, Legislator  
of Distinction; Mike Atzenhoefer, Swine  
Manager of the Year.

### Back:

Randy, Seth, and Taylor Spronk





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**Lauren Servick**  
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*Director of Events  
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**Bailey Ruen**  
*Director of  
Communications*



**Kate Maddock**  
*Sustainability  
Outreach  
Coordinator*



# MPPA / MPB BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The 12-member Minnesota Pork Producers Association (MPPA) and Minnesota Pork Board (MPB) Board of Directors represent a diverse cross-section of pig farmers across Minnesota. This unified board works to align the organization's operations with its 2024-2027 strategic plan, advancing the five foundational pillars that guide Minnesota Pork's mission. Each elected member serves three-year terms, limited to three consecutive terms.

The strategic pillars include:

## 1. Building Trust

- Advocating for the pork industry, its people, and its products at local, state, and national levels.
- Promoting Minnesota Pork's image as a provider of essential, sustainable protein and ensuring stakeholders' trust through transparency and advocacy.

## 2. Investing in People and Communities

- Guiding initiatives that develop leadership, training, and resources for stakeholders across the pork industry.
- Investing in communities to ensure opportunities for future generations.

## 3. Driving Impact Through Influence

- Leveraging relationships with policymakers, collaborators, and industry partners to shape regulations, policies, and research priorities in line with strategic goals.

## 4. Protecting the Freedom to Operate

- Proactively addressing policy and regulatory challenges to safeguard the pork industry's sustainability and economic viability.
- Championing practices that promote environmental, social, and operational sustainability.

## 5. Enhancing Animal Well-being

- Overseeing research investments in animal health and welfare to ensure the sustainable production of safe, nutritious pork.
- Supporting programs that advance disease prevention, biosecurity, and animal care standards.

Through strategic governance, the board ensures the organization delivers measurable results aligned with its long-term vision for producers and consumers alike.

## MPB Board of Directors:



### Ex Officio NPB Board Member



**Gordon Spronk**  
*Pipestone  
Vice President*

### Ex Officio NPPC Board Members



**Todd Marotz**  
*Sleepy Eye*



**Lori Stevermer**  
*Easton  
President*

# RETIRING BOARD MEMBERS



The Minnesota Pork Board (MPB) and Minnesota Pork Producers Association (MPPA) recognizes several individuals this year for their service on the board of directors. We are grateful to Amber Portner, Brad Hennen and John Anderson for their time and dedication. Ranging from diverse backgrounds in the Minnesota Pork industry, each of them led the board sharing their knowledge and expertise while overseeing the investment of mandatory checkoff dollars and voluntary non-checkoff dollars.

Each of the outlined retiring board members served on the board for a varying amount of time, from three years to ten years; each ran for a spot on the board for a different reason; and each acknowledged something different that they learned or found the most rewarding about their experience.

\*At the 2025 annual meeting held on Feb. 10, prior to the Minnesota Pork Congress, four board members will be elected to the Minnesota Pork Board of Directors.



**Compert partakes in a tour on UMN's campus as part of the research committee.**



## Chris Compert

### How long did you serve on the Board?

I am honored to have served on the Minnesota Pork Board (MPB) for 8 years. For the first 6 years of my membership, I served on the MPB, and most recently, I've served on the Minnesota Pork Producers Association (MPPA) and MPB joint board of directors.

### Please state any committees you are/were a part of and any positions you held.

While serving on the board, I was an active research committee member. I truly enjoyed evaluating research projects, tracking their progress and seeing the impactful outcomes of the work.

### What did you enjoy most about serving on the Board?

I valued building relationships with fellow board members and learning about the innovative practices that drive their success. Participating in pork promotions and community events—like the State Fair, Minnesota Twins games and St. Paul Saints games—was also a highlight.



**Compert converses with colleagues in the Minnesota Pork tent at Farmfest 2023.**

### What was the most rewarding part about serving MPPA/MPB?

The most rewarding aspect was collaborating with other Minnesota pork producers to produce and supply healthy, nutritious pork while collectively sharing our story with the public.

### What motivated you to serve on the Board of Directors?

Serving on the MPB board of directors provided the opportunity to give back to the pork industry while gaining a deeper understanding of the vital role the board plays within the industry.

### What is your favorite pork product/dish?

Smoked pork prime rib and grilled dry-aged pork ribeye are hard to beat when cooked to perfection.





## Roger Punt

### How long did you serve on the Board?

I served on the Minnesota Pork Board (MPB) for five years. The first three years I served on the MPB, then after the MPB and MPPA joined to form one board, I served for two more years.

### Please state any committees you are/were a part of and any positions you held.

When I was elected to the board in 2020, I became deeply involved in post-COVID initiatives, including addressing composting challenges and advocating at Capitol visits on both state and national levels. I also worked on waste disposal efforts ensuring sustainable practices and efficient solutions for the industry.



*Punt and Minnesota Pork staff and board members engage at Farmfest 2024.*

### What did you enjoy most about serving on the Board?

I have valued getting to know pork producers from across the state. Building relationships with them and learning about their operations has made the world feel much smaller. I also appreciated the opportunity to participate in state and national Capitol visits. Throughout my time on the board, the importance of teamwork has been clear—working together to advocate for and support the success of Minnesota’s pork industry.

### What was the most rewarding part about serving MPPA/MPB?

In addition to building relationships, it was incredibly rewarding to be part of the CEO transition in 2022 and to witness the continued success of the staff and the exceptional Minnesota Pork team. We have a highly respected group in Minnesota, and it’s gratifying to see the next generation in such capable hands.

### What motivated you to serve on the Board of Directors?

I was motivated to give back to an industry that has given so much to me, and the timing of the opportunity felt right. It’s a priority for me to contribute to something that has shaped my life.

### What is your favorite pork product/dish?

If I had to choose just one, it would be a grilled pork chop from my home state of Iowa’s state fair.



*Punt, former executive board member Amber Portner, and Compart at Farmfest 2023.*

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# PRESIDENT'S WELCOME TO PORK CONGRESS

As we step into a new year, we are reminded of both the challenges and opportunities that define our industry. Market volatility, the threat of foreign animal diseases, the complexities of production practices, and evolving regulations continue to shape our landscape. In response, Minnesota pig farmers demonstrate remarkable resilience, optimism, and a commitment to thoughtful risk management—traits that sustain us through both the highs and lows of our work.

At the Minnesota Pork Board (MPB) and Minnesota Pork Producers Association (MPPA), we remain steadfast in our mission to maximize the impact of your checkoff and non-checkoff contributions. Be sure to check out both the MPB and MPPA year in reviews at the end of this magazine to catch up on what we've been up to the past year.

We are thrilled to gather once again in Mankato for the 2025 Minnesota Pork Congress—an event that showcases the innovation, dedication, and community spirit of our industry. Through the Minnesota Pork Board, funded by the mandatory pork checkoff, we continue to invest in research, promotion, and education. These efforts are designed to enhance consumer confidence in pork and highlight the values of the families who raise it.

Meanwhile, the Minnesota Pork Producers Association, supported by voluntary contributions through the Strategic Investment Program (SIP), remains focused on advocacy and leadership. From representing pig farmers in St. Paul and Washington, D.C., to fostering the next generation of industry leaders and promoting a positive image of Minnesota pork, MPPA is your trusted partner in navigating the path forward.

As President of the MPB and MPPA, I encourage all Minnesota pig farmers to stay informed and engaged. The 2025 Minnesota Pork Congress is an excellent opportunity to connect with peers, learn from industry experts, and celebrate the progress we've achieved together. Your ongoing support and investment are the backbone of our success, and I'm grateful for the privilege of serving this remarkable community. Be sure to check out both the MPB and MPPA year in reviews at the end of this magazine to catch up on what we've been up to the past year. Let's make 2025 a year of growth, collaboration, and pride in the work we do. I look forward to seeing you at Pork Congress!

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daryl Timmerman". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Daryl Timmerman**

*President,  
Minnesota Pork Board and  
Minnesota Pork Producers Association*



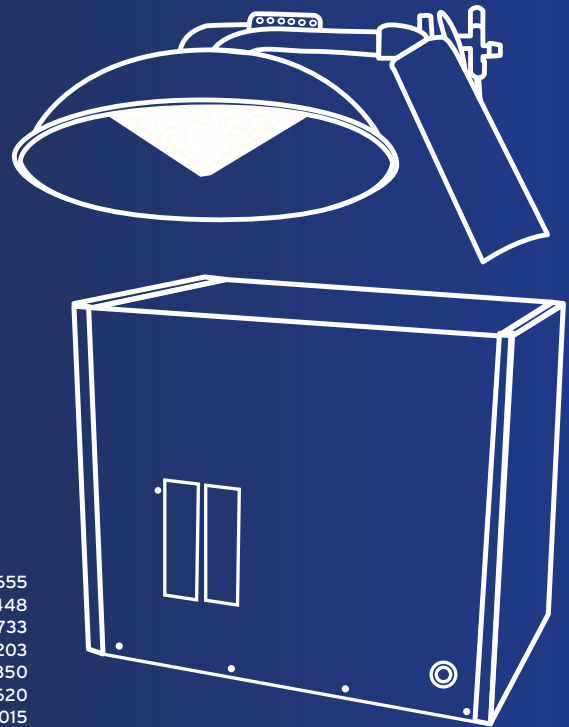
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**Monday, February 10, 2025**

**11:00 – 12:00 PM MPB Annual Meeting**

**12:00 PM Lunch**

**Reception Hall/Ellerbe Room,  
Mayo Clinic Health System Event Center**

## **AGENDA**

- I. **Call to Order** – Daryl Timmerman, President
- II. **Introductions**
- III. **2024 Annual Meeting Minutes** – Jay Fultz, Secretary
- IV. **2024 MPB Financial Audit** – Jill Resler, CEO
- V. **2025 Advisements, Discussion and Action** – Todd Selvik, Vice-President
- VI. **2026 Pork Act Delegate and Alternate Elections**

**RECESS**

## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

### **Public Notice by Minnesota Pork Board and the National Pork Board**

The election of pork producer delegate candidates for the 2026 National Pork Producers (Pork Act) Delegate Body will take place at **11:00 AM, Monday, February 10, 2025** in conjunction with a Board of Directors meeting of the Minnesota Pork Board. All Minnesota pork producers are invited to attend. This Annual Meeting will be held at the Mayo Clinic Health System Event Center, 1 Civic Center Plaza, Mankato, MN 56001. All Minnesota pork producers are invited to attend. **To RSVP, please contact the Minnesota Pork office at (507) 345-8814 or email [mnpork@mnpork.com](mailto:mnpork@mnpork.com).**

Any producer, age 18 or older, who is a resident of the state and has paid all assessments due may be considered as a delegate candidate and/or participate in the election. All eligible producers are encouraged to bring with them a sales receipt proving that hogs were sold in their name and the checkoff deducted. For more information, contact the Minnesota Pork Board Office, 151 St. Andrews Court, Suite 810, Mankato, Minnesota. (507) 345-8814 or (800) 537-7675.



**Monday, February 10, 2025**  
**12:30 PM MPPA Annual Meeting**  
**Joint Session with MPB – 2:00 PM**  
**Reception Hall/Ellerbe Room,**  
**Mayo Clinic Health System Event Center**



## **AGENDA**

- I. **Call to Order**
- II. **2024 Annual Meeting Minutes** – Jay Fultz, Secretary, MPPA
- III. **2024 MPPA Financial Audit** – Jill Resler, CEO, MPPA
- IV. **2025 Resolutions** – Todd Selvik, Vice-President
- V. **2025 MPPA State Legislative Priorities and Outlook** – AJ Duerr, MPPA Lobbyist
- VI. **Adjourn**

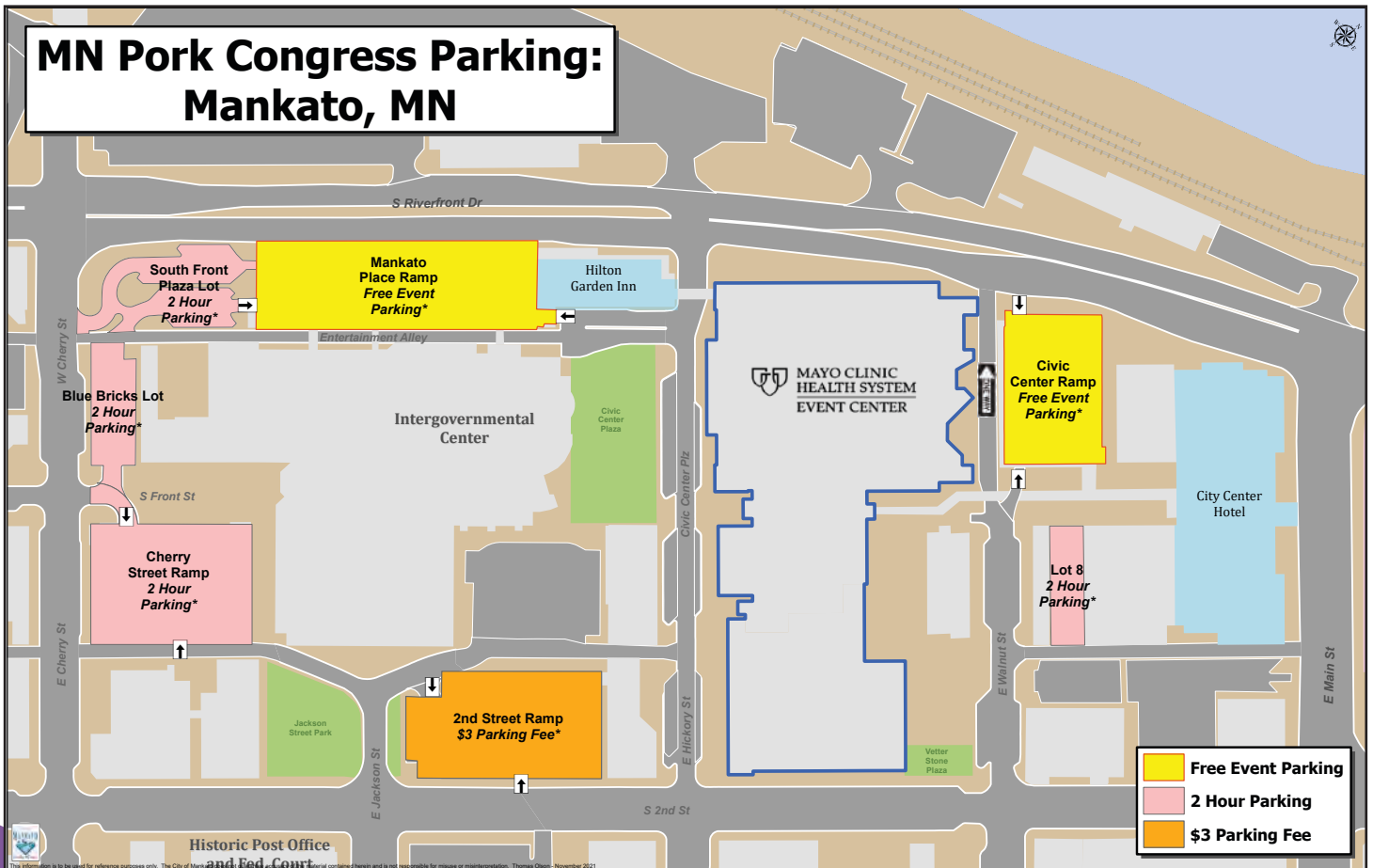
## **JOINT SESSION AGENDA**

- I. **Executive Board Election**
- II. **President's Remarks** – Daryl Timmerman
- III. **Programmatic Updates and Discussion** – Jill Resler, Bryan Humphrys, and Bill Even



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# MNPORK & MPPA 2024-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## OUR MISSION

We provide best-in-class programming, build relationships, and have influence in five key areas that deliver a demonstratable return-on-investment (Checkoff and Non-Checkoff) to our stakeholders ensuring opportunities for the next generation of Minnesota pig farmers.

## BACKGROUND

To ensure delivery on the organizational mission, Minnesota Pork employed a third-party to facilitate a strategy plan refresh starting in May 2023. A stakeholder survey, stakeholder interviews and planning sessions collectively helped the team arrive at the most important areas of focus. Feedback was solicited from a variety of interests, including national organizations, contract growers as well as independent producers, veterinarians, environmental experts and public officials. The following five pillars were identified as essential success of the organization and industry.



### Build Trust

MN Pork will build trust with customers, consumers, and decision makers. We will advocate for our industry, our people, and our product. MN Pork is a voice for pork producers, working to ensure our image accurately reflects our industry, while elevating pork as an essential protein of choice.

#### Example:

- *Star Tribune Targeting – Proactive and Reactive*
- *Cook 'n Bacon / Chad Greenway / Nourish Move Love / Real Food RDs Partnerships*



### Impact Through Influence

MN Pork will leverage our reputation and exert our influence on decision makers to impact local, state, and federal policy decisions, regulatory standards, rule-making, and national priorities on research and policy issues. We will build relationships, collaborate with partners and states, develop coalitions, and leverage our value propositions.

#### Example:

- *Denver Ballot Initiative – Municipal Initiated Measure Risk*



### Invest in People and Communities

MN Pork will build on existing efforts and create new programming that develops stakeholders of the MN pork industry. Programming will focus on the talent life cycle of our stakeholders, prioritizing training, leadership development, and the investment in and development of rural communities. Investing in our people today ensures opportunities for future generations tomorrow.

#### Example:

- *MN Pork Cohort Group Initiative*
- *Second Harvest Heartland Partnership*



### Protect Our Freedom to Operate

MN Pork will proactively engage to protect our freedom to operate and enable producers to profitably and successfully produce sustainable, safe, and healthy protein. We will focus on understanding the impact of policy and regulatory changes, prioritizing industry profitability for all operational structures, driving efforts to promote social, environmental, and economic sustainability, and ensuring opportunities for future generations.

#### Example:

- *Environmental Policy and Permitting*
- *Sustainability*



### Animal Well-Being

MN Pork will **lead the nation in herd health** improvement to support a nutritious, safe food supply, protect public health, and advance animal well-being. We will engage with farmers, veterinarians, academia, other pork producer associations, and the Minnesota Board of Animal Health in disease prevention and mitigation. We are **committed to the eradication of endemic domestic diseases**. We believe healthy pigs support animal well-being, sustainability, profitability, and vibrant rural communities.

#### Example:

- *US SHIP Enrollment Targets*
- *Animal Health Task Force*

# SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10

### Exhibitor Move-In

7 A.M. – 7 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Arena & Grand Hall

### Minnesota Pork Board Annual Meeting

11 A.M. – 12 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Reception Hall/Ellerbe Room

### Lunch

12 P.M. – 12:30 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Reception Hall/Ellerbe Room

### Minnesota Pork Producers Assoc Annual Meeting

12:30 P.M. – 2 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Reception Hall/Ellerbe Room

### Joint MPB/MPPA Annual Meeting

2 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Reception Hall/Ellerbe Room

### Awards Reception

5 P.M. – 8:30 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Banquet Hall West

Sponsored by: Hormel, Boehringer  
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## TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11

### Pork Congress Registration

9 A.M. – 5 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Main Entrance

### Pork Congress Trade Show

9 A.M. – 5 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Arena & Grand Hall

### Beverages on Pork Congress Trade Show Floor

9 A.M. – 5 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center

Arena & Grand Hall Sponsors:  
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### Seminar: The Brazil Pork Industry: What are they capable of?

9 A.M. – 10 A.M.

Speaker: Courtney Knupp, VP of  
International Market development,  
National Pork Board

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Banquet Hall West

Sponsors: Minnesota Soybean  
Research and Development Council,  
Minnesota Farm Bureau and Compeer



### Seminar: The Pork Cutout Formula

10:30 A.M. – 11:30 A.M.

Speaker: John Greteman, VP of Hogs,  
Commodity and Ingredient Hedging

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Banquet Hall West

Sponsors: Minnesota Soybean  
Research and Development Council,  
Minnesota Farm Bureau and Compeer



### Box Lunch

11:30 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Arena & Grand Hall

Sponsored by: Minnesota Pork Board  
and the Pork Checkoff



### Seminar: The War on Food

12:30 P.M. – 2 P.M.

Speaker: Andy Curliss, VP of  
strategic engagement, National Pork  
Producers Council

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Banquet Hall West

Sponsors: Minnesota Soybean  
Research and Development Council,  
Minnesota Farm Bureau and Compeer



### Seminar: Domestic Pork Demand

2:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.

Speaker: Dr. David Newman, Senior VP  
of Market Growth, National Pork Board

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Banquet Hall West

Sponsors: Minnesota Soybean  
Research and Development Council,  
Minnesota Farm Bureau and Compeer



### Trade Show Social Hour

4:30 P.M. – 6:30 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Banquet Hall Lobby

Sponsored by: Manitoba Pork Council





WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12

**Pork Congress Registration**

9 A.M. – 2 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Main Entrance

**Pork Congress Trade Show**

9 A.M. – 2 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Arena & Grand Hall

**Breakfast Sandwiches**

9 A.M. – 10:30 A.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Arena & Grand Hall

Sponsored by: Manitoba Pork Council,  
Minnesota Corn Growers Association,  
& Zoetis



**Seminar: H5N1 Isn't Fun!**

9 A.M. – 10 A.M.

Speaker: Andrew S. Bowman, MS, DVM,  
phd, DACVPM, Professor, college of  
veterinary medicine, department of  
veterinary Preventive Medicine, The  
Ohio State University

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Banquet Hall West

Sponsors: Minnesota Soybean  
Research and Development  
Council, Minnesota Farm Bureau  
and Compeer



**Seminar: Everyone knows,  
but few get it right: how to  
use hedging to secure your  
farm's profit**

10:30 A.M. – 11:30 A.M.

Speaker: Adam Hocker, Future  
Profits Consulting LLC

Mayo Clinic Event Center  
Banquet Hall West

Sponsors: Minnesota Soybean  
Research and Development Council,  
Minnesota Farm Bureau and Compeer



**Minnesota Pork Congress  
Closes**

2 P.M.

Mayo Clinic Event Center

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## TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2025

### The Brazil Pork Industry: What Are They Capable Of?

9:00 AM



*Speaker: Courtney Knupp, VP of International Market Development, National Pork Board*

Brazil has steadily grown their presence in the global pork trade competing with U.S. Pork in key markets. The National Pork Board and Minnesota Pork Board co-funded an in-depth competitor analysis of Brazil's capabilities. This seminar will provide an overview of Brazil's capabilities in production and exports for the next five years.

### The Pork Cutout Formula

10:30 AM



*Speaker: John Greteman, Vice President of Hogs, Commodity, and Ingredient Hedging (CIH)*

This seminar will explore the evolution of the pork cutout formula, tracing its original intent as a marketing resource and its shift over time into a pricing mechanism. Participants will learn to differentiate between quantitative and qualitative insights from cutout reports, uncovering the implications for decision-making. The goal is for producers to leave with a clearer understanding of how to leverage cutout information to optimize their risk management strategies and market positioning.

### The War on Food

12:30 PM



*Speaker: Andy Curliss, Vice President of Strategic Engagement, National Pork Producers Council*

Andy Curliss works at the intersection of strategy and research, focusing on competitive intelligence and threats that affect the full scope of modern production agriculture. Andy currently serves on the Leadership Team at the National Pork Producers Council, where he is Vice President of Strategic Engagement. In that role, he works to engage within and outside of agriculture to advance the U.S. pork industry and all of agriculture.

### Domestic Pork Demand

2:30 PM



*Speaker: Dr. David Newman, Senior Vice President Market Growth, National Pork Board*

Dr. David Newman will detail and discuss the work that National Pork Board is doing to address domestic pork demand. This includes outlining the details about the new consumer brand campaign that will be launching in 2025.

## WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2025

### H5N1 isn't fun!

9:00 AM



*Speaker: Andrew S. Bowman, MS, DVM, PhD, DACVPM Professor, College of Veterinary Medicine Department of Veterinary Preventive Medicine The Ohio State University*

H5N1 influenza has negatively affected business on poultry and dairy farms across the country. Are swine farms next? Let's review the situation, assess the risk for pork production systems, and learn some lessons from the other species in the barnyard.

### Everyone Knows, But Few Get It Right: How to use Hedging to Secure Your Farm's Profit

10:30 AM



*Speaker: Adam Hocker, Future Profits Consulting LLC*

Address a common reality: most farmers know about hedging as a risk management strategy, but very few use it effectively. The goal is to show how, with the right approach, risk management can be a game-changer for farm profitability. The session offers practical steps to help farmers avoid common mistakes and implement hedging correctly.

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The MPPA Partner program allows contract growers, farm employees and others who have an interest in the swine industry to take part in the MPPA decision-making process, including the right to vote at meetings and serve on committees.

This annual fee supports Minnesota Pork Producers Association and National Pork Producers Council legislative activities and public policy development on issues important to Minnesota pork producers. The membership begins each year October 1st and ends September 30th of the following year.

A description of each membership level is found on the backside of this form.

Please select one of the following levels:

- Level 1      \$750 Annual Membership Fee  
Benefit Summary: Invitation and 2 tickets to Member only Events,  
Access to Litigation Fund, Voting Rights, Communications, and NPPC SIP  
Membership
- Level 2      \$400 Annual Membership Fee  
Benefit Summary: Invitation and 1 ticket to Member only Events, Voting Rights,  
Communications, and NPPC SIP Membership
- Level 3      \$250 Annual Membership Fee  
Benefit Summary: Invitation and 1 ticket to Member only Events, Voting Rights,  
and Minnesota Communications

Please select one:

- Contract Grower [To receive full NPPC SIP membership benefits (Level 1 and 2), your selected membership level fee must exceed your gross contract x 0.0015]

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Revised 2024

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## Congratulations to the 2025 Minnesota Pork Board Award Recipients!

On Monday, February 10, from 5:00 – 8:30 p.m., Minnesota Pork will recognize the 2025 award recipients. The invitation-only event will take place the Mayo Clinic Event Center. Attendees are welcome to enjoy refreshments and heavy appetizers while honoring these pork industry leaders. Please reference the following pages to learn about each recipient and their contributions to the pork community.

### 2025 Minnesota Pork Industry Award Recipients:

#### DISTINGUISHED SERVICE:

**Lee Johnston**

*Sponsored by Minnesota Farm Bureau*



#### ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARD:

**Dave & Tracie Mensink**

*Sponsored by Alltech Pork Team*



#### PORK PROMOTER OF THE YEAR:

**Myrna Welter**

*Sponsored by Elanco Animal Health*



#### SWINE MANAGER OF THE YEAR:

**Mike Atzenhoefer**

*Sponsored by Purina Animal Nutrition*



#### LEGISLATOR OF DISTINCTION:

**Senator Nick Frentz**

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## Dave and Tracie Mensink

### Environmental Stewards of the Year



Environmentally minded, humble, and grateful describes the 2025 Minnesota Pork Board Environmental Stewards of the Year, Dave and Tracie Mensink. Their determination to do the right thing and willingness to make decisions to improve

their farm's sustainability for the next generation is inspiring, deserving to be shared.

### An Early Start, Next Generation

Dave, along with his three brothers and sister, grew up near Preston, Minnesota, raising pigs on the family farm. Dave recalls taking out his first loan and buying a few pigs from his dad in high school. Like many family farms, there was not enough farm for all four brothers to come back to after college.

Dave graduated from the University of Minnesota – Waseca (UMW), a two-year technical college specializing in agriculture. It was there Dave made lifelong friendships and built industry connections.

*“An education in agriculture trains you for on-the-farm experiences and sets you up to know the right people,”* Dave said.

Dave was encouraged by his high school agriculture teacher and college advisors throughout his educational experiences to seek out opportunities.

“If there is not a spot for you at home on the farm, take a look around because there may be somebody that doesn't have a next generation and they may be looking for someone to be their next generation,” Tracie explains.

The Mensinks explained after visiting with a couple in the neighborhood and in their church congregation, Harold and Pearl Hebrink provided Dave and Tracie with a life changing opportunity. This included a farm to get started and financial

support to one day take over their farm. The Hebrinks truly became their family, and grandparents to Dave and Tracie's two children, Alex and Morgan.

“They filled a great need for us, and we tried to fill a need for them,” Tracie said.

The Mensink family continued to support the Hebrinks as they aged. Dave and Tracie's deep appreciation and support for Pearl and Harold is one that is hard for them to express in words.

Tracie also grew up in Preston and continued her education at Minnesota State University – Mankato (MSU). She began her career as a nurse at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. She retired from nursing and continues to work full-time on their farm.

Mensink Farms is a diversified crop and livestock farm, where they raise pigs, beef cows, and row crops. They also have a feed mill on-site where they manufacture all of their own feed. They feed 100% of the corn they grow to their pigs. The Mensinks also buy some corn from their neighbors.

Dave refers to this process as a sustainability circle: *“Corn feeds the pigs, pigs make manure, manure grows the corn.”*

Dave and Tracie have two children, Alex and Morgan, who both served as county pork ambassadors and have taken part in Minnesota Pork Ambassador programs and state ambassador competitions. Alex and his wife, Katie, live on the home farm with their three daughters: Penelope, Eloise, and Finley. Morgan and her husband, Thomas, reside in St. Louis Park with their daughter, Eleanor.





## Environmental Stewards of the Year Award Sponsor:



### Doing the Right Thing

When asked what receiving this award means for the Mensink family, they shared how it takes a village and the importance of the neighborhood.

*“Tracie and I are honored to receive this award, but there are so many others that are deserving,”* Dave said.”

Dave explained how they have a big responsibility to be good stewards of the land since they farm in an environmentally sensitive area, referred to as the Karst region. This region in southeastern Minnesota is known for the layers of limestone that are very close to the soil surface, with areas of shallow bedrock, disappearing springs, and sinkholes.

“In these times when there is an increasing focus on the Karst area and water quality, Dave has been a strong voice and good example for the pork industry,” said Lori Stevermer, National Pork Producers Council president.

To increase their overall positive environmental impact and biodiversity, the Mensinks have installed pollinator habitats surrounding their pig barns. In July 2024, right off the ‘bat’ of its inception, Dave and Tracie got involved in a new program where they installed four bat houses in wood lots around the Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park. The houses create new potential roost trees within upland and riparian forests to achieve the desired summer habitat for forest-dwelling bat species. This is a cost-share program through Conservation Stewardship Program.

Another sustainable practice that they have implemented recently is cover crops. Their cover crops were planted using a drone and a no-till drill this fall. Even with the limited amount of rain this fall, they are still seeing success with the cover crops they planted. Additionally, they apply nutrients at agronomic rates and strive to stretch the manure fertilizer they apply as far as they can. Dave is proud that their highest yielding corn is always where manure is applied.

The area surrounding Mensink Farms places a large focus on water quality, a concern highlighted by the presence of



sinkholes around Dave and Tracie’s farm. They have planted buffer strips around the sinkholes, some through conservation reserve programs and some planted voluntarily. They have also installed grass waterways that they bale to feed their beef cows and have worked with neighbors to extend their grass waterways.

In December 2023, the Mensinks had all six of their wells tested to understand the nitrate levels. They were pleased to learn all the water came back within safe levels. This was very important to Dave and Tracie because they wanted to ensure their grandkids’ drinking water was safe and is also reassuring that their farming practices are protecting water quality. Dave and Tracie hope the next generation of the family farm understands the importance of water quality and protecting our natural resources.

*“Dave has always been a good role model for the next generation coming,”* Tracie said. *“If there is a new or better way of doing something, he is open to learning about it.”*





## (Dave and Tracie Mensink Continued)

Animal health and sustainability go hand in hand at Mensink Farms.

“If we have healthy animals, everyone’s job is easier on the farm and we can focus on animal health,” Dave said.

Focusing on doing the right thing for the pigs allows the Mensinks to manage their barns better and contributes to overall environmental stewardship.

### Environmental Legacy

Dave recognizes that one size does not fit all for every farm, however there are many ways to implement new practices.

“Soil erosion is a big deal in the Karst area too, because we do farm a lot of highly erodible land. We do the best we can to do minimum till and not do much deep tillage,” Dave said.

When asked what advice he would give other pig farmers who want to improve their sustainability practices, Dave said, “We as farmers cannot wear all the hats and that we must lean on experts.”

**“Embrace the new technology and don’t be afraid to try something new,”** Dave said.

He also believes in regular soil testing and ensuring he is following his manure management plan. While there is an abundance of information available, Dave states one must be proactive and actively seek these programs out.

**“If you keep doing what you have always done, you will be left in the dust,”** said Tracie.

Dave has been involved in three different nitrogen rate plots with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA). Also, in cooperation with the MDA, Dave has conducted dye tracing in some of the sinkholes and areas where water will come out

of sidehills. This can help determine the flow rate, velocity, recharge, and discharge points of groundwater. Dye tracing also helps the Mensinks understand how water moves across their farm, and ultimately the water moving through their farm to the neighboring state park.

Reflecting on years of Dave’s involvement with state programming, Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture Thom Peterson recalled their collaboration.

“Dave is just an incredible leader. With a lot of the conservation and nitrate issues we’ve had in southeast Minnesota recently, Dave’s been incredibly gracious with his time to share with me as a policy-maker, practices he and his family have implemented on their farm and that’s incredibly important, and it’s a great story to tell,” said Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture, Thom Peterson.

Dave volunteered to be involved with a task force specializing in nitrogen management starting the summer of 2024. Dave was appointed to the Southeast Minnesota nitrate studies collaborate work group and continues to represent pig farmers as part of the group.

“We think the rest of the state might have their eye on Southeast Minnesota, because whatever comes out of this nitrate study, might be reflected in the rest of the state,” Dave said. “Compared to twenty years ago, we manage nitrogen so much better than we did.”

Through his ongoing efforts and leadership, Dave remains at the forefront of advancing sustainable practices and shaping the future of nitrogen management in the region.

### “Ask me a question, I’m a pig farmer!”

Dave is proud to share his story as a farmer wherever he goes and with whomever he meets. The Mensink family has hosted numerous farm tours for groups from New York City, Nashville, and Houston to name a few. They enjoy answering questions and



explaining how pork is raised and how crops are grown. Most of the people that tour the farm have never been on a farm before.

"It is like taking them to Disneyland," Dave said.

Tracie mentioned people are fascinated to meet a farmer, as it is becoming increasingly rare. Dave hopes that their visitors will go home and share the story that he has shared with them.

"His involvement in the industry speaks to his passion and commitment to not just other pig farmers, but to promoting the industry with consumers and the general public," said Lori Stevermer.

Dave has been active on the Minnesota Pork Producers Association (MPPA) Board for several years including serving as President.

*"There are so many good people from the time that I was on the Board, that I kept relationships with,"* Dave said.

"Dave exemplifies what it means to be a leader and environmental steward amongst his peers. The willingness to consider new perspectives, experiment with new practices and technologies, all while representing and advocating on behalf of his fellow farmers is so invaluable," said Lauren Servick, director of public policy strategy and sustainability, MPPA. "Farming in Minnesota, and especially in a sensitive area like the karst region of southeast Minnesota, presents unique challenges. I think it's a true testament to the Mensink family's approach to doing right by their animals, the environment, and their neighbors and

communities where they have grown a thriving, generational family farm."

Dave and Tracie are very involved in their church and community. Dave enjoys supporting FFA members that come to the field each year for the FFA Corn Drive. He has also enjoyed sharing his story and farming background with the next generation. The Mensinks have seen firsthand that people are very removed from the farm. They have found it is important to educate students and show farm visitors they have fun on their farm.

"I'm really proud of the work that he's done, but more importantly, the time that he takes to share with other farmers and policy makers like myself," said Commissioner Peterson.

"I can't say enough about him. I've been down in his area about three times in the last year, and Dave's always there."

Through their dedication to the environment, carrying on family farming, and supporting their community, Dave and Tracie continue to make a lasting impact on the next generation of farmers and the pork industry in Minnesota.



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## Mike Atzenhoefer

### Swine Manager of the Year



Dedication to his team and his community sets Mike Atzenhoefer of Wakefield Pork apart as a leader in Minnesota's pork industry. Known for his selfless "we" mindset and focus on collaboration, Atzenhoefer is recognized as Minnesota Pork's 2025 Swine Manager of the Year for his tireless commitment to the people he works with, his expertise in pig management, and dedication to his community.

### Growing with the Farm

Atzenhoefer's journey into the pork industry began early in life. At a young age, his family moved to a farm near Trimont, Minnesota, and raised a small number of sows. After high school, Atzenhoefer initially attended Minnesota State University – Mankato to study accounting, but soon realized his passion was elsewhere. He transferred to the University of Minnesota – Waseca, where he pursued a degree in animal science, a much better fit. While there, he interned at a pig farm, marking the beginning of a lifelong career in the pork industry.

After college, Atzenhoefer worked in various roles across southern Minnesota farms, gaining hands-on experience in every stage of pig management. His skills reach every aspect of pig farming, from breeding and farrowing to wean-finish production. He also has experience in hiring, training, and keeping records to ensure success.

*"Mike's roles have varied, and you could say, 'he's done it all'",* stated Lincoln Langhorst, general manager at Wakefield Pork.

His career took a pivotal turn in 1994 when he met his future wife, Ann, who was an employee at Wakefield Pork. After some conversations between the two young professionals, an interview for Atzenhoefer was scheduled with Steve and Mary Langhorst, and everything fell into place. His first role was at the Langhorst 'home farm', where his work consisted of nursery and finishing duties. Recalling his early years, Atzenhoefer describes these as "the good old days," when he gained a first-hand understanding of the demanding and rewarding work behind raising healthy pigs.

After some time, Atzenhoefer began managing sow production and was responsible for three employees. He later spent many years as a farrowing field supervisor, where he was responsible for multiple sow farms, regularly visiting each one to help improve production.

To this day in his current role as Head of Farrowing, Atzenhoefer does not hesitate to fill a void wherever it is needed.

"There are times I go to the farm and Mike is pressure washing – he's just not afraid to help out wherever it's needed," noted Alison Eibs, human resources and recruitment specialist at Wakefield Pork.

Reflecting on his 30-year career thus far, Atzenhoefer shared, *"What I love about this work is that no two days are the same, and there's always something new to learn."*

His journey from overseeing a "handful of sows" growing up to overseeing all sows in the Wakefield Pork system speaks to his adaptability, resilience, and deep dedication to the pork industry.

### Leading with a "We" Mindset

Atzenhoefer's approach to leadership is rooted in empowering his team and fostering a collaborative environment. For him, effective management starts with building trust and guiding his team to make decisions independently.





**Swine Manager of the Year  
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"It's always 'we' with Mike, it's never 'I,'" shared Neal Paszekiewicz, head of training and development at Wakefield Pork. "It's never been about Mike; it's always been about the team and the system he is a part of. I think it says a lot about his leadership. I can't think of anybody else here more deserving of this [award] than Mike."

His philosophy of always leading with the team in mind reflects his deep belief in shared responsibility and mutual respect.

"I'm not the type of manager who says, 'Here's the task, report back when you're done.' I want my team to think for themselves, bring solutions to the table, and grow in their roles," Atzenhoefer explained.

Atzenhoefer encourages his team to come to him with potential solutions, allowing them to build confidence and problem-solving skills.

"If someone has a problem, I'll help them with it. I may not give them the answer right away because I want them to think through it. Mistakes are fine – that's how you learn," Atzenhoefer stated.

Atzenhoefer's collaborative spirit helps maintain a supportive culture at Wakefield Pork, where employees are encouraged to grow into new roles and take on greater responsibilities over time.

### **A Commitment to Health and Productivity**

For Atzenhoefer, maintaining high health and productivity standards across multiple farms is both a priority and a daily commitment. With decades of experience, he knows the importance of setting clear goals and supporting his team to meet them. Part of his success lies in his focus on biosecurity and animal welfare, two critical components of pork production.

He ensures that each farm follows strict biosecurity protocols, with regular audits and meticulous checks on sow health and productivity. His management includes consistent monitoring, open communication with farm managers, and providing teams with the resources they need to keep pigs healthy and thriving.

As technology has transformed the pork industry, Atzenhoefer has embraced new systems that make managing health and productivity easier and more accurate.

"Back when I started, we had simple controllers. Today, controllers can be accessed on your phone, so we're in constant contact with what's happening," he said.

Now, monitoring systems allow Atzenhoefer to oversee multiple farms remotely, keeping close tabs on any fluctuations in health or productivity and responding quickly to issues. This technology allows him to be proactive, ensuring each farm is set up for success and quickly addressing any challenges that arise.

*"Do what is right for the sow, and she'll pay you dividends in the long run,"* he noted.

This approach has earned him respect from his colleagues, who see his commitment to excellence as an example to follow.



### **Serving the Community Beyond the Farm**

Outside of his work in the pork industry, Atzenhoefer is deeply dedicated to his community. He and his wife, Ann, live in Lafayette, where they raised two children and now take pride in watching their children thrive in their careers.

*"Being a role model for my kids and my community is important to me,"* Atzenhoefer shared.

For 22 years, he has volunteered as an emergency medical technician (EMT), and is currently in his 18th year with the Lafayette Fire Department. His commitment to public service does not end there. He has also been an active member of the Lafayette Lions Club and frequently volunteers at local events.

# SWINE MANAGER OF THE YEAR

## (Mike Atzenhoefer Continued)

One of his proudest contributions is his role on the local park and recreation board. He helped revive programs for local families and youth, providing opportunities for recreation that had been missing from the area for years.

His community involvement doesn't just make an impact locally. It also sets an example for his coworkers.

"When employees see Mike volunteering, it makes them want to give back, too," Eibs noted. This commitment to service reinforces a culture of responsibility and integrity that Atzenhoefer upholds both in and outside of his work, and it aligns completely with the values of Minnesota's pork industry.

### Looking to the Future

Reflecting on this award, Atzenhoefer is honored to be recognized for work that he finds both challenging and deeply fulfilling. For him, the future of the pork industry lies in embracing technological advances, enhancing animal well-being, and fostering the growth of his team.

"Ask questions, stay curious, and never think you know everything," Atzenhoefer advises those just entering the field. "There's always something new to learn, whether from a vet, a colleague, or just from watching the animals closely."

Looking ahead, Atzenhoefer is excited about the continued evolution of the industry and the advancements in understanding animal behavior and needs.

*"If you give pigs what they need, they'll give you what you want in return,"* he said.

When asked what winning the award means to him, a resounding "we" is again heard in Atzenhoefer's response. "I'm sure there are a lot of people out there that earned this award just as much as myself. It's nice to be recognized for the hard work and the commitment we have to the industry, to the company, and to the people," Atzenhoefer humbly noted.

With his dedication to people, animals, and community, Mike Atzenhoefer exemplifies what it means to be a leader in swine management and the industry, setting a high standard for others to follow.



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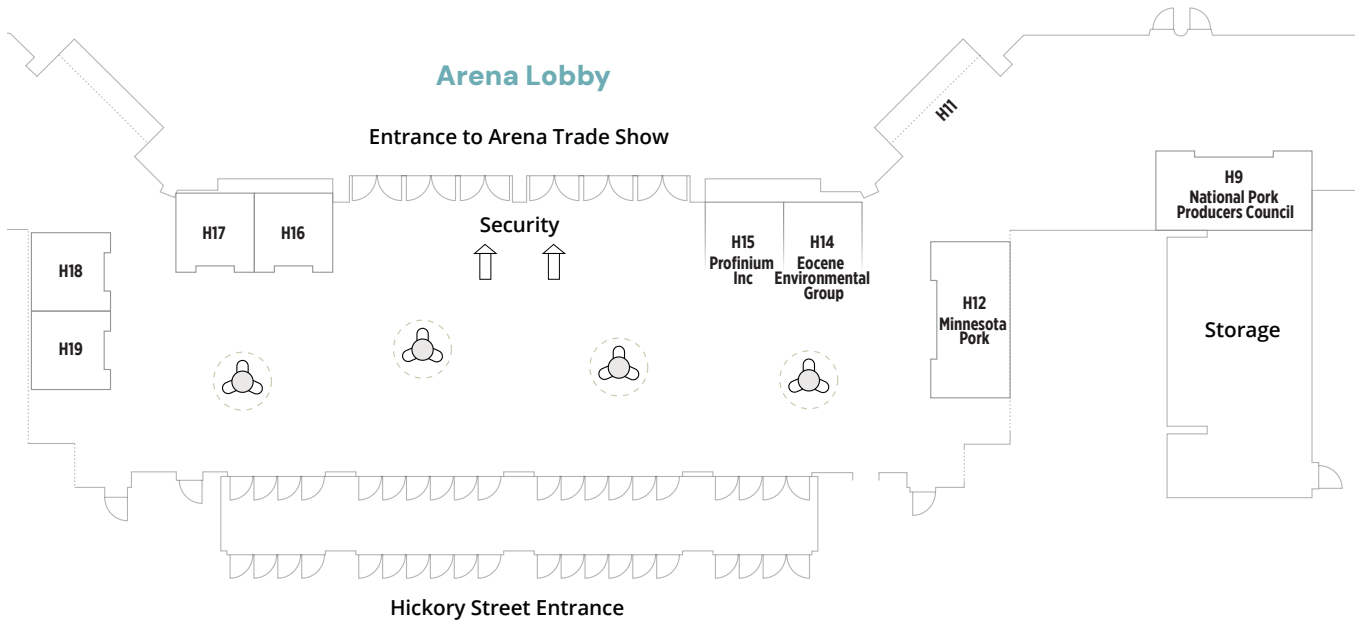
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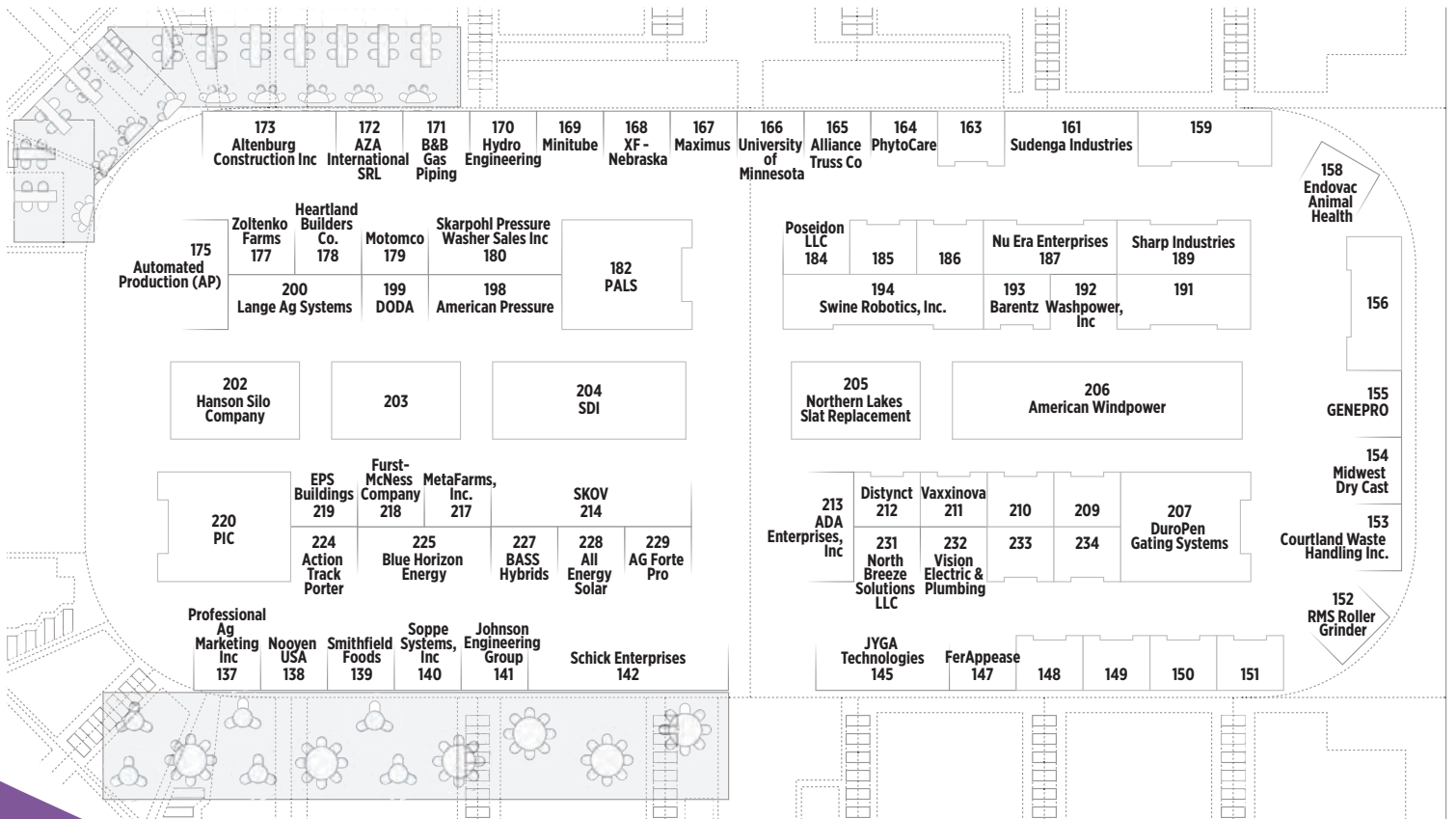
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AZA International SRL	172	Healthy Farms	41
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Blue Horizon Energy	225	Hydro Engineering	170
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Boekett Building Supply	60	ISG	33
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Central Confinement Service	18	JR's Confinement Repair LLC	99
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CSA Animal Nutrition	27	MetaFarms, Inc.	217
Cutco	67	Midwest Dry Cast	154
D & D Distributing	76	Midwest Livestock Systems, LLC	88
Danbred	69	Minitube	169

# EXHIBITOR BOOTH MAPS

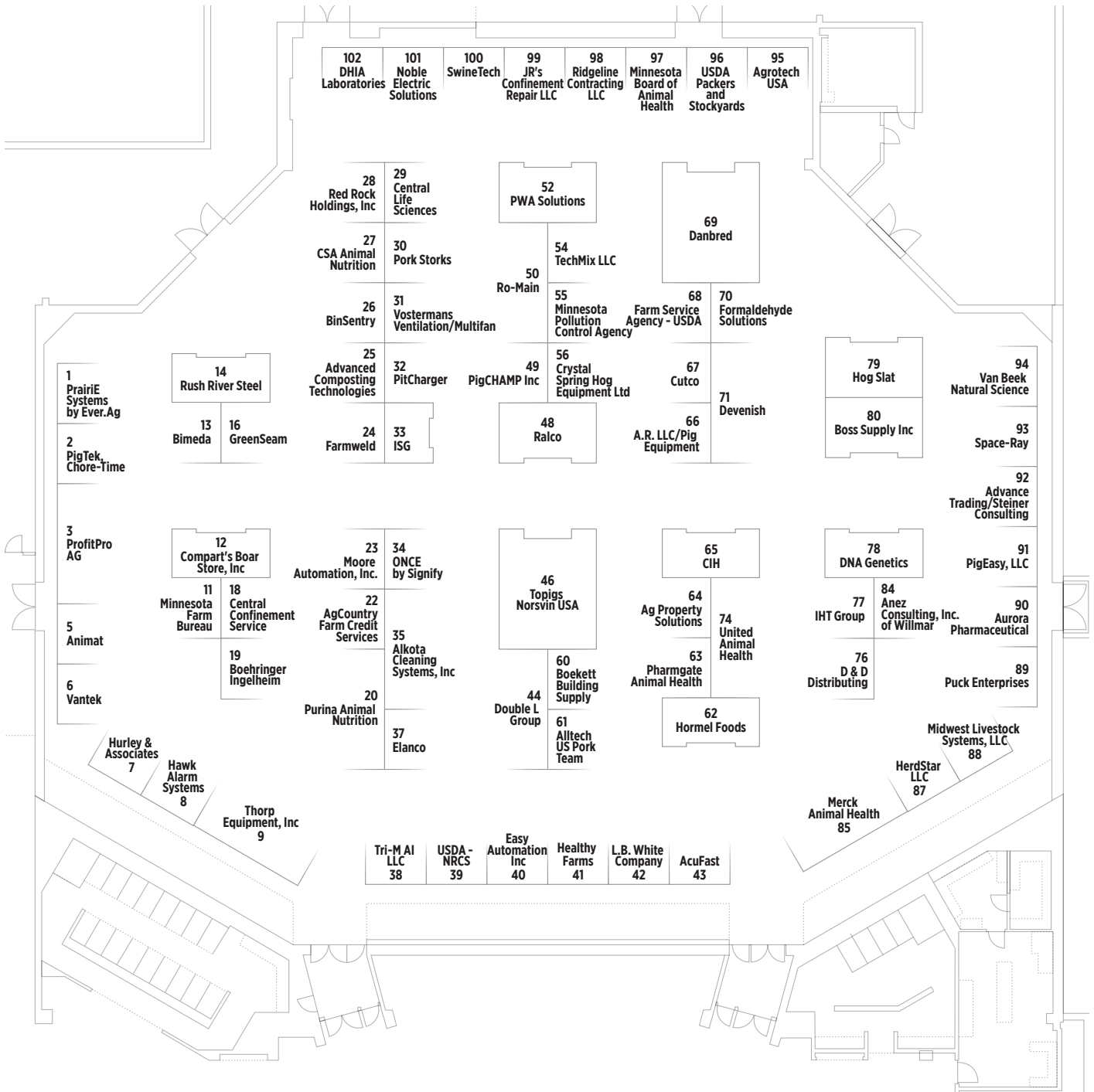


## Arena Trade Show





## Grand Hall



# EXHIBITOR LIST

Exhibitor	Booth Number	Exhibitor	Booth Number
Minnesota Board of Animal Health	97	RMS Roller Grinder	152
Minnesota Farm Bureau	11	Ro-Main	50
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Prairie Systems by Ever.Ag	1	Vantek	6
Professional Ag Marketing Inc	137	Vaxxinoa	211
Profinium Inc	H15	Vision Electric & Plumbing	232
ProfitPro AG	3	Vostermans Ventilation/Multifan	31
Puck Enterprises	89	Washpower, Inc	192
Purina Animal Nutrition	20	XF - Nebraska	168
PWA Solutions	52	Zoltenko Farms	177
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Red Rock Holdings, Inc	28		
Ridgeline Contracting LLC	98		



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## Myrna Welter

**Pork Promoter of the Year 2025**



An unwavering passion for pigs and people can describe Myrna Welter's lifelong pork promotion efforts. Although for her, promoting pork does not take effort, as her dedication and love of the industry permeates every aspect of her life. Her unyielding enthusiasm and decades-long commitment to promoting pork make her a natural and deserving recipient of the 2025 Minnesota Pork Promoter of the Year award.

### A Passion Rooted in Childhood

Welter's love for pigs began during her childhood on her family farm in Elma, Iowa. The farm was home to a variety of animals, including dairy cows, sheep, and laying hens, but it was always the pigs that captured her heart.

"It was always me and my dad," Welter recalled. "As an adult now, I think it was that bond—a father-daughter connection from being with the pigs together."

Welter's passion for pigs and her lively personality did not go unnoticed in the local community. When she became old enough to run for the county pork queen, several people encouraged her to pursue the title, telling her she'd be a natural at promoting pork. Inspired by their support, Welter embraced the opportunity.



"Nobody in my family had ever done anything like [running for county pork queen], but I did. I wrote this little speech and shared everything I knew about pigs," she said. "I was successful and was crowned the 1980 Howard County Pork Queen."

The experience opened doors to a year of parades, promotional events, and public appearances. The same year, Welter's future husband, Randy, was the Junior Swine Producer of the Year in the county just south of hers. The two also attended the same high school.

*"So obviously, two pig people attract,"* Welter said.

### From Iowa to Minnesota: A New Chapter

After marrying, the Welters faced a decision about where to plant their roots. Randy, who was in the Air Force at the time, needed to be within a specific distance from a base. There were bases in Des Moines, Iowa and in the Twin Cities. Welter, who had recently graduated from nursing school, saw greater career opportunities at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. The couple ultimately chose Minnesota, settling in Rochester to begin their next chapter together. For two years, they lived in town, but life in the city wasn't for them.

"We said, 'this is enough of this,' and bought an acreage," Welter explained.

They started finishing feeder pigs on the property and eventually found a farm that better suited their ambitions.

"It was a lot of hard work to build it all up and redo the barns," Welter said. "We had to convert structures originally used for calves into barns suitable for pigs. But we knew this was where we were supposed to be."

While balancing the challenges of raising a family and running a farm, Welter left her nursing career at Mayo Clinic in 1989 to focus full-time on raising her seven children and their growing operation, specifically farrowing all their pigs.

"I didn't miss nursing because I had plenty to care for with my kids and pigs," she said. "I always gravitated toward the piglets that needed a little tender loving care. They weren't going to die on my watch!"

### Promotion: Creative and Unwavering

Welter's passion for promoting pork is truly infectious, evident in her extensive leadership and community involvement at the local, state, and national levels. She has served as president and secretary of the Olmsted County Pork Producers and directed the county's ambassador program. She has served on the Minnesota Pork Board for 10 years, volunteering at numerous consumer

## Pork Promoter of the Year Award Sponsor:



outreach events, and even volunteered in a National Pork Board promotional tour, which took her to Portland, Oregon.

Whether in grocery stores, farmers markets, or even through her voicemail greeting, she seizes every opportunity to educate others about the versatility, affordability, and quality of pork products.

*“I love to share,”* she said. *“If you listen to people, you can change their minds so quickly just by sharing information.”*

Welter’s promotional efforts are both creative and effective. At Stewartville’s Fareway grocery store, she frequently sets up an educational table featuring an activity she calls ‘Show Me the Pork.’ Designed to encourage pork purchases with small prizes, the initiative has been a clear success. At her first event, she engaged with 78 customers in just 90 minutes; 10 returned to purchase pork after learning about the promotion, while many others who proudly ‘showed her the pork’ in their carts took home recipes or giveaways.

At the senior center, she hosted bingo games featuring pork prizes. During National Pork Month, she created customized bingo cards, which the winners redeemed for pork chops as their bingo prizes.

Her efforts to reach younger audiences are equally inventive. During school visits, she gives children tangible items, like pig-themed building blocks, and involves them in creating grocery lists filled with pork products to take home to their families.

*“You have to seize every opportunity,”* she said. *“Even something small can spark interest.”*

Welter’s creativity extends to crafting pork-related jingles, such as her version of “’Twas the Night Before Christmas,” which she shares through her phone’s voicemail [see full jingle below]. Callers often leave messages saying, “Now I’m craving pork chops for dinner!”

*’Twas a Month Before Christmas (I’m Cooking Pork)  
’Twas a month before Christmas, and all through the house,  
there was a creature stirring, but it wasn’t a mouse.  
It was I in the kitchen, using my fork,  
you got it that’s right, I’m cooking pork.  
There was ribs and chops and bacon in the pan  
and yummy, yummy Christmas ham.  
It all sounds delicious, I wish you were here,  
but leaving a message will bring Christmas cheer.*

Neighbor and long-time fellow member of the Olmsted County Pork Producers Board, Anne Schatz, shared her personal experience with Welter’s promotional efforts.

“Myrna is never afraid to visit with people and talk with them about the industry. She is very knowledgeable about the product and is determined to educate the public, reassuring pork is safe, healthy, and a great choice of protein,” Schatz said. “When speaking to Myrna in everyday conversation, she always relates back to promoting the pork industry. I can’t think of anyone more deserving of this award.”

### Valuable Community Impact

Welter also works off the farm as the membership director for the Stewartville Chamber of Commerce, a role that provides a direct route to community engagement. She seizes every opportunity to incorporate pork into local activities. Chamber President, Nick Johnson, shared his experience working with Welter and seeing her direct promotion daily.

“If you have ever met Myrna, you know she is a ball of energy. She is a do-er and natural promoter,” Johnson said. “She is fantastic at the little things, always giving out pig-themed prizes. Everybody in Stewartville knows Myrna and pork are a package deal. She never fails to make pork part of the equation.”

Welter has hosted storytelling sessions at the Stewartville Public Library, reading pig-themed books such as a playful reading of *If You Give a Pig a Pancake*. Each event leaves a lasting impression on her community, solidifying her role as a tireless advocate for pork.





## (Myrna Welter Continued)

"I've gotten known as the pig lady in town," she said with a smile. "I have several important keys, all of which have my phone number and a pig keychain. We joke that I don't need my phone number on it, because if it has a pig key chain, it will get back to me."

She also shares pork-related trinkets from her personal collection, creating fun and engaging ways for people to connect with pig farming. Her home "pork store" is stocked with items she collects from tradeshow, which she uses to create thoughtful promotional baskets.

Welter's efforts extend to local farmers markets and collaborations with organizations like the Farm Bureau, FFA, and 4-H, reinforcing the importance of working together to promote agriculture.

From the very beginning, Welter's husband, Randy, has witnessed her unwavering passion firsthand. In a simple yet heartfelt statement, he captured how deeply it influences her daily life.

*"Sharing about pigs is constant for her. It's what she loves,"* he said.

## Continuing the Mission and A Well-Deserved Honor

For Welter, simplicity is the key to effective promotion. She focuses on teaching others how pork can fit easily into their lives, from affordable meal ideas to its nutritional value.

"I want to show the younger generation how simple and delicious pork can be," she said. "If we make it approachable, more people will embrace it."

Being named Minnesota Pork Promoter of the Year is a humbling recognition for Welter.

*"It doesn't feel like work; it's my passion,"* she shared. *"There are so many deserving people, so it's an honor to be recognized. I just want to share the pork love."*

Welter's tireless efforts have left a lasting impact on her community and beyond, ensuring the next generation understands the value of pig farming. Whether at a fair, a grocery store, or through her voicemail jingles, her dedication to promoting pork is unwavering.

For Myrna Welter, pigs aren't just a livelihood—they're a lifelong love.







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## Lee Johnston

### Distinguished Service



Lee Johnston's unwavering commitment to agriculture, advancing research, and mentoring future leaders has earned him the Minnesota Pork Distinguished Service Award. His journey from a dairy farm in Pennsylvania to becoming a respected expert in the pork industry highlights a career marked by curiosity, commitment, and passion.

The Distinguished Service Award honors individuals who have made significant contributions to the pork industry in Minnesota. Johnston's decades of impactful work as a researcher, professor, and mentor at the University of Minnesota (UMN) West Central Research and Outreach Center (WCROC) have shaped not only the pork industry but also the lives of those who have learned from him.

### From dairy to pigs: A journey to leadership

Johnston grew up on a ninth-generation dairy farm in western Pennsylvania. While his early life revolved around milking cows and managing farm chores, one part of the routine stood out to him.

*"I liked everything about the farm—I just didn't like milking,"* Johnston said.

While pursuing his bachelor's degree in animal production at Pennsylvania State University (Penn State), Johnston learned the university hired students to work on its research farms. He then submitted applications to work at the dairy, beef, and swine barns.

"I put my application in, and it just so happened that Vern Hazlett at the swine barn called and said he had a position," Johnston said. "He told me it would be 17 hours a week and asked if I was interested."

Although he had no pig experience, Johnston was eager to get started.

"I interviewed, and there was another guy that applied who didn't have any pig experience, either," Johnston said. "So, Vern said he'd hire us both but split the hours and see which one of us works out. He hired Bob Bortz and I, and we ended up staying three years working in the pig barn at Penn State."

The experience was profound and marked the start of Johnston's lifelong involvement in the pork industry.

"That was really the launching of the whole pig thing," Johnston said. "I judged on the livestock team and got to see genetic advancements on pig farms. It was exciting, and I didn't want to milk cows, so the pig thing seemed like the right career path."

His family's farm was a Revolutionary War-era land grant, originally spanning more than 300 acres before shrinking to 40 acres as the town expanded. These deep agricultural roots reinforced Johnston's commitment to farming, even as he pivoted from dairy to pigs.

While approaching graduation from Penn State in 1982, Johnston



Distinguished Service Award Sponsor:



recalled the pig industry had limited jobs available amidst low prices. Although he did not anticipate moving west of the Mississippi River, or obtaining additional degrees, he took an opportunity to work as an assistant manager at Texas Tech University's Swine Research Unit in Lubbock, Texas. While there, he earned a master's in swine nutrition in 1984.

Johnston's academic journey continued at Michigan State University, where he obtained a Ph.D. in swine nutrition and management in 1988. During his time there, Johnston worked as an assistant state swine extension specialist, contributing to extension programs including barrow shows and carcass evaluations. This role expanded his experience and understanding of various industry activities.

Each step of Johnston's education was guided by mentors such as Hazlett, Dr. Don Orr, Dr. Elwyn Miller, and Dr. Maynard Hogberg, helping him build connections that shaped his career. When his time at Michigan State was coming to a close, Johnston decided he wanted to stay in academia for at least the early part of his career.

*"It's easier to go from academia to industry, it's more of a challenge to go from industry back into academia,"* Johnston said.

In 1988, Johnston and his wife, Judy, moved to Morris, Minnesota, where he began his position at the WCROC as assistant professor.

"It was the only academic position available at the time, and we thought, 'We're young, we don't have kids yet, and if it doesn't work out, we can move.' That was 36 years ago," he said.

By 1998, ten years after Johnston started, he achieved the rank of full professor. In 2010, he was promoted to director of the WCROC, a position he held until late 2022.

### Innovative research grounded in science

Throughout his career, Johnston has focused on research addressing producers' needs through practical solutions. He has conducted impactful research spanning a wide range of topics, including sow housing, carbon footprints and solar-powered barns, and reproductive management in sows. Early on, he was part of the first academic team to study feeding distillers grains to pigs.





## (Lee Johnston Continued)

Johnston noted how these projects did not always produce groundbreaking results for the industry, but still yielded valuable insights.

*“Not everything we try works, but that’s equally important to know,”* Johnston said. *“Knowing what doesn’t work can save time and resources for producers.”*

Johnston’s evidence-driven approach has earned him a reputation as a trusted resource. Long-time colleagues of Johnston’s can testify to the lasting impact he has made on the pork industry, both nationally and internationally. Dr. Bob Thaler, South Dakota State University extension swine specialist and distinguished professor, recalled Johnston’s contributions.

*“Lee has spent his career working directly with producers to first determine what their main challenges are, and then to design research trials to provide science-based, unbiased answers to those problems,”* Dr. Thaler said. *“While it’s not very ‘sexy,’ he is the only person I know that has done work on sow constipation and its effects on sow performance because that was a big issue plaguing the industry in the late 1990s.”*

Johnston’s colleague at UMN’s College of Veterinary Medicine, Montserrat Torremorell, DVM, Ph.D. and professor and department chair, highlighted Johnston’s impacts.

*“Lee’s research is applied, relevant and impactful. He consistently delivers thorough studies with rigorous experimental design, analysis and interpretation of results,”* Torremorell said. *“Producers can always count on Lee’s results to be presented in an unbiased way. Through his research, Lee has also trained many graduate students who have also contributed to the dissemination of knowledge to swine producers.”*

John Anderson, a pig, cattle, and crop farmer from Belgrade, Minnesota, reflected on his over 30-year collaboration with Johnston at Anderson Farms.

*“As farms like ours expanded and moved our production inside, Lee and the WCROC would hold many events to give guidance in many aspects of production,”* Anderson said. *“We were breeding for a more prolific sow and Lee responded by helping formulate diets to meet her needs. As the feed ingredients changed everything from synthetic amino acids to distillers, Lee would supply unbiased research to help us make informed decisions.”*

## Respect earned by doing

Johnston’s academic contributions include over 140 journal articles, six book chapters, numerous extension publications,



and articles in popular press. He has been a keynote speaker over 50 times both nationally and internationally.

He has been a leader delivering national pork quality assurance, helping ensure those in the industry across the state are educated in proper animal handling and knowledge.

His career has also spanned some of the pork industry’s most challenging periods. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he helped producers manage mass euthanasia events and supply chain disruptions. He also worked collaboratively to elevate agricultural literacy among the public.

*“Farmers were hurting—not just financially, but emotionally,”* Johnston said. *“We worked to provide support. We had calls on Sunday afternoons to discuss what we could do to help.”*

Working alongside colleagues at the UMN’s Andrew Boss Laboratory of Meat Science, the team learned that inexperienced individuals were obtaining pigs from farmers forced to euthanize animals during the pandemic plant closures. In response, the team developed educational resources, including a YouTube series on small-scale pork processing as part of broader efforts to engage non-agriculture audiences.

*“The genesis of this work was about bridging understanding,”* Johnston said. *“We wanted to explain why these challenges were happening during the pandemic shutdowns and how they could be addressed.”*

Johnston’s list of professional accomplishments is impressive. His awards include multiple recognitions for innovation in outreach from the National Pork Board, the Outstanding Faculty Award from the UMN Animal Science Graduate Club in 2003 and 2008, the Distinguished Alumnus Award in 2014 from the Penn State Department of Animal Science, and, most recently, the Outstanding Extension Faculty Award at the UMN Extension Dean’s Distinguished Banquet in 2023.

However, his impact extends beyond these accolades. Johnston’s work in the pork industry is shaped by his unwavering integrity and commitment to providing honest, fact-supported guidance.

"What I appreciate the most about Lee is that he is a man of character and principle," Dr. Thaler said. "He tells people not what they want to hear, but what they need to hear, and it's supported by hard science."

## Mentorship and integrity

For Johnston, the most rewarding aspect of his work has always been mentoring and guiding students.

"Graduate students are one of the reasons I'm still in this role after all these years," he said. "I can tell you where every one of them is, what they're doing, and the impact they're making in the industry."

One example of this lasting connection is Jeffery S. Knott, Ph.D., owner of Ideal Animal Nutrition, LLC, who first met Johnston when he began graduate school in 1999. Now collaborating on swine research trials, Knott described the impact Johnston has had on his career.

"Lee has taught hundreds of students critical thinking, principles of swine nutrition and management, and the scientific method in a very challenging yet caring way," Knott said. "Best of all, Lee is a very caring person and helps people succeed. He finds the best in people and is a very positive role model."

Johnston's dedication to his students goes beyond teaching, as he often learns from them as well. He shared a light-hearted story that illustrates how the next generation thinks and communicates, particularly when it comes to texting.

"I text using proper grammar, and one day my students told me they thought I was upset because I put periods at the end of my sentences," Johnston said with a smile. "They still laugh about it to this day."

Johnston advises the younger generation to remain open-minded and receptive to diverse opportunities. Internships and varied experiences are invaluable, not only for discovering what one wants to pursue, but also for identifying what is not the right fit. With two children of his own, Johnston understands this first-hand.

Johnston also emphasizes the importance of personal and professional integrity. Quoting mentors who shaped his career, he recalls being told:

*"You never know who is going to become your boss, so treat people right and fairly. Your professional reputation follows you everywhere."*

These lessons align with a core value in the pork industry of doing the right thing, even when no one is watching.

## A well-earned recognition

Receiving the Minnesota Pork Distinguished Service Award is deeply significant for Johnston.

*"The recognition of colleagues in the industry is important. Being in a camp with past award winners I respect is meaningful,"* he said. *"It's rewarding to know people thought you did something worthwhile."*

Outside of his professional work, Johnston enjoys caring for his Dorset ewe flock alongside his wife, Judy, while also mentoring the young people who show the animals. Together, they raised two children, Justin and Natalie, who are each making their mark in agriculture. The couple now takes pride in being grandparents to four boys.

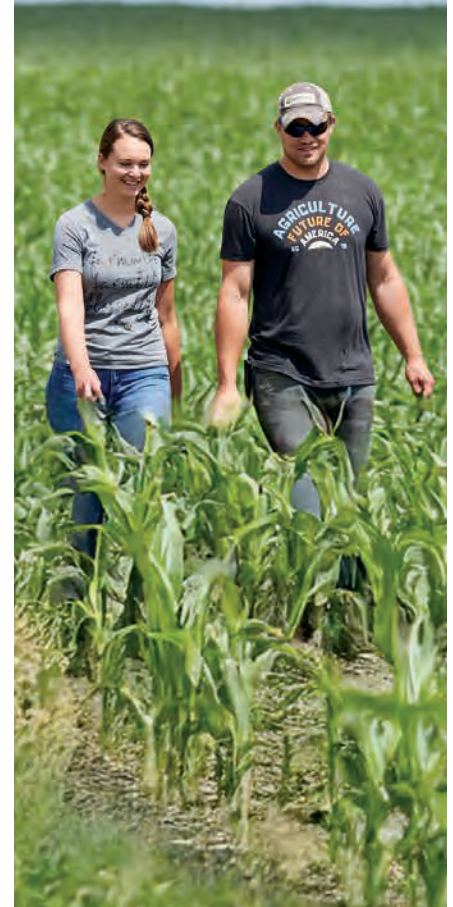
Johnston's journey, from his first job in the Penn State swine research barn to becoming a leader in the field, reflects the value of mentorship, collaboration, and his unwavering commitment to agriculture. His influence on Minnesota's pork industry will resonate for generations.

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## Senator Nick Frentz

### Legislator of Distinction



For Senator Nick Frentz, serving his district and supporting agriculture are deeply personal missions. As the recipient of the 2025 Legislator of Distinction award, Sen. Frentz's commitment to pork producers and agriculture shines through his legislative work and his pride in representing a vibrant, diverse district.

### A Personal Connection to the Land

Sen. Frentz's connection to his district and its agricultural roots dates back generations. His father's family moved to the Mankato area more than 160 years ago, instilling in Sen. Frentz a deep appreciation for the rural landscapes of southern Minnesota.

Born on a military base in Japan while his father served in the United States Army, Sen. Frentz spent his early years in northern California after his father completed his service. Despite living on the West Coast, the family returned annually to the Mankato area to visit relatives, where Sen. Frentz developed a deep appreciation for southern Minnesota.

"I always knew I would move to Minnesota the first chance I had. One of the things I loved most growing up visiting the Mankato area was seeing the cornfields and barns. It's part of what makes southern Minnesota special," he said.

These early experiences fostered his respect for the hard work of farmers and the importance of agriculture to the state's identity.

*"I think I'm the number one consumer of pork in Nicollet County,"* he joked, emphasizing his enthusiasm for supporting local producers.

After graduating from Macalester College in 1984 and William Mitchell College of Law in 1987, Sen. Frentz settled in North Mankato. There, he and his wife raised their four children, and have called the area home ever since.

### Advocating for Agriculture

Sen. Frentz's advocacy for agriculture began when he was first elected to the Minnesota Senate in 2016. Recognizing the vital role agriculture plays in the state's economy—with pork alone contributing more than \$4 billion annually—he requested to serve on the Senate Agriculture Committee during his freshman term.

"One of the cool things about serving in the legislature is the incredible opportunity to learn about things you didn't know before," he said. "In the Agriculture Committee, we set policies and fund essential programs like the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory at the University of Minnesota. It's fascinating."

Sen. Frentz quickly immersed himself in the local pork industry, learning from farmers about the challenges they face. These interactions deepened his understanding of the industry and informed his legislative efforts.

*"Pork production is not just an economic driver; it's about caring for living, breathing animals,"* he noted. "I've even





## Legislator of Distinction Award Sponsor:



brought legislators from the Twin Cities on sow farm tours so they can see firsthand what goes into this work.”

He credits these tours as key to bridging the gap between urban and rural lawmakers.

“It’s one thing to talk about pork production in a committee room; it’s another to see the biosecurity measures and animal care up close,” Sen. Frentz explained. “It changes the conversation.”

Nicollet County pig farmer Dean Compart and the entire Compart Family Farms team have played a pivotal role in Senator Frentz’s introduction to pig farming. As a past member of the Minnesota Board of Animal Health, Compart has received strong support from Senator Frentz in his endeavors.

“He is very approachable and understands the importance swine production has in this state. He doesn’t try to hide decisions being made,” Compart said. **“He is a very strong supporter and ally, advocating for new and emerging diseases and looks to find common ground.”**



### Bringing Agriculture to the Capitol

Representing Senate District 18, which includes Nicollet County, Mankato, and parts of Blue Earth and Le Sueur counties, Sen. Frentz’s district is home to nearly 2,000 family farms. This proximity to agriculture has shaped his legislative priorities.

**“My role has always been to bring the voice of agriculture to the Capitol,”** he explained. “With so many legislators lacking a background in farming, it’s crucial to educate them on policy and budget choices that impact producers.”

Sen. Frentz’s work extends beyond legislation. He is an affiliate member of the Nicollet County Pork Producers and actively participates in their events.

“These dinners and meetings aren’t just about great pork chops—though they are amazing,” he said with a laugh. “They’re about building relationships and understanding the issues farmers face.”

In addition to agriculture, Sen. Frentz’s committee assignments reflect the diversity of his district. He currently chairs the Senate Energy, Utilities, and Climate Committee and serves on the Senate Commerce, Transportation, and Rules Committees, among others. His leadership roles underscore his dedication to addressing a broad range of issues affecting Minnesotans.

### Pride in the District

Sen. Frentz takes immense pride in the district he represents, which he describes as a microcosm of Minnesota.



## (Senator Nick Frenz Continued)



"It's a little bit of everything—rural areas, suburban neighborhoods, and a university town. I'm fortunate to represent a region that thrives because of its diversity," he said.

One of his proudest achievements is fostering partnerships that strengthen the region. He highlighted Greater Mankato Growth, an integrated chamber of commerce that brings together business owners, agricultural leaders, and local government officials.

***"When we collaborate, our voice is much stronger,"*** Sen. Frenz said. ***"That's what makes our district special."***

Minnesota Pork Producers Association's contract lobbyist, AJ Duerr, has worked alongside Sen. Frenz on many key pieces of legislation. He notes how Sen. Frenz has been a consistent champion for Minnesota's pig farmers during his entire time in the Minnesota Senate.

"He always takes the time to thoughtfully hear the ideas and concerns of farmers and is very effective in moving positive legislation through the process," Duerr said.

"In a time when politics is getting increasingly partisan, Senator Frenz goes against that trend by working well with both Democrats and Republicans in St. Paul to the benefit of our members. He is not afraid to go to bat for the pig farmers in his district, even if it means going against some members of his own party.

"He is one of the most respected members of the Legislature. Senator Frenz has the leadership qualities to bring together like minded colleagues in St. Paul to ensure that farmers and all rural Minnesotans have a fair seat at the table."

## A Vision for the Future

Sen. Frenz's dedication to agriculture extends beyond his legislative accomplishments. He emphasizes the importance of partnerships and collaboration in policymaking. "What's starting to go wrong in American politics is the idea that there has to be a winner and a loser," he said. "You wouldn't run a farm that way, so why run government that way? Partnerships bring credibility and stronger results."

As a Legislator of Distinction, Sen. Frenz continues to champion the interests of pork producers and the agricultural community. His efforts include advocating for funding agricultural research and ensuring fair policies for producers. He also remains a staunch supporter of education initiatives that connect young Minnesotans to agriculture.

***"We need to inspire the next generation to see farming as both a calling and a career,"*** he said.

Reflecting on his role, Sen. Frenz said, "If you like helping people and love the area you serve, there's nothing more rewarding than this work."

Sen. Frenz's unwavering commitment to his district and the agricultural community ensures that his impact will be felt for years to come.







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# HELP MAKE MINNESOTA THRIVE: THE IMPACT OF ON-FARM REPORTS

Farming in Minnesota is not without its challenges. Minnesota has had a tight labor market for years, with many rural counties seeing unemployment rates below three and four percent. On top of that, with a higher tax burden along with robust regulations, Minnesota farmers have a lot to manage and navigate. For those reasons, the task of advocating for and representing Minnesota pig farmers is an important one that necessitates leadership, collaboration, and key insights delivered by the Minnesota Pork Producers Association to ensure future generations of Minnesota pig farmers have opportunities to succeed.

One story that Minnesota pig farmers can be proud to share begins with their commitment to their pigs, people, and planet. For decades, the WeCare Ethical Principles have served as a rallying message for farmers, providing commitment and proof to customers and consumers that pig farmers are doing the right thing.

In 2020, Minnesota became a pilot state for on-farm sustainability reports, done in partnership with the National Pork Board and Sustainable Environmental Consultants, now known as Eocene. While the early years of the work leveraged checkoff dollars to complete the reports for farmers, the Climate Smart Commodities Grants created a new opportunity for farmers to benchmark their practices specific to their farm, their barns, and their soils to better capture the true impact of their work and commitment toward continuous improvement.

Minnesota took the lead during the early pilot phases and continues to excel as enrollment in on-farm reports steadily increases. For no additional out-of-pocket expense for farmers and a small investment of time, farmers are providing an invaluable resource to protect and defend their freedom to farm in Minnesota.

As each farm completes its on-farm report, that information gets rolled up into a blind, aggregated state report. The state report has given an edge to the Minnesota Pork Producers Association's advocacy efforts. Because the reports are done crop year by crop year, these third-party verified reports make a compelling case when used in discussions of increased regulations or rules. The conversations MPPA can lead with farmers' primary data have fundamentally set apart pig farmers from their peers, providing credible information that reinforces the policy and regulatory priorities of Minnesota's pig farmers.

In the Minnesota Pork Strategic Plan, Protecting Freedom to Operate is a foundational pillar. The Minnesota Pork executive board has set ambitious goals toward have 51% of Minnesota's pig represented in the on-farm sustainability reports. The political headwinds in Minnesota underline the necessity of having robust data and information to enhance the position of Minnesota pig farmers.

Scan this QR Code to sign up for your individual on-farm sustainability report. Any Minnesota pig, corn, or soybean farmer is eligible, including contract growers. Together, Minnesota's pig farmers can continue to lead the way and ensuring opportunities for future generations of farmers.



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FOR YOUR ON-FARM REPORT





# Protect Your Freedom to Farm

## Complete Your On-Farm Sustainability Report

### Use Data to Tell Your Story Through a Pork Cares Farm Impact Report

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[porkcheckoff.org/impact](https://porkcheckoff.org/impact)

To learn more, contact:

**Kate Maddock**  
Sustainability Outreach Coordinator  
[kate@mnppork.com](mailto:kate@mnppork.com)  
507-345-8814



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Minnesota Pork's investments, events, and collaborations continue to be directed by the strategic imperatives laid out in its 2024–2027 Strategic Plan under the pillars of Build Trust, Animal Well-Being, Invest in People, Impact Through Influence, and Protect Our Freedom to Operate. The following activities and partnerships represent action-oriented ways Minnesota Pork has added value to producer investments and drove the organization forward in the past 12 months.

## Protect Our Freedom to Operate

### Minnesota Leadership in SHIP

Minnesota continues to be significantly involved in the U.S. Swine Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) – a partially Checkoff-funded program developed and facilitated by a House of Delegates comprised of industry professionals, farmers, and government officials. It is built on a foundation of biosecurity, traceability, sampling, and testing using tools like AgView and Secure Pork Supply Plans. The objective of SHIP is to develop and implement an African Swine Fever (ASF)–Classical Swine Fever (CSF) Monitored Certification Program. This certification demonstrates evidence of disease freedom to resume international trade during the response and recovery period of a foreign animal disease outbreak.

Minnesota is represented by Mike Walker on the U.S. SHIP steering committee. Minnesota's enrollment in U.S. SHIP stands at 81% of the state's breeding herd and 61% of the state's growing pig herd.



### Advancing U.S. Pork Sustainability; Climate-Smart Grant

The Advancing U.S. Pork Sustainability grant is a new opportunity for farmers in select states to receive technical support and incentives for adopting climate-smart agriculture practices. The five-year, \$35 million grant program is administered by the National Pork Board (NPB) and six collaborating organizations through USDA's Partnership for Climate-Smart Commodities program.

Learn more about details of the program and request a Pork Cares Farm Impact Report for your farm by reaching out to Kate Maddock, MPB's sustainability outreach coordinator, at [kate@mnppork.com](mailto:kate@mnppork.com).

## Build Trust

A major barrier for consumers who do not eat pork regularly or who are considering eating less pork is the perceived health of pork being fatty and non-nutritious. To address this health barrier and share the benefits of nutritious, healthy pork in a wellness lifestyle, MPB continues to show up in spaces that many health-conscious individuals frequent, such as marathons, triathlons, and dietitian conferences. Key areas include opportunities where consumers gather and can access information about pork products and pig farming.

### Minnesota State Fair Oink Booth

The Oink Booth at the Minnesota State Fair remains a fantastic venue for connecting the public with pig farmers. In 2024, the booth was enhanced with two murals: inside the Oink Booth, one mural depicts the interior of a finishing barn, while the exterior features a photomontage celebrating the people, places, and animals involved in pig farming. These photo murals illustrate how pigs are provided with fresh food, water, and ample space in finishing barns. The success of the Oink Booth relies on the dedication of farmer volunteers who share their stories and experiences with fairgoers. A big THANK YOU to everyone who participates! As always, the sow and litter, along with the largest boar, continue to be crowd favorites.



### Mankato Marathon

Again in 2024, the Minnesota Pork Board (MPB) sponsored the Pork Power 5K during the Mankato Marathon weekend, held October 18–19. On Friday, Oct. 18, MPB took part in the Scheels Wellness Expo, hosting a booth to share nutritional information about pork and distributing bib clips, meat thermometers, and recipes. During the Pork Power 5K, MPB provided prize packs for the first male and female finishers and handed out pork snack sticks at the finish line for all participants.

## Grandma's Marathon

MPB continued as a major sponsor of Grandma's Marathon in 2024. The event, held in Duluth on June 20–21, included the Essentia Health and Fitness Expo and featured three races that drew over 18,000 runners, along with their families and fans from around the globe. MPB offered pork loin samples, nutritional information, meat thermometers, and cooking tips at the expo. Farmer volunteers and runners staffed the booth, sharing insights, answering questions, and participating in the 5K, half marathon, and full marathon. Additionally, 8,000 pork snack sticks were distributed in the recovery area for half-marathon and marathon runners.

## Nourish, Move, Love

Nearly 600,000 people now follow fitness trainer Lindsey Bomgren of Nourish Move Love (NML), marking a nearly 40% increase in her audience over the past year. MPB continues its partnership with NML to produce free 30- and 45-minute workout videos that authentically highlight the health benefits of pork and its value as a protein for post-workout recovery.



New this year, MPB and NML introduced a kitchen-style video featuring a pork tenderloin sheet pan meal, complementing the traditional workout content. The partnership also included two two-week workout challenges in April and September, both part of a free, four-week program that combined fitness routines with messaging about the nutritional benefits of pork. A special thank you goes out to everyone who participated in these videos!



## The Real Food Dietitians



The Real Food Dietitians are dedicated to promoting healthful cooking practices, making pork a standout choice for consumers planning their weekly meals. Throughout the year, MPB collaborated with these influential digital voices to craft delicious pork dishes, as well as two comprehensive two-week meal plans complete with grocery lists. MPB-sponsored content emphasized pork's simplicity, versatility, and nutritional benefits while also highlighting key sustainability practices in pig farming. This approach not only encourages consumers to embrace pork in their diets but also helps foster trust and confidence in choosing pork as a sustainable, healthy protein.



## Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo (FNCE)

The Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo (FNCE), a national event for nutritionists and dietitians across the U.S., took place



in Minneapolis from October 5–8. The National Pork Board (NPB) sponsored a pre-conference event featuring Chef Yia Vang, highlighting how the Hmong culture incorporates pork into everyday life. During the three-day conference, NPB hosted a booth focusing on the Pork and Partners program. The event drew over 6,100 health and nutrition professionals, with more than 1,000 engaging directly with booth representatives. Minnesota pig farmers were on hand to answer farming-related questions and support NPB staff in building meaningful connections.

## Minnesota Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (MAND)

Continuing its sponsorship of this annual event, the MPB hosted a booth and served as the lunch sponsor at the Minnesota Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (MAND) conference for current and emerging dietitians. Held in Eagan, Minnesota, the conference provided an excellent opportunity to connect with professionals dedicated to understanding and advising on nutrition.

## Twin Cities Live Participation

Over the past year, the MPB collaborated with Twin Cities Live in several engaging ways. During the daytime show, hosted by Elizabeth Ries and Ben Leber, MPB featured a variety of segments. These included a monthly pork recipe tied to the season, a "12 Days of Grilling" campaign in July in partnership with the Minnesota Turkey Growers, and a week-long series of pork-focused segments to kick off grilling season and celebrate National Pork Month in October. In each six-minute segment, a representative—whether a chef, pig farmer, veterinarian, or dietitian—highlighted creative ways to prepare pork while discussing its nutritional benefits and farmers' sustainability practices.





## Start Tribune Display Ads

*The Minnesota Star Tribune* offers a powerful platform to engage a highly targeted and influential demographic within the Twin Cities metro area. Its ability to connect with MPB's key audiences aligns with the organization's goal of shaping consumer perceptions. Strategically placed display ads on *The Minnesota Star Tribune's* pages and streaming platforms emphasize pork's commitment to sustainability and its rich, diverse flavor profile, ensuring impactful messaging that resonates with readers and viewers alike.



## WCCO Radio

Jason DeRusha continues as the drive-time host on WCCO Radio, well-known for his previous role in the Twin Cities as a WCCO-TV personality and food critic. DeRusha has been a long-time supporter of pig farming and pork for nearly two decades. His authentic voice can be heard over one dozen times each month sharing Minnesota pig farmers' sustainability story and simple, delicious, versatile ways to cook pork during his live segments and online on the Audacy radio network. In addition to his radio presence, he hosts a podcast titled DeRusha Eats where he has also had segments based on pork's flavorful potential and nutritional benefits.

## NPB/Hy-Vee Partnership

MPB, in collaboration with other state organizations, the National Pork Board, and Hy-Vee, sponsored a comprehensive pork promotion campaign both in stores and online. The partnership featured five targeted monthly promotions throughout 2024, showcasing a variety of pork products. In addition to these paid promotions, Hy-Vee consistently spotlighted pork by including recipes and featuring pork products in nearly every issue of its Seasons magazine.

## Coborn's Grocery & Cash Wise Foods Registered Dietitian Team

In 2024, MPB partnered with the registered dietitian teams at Coborn's Grocery and Cash Wise Foods for three impactful promotions. March's promotion highlighted National Nutrition Month, while April's featured the "Midwest Roots" theme, including a farmer handing out tenderloin samples at the Coborn's location in Buffalo, Minnesota. In September, the focus shifted to family meals, with space provided in the meat department to display all the ingredients for a quick, nutritious family meal. This family meal promotion earned Coborn's a Gold Plate award from the Food Marketing Institute (FMI). The campaign resulted in a 22% increase in pork sales and a 20% rise in tonnage year-over-year, demonstrating the effectiveness of targeted nutrition marketing.



## Partnership with Olympic Duo, Cook 'n Bacon

When MPB learned there was an Olympic duo training in Minnesota with a fun play on their last names—Kassidy Cook and Sarah Bacon, known as #CooknBacon—a creative partnership was formed to connect with a wide audience to promote the benefits of pork. Their collaboration with MPB kicked off with a social media announcement video before the Olympics, effectively raising awareness about pork as a nutritious protein source.



The duo continued their engagement with MPB by hosting a meet-and-greet at the Minnesota State Fair, further connecting with fans and sharing their love for pork. They also appeared on Twin Cities Live, where they promoted pork's health benefits and showcased its versatility in the kitchen.

Their partnership culminated in a significant donation to Second Harvest Heartland, further emphasizing their commitment to community support. By leveraging their large social media following and the playful connection of their names, Cook and Bacon helped MPB reach new audiences and spread the message of pork's protein power in an engaging, memorable way.





### National Pork Month Promotion with Chad Greenway

To promote October Pork Month 2024, MPB ‘teamed up’ with Chad Greenway, a former Minnesota Vikings linebacker raised on a South Dakota pig farm, to showcase the values of pig farming—animal care, sustainability, and pork’s nutritional benefits. Throughout October, five videos highlighted these

topics, with Greenway’s influence reaching a new, engaged audience. His authentic connection to farming and commitment to nutrition made this collaboration a powerful and memorable way to spread the word about the quality of pork and the hardworking farmers behind it!



### Invest in People and Communities

#### Young Leaders in Agriculture Conference

91 college students gathered in Mankato, Minnesota in June to attend the Young Leaders in Agriculture Conference (YLAC), hosted by MPB. Various ages, majors, companies, and backgrounds from across the country were represented. Speakers addressed topics such as leadership, personal



well-being, career preparedness, and persevering through challenges throughout the three-day conference.

### Summer Intern Program

The Minnesota Pork Board employed two interns during the summer of 2024, each bringing unique skills and experiences. Anika Hansen, a graduate of Kansas State University, focused on engaging young swine exhibitors, teaching important lessons on biosecurity and exploring potential careers in the pork industry. Samantha Moser, a student at South Dakota State University, worked on reaching consumers through digital messaging and signage at the Minnesota State Fair. Both interns played a key role in the success of the Oink Booth, overseeing supervisors and volunteers, managing the booth’s operations, and ensuring it was ready to welcome visitors.



### Second Harvest Heartland Donation

In December 2024, MPB and Profinium Bank donated 91,395 meals to Second Harvest Heartland, the Upper Midwest’s largest hunger relief organization. Olympic athletes Kassidy Cook and Sarah Bacon, the #CooknBacon duo, presented the donation, which amplified the messaging to their audience and highlighted their ongoing partnership with MPB to promote pork as a nutritious protein and the importance of giving back to your community. This donation reflects the collaboration between MPB and Profinium Bank to support local food banks and strengthen Minnesota communities with funds from MPB’s community initiatives, including the Minnesota State Fair shirt proceeds.





## Pork Leadership Institute (PLI)



Conducted jointly by the National Pork Producers Council and the National Pork Board, the PLI cohort welcomes approximately twenty future leaders into the program each year. Farmer candidates are identified and nominated by state pork associations and NPPC's field teams.

This past year, Madison Hokanson represented Minnesota Pork as a participant in PLI. Madison along with her fellow PLI participants were exposed to different facets of the pork industry, the national advocacy work and pork promotion work, attend two Legislative Action Conferences in Washington, DC, and had an international experience in Mexico.

## Leadership Minnesota and Minnesota Chamber Tours

MPPA is proud to support farm tours hosted by Minnesota pig farmers in conjunction with the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Minnesota cohort. Hugoson Pork hosted another leadership cohort as part of the groups' experiences,



meetings and tours within the food and agriculture sector of Minnesota. The tour participants represent business leaders from across Minnesota who get firsthand experience visiting the farms and learning about how pigs are raised and how their businesses operate in greater Minnesota. Always receiving high reviews, the farm tours are often a highlight for the year for each of the classes. They group also meets with Hormel Foods following their visit to the farm capping off a full farm to fork experience with the Hormel Sales cabin chef preparing a pork meal for the group. Exposing other thought leaders from around Minnesota remains a key objective of Minnesota Pork as the organization continues to build connections and relevance with other key partners and influencers, including the Minnesota Chamber.

## Minnesota NPDES & SDS Feedlot Permit Discussions

2024 Was a busy year for discussions and activity surrounding the state's National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) and State Disposal System (SDS) permit where are due for renewal. In March, MPPA hosted a discussion with Minnesota Pollution Control Agency officials and permit holders to discuss the proposed changes.

Along with other livestock organizations and farm groups, MPPA leaders discussed the changes and impacts they would have on their farms and the environment. Following the March meeting, in July, a series of community meetings were hosted by the MPCA where MPPA worked to have permit holders participate in each meeting through grassroots engagement. That culminated when the draft permits were open for public comment, closing on September third. MPPA worked to provide feedback to the agency throughout the process and work with farmers to participate in meetings and submit comments. MPPA engaged early and often in the process and worked to keep members informed throughout the process.

## Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Visits Christensen Farms Research Site

Sen. Aric Putnam (DFL-St. Cloud), chairman of the Minnesota Senate Agriculture, Broadband, and Rural Development Committee visited a Christensen Farms research farm as part of a swing through southern Minnesota. Sen. Putnam along with his committee staff got to hear from a variety of Christensen Farms employees and leaders on key issues facing their business, agriculture, and rural communities.

Sen. Putnam has shown his curiosity and willingness to consider new ideas throughout his time as Senate Ag committee chair. With a focus on rural housing, daycare, workforce challenges, animal health, permitting, and the shortage around large animal veterinarians, the Christensen team represented the industry well. Continued relationship building such as opportunities like this visit remain a key tactic for MPPA's advocacy on behalf of Minnesota pig farmers.





### Minnesota Farmfest

Minnesota Farmfest remains a significant political stumping ground for state and federal legislators alike, especially in a busy election year. Minnesota Pork leaders hosted many elected officials and regulators for discussions about policy topics and to broadly build understanding about key issues impacting Minnesota's family farmers. NPPC President and Minnesota farmer Lori Stevermer was a panel member for the "Farm Bill Fatigue: Will Congress Pass a Farm Bill?" on the forum stage. She was joined by Sen. Tina Smith, Zippy Duval, president American Farm Bureau, Rob Larew, president National Farmers Union, Harold Wolle, president National Corn Growers Association, and Geroge Goblisch board member American Soybean Association. At the Livestock Tent, MPPA directory of public policy strategy and sustainability, Lauren Servick presented on a panel discussion Proposition 12, Feedlot Regulations and Other Livestock Policy Issues.

Featured guests to the Minnesota Pork tent included University of Minnesota President, Dr. Rebecca Cunningham, Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan, Sens. Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, Reps. Craig, Fischbach, Emmer, Stauber, Finstad and many of their election challengers. Additionally, MPPA welcomed USDA Deputy Secretary, Xochitl Torres Small as she visited different groups around the Farmfest grounds. MPPA leaders also welcomed numerous Minnesota state Senators and Representatives and agency officials.



### Sen. Nick Frentz Golf Event

Each August, Minnesota State Senator Nick Frentz (DFL-North Mankato) hosts a golf fundraiser event at the Mankato Golf Club and invites agricultural organizations to participate and interact with gold teams and other key legislators that attend the event.

MPPA continues to have a tent on the course is able to meet with many prominent DFL legislators and leaders throughout the day. Sen. Frentz continues to be gracious with inviting MPPA. Beyond exposure to legislators, MPPA leaders are able to continue building relationships with elected officials in a more casual setting.







## UK Trade Promotion at the Minnesota State Fair

MPPA staff connected with a trade team from the United Kingdom while they visited the Minnesota State Fair. The group gathered for a sit-down discussion, which included Sen. Amy Klobuchar, Minnesota Commissioner of Agriculture Thom Peterson, and Chief Agricultural Negotiator in the Office of the United State Trade Representative, Doug McKalip.

The entire group shared interest in continuing to diversify and build strong trading relationships that include agricultural products. Additionally, there was shared interest in partnership to protect animal healthy from incursions of foreign animal diseases including African Swine Fever. In Mr. KcKalip's role, he also discussed the need for open and fair trade on topics including animal health technology and regulations in an effort to bring down non-tariff barriers.

## Connecting with Elected Officials at the Minnesota State Fair (Walz)

Election years make for especially busy state fair interactions with elected officials and candidates looking to connect with agriculture and constituents. This year's state fair was no different. Someone who often stops by the Minnesota Pork booths, however this year in a new race, Vice-Presidential



candidate Tim Walz visited the Pork Promotion booth in the Dairy Building. Minnesota Pork intern Samantha Moser and director of events and promotions, Pam Voelkel welcomed Gov. Walz, talking about the healthfulness of pork and the important role farmers play in Minnesota economy. Typically, Gov. Walz moves around the fair without much of an entourage, however, this year required security screenings and much preplanning.



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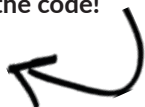
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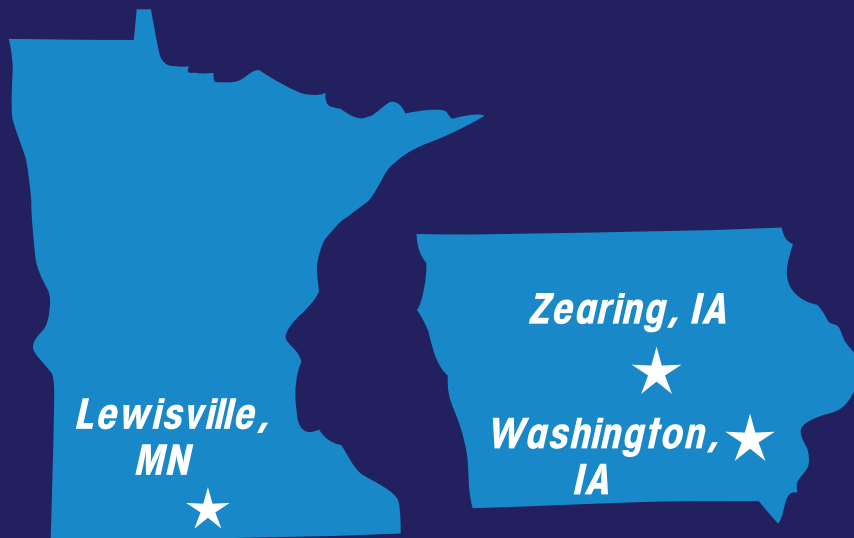
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## Pig Farmers Put in the Federal Policy Work



**MPPA farmer leaders met with Rep. Michelle Fischbach, a Republican representing Minnesota's Seventh congressional district. Rep. Fischbach sits on the powerful House Ways & Means committee which has oversight of trade, and the Rules committee which determines when legislation moves to the floor for votes. From Left to Right: Roger Punt, Mike Patterson, Rep. Fischbach, Todd Marotz, Daryl Timmerman, Dr. Abbie Redalen, and Madison Hokanson.**

In partnership with the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC), Minnesota farmer leaders and related industry advocates meet with Minnesota's congressional delegation to raise issues important to pig farmers and the pork industry during the Spring and Fall Legislative Action Conferences (LAC). Additionally, in an election year with a Farm Bill expiring at the end of the year, two additional "mini fly-ins" were conducted to continue keeping the pressure on legislators to pass a new Farm Bill and include a federal solution to California's Proposition 12 (Prop 12) that provides farmers with certainty and avoids a fifty-state patchwork or regulations.

These formal visits build on the long-term strategy and relationships developed with Senators, Representatives and their respective staff leads on agriculture in addition to key committee staff and leaders. Beyond the trips made to Washington, DC throughout the year, many in-state and in-district meetings take place to continue strengthening the relationship with Minnesota's elected officials.

As part of NPPC and MPPA's investment in future organization leaders, participants in the Pork Leadership Institute (PLI), veterinary externs and swine veterinarians also join the delegation of Minnesota farmers in DC, attend the congressional meetings, the pork legislative reception, and get to hear from other agencies and offices as they learn more about NPPC and MPPA's work to influence and advocate for farmers in the legislative and regulatory activities in Washington, DC.

## March and July Mini Fly-ins

In March and July, smaller contingencies of farmer leaders and MPPA staff made the trip to DC along with a select number of other states who had key members on the House and Senate agriculture committees had meetings to very directly ask these key members to stay engaged in the Farm Bill process.

In March, Todd Marotz and Mike Boerboom met with Minnesota's four member of their respective agriculture committees, Senators

Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, both in the Democratic Senate majority, along with Reps. Brad Finstad, Republican majority, and Angie Craig, Democratic minority along with Representative Michelle Fischbach who is a member of the critical Rules committee which determines when legislation moves to the House floor.



**Rep. Angie Craig, a Democrat representing Minnesota's second congressional district, is a strong leader on the House Agriculture committee representing a district with suburban and rural constituents. Pictured during the March mini fly-in from Left to Right: Mike Boerboom, Rep. Craig, Todd Marotz, and Lauren Servick.**

Joined by farmer leaders from Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Colorado, Kentucky, and North Carolina, the group received a briefing from the House Agriculture Committee Majority staff on behalf of Chairman G.T. Thompson (R- Pennsylvania). Staff offered their perspective on the language that was coming together for the Farm Bill mark up coming later that spring. The livestock specialist on the House Agriculture committee staff reassured the group they were committed to including language to address challenges created by Prop 12.



**During the July mini-fly in, the group received a briefing from the Senate minority staff of the Agriculture Committee. Terry Forsythe (far right) leads livestock topics for Ranking Member Boozeman (R - Arkansas) and reiterated their work to find a compromise in the Senate language that provides certainty to farmers for Prop 12. MPPA farmer leader, Terry Wolters is pictured back right.**

For the July mini fly-in, Terry Wolters met with members for the first time following the House Agriculture committee's work to pass a bipartisan Farm Bill out of Committee in May. The meetings with Minnesota members were productive in all parties striving to pass a new Farm Bill before the end of the year. The July meetings included a briefing from both Senate majority and minority agriculture committee staffers.

Minnesota is in a unique position compared to many other states have four key members on the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, include key subcommittee chairs. These added trips to D.C., were important to keep elected officials reminded of the absolute need for a new Farm Bill.

## Spring LAC

The Spring LAC event is always a highlight as attendees are often able to see the famous blooming cherry blossoms while in the district in early spring. This year's Spring LAC also welcomed



**Featured guest speaker for the Spring LAC, Sen. Amy Klobuchar provided her perspective on progress for the Senate Farm Bill. Sen. Klobuchar also emphasized her bipartisan work to include pork's animal health priorities in the Farm Bill. Pictured Left to Right: Madison Hokanson, Dr. Abbie Redalen, Daryl Timmerman, Roger Punt, Mike Patterson, Sen. Klobuchar, and Todd Marotz.**

Sen. Amy Klobuchar to address the full LAC group. Sen. Klobuchar has been an active leader on animal health related policy for the pork industry and provided her optimism for getting a new Farm Bill done. Sen. Klobuchar also called attention to the importance of agricultural trade and challenges being experienced by farms that utilize the TN visa program.

Minnesota was represented in the spring meetings by MPPA farmer leaders Abbie Redalen, Roger Punt, Mike Patterson, Daryl Timmerman, and Madison Hokanson. Hokanson was a member of the 2024 PLI class. NPPC Board members Steve Malakowsky, Todd Marotz, and Lori Stevermer also participated in various legislative meetings.



**Rep. Brad Finstad, a farmer and member of the House Agriculture Committee and represents Minnesota's first congressional district in Congress as a Republican. Rep. Finstad has been a fierce advocate for Minnesota's pig farmers and has been a staunch advocate for finding a solution to Prop 12. Pictured left to right: Rep. Finstad, Daryl Timmerman, and Madison Hokanson.**

Issue briefings for the entire U.S. pork delegation kick off each LAC with NPPC staff lead briefings to discuss the key points of each of the asks that farmer leaders take to their congressional visits. Daryl Timmerman, along with NPPC farmer board members attending a meeting at the White House to discuss the challenges farmers were experiencing with the TN visa program and the inconsistent process that being used for approvals. While that meeting did not lead to any direct outcomes, continued work and pressure from NPPC and MPPA have yielded some positive work later in the year.

After a full day of congressional visits, the entire group went to the Mexican Cultural Institute for an evening reception and meal. The Mexican Cultural Institute serves as a venue for the Embassy of

Mexico to host events and receptions, including celebrating and continuing diplomatic relations. NPPC President, Lori Stevermer spoke alongside key Mexican officials about the critical trade relationship between the United States and Mexico, especially agriculture and pork.



**Minnesota Farmer and 2024 NPPC President, Lori Stever welcomes the spring LAC to the Mexican Cultural Institute for a dinner reception. Relations between NPPA and Mexican officials is critical for continued growth and development of the U.S. pork industries largest trading customer.**

### Farmers Meet with EPA

Ahead of the Fall LAC, Minnesota farmer leaders were invited to a meeting at the Environmental Protection Agency with Venus Welch White, acting Agriculture Advisor acting Deputy Director of the Office of Agriculture and Rural Affairs. Ms. White Welch shared with the group activities being conducted to engage agriculture and feedlot permit holders in their review processes and the timeline of Animal Ag Water Quality Subcommittee work. She also briefly spoke about work happening at the Regional EPA levels related to feedlot inspections.



**MPPA leaders joined farmers from other Region V EPA states for a meeting at the EPA office in Washington, DC, ahead of the Fall LAC. The group shared their experiences working with their state agencies and Region V EPA officials on all things related to regulating feedlots.**

### Fall LAC

The Fall LAC came at extremely critical time ahead of the 2024 election. Senators and Representatives were working to get needed work done ahead of the October recess where they return to their state and districts to round out their campaigns. This was also ahead of the September 30 expiration of the current Farm Bill. Passing that deadline would require a renewal or another extension to avoid certain programs reverting to much older indices for federal programs including the milk program. There was also increasing interest in some sort of federal disaster relief package for farmers and areas that were impacted by hurricanes Helene and Milton.



# NPPC LEGISLATIVE ACTION CONFERENCE

In early September, Minnesota farmer leaders Brad Kluver, Todd Selvik, Brian Schwartz, and Madison Hokanson along with NPPC board members Todd Marotz, Steve Malakowsky, Lori Stevermer took to the hill for congressional meetings. The congressional meetings were followed by the much-renowned “Baconfest” reception held at the Library of Congress. Many elected officials and key staffers attended the event while also providing a unique opportunity to network with other government officials and fellow pork producers.

## Key Legislative Issues Lobbied on During LAC

### 2023/2024 Farm Bill – Protect the U.S. Food Supply:

Pig farmers advocated for a new Farm Bill that fully funds the programs safeguarding the nation’s food supply against threats posed by foreign animal diseases, as well as key programs that expand foreign markets for U.S. agricultural products. Specifically, these include the National Animal Health Laboratory Network, the National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program, the National Veterinary Stockpile and the National Animal Vaccine and Veterinary Countermeasures Bank.

Farms looked to protect and grow the trade programs including Market Access Program (MAP) and Foreign Market Development (FMD) saw increased funding provided in the House version of the Farm Bill. MAP and FMD are run through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) where grants and programs are provided to do in market work to maintain and access new trade opportunities for agriculture.



**At the Fall LAC, Rep. Brad Finstad shared his continued support for pig farmers Farm Bill priorities and provided an update on the progress he was instrumental in achieving for the ongoing challenge with TN Visas. Pictured Left to Right: Kriby Hettver, Brad Kluver, Todd Selvik, Brian Schwartz, Rep. Finstad, and Madison Hokanson.**

Also in this next Farm Bill, the pork industry would like to see the Beagle Brigade Act included, which provides critical inspections at our nation’s ports of entry that prevent FADs from entering the U.S. Additionally, it provides congressional authority to the USDA’s National Detector Dog Training Center — allowing it to continue to operate. The Beagle Brigade Act was passed by the Senate as a standalone package.

The 2018 Farm Bill provided funding for the eradication and control of feral swine through the Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program (FSCP). Farmers advocated for at least maintaining the funding for the program to help address the threat of feral swine, particularly after seeing the effects of feral swine on the outbreak of African Swine Fever across the globe.

The upcoming Farm Bill offers the opportunity to address the challenges, provide the industry with the tools to prevent further disruption, and keep the food system safe and reliable.

The final ask related to a new Farm Bill was clarity for producers around Prop 12 and finding a federal solution that avoids a fifty state patchwork. NPPC was pleased to see language included in the House version of the Farm Bill that passed out of committee included language addressing Prop 12.



**Sen. Tina Smith is a Democratic member of the Senate Agriculture Committee and continues being a champion for the pork industry’s animal health priorities. Pictured Left to Right: Sen. Smith Agriculture legislative staffer Adam Schiff, Sen. Smith, Daryl Timmerman, and Dr. Abbie Redalen.**

### Agriculture Labor Needs – Ensure Fair Markets and Competitive Opportunities and Strengthen the H-2A Visa Program:

Agriculture suffers from a severe labor shortage that negatively affects all links in the food supply chain, particularly in the pork industry. Pig farm employment has declined since 2021, despite higher wages and competitive benefits. Although historically dependent on foreign-born workers, current visa requirements fail to meet pork industry workforce needs.

This topic was especially important this past year as many organizations that utilize the TN visa saw increased denial rates for new and renewing visas. MPPA and NPPC continue working to find solutions to this challenge and Minnesota’s elected officials remain engaged with the U.S. State Department on TN visas.

### Trade – Expand and Develop Market Access:

The U.S. pork industry supports trade agreements and other initiatives that open new and expand existing export markets as well as eliminate tariff and non-tariff barriers to U.S. pork exports.

U.S. pig farmers have built a global reputation for providing domestic and foreign markets with high-quality, affordable products. In 2022, the U.S. exported \$7.6 billion worth of pork to

more than 100 countries and increased the average value of each pig marketed by nearly \$61. U.S. pork exports also support over 100,000 jobs domestically.

Additionally, there were asks to eliminate ongoing market access issues globally for countries in Asia and the South Pacific. These fast-growing regions have tariff and on-tariff barriers to trade. Examples of these issues include:

Vietnam were an ongoing ban on white offal has been cleared, but is now having an inconsistent approval process that has left many US exporters waiting for approval.

The Philippines requires all imported meat be placed in to a cold storage facility upon importation However, domestically produced meat is exempt from that requirement. This suppresses demand for U.S. pork and is a rules violation of the World Trade Organization related to non-discriminatory treatment of imports.

In Australia, they limit certain U.S. pork imports for the retail market for products that are heat-processed or frozen and boneless intended for further processing because of what the

country claims are risks associated with the transmission of PRRSv. These restrictions are inconsistent with international trade standards and scientific findings.



**Rep. Tom Emmer served a House Majority Whip in the 118th Congress and Represents Minnesota's sixth congressional district. MPPA and NPPC continue working closely with Whip Emmer to ensure agriculture's priorities move forward in Congress. Pictured Left to Right: Duanne Statler (OH), Lori Stevermer, Whip Emmer, Rob Brennehan (IA) and Todd Marotz.**



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## Minnesota Legislature Recap

On Monday, February 12, 2024, the Minnesota Legislature convened to start the second year of the biennial session. The session would run about six weeks shorter than the 2023 session and was expected to focus on bonding and policy changes following the aggressive DFL trifecta agenda passed the previous year.

The biggest change from 2023 was the status of the State's finances. Budget forecasts showed the state had a short-term \$2.4 billion surplus, but also a structural deficit in the out years of about the same size. This meant there would be nowhere near the resources available for legislators, who spent the \$17.5 billion surplus, the previous year.

Despite the new fiscal reality, DFL caucus leaders were looking to build on their ambitious agenda.

"We'll continue, as we did last year, focusing on the things (Minnesotans) care about the most which is strong public education, affordable health care, and then economic security for their families," said House Speaker Melissa Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park) ahead of session.

Republicans on the other hand pointed to last year's spending as a reason there needs to be more balance in St. Paul.

"You'll be hearing from us about the surplus that was spent through, taxes and fees increasing that state budget, and the concerns we have going forward," said House GOP Leader Lisa Demuth (R - Cold Spring).

The lack of available cash also had political implications for a potential bonding bill. Bonding requires a super-majority vote in both the House and Senate, which meant Republicans votes are needed to pass a bonding bill.

With budget Committee Chairs consistently tempering budgetary expectations, policy changes were expected to be in the spotlight. Topics such as sports betting, medically assisted suicide, school resource officers, and constitutional amendments on abortion and equal rights received early attention.

There was also a shake-up in Senate leadership right before the beginning of the session. Former Majority Leader Sen. Kari Dziedzic (DFL - Minneapolis) stepped down after learning that her cancer had returned. Democrats elected Senator Erin Murphy (DFL - St. Paul) to take over as Senate Majority Leader.

With an aggressive calendar and few legislative days, the 2024 session was going to be swift. While it was a presidential election year, the entire Minnesota House was also on the ballot, many representatives wanted a concise, speedy session so they could head home and campaign in district. A smooth finish it was not.

## Session Ends in Chaos

There have been some acrimonious finishes to the Minnesota Legislative session in the past, but veterans of the Minnesota State Capitol seem to all agree that nothing like the 2024 finish has ever occurred. 2024 was supposed to be a relatively light year. As often happens, the list of policy priorities begins to grow as the session moves along and individual legislators demand their favored bills be included in any final omnibus packages.

After the committees finished their work and passed out omnibus bills, it became apparent that it was not going to be the narrowly defined session that was advertised before the session began.

Republicans called foul for being excluded from having any input on massive omnibus bills. Republicans spent hours upon hours debating on the Senate and House floor, stating that was the only chance they had to make their voices heard. The DFL majorities struggled to move these bills along in a timely fashion. Along with

the extremely long debates by the GOP minority, long delays were added due to the felony criminal charges against a DFL Senator from Woodbury. The Minnesota Senate also lost most of the second to last day, May 18, due to a DFL Senator leaving the building for over

***During the 2024 MPPA Day on the Hill, MPPA leaders Daryl Timmerman and Vince Baack met with Representative Jeff Brand (DFL - St. Peter). Constituent meetings are a critical tool in MPPA's advocacy efforts. Rep. Brand held an important seat on the House Environment Committee which has oversight on the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and their authority over feedlot permitting.***



10 hours due to negotiations on a rideshare bill. The DFL only has a 34-33 majority in the Senate, meaning every member is needed to pass bills.

This all led to many omnibus bills being compiled in a Tax Conference Committee report with two hours to go on Sunday night, the final night of session. The bill was more than 1,400 pages and nobody, elected officials or lobbyists, had a chance to see what was being moved. When the bill was later brought up on the House floor, the majority moved to call the previous question ending debate and immediately preceding to a vote.

That was when the chamber melted down with members of the minority shouting as loudly as they could into their microphones.

"We request a copy of this bill of 1,430 pages," yelled House Minority Leader Lisa Demuth (R-Cold Spring). "Not available on the website! Not available in this chamber! This is a horrible way to govern and do this to the State of Minnesota!"

"Each of these bills has been vetted through the conference committee process," House Majority Leader Jaime Long (DFL-Minneapolis) said. "The minority has a right to be heard, but the majority also has a right to govern. This week, we saw in this chamber an eight-hour filibuster on a bill to limit junk fees. We saw an eight-hour debate on a technical fix on paid leave



**Maddie Hokanson**  
Minnesota Pork Producers Association

**Madison Hokanson, a pig farmer and SIP investor from Goodhue testified during an informational hearing in the House Agriculture committee. The hearing provided opportunities for agriculture and conservations organizations to talk about their efforts to protect water quality, specifically in southeast Minnesota on the topic of nutrients used in agriculture. Hokanson's testimony focused on pig farmers commitment to the precision application of manure and protecting water from nutrient contamination through manure management plans and engineer manure storage structures.**

that stretched longer than the original debate on the program. We spent 14 hours going through the night on the equal rights amendment. ... Given this, the majority has to use the tools it has to get its work done."

A similar scene played out immediately after on the Senate floor. The two chambers then adjourned for the session. It is hard to imagine that sessions ending not having an impact on future legislative sessions.



**Dave Mensink**  
Minnesota Pork Producers Association

**David Mensink, a pig farmer and SIP investor from Preston Minnesota testified in the House Environment committee sharing MPPA's support for better protection against feral swine and loose domestic swine management. MPPA advocates for strong protection and control against feral or loose domestic swine as they present a known vector for animal disease transmission.**

## 2024 MPPA Legislative Agenda

Despite an eventful end to the session and biennium, the Minnesota Pork Producers Association was able to preserve the progress made in some areas and hold back policy that could harm Minnesota's pig farmers and pork industry.

While a DFL trifecta presents unique challenges, MPPA was still able to be effective in its lobbying and testifying efforts. Two MPPA leaders testified during the 2024 session in addition to a number of letters of support and opposition that were sent to legislators on various priority topics. Madison Hokanson of Goodhue testified on the practices and commitment farmers make to protect water quality in surface and groundwater resources. David Mensink from Preston, testified to MPPA's support of increased provisions for ensuring feral swine and loose domestic pigs do not present risk to disease transmission.

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An overview of each topic and status at the end of the session is listed below.

**Gestation stall ban** – A bill to ban the use of gestation stalls was being talked about by a member of the House Agriculture Committee prior to the legislative session. With quick intervention and advocacy from pig farmer leaders, *this bill was not introduced in either body.*

**Companion Animal Board** – A bill to create a “Companion Animal Board” with rulemaking authority and a loose definition of what is a companion animal, was introduced by animal rights activist groups. *The bill did not receive a hearing in either the Senate or House.*

**Office of Animal Protection** – Legislation was introduced to create an “Office of Animal Protection” within the Department of Public Safety. This bill would have hired state employees to educate and offer guidance on the enforcement of animal cruelty laws. *The bill was heard in the House and Senate Public Safety Committees but was not included in the final legislation.*

**MPCA manure management plans in DWSMAs** – An MPCA sponsored bill that would require a manure management plan for anyone applying manure inside of a level 2 Drinking Water Supply Management Areas or higher. *This language was passed into law.*

**Expansive manure management plan regulations** – Bills in both the Senate and House were introduced looking to significantly increase the number of regulations and requirements for manure management plans. Greatly increased setbacks and penalties were the main topics of this extensive bill. *This bill was not heard in the Senate or House.*

**Mandatory EIS over 10K animal units** – This bill would require a mandatory Environmental Impact Statement for all permitted feedlots over 10,000 animal units. *Heard in both the House and Senate Environment Committee, the language was included in the House Environment Omnibus Bill, but was dropped by the conference committee.*

**Feral pig bill** – This bill was introduced to add new regulations and penalties for the intentional release or the persistent accidental escape of restricted and domestic pigs. MPPA made some clarifying changes to the language before offering support. *It was passed in the Environment Omnibus Bill.*

**Ag Water Certification tax credit** – This bill would have offered farmers a \$5 per acre property tax credit as an incentive for going through the Department of Agriculture’s Ag Water Quality Certification Program. *The bill was heard in the House*

*Agriculture Committee but did not receive a hearing in House Taxes. The bill was also heard in the Senate Tax Committee but was not included in either Tax Bill.*

**Feedlot Financial Assurances** – A bill from the 2023 session requiring all permitted feedlots to put up “financial assurances” in the event of a feedlot abandonment. *This legislation was heard in the House Environmental committee in 2023, but was not heard in either body or included in a final 2024 omnibus bill.*

**MPCA Citizens Board** – A bill to re-establish the PCA Citizens Board was also introduced and heard during the 2023 session. *This legislation was not heard in either body or included in any omnibus.*

Considering the political realities the pork industry faced, MPPA is happy with how things ended for the 2023–2024 biennium. Now, everyone is waiting for the dust to settle on the 2024 election where the 34–33 Senate returns, but now with a tied Minnesota House of Representatives, 67–67. On top of that, Governor Tim Walz returns to the state after an unsuccessful run as the vice-presidential candidate alongside Kamala Harris. Many interesting dynamics are sure play out in the next session but MPPA remains steadfast in its work to advocate on behalf of Minnesota’s family pig farmers.



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