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Michigan corn growers take on national leadership roles

Farmers, staff take part in action teams and committees that impact industry's direction

LANSING, MI – Michigan's corn growers were well represented at the recent National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) action team meetings. The national grower-led action teams met to discuss issues and set the direction for the NCGA for the upcoming year.

The six action teams and committees include the Biotechnology and Trade Action Team, Ethanol Committee, Grower Services Action Team, Production and Stewardship Action Team, Public Policy Action Team and the Research and Business Development Action Team. State and national corn grower members involved with the organization are encouraged to apply for a position on the action teams in mid summer and teams are selected in the fall. The teams met Dec. 7 through Dec. 9 in St. Charles, Mo. for the first of three meetings they will hold this year. Also meeting in St. Charles was the National Corn Board.

Scott Miller, a member of the Michigan Corn Growers Association (MCGA) board of directors and a corn grower from Elsie, serves as a member of the Biotechnology and Trade Action Team. The team works to support the availability, marketability and acceptance of biotechnology around the world, while protecting the integrity of U.S. corn. The group is also charged with providing quality information to NCGA member organizations and grower members on current approvals and marketability of biotechnology products, as well as responding to trade issues that affect the growth and development of overseas markets for U.S. corn. Miller is currently serving his third term with the action team.

"Biotechnology has helped to significantly advance the U.S. corn industry since its introduction more than a decade ago," Miller said. "It is vital to the future success of our industry that we continue to investigate advancements in biotechnology and to help consumers see the benefits of these advancements. The Biotechnology and Trade Action Team is helping to achieve these goals."

Jeff Sandborn, president of the MCGA and corn grower from Portland, serves on the NCGA Ethanol Committee. The Ethanol Committee ensures corn growers continue to take a leadership role in the production of ethanol as well as to advocate for the increased production of domestic energy resources.

"Reducing our nation's dependence on foreign oil with renewable domestic transportation fuels is an achievable goal. The U.S. ethanol industry is the strongest weapon we have to combat this growing problem," said Sandborn, who is serving his third term on the committee. "However, the industry is facing some unique challenges the Ethanol Committee is working to help correct. The ongoing food and fuel debate, the current cap-and-trade legislation and the expiration of the volumetric ethanol excise tax credit are all important issues that will directly affect the future of ethanol as a renewable energy source."

Clark Gerstacker, a member of the Corn Marketing Program of Michigan (CMPM) board of directors and a corn grower from Midland, is serving his second term as a member of the NCGA Corn Board. NCGA Corn Board members are charged with representing the corn industry as it moves toward increasing the value of the U.S. corn

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crop. Gerstacker operates as the Corn Board liaison for the Research and Business Development Action Team and ensures the Corn Board receives all of the recommendations and guidance of the action team and that the action team receives information from the Corn Board.

“This is such an exciting time to be a part of the U.S. corn industry. The advancements made now will impact, not only corn growers, but consumers all over the world,” Gerstacker said. “There are a lot of opportunities for corn and expanding markets, so it is very exciting to be a part of the Research and Business Development Action Team.”

Val Vail-Shirey, Policy Director for the MCGA, is serving her first term on the Public Policy Action Team. The team engages grower members to take responsibility for giving direction to NCGA efforts in addressing public policy issues that impact the U.S. corn economy as well as coordinating policy efforts to reflect the policies adopted by the NCGA Corn Congress.

Nikki Beattie, Membership Coordinator for the MCGA, also attended the Grower Services Action Team meetings. The Grower Services team focuses on member benefits development, image and activism programs and grassroots networking.

Also serving, but unable to attend the December meetings in St. Charles, is Pat Feldpausch, president of the Corn Marketing Program of Michigan and a grower from Fowler. Feldpausch, serving his first term on the Production and Stewardship Action Team, returned earlier this week from a leadership mission, joining other U.S. agriculture groups visiting leaders in three key Asian markets – Japan, China and Vietnam.

Headquartered in Lansing, the MCGA is a grassroots-membership association that has represented the political interests of the state's corn growers since the 1970s. The MCGA works cooperatively with the Corn Marketing Program of Michigan (CMPM) a legislatively established program that utilizes one-cent per bushel of Michigan corn sold and invests in research, education, new uses and market development. Michigan's corn industry adds more than one billion dollars to the state's economy annually, and in 2010, Michigan's corn farmers harvested a record-setting crop of more than 315 million bushels. For more information, visit the website of the MCGA and the CMPM at www.micorn.org.

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