



Inputs

Capitol Update

Despite a more cordial relationship between new Speaker of the Minnesota House of Representatives Kurt Dautb with the minority leaders in the House and Senate and a good trusting relationship with Governor Dayton, the expected political invectives made headlines about legislative budget priorities called “spending targets.”

Republicans in the Minnesota House are proposing \$2 billion in tax cuts as part of their two-year budget plan. The budget outline House GOP leaders released recently also spends nearly \$40 billion, although they didn’t include their recently announced transportation funding plan in that number. They put \$100 million in the state’s rainy day fund and leave \$319 million unspent. Despite the state’s projected \$1.9 billion budget surplus, House Speaker Kurt Dautb (R-Crown) said during a news conference that Republicans are trying to reduce government spending. “The bottom line is this: government spending cannot grow faster than family budgets,” Dautb said. “We set our budget target with that value in mind, and at the same time we’re going to show Minnesota that we can prioritize education, we can prioritize roads and bridges and we can prioritize protecting our aging Minnesotans’ way of life.” Dautb said some of the proposed tax cuts would benefit businesses and some would benefit individuals, but he offered few specifics. He said the House tax committee will make those decisions in the coming weeks.

House Democrats were quick to criticize the plan. Minority Leader Paul Thissen (DFL-Minneapolis) said Republicans are trying to pay back corporate special interests. He also warned that the budget proposal is a recipe for a state government shutdown. “Cutting taxes for millionaires and the wealthy by cutting services for our most vulnerable should offend the sensibilities of every Minnesotan, and it will, because it’s the wrong priority and frankly, it’s simply mean spirited,” Thissen said.

Of more specific interest to MCPR members are legislative issues in which MCPR has been engaged. These issues do not make headlines or get coverage in most publications.

1. The Senate Jobs, Agriculture and Rural Development Policy Committee assembled and passed the committee’s Omnibus Agriculture Policy Bill. The bill, S.F.1459, authored by Sen. Dan Sparks (DFL-Austin) contains only policy provisions relating to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. Some of those items include:

- Modifies the waste pesticide collection program statute by removing the requirement that collections are offered in every county.
- Modifies and simplifies recordkeeping and reporting requirements for commercial and noncommercial pesticide applicators.
- Requires a person required to obtain a license to store or produce bulk agricultural chemicals (i.e., fertilizer and/or pesticide) to prepare and maintain an incident response plan, while changing nothing about MCPR members’ ability to delegate product transporting to employees who are not MDA certified applicators.
- Defines the term for purposes of labeling and permit application requirements in the Minnesota Seed Law which was a major win for MCPR. You may remember the Duluth library’s seed exchange program which became a major news story across Minnesota when the MN Department of Agriculture required that they become licensed. After much political fanfare and legislative jostling, MCPR learned that a national organization was behind a push to create a commercial right to exchange most seeds which violated several MN laws, rules, and concerns from the American Seed Trade Association. New MCPR Board member Doug Becher, Commercial Agronomist for Mycogen’s Upper Midwest District and MCPR representative on the MDA Seed Program Advisory Group, worked to create a workable compromise which accommodates reasonable nonprofit seed exchange programs while insuring current commercial seed protections. During extensive discussions a final meeting at the MDA created language which simply exempts from seed law requirements people who share seeds for home, educational, charitable, or personal noncommercial use, subject to specified restrictions. Nice work, Doug!



Inside this Issue

Capitol Update	1&3
Executive Director’s Report	2
Reguletter	Insert
News & Notes	3
Craig’s View	4

Executive Director's Report

Hello MCPR members,

Sometimes I think back to those days eleven years ago when I had just started with MCPR. At the time, we had many challenges such as addressing a MCPR structural financial deficit, retooling MCPR's ability to function in the new world of internet data exchange, recovering from the tragic loss of Craig Sallstrom's leadership because of his untimely death, and revitalizing the Short Course/Trade Show which was going backwards in attendance, quality, and the net income MCPR so desperately needed.

Actually, we have successfully addressed each of these issues...MCPR is more robust than ever. That said, we are a very small organization in terms of resources and staff. Nevertheless, we have and continue to be an influential agricultural organization here in Minnesota and throughout the United States agricultural community. Why? Because of the commitment of your Board of Directors, Jessi and I as your staff resource, you – the members of MCPR, and the strong cooperation we have with other agricultural organizations.

Think about some of our accomplishments:

MCPR has had a black bottom line for every year since we addressed the MCPR budget deficit;

Our Short Course/Trade Show has been on an upward trajectory in attendance, income, and program evaluations for ten years now;

The MCPR newsletter/website/E News communication has vastly improved while still performing for a very modest cost;

MCPR has made a huge difference at the state Capitol with our determination and dedication to spend countless hours monitoring and influencing politicians through our well respected presence at the Capitol;

Through the leadership of MCPR we have provided leadership to create and successfully operate for many years now the MN Agricultural Fertilizer Education and Research Council (AFREC) which is pumping nearly \$1 million annually into modern production ag research and education;

Through a cooperative relationship with Asmark Institute, MCPR created and operated the MCPR Stewardship program which enrolled over 40 facilities in the audit program before it became, in my view, a model for the ambitious ResponsibleAg (RA) national third party audit program. RA, created in response to the West, Texas explosion has enrolled well over a thousand retail ag facilities to perform the fertilizer (and optional pesticide) audits rather than wait for the state and federal government to create yet again more rules, regulations, and audits. And more facilities join RA every week...I hope you have enrolled also!

Now, MCPR is embarking on yet another major initiative to benefit our members and dealers throughout the upper Midwest. At the March Board meeting MCPR decided that MCPR will spend some of our resources, and also apply for funding through various sources, to develop a BMP data collection software system. This software system will be designed to accommodate regional fertility BMP recommendations in Minnesota and dynamic enough to merge data elements from the MDA Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification software, Field-to-Market software, the Green Star Farm Initiative software, the "clunky" NRCS systems, and also the various proprietary precision Ag software/hardware systems that MCPR members utilize. Included in the proposal is the retention and appointment of a project manager to develop the software, a data collection system and training that will meet the requirements of MCPR members and their customers, Minnesota Ag producers, and cooperating environmental interests and public agencies as necessary.

The goal of the motion above is to develop and operate a Minnesota fertilizer BMP educational program that will appeal to adult learners, and also a data collection software system that will interact with precision Ag software systems, can be integrated into emerging water quality assessment programs, and can be used for third party verification. Yet to be determined is licensing the software, what fees (if any) will be charged to those using the software program, and what support (initial and continuous) will be necessary and provided. The Board determined that this project will be reviewed at strategic financial and development benchmarks as MCPR acquires a better understanding of the development and resources required for this software/training initiative.

Many projects of this nature are moving forward in surrounding states such as: the Ohio 4 R's certification program in response to the Lake Erie phosphorous pollution, the Illinois BMP Council and Keep it for the Crop initiative, the Iowa N and P farming practices documentation and education in response to Gulf hypoxia and the City of Des Moines law suits to name but a few. We will cooperate, coordinate, and learn from what others have created and accomplished across the country so as not to waste any resources or time. Let's face it...we will be documenting and becoming more publically accountable for the advice we give farmers, the crop inputs and services we provide, the carbon footprint our industry makes...sooner rather than later.

This challenge is not all bad...making a competitive difference is always how dealers and crop advisors have made a living. Now we can respond to ...or lead...the path forward in this new and complex business and public policy environment. I know MCPR has what it takes to do more than respond...we will do our part to lead our members forward in a cost effective and efficient manner. That's always been the job of MCPR...and that will not change.

Until next time,



Bill Bond

Capitol Update *(continued from page 1)*

- An amendment was added which repealed the definition of “Lethal Pollinator Insecticide” which eliminated this unscientific term which might have created additional pollinator rules or legislation in the future.

The House Omnibus Agriculture Policy Bill, authored by Rep. Paul Anderson (R-Starbuck), passed the House Agriculture Policy Committee and is scheduled for debate and passage on the House Floor.

In a pollinator related issue, the House Ag Policy and Finance Committee passed HF 1906 which is a bill attempting to correct and modify another pollinator inspired law from the 2014 legislative session. Rep McNamara is attempting to assist nursery companies and flower stores affected by the advertising law enforcement which is good, but, he is attempting to circumvent an increase in the MDA nursery regulatory fund so his constituents will not see a nursery fund fee increase, rather taking the enforcement and testing costs out of the pesticide regulatory fund. I testified defending MCPR member interests but the final language and solution to our concern is still being negotiated in the House of Representatives. Stay tuned on this bill which does not have a companion in the Senate.

Buffers on farmland have been a huge issue, both politically and in the media. MCPR has been working in support of your customers, the farmers. MCPR Board Chairman Craig Maurer attended a grower meeting in Owatonna to help educate the MDA Ag Commissioner Frederickson on the complexity and local nature of buffers. Governor Dayton’s inflammatory public comments about farmers creating “pollution cesspools” really got agriculture’s attention. Very little actual change in state law will likely be the outcome of this issue, but more focus on county and township enforcement is inevitable.

As always, MCPR works in cooperation and through coalitions with other ag groups to get the job done at the Capitol in such issues as feed and grain concerns, elevator man lift issues, and the AFREC reauthorization, to name a few, of many areas of concern. Jessi Brunelle has been particularly helpful this year as she has engaged in legislative monitoring, testifying in committee hearings representing MCPR at the Capitol, holding meetings with regulators and legislators, and providing professional leadership in this very important public policy arena.

This legislative session will likely adjourn in mid-May unless differences listed above create the need for a special session which at this writing looks unlikely. If any of you have been to the Capitol Building this year, you are aware of the vast remodeling and rebuilding going in the Capitol building itself and the surrounding Capitol complex. Next year the repair and building will enter a new phase of even more extensive work, so talk of holding part or all of the legislative session elsewhere is proceeding...even the idea of not having a session at all in 2016. Most political pundits, including this one, are highly skeptical of no legislative session next year... the fact is some legislators need/want the per diem and expense money to meet their own personal budgets.

News & Notes

USDA Pollinator Study May Clash with White House Findings - Even as a special White House created task force is poised to address concerns over supposedly vanishing honeybees, new research suggests that the very premise of the federal investigation may be misplaced. A thorough USDA study on bee health states that previous studies often cited by activists didn’t control for pathogens and used exponentially higher concentrations of pesticides than bees would normally encounter. With honey production and the number of bee colonies increasing, the study rebukes the impact of neonicotinoids on bee health. ARA.

U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee Hearing on Proposed WOTUS Rule - The Senate Agriculture Committee held a hearing on March 24 regarding the impacts of the proposed WOTUS rule on rural America. The hearing included representatives from State agencies, agriculture and a mosquito abatement district. Most of the witnesses agreed that this rule is a bureaucratic over reach and will be impossible to implement and very expensive because of the new regulatory burdens imposed. Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) stated that this rule is bad for agriculture, bad for public health, and should be withdrawn and rewritten. ARA.

New MN Rural Political Muscle - Months after rural voters helped Republicans reclaim the majority in the Minnesota House, lawmakers in both parties are looking to weaken environmental laws tied to agriculture. Legislation helping the agribusiness industry is moving through the House and Senate and environmental groups appear unable to stop it. Gov. Mark Dayton’s push to require farmers to leave a 50-foot buffer zone unplanted around rivers is facing stiff resistance from agriculture lobbying groups. Dayton is hitting the road to press for his buffer plan, arguing that it will reduce pesticide and fertilizer runoff that is harming the environment. It’s not clear, however, what kind of clout he holds now in Minnesota’s farm country.” MPR.

New MN NRCS State Conservationist - Cathee Pullman is the new NRCS State Conservationist in Minnesota for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) - Cathee Pullman worked for NRCS since 1987. As the Minnesota State Conservationist, Pullman looks forward to establishing relationships with conservation partners, private landowners and organizations as well as facilitating technical support to field office staffs and providing technical and financial assistance to landowners and operators in Minnesota. Pullman is a native of Illinois. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Economics and Ranch/Farm Management from Oklahoma State University in 1984. Pullman has three children attending college. She enjoys snow skiing, kayaking and traveling. USDA.



MINNESOTA CROP PRODUCTION RETAILERS

15490 101st Ave. N., Ste. 100
Maple Grove, MN 55369

Phone 763-235-6466

Fax 763-235-6461

www.mcpr-cca.org

MCPR Board

Craig Maurer,
Board Chair

Jeff Arnold
Doug Becher
Matt Benda
Brad Englund
Perry Estabo
Dale Johnson
Sean Ness
T.J. Phillips
Arnie Sinclair
Bryan Strickler
Rick Walker
Tristan Wilmes

Staff

Bill Bond
Executive Director

Jessica Brunelle,
Vice President

Craig's View

Hello MCPR Members,

By the time everyone reads this I hope spring is in full swing. Although we are consumed with our daily business, I suggest you keep a close eye on what's going on at the State Capitol. The Governor has painted a picture to the non-ag community that farmers are creating cesspools of all the rivers, lakes and streams in the State of Minnesota. I encourage everyone to attend local and county meetings regarding buffer strips.

Support the Corn and Soybeans Growers, the Farm Bureau and other ag groups to promote the science of the use of buffer strips. A mandatory 50 ft. buffer is not a solution that will cure all run-off. Now is the time to step forward and support your customers and the future of ag business. Together we can make the difference in the political future of farming.

Have a safe spring season and thank you for supporting the Minnesota Crop Production Retailers Association.

Board Chair,
Craig Maurer