

Report on Grant 2016029 - Maryland Grain Producers Association

Prepared Mailed Newsletter, Monthly Emailed Newsletters and FaceBook: The MGPA grant funded the writing, printing and mailing of one “Grain Store” newsletter. The 2015-2016 funding report was mailed to over 7,000 subscribers. This was the first year MGPA did the newsletter in color and received a very positive response. The Facebook page has been updated almost daily in 2016 and the Twitter account is gaining followers. Monthly e-newsletters were emailed until October and then became bi-weekly. The e-newsletter is sent primarily to MGPA members and we have received very positive feedback.

Conduct an Annual Meeting to Promote MGPA Functions and Hold Election of MGPA Officers: MGPA conducted the eighteenth annual Maryland Commodity Classic jointly with MGPA, the Maryland Soybean Board and the Mid-Atlantic Soybean Board. The event was held on Thursday, July 28, 2016, at the Queen Anne’s 4-H Park in Centreville. This year, a research presentation where four MGPA funded researchers showcased their work was held at the 4H park indoor exhibit hall. The program also included a communications training sponsored by US Farmers and Ranchers Alliance. Booth space was provided for grant recipients so they could provide information on the results of their research and activities to the grain producers. Elections for MGPA board members were held at the meeting. Charles Arnot of the Center for Food Integrity provided the keynote speech about how agriculture can communicate with the public about sustainability. Presentations were also provided on current issues and public policy impacting grain farmers including the value of the Maryland Grain Checkoff Program. Lynne Hoot was recognized during the program for her three decades of service to Maryland agriculture and wished well in her retirement.

Administer the Scholarship Program: MGPA promoted the scholarship program and reviewed the applications. The selection committee approved four recipients for the \$2,500 scholarships. The four recipients were announced at the Maryland Commodity Classic. Recognition was given to MGPA for funding the grants in the press, including the *Delmarva Farmer*.

Support for National Organization Leadership from Maryland: MGPA provided support to Chip Bowling, Chip Councill, and Jason Scott for their travel as leaders of national organizations. MGPA staff helped to coordinate meetings including the NCGA summer board meeting. Staff also attended the 2016 Commodity Classic, NCGA State Staff meeting, USGC Cuban reception in DC and other events to support our leaders. MGPA staff helped to coordinate tours for international trade groups coming to Maryland and issued press releases on those events.

Public Relations, Promotion, and Education Programs: Reaching the consumer with a positive and factual message about the Maryland farmer is a priority for the Maryland Grain Producers Association. In 2016, MGPA staff and directors participated in a variety of initiatives to achieve an improved image of grain producers.

The new “My Maryland Farmer” campaign was continued in 2016 at the Maryland State Fair. The campaign featured farmer photos with facts on banners, posters, and cutouts (including one of MGPA President, Jennie Schmidt) blanketed the fairgrounds. The MGPA exhibit at the State Fair was given a new dimension with a Go Flex Fuels race track where visitors could race remote control cars around the ethanol promotion race track. This drew in over 3,000 participants who were then also informed about ethanol. The MGPA booth and race track were featured on Fox 45 Morning News. Visitors were also asked to watch the ethanol commercial contest submissions and select their favorite. State fair attendance was estimated at 400,000 people, primarily from urban markets.

Utilizing the volunteers in the CommonGround program, over a dozen urban activities were conducted for the volunteers to share on-farm experiences and factual information with metropolitan consumers. GMO and Ethanol brochures continue to be popular to provide details for consumers with issue questions. Volunteers were also active in social media and farm blogs, to provide a constant positive conversation about what goes on at a farm and comment on headline issues.

Further communication with farmers about the benefits of the organizations and the Maryland Checkoff Program garners support for the organizations which serve the farmers. Staff and members of MGPA exhibited at farm meetings throughout the year, including the Maryland Commodity Classic, Cattleman's Convention, Farm Bureau Convention, and seasonal Extension Meetings. MGPA also branched out to talk to 4H groups, the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, and the Chesapeake Bay Program at their meetings. The Grain Store annual report was sent to farmers and stakeholders provided details on checkoff-funded projects as well as current issues effecting grain producers. Electronic newsletters provided regular communications on current issues and news about Maryland grain farmers.

The MarylandGrain.com website was rebuilt to give it a fresh look and make it compatible with all mobile devices. The website is now being updated with bi-weekly content from the e-newsletters in the "News" section. The ethanol postcard project was mailed to nearly 5,000 FFV owners near the current E85 locations and will be updated with new locations as they come on-line through the USDA grant.

November saw the launch of the fourth season of *Maryland Farm & Harvest*. Featured on this season are board members Bobby Hutchison, Chip Bowling, Drew Stabler, and Steve Ernst. In season three, we were happy to see an entire episode dedicated to grain and hope this season will build on that foundation.