Michigan Wheat Program
Annual Report
2015-2016
Just a word …

About the 2015-2016 Annual Report.

This report marks the fifth year for the Michigan Wheat Program. It was a very significant year, in that the program was re-affirmed by a very large majority of you, the state’s wheat farmers, through the continuation referendum.

Highlights of fiscal year 2015-2016 for the Michigan Wheat Program are found on the next 10 pages. Due to budget constraints, this year’s report has been condensed. However we have worked hard to bring you an overview of activities and accomplishments throughout the past year. If you want more detail or to remain informed throughout the year, visit the website to learn and read more by visiting miwheat.org or sign up for the free monthly Wheat Wisdom e-newsletter on the bottom of the homepage.
Dear Fellow Michigan Wheat Farmer:

This last year has been a very significant year for the Michigan Wheat Program. I’m pleased that we’ve selected “Signposts of Progress” as our theme because it truly captures where we are as a check-off board and program.

Some of the most significant signposts on our journey during 2015-2016 are:

- **Stability** – With the overwhelming passage of our referendum marking our 5th year, it seems Michigan’s 8,000 wheat farmers are seeing the value of a wheat-focused check-off.

- **Growth** – In fiscal year 2016, the program invested nearly $500,000 in 18 research projects. That grows our total investment in research to more than $1.56 million and nearly 75 projects. Many of those projects are already yielding results farmers can use.

- **Boots on the Ground** – In this fiscal year we hired a new wheat specialist at MSU, which grew out of a financial partnership with MSU in which we are sharing the cost of the position that is focused solely on wheat.

- **Consumer Focus** – We continued our consumer outreach at Breakfast on the Farm events. We also added some new projects, such as the first Michigan Restaurant Show recipe contest and presentations to culinary students.

- **Higher Level** – We’re not resting on our laurels. The board has strong, strategic goals for moving Michigan wheat even further down the right road. After our announcement this year, we are planning even more wheat research to help utilize the additional 150 acres we helped MSU secure for crop research. We are awaiting the results from our first grant which was to benchmark and forecast the future of Michigan wheat. These two large projects continue to build upon the work already done and pave the way to provide benefits for the grower for years to come.

These are signposts that the Michigan Wheat Program is making – or exceeding – the kind of progress we had in mind when a visionary group of farmers and stakeholders put the program to a vote by the growers in 2011.

**Thanks for your continued support!**

David J. Milligan
Chairman, Michigan Wheat Program
Board involvement

The success of the Michigan Wheat Program over its first five years can be attributed to the outstanding leadership, dedication and commitment of its board of directors.

Many of them were part of the original committee that developed the idea for the wheat check-off and got it to a vote of the state's 8,000 wheat farmers in 2011. Once the board was appointed, they have met nearly every month since to get the program up and running to ensure that the focus was on the most important needs of growers.

Since the program was voted in, only one seat has turned over on the board. This steady support, commitment and vision has thrust the program forward very rapidly.

Officers of the Michigan Wheat Program, 2015-2016

CHAIRMAN: David J. Milligan (Dist. 7) Milligan Farms LLC; Cass City. (board member since 2011)
VICE CHAIRMAN: Dean Kantola (Dist. 1) Kantola Farms, Inc.; Ravenna. (since 2011)
SECRETARY: Chris Schmidt (Dist. 8) Schmidt Farms of Auburn; Auburn. (since 2011)
TREASURER: Frank M. Vyskocil (Dist. 6) Shiawassee Valley Farms. (since 2011)

Board Members
Gerald W. Heck (Dist. 3) Heck Farms LLC; Monroe. (since 2011)
William H. Hunt (Dist. 4) Hunt Farms, Inc.; Davison. (since 2011)
Art Loeffler (Dist. 9) Star of the West Milling Co.; Frankenmuth. (since 2011; milling representative)
Sally McConnachie (Dist. 5) Dave’s Dirt LLC; Deckerville. (since 2014)
Carl Sparks (Dist. 2) Sparks Cedarlee Farm LLC; Cassopolis. (since 2011)

Executive Director
Jody Pollok-Newsom Webberville. (since 2012)
Check the box: Grower satisfaction.

The Michigan Wheat Program, and every other agricultural check-off, gets graded every five years when farmers cast ballots to determine if the program shall continue. The ballots were mailed to every wheat grower on record by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in January 2016 and growers had two weeks to cast their votes.

The Michigan Wheat Program’s first renewal vote overwhelmingly passed. When all the votes were counted, the program was re-affirmed by an overwhelming 80 percent of the farmers who voted, representing 81 percent of the production volume of the farmers voting.

It's quite a step up from the initial vote of 54 percent approval in 2011, that set the program in motion!

The board believes that's because farmers see real value in the education, communication and, particularly, the research activities performed by the Michigan Wheat Program.

“There are so many opportunities for Michigan wheat, given Michigan’s strong infrastructure with millers and end users, as well as the niche craft brewing industry,” said executive director Jody Pollok-Newsom. “To meet those needs of the industry, it is imperative that the farmers receive the best information available in regard to production of the crop.

“The board and I have been working to develop the information and technology needed by growers and deeply appreciate this vote of confidence by Michigan wheat farmers. We will continue to keep our focus laser sharp and watch out for our growers interests and needs,” said Pollok-Newsom.

Where do the Funds go?

2015-16 Audited Expenses of the Michigan Wheat Program

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1 The Michigan Wheat Program was established under P.A. 232 (1965), the Agricultural Commodities Marketing Act, which allows growers to organize check-off programs. In general terms, P.A. 232 permits authorized agricultural groups to engage in research, education, communication and market development activities.
Michigan Wheat Program invests in 18 projects in 2015-2016

Research to advance the Michigan wheat industry was the founding principle that drove creation of the Michigan Wheat Program back in 2011.

Five years later, the Michigan Wheat Program continues to make significant investments in its research portfolio. In fiscal year 2015-2016, the board put nearly $500,000 into 18 new or continuing research projects. That brings the Michigan Wheat Program’s total research investment to date to $1.76 million in 75 projects.

By the numbers . . .

This graph shows the percentage of Michigan Wheat Program research dollars invested in project areas since 2011.

Michigan Wheat Program Strategic Research Goals

#1: Increase grain yields by 25 bushels/acre by 2018.
#2: Fund research to reduce risk.
#3: Create a wheat research infrastructure.
#4: Elevate MSU to a premier wheat research institution.
Big 3 projects for 2015-2016

While every project was important, here are a few that were particularly significant to the board and growers:

- **High-Management Research**

  The Michigan Wheat Program began funding high-management wheat plots in 2012, as one of the board’s highest priorities. Results are now in – and posted on the Research section of the website – for four crop years in five locations across the state.

  The goal of adding high-management to the variety trials, was to enable farmers to get a better understanding of how varieties would perform under the same production systems as farmers utilize in their operations.

  In 2016, 90 wheat varieties were evaluated including 26 experimental lines.

  Emerging results indicate that high-management practices are showing increased yield, increased test weight and slightly reduced grain moisture at harvest. In 2016, results showed that high-management increased yield just over 6 percent, which was down from the previous years’ work. By capturing all the data, it is possible to make comparisons on future research given same weather conditions.

  Also, it’s important to point out that some varieties do not flourish under high management, so it is vital that growers consider their management practices, input costs and varieties before making a decision. MSU and the Michigan Wheat Program caution that three years of data should be reviewed to get a more complete picture of research results.

- **Disease – Stripe Rust**

  Michigan experienced a particularly severe outbreak of stripe rust in early May 2016 that caught many farmers by surprise. The disease appeared a month earlier than in previous years, which allowed it to disseminate spores and cause more damage.

  Stripe rust can be particularly aggressive, with the potential to damage one-third of the crop. There are no known varieties that are completely resistant to it.

  Several MSU researchers worked together to quickly evaluate the relative susceptibility to stripe rust of many soft white and red wheat varieties, and made general recommendations on fungicides to control it.

  Because of the severity of the disease, the Michigan Wheat Program has continued to fund research on stripe rust by Dr. Martin Chilvers. His project will particularly look at the correlation between weather patterns and disease emergence for stripe rust, along with other wheat diseases.

- **Nutrient Management**

  Dr. Kurt Steinke continues the very important work of determining how to optimize wheat yields. The Michigan Wheat Program has funded his work since 2012 to look at three key issues:

  - Effect of planting date on wheat yield;
  - Optimal nitrogen application rates for higher yields; and
  - Optimal nitrogen timing.

  While the first two years of research indicate that planting date is the dominant factor to increase wheat yield, Steinke continues to tease out the other factors that influence the above variables — including weather. The issue is quite complex, given that each change impacts the other variables as well.

  Steinke’s most recent reports and PowerPoint presentations were recently published on the miwheat.org website under the Research – Nutrient Management tab.
Marketing, communication activities stepped up

Communication and consumer marketing are two of the purposes of a commodity check-off program, authorized under Michigan’s Public Act 232.

While the Michigan Wheat Program was solely focused on grower communication in its first three years, the check-off took its first small steps into consumer education in 2014. Building on that foundation in 2015-2016, the Michigan Wheat Program reached out to consumers, chefs and fledgling chefs in a bigger way at three important events. In addition, the social media platforms (Facebook and YouTube) were maintained and further developed.

Breakfast on the Farm.

The Michigan Wheat Program continued its consumer outreach by participating in Breakfast on the Farm again in the summer of 2015. All five Breakfast on the Farm events, in fact!

- Stakenas Farms, Free Soil
- Roto Z Dairy, Snover
- Hood Farms Family Dairy, PawPaw
- Wheeler Dairy, Breckenridge
- Pleasant View Dairy, Jonesville

Breakfast on the Farm events are supported by many commodity organizations including wheat, Michigan Farm Bureau, local volunteers and agribusiness, and organized by MSU Extension.

The events help area residents learn about agriculture at a free, fun family event. Executive director Jody Pollok-Newsom and board members Dave Milligan and his daughter Elisabeth; Sally McConnachie and her husband, Dave; and Carl Sparks staffed the table at the various locations and talked with thousands of visitors about Michigan-grown wheat.

Introducing professional chefs to Michigan-grown wheat.

For the second straight year, the Michigan Wheat Program had a booth at the Michigan Restaurant Association Show, held in Novi.

Hundreds of professional chefs and restaurant ingredient buyers attend the show to learn what’s new in the culinary world.

This year, the Michigan Wheat Program and the Michigan Beef Industry Commission partnered, serving up beef sliders on pretzel buns. This opened the door for recipe-sharing and discussions with restaurant operators on the health benefits of wheat, wheat production in Michigan and new wheat products on the market. Helping executive director Jody Pollok-Newsom with the booth were board member Sally McConnachie; Glenda Hunt, wife of board member Bill Hunt and Michigan wheat millers Todd Wright from Knappen Milling and Mary Kern from Star of the West.

Putting locally-grown Michigan wheat and wheat products before the state’s culinary professionals, positions Michigan wheat to participate in the local food movement.
Bringing new chefs to the table bearing wheat foods.

The Michigan Wheat Program also held a wheat recipe contest at the Michigan Restaurant Association Show.

While other commodity groups have recipe contests, this was a first for the Michigan Wheat Program. Chefs entered numerous recipes, with the top 10 selected for judging by the Michigan Restaurant Association.

The recipes ranged from traditional breads and desserts to a few recipes featuring wheat berries. Five recipes were selected for prizes and turned into recipe cards for use at future events.

All the recipes may be found on the Michigan Wheat Program website at [http://www.miwheat.org/consumer-info/recipes/](http://www.miwheat.org/consumer-info/recipes/).

**Smart Tip:** Join the 700+ fans of Michigan Wheat who follow us on Facebook. We’re at facebook.com/michiganwheat. Post your own tidbits about Michigan wheat and join the conversation.

This just in: Working to inform Michigan wheat growers!

Education is one of the top goals of the Michigan Wheat Program. Staff and researchers work hard to bring new information to growers, particularly from research projects funded by the program.

Three of the key grower educational opportunities this year were . . .

- **2016 Summer Field Day – Frankenmuth**

  About 200 wheat farmers braved the rain to attend the Michigan Wheat Program’s Summer Field Day in June 2016, at the MSU Saginaw Valley Research & Extension Farm’s brand new facility.

  A half-dozen researchers talked about their check-off-funded research projects. By popular request, MSU wheat specialist Dennis Pennington talked about spray nozzle technology and highlighted spraying equipment through a demonstration. Pennington and MSU wheat educator Martin Nagelkirk highlighted their expectations for the 2016 harvest.

  Other researchers presenting included Dr. Jan Byrne, Dr. Marty Chilvers, Dr. Chris DiFonzo, Dr. Eric Olson, Dr. Christy Sprague and Dr. Kurt Steinke.

  Once again this year, on-site analysis of wheat samples was provided through the Michigan Wheat Program’s agreement with the MSU Plant Diagnostic Lab and Dr. Jan Byrne.

- **2016 Winter Annual Meeting – Bath Township**

  In March, nearly 300 wheat farmers converged on a Bath Township conference center to participate in the Winter Annual Meeting organized by the Michigan Wheat Program.

  Headlining the event was Dr. Dave Hooker, University of Guelph (Ontario, Canada), a leading voice for high-management wheat production and an advocate for adding wheat into crop rotations on a regular basis.

  Hooker’s research has looked at the impact of genetics, soil fertility and pest management on wheat production. His research projects include nitrogen management, crop rotation, crop interactions and the DONcast tool for predicting the formation of DON in wheat.

  Other speakers presented the new RMA crop insurance adjustment for falling numbers in Michigan wheat; wheat breeding and genetics research; and grower resources.

- **Website Additions: miwheat.org is updated regularly with materials from grower meetings and research reports.**
The board and staff were also figuring out how to collect its first assessments on both wheat and seed wheat to fund research focused on quality and yield. Over the past five years the Michigan Wheat Program has invested in 75 research projects, many of which are delivering final reports, meeting the program’s strategic goals, and being thoroughly vetted by the check-off board.

**Moving Michigan wheat to the next level …**

The Michigan Wheat Program strengthened its research infrastructure considerably this year by...

- **Receiving a State Strategic Growth Initiative Grant to Create Wheat’s Economic Outlook**

In this day and age, it seems that data should be available everywhere for everything, but it became apparent that there was not good data on the state of the Michigan Wheat Industry. The wheat check-off board and director Jody Pollok-Newsom sought its first grant to get a clearer picture of the strengths, challenges and opportunities facing Michigan’s wheat farmers and industry now and into the future.

The check-off applied for a grant from the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to do this work. The committee was so supportive, they offered more funds to increase the scale of the project.

The $76,000 Strategic Growth Initiative grant was used to hire the MSU Product Center Food-Ag-Bio, which is now conducting a thorough review of Michigan’s wheat markets and crop availability to see what opportunities exist now for growers and what future trends make sense for Michigan.

When the report is fully vetted by the board and the industry, its baseline metrics will be released to farmers, millers and stakeholders. The report will include current wheat production, current and potential milling capacity, and preferred wheat varieties for various processing sectors.

- **More Boots on the Ground**

Since the Michigan Wheat Program’s introduction, it has developed a broad team of quality researchers including Martin Nagelkirk, MSU wheat educator from Sanilac County. Although the ramp-up of wheat research happened quickly, there was still more the board wanted to do, but found itself limited by staff. With the board’s desire to have more “boots on the ground” to oversee field trials, research projects, leverage funding with other states/regions, and to convey results to farmers, the program worked with MSU for an answer. It was a long process that resulted in the new position—a MSU Wheat Specialist jointly funded and hired by the Michigan Wheat Program and MSU.

That work came to fruition in October 2015, with the hiring of Dennis Pennington, a MSU Extension bioenergy educator since 2008, and an agriculture and natural resources coordinator prior to that. He holds B.S. and M.S. degrees in Crop and Soil Science from MSU and worked in wheat research during college.

Pennington and Nagelkirk are important authors and presenters on new research and production techniques, including writing for our e-newsletters and for our website at miwheat.org. You can view their papers at our website under the Education and then Production Articles tabs.
The first step in the Michigan Wheat Program’s wheat research strategy began in 2012 when the first research projects were funded. Every year since, the program has funded more projects and addressed more wheat issues. To date, the MWP has invested more than $1.56 million in nearly 75 wheat research projects, mostly at MSU.

The second objective of the wheat research program was to secure a high-quality research team at MSU, through new positions and dedicating existing staff positions to wheat needs. MSU Extension wheat educator Martin Nagelkirk and MSU wheat specialist Dennis Pennington, complete the team. They work in conjunction with MSU researchers as we build a top-notch, world-class wheat research program with MSU.

With a top-notch team in place, it became obvious that there was also a need for more land to conduct additional long-term wheat research in strategic locations.

“If we want wheat to be included in crop rotation research in locations that are near major wheat production areas, we need to ensure that MSU has both the land and a commitment to serve the wheat industry going forward,” said Dave Milligan. “The board has worked out an agreement that achieves this.

“By adding land to the Saginaw Valley Research and Extension Center (SVREC), we are ensuring a commitment to wheat research by the growers through the Michigan Wheat Program, the University and researchers. The Michigan Wheat Program board is thrilled to join with the long-standing commitments of sugarbeet and dry bean organizations.”

The commitment was the next major step by the wheat check-off board in advancing its research platform: To make Michigan known for world-renown wheat research that makes a difference in a farmer’s bottom line.

During 2015 and into 2016, the Michigan Wheat Program board developed an agreement with Michigan State University to move wheat research to a new level. The Michigan Wheat Program board has committed $700,000 over the next five years that will be used towards the purchase of the 150 acres of land adjacent to the MSU Saginaw Valley Research and Extension Center near Frankenmuth. In turn, MSU will commit to supporting wheat research in this location for at least the next 25 years.

Looking carefully at current and future market capacities for Michigan wheat, making a strategic hire to advance research trials and grower education, and dedicating land to wheat research will all take wheat production in Michigan to the next level.

Today’s seeds will yield benefits for Michigan wheat farmers for years to come.

Wheat Contacts

Martin Nagelkirk, MSU wheat educator. Email at nagelkir@msu.edu. Or call (810) 404-3400.

Dennis Pennington, MSU wheat specialist. E-mail at pennin34@anr.msu.edu. Or call (269) 832-0497.
HERE’S YOUR 2015-2016 MICHIGAN WHEAT PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT

For more information on our programs and research results as they become available throughout the year visit us at www.miwheat.org. For monthly updates, sign up for our e-newsletter through our website.