

Report on Grant 2017029 - Maryland Grain Producers Association

Prepare Two Mailed Newsletters, Monthly Emailed Newsletters and FaceBook: The MGPA grant funded the writing, printing and mailing of one “Grain Store” newsletter. The 2016-2017 funding report was sent to over 7,000 subscribers. The e-newsletter has been sent bi-weekly this year and has had a very positive response. The e-newsletter averages an over 40% open rate which is nearly double the industry average. The Facebook page has been updated almost daily in 2017 and is reaching over 3,000 people a month on average. Something new we tried this year was a Snapchat filter at Maryland State Fair which reached over 12,000 users.

Conduct an Annual Meeting to Promote MGPA Functions and Hold Election of MGPA Officers: MGPA conducted the eighteenth annual Maryland Commodity Classic jointly with the Maryland Soybean Board and the Mid-Atlantic Soybean Board. The event was held on Thursday, July 27, 2017, at the Queen Anne’s 4-H Park in Centreville. This year, a research presentation where four MGPA and MSB funded researchers showcased their work at the 4H park indoor exhibit hall. 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. Stephen Niedenbach provided the keynote speech about misconceptions of GMOs. Presentations were also provided on current issues and public policy impacting grain farmers including the value of the Maryland Grain Checkoff Program. A national leaders panel of Chip Councill, Jason Scott and Richard Wilkins updated the audience on the national organizations.

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 and the press, including the *Delmarva Farmer* and *Lancaster Farming*, provided publicity on the winners.

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 2017, MGPA staff and directors participated in a variety of initiatives to achieve an improved image of grain producers.

The “My Maryland Farmer” campaign was continued in 2017 through social media and at the Maryland State Fair. A series of farm blogs to connect consumers with farm life was added to the website and promoted through social media, gaining over 8,000 viewers between June and November. The blogs included a series following the growing season with MGPA board member, Eric Spates. His blogs included video clips and proved very popular throughout social media. Blanketing the state fairgrounds were farmer photos with facts on banners, posters, and cutouts (including one of MGPA President, Jennie Schmidt). The project was expanded in the Farm and Garden Building where large infographics educated fair goers about agricultural technology, conservation, and careers. The MGPA exhibit at the State Fair featured the Drive Flex Fuels race track where visitors could race remote control cars around the ethanol race track. This drew in another 3,000 participants who were then also informed about ethanol. State fair attendance was estimated at over 400,000 people, primarily from urban markets.

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, local Farm Bureaus and the Chesapeake Bay

Program at their meetings. MGPA also helped Chip Bowling collaborate on an op-ed for NCGA in the Chesapeake Bay Foundation 50th anniversary magazine. 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.

In an effort to strengthen relationships with the national organizations and develop our own organization, MGPA staff attended the NCGA State and National Staff Summit and Communicators Summit. Staff also presented at the US Wheat Summer Meeting and attended the USW/NAWG Board meetings.

MGPA worked to support the public relations campaign for the USDA Biofuels Infrastructure grant. Reached approximately 22 million individuals through advertising campaign, attracting 170,000 page-visits to the DriveFlexFuels.org website. This is 16 times the number of normal page-visits per month. The digital campaign generated 22,542 clicks; Video campaign generated 1,710 clicks, but more than 100,000 individuals viewed 100% of our videos. The radio campaign reached an estimated 19 million, and was responsible for remainder of the clicks. We saw a 10% or approximately 101,000 gallons increase at existing Protec stations (16 stations) So far, seven stations have installed 36 blender pumps.

- a. BWI (completed last year);
- b. NEXCOM, Annapolis;
- c. Crown, Baltimore;
- d. Royal Farms, Baltimore;
- e. Ft. Meade Auto Center, Laurel;
- f. Royal Farms, Elkridge; and
- g. NEXCOM, Patuxent (started)