



PORK CHECKOFF REPORT

JULY AUGUST 2023



Resilience in Agriculture: A Legacy

By Megan Meyer

A livelihood that means so much more.

“Farming is more than a career; it’s a purpose, a passion, a legacy. During challenging times, the weight can be heavy,” said Minnesota Pork Chief Executive Officer, Jill Resler, in the press release on May 31st. This press release addressed Minnesota Pork’s pledge to give \$300,000 to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota Center for Rural Behavioral Health at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Farmers and people within agriculture are some of the most resilient people. Think about it. Most farms have survived every struggle they have gone through. PRRS outbreak? Clean up, get more pigs. Machine breakdown? Fix it, keep moving. Loss in the family? Live their legacy by continuing to work hard. There is something about farming that makes people want to keep moving and never give up. This is resilience.

Farmers help feed the world, but when they are unwell, who is going to help them? Thad Shunkwiler and his team at MSU are committed to finding ways to help farmers in times of need. Thad is the founding director of the program and a Minnesota State Mankato professor of health science.

Combating slim resources.

Shunkwiler reports that in Minnesota today there is an “unequal, inequitable distribution of resources when it comes to mental health care.” 80% of mental health resources are in the metro area, leaving rural healthcare with only 20% of the resources. “Within agriculture specifically this is coming at a time where we are seeing unprecedented rates of farmer suicide and unprecedented rates of agriculture substance use. It’s a perfect storm of bad things happening,” says Shunkwiler.



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AUGUST 31, 2023

Bovine Emergency Response Plan Training

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The Center for Rural Behavioral Health is committed to combating this epidemic of slim resources. Their plan to do so is by prioritizing two ideas:

- Mental health workforce development.
- Encouraging agriculture leaders to spread the word and resources.

Exposing students to the mental health care career is one way the center is working to lessen the treatment gap. This is considered “workforce development”. The center plans to recruit for these careers.

“The center is intentional in our programming in recruiting students from rural communities because research shows that they will go back and provide care in those rural communities,” says Shunkwiler. In some cases, schooling for a mental health professional can take up to ten years, which is why the center is investing in the pipeline to get students through to the end. Their recruitment plan involves recruiting at rural high schools. “We have been in 12 rural high schools this year, talking about the mental health career pathway as a way to recruit those students,” said Shunkwiler. This is promising for the future of rural mental health.

Agenda item two is where the Minnesota Pork partnership comes in. “How do we get practical and real-life resources in the hands of the rural community?”, Shunkwiler asks himself and his team. They believe the answer is culture. Help people help themselves. Practicing self-care can improve your mental health before larger measures should be taken. Dealing with stress before it manifests into a bigger issue will help reduce the need for already limited resources. Shunkwiler wants to work to get resources into the right people’s hands to accomplish this. He does so by speaking to leaders in agriculture and providing steps to help themselves and others.

“The [Minnesota Pork] investment is a force multiplier [GU1] [MM2]” Shunkwiler remarks, “What we are doing is getting the information in the hands of the people who are doing the work.” His goal is to give supervisors and managers the tools to help their employees or the people around them. This will help reduce dependence on the limited supply of resources available.



Creating a workplace culture that promotes mental health is essential in reaching these goals. Showing and teaching resilience, embracing healthy thoughts and always being grateful are steps leaders can take to keep your employees safe and healthy.

Call to action.

These solutions sound easy, right? Shunkwiler points out, “even the most obvious and basic things still take effort to accomplish. Conversations about mental health will move this issue forward.” As agriculturalists, it is up to us to eliminate the stigma around mental health.

Sharing messages makes all the difference.

The best way to breakdown a stigma is to simply talk about it.

Most people work to live, not live to work. As a boss or a person who works with farmers, it is important to recognize the hard things that people may be enduring. Asking how you can help, sharing resources and creating a top-notch workplace culture are key in those situations. Offering words of support that we are in a challenging industry, we have gotten through this before, and we will get through this again reinforce the importance of mental health.

“Hope is a powerful antidote to pretty much any negative thing in life,” Shunkwiler notes. Instilling hope starts with leaders. You set the tone. If you are unhappy with what’s going on with your operation, start with yourself first.

Exciting steps forward for the generation to come.

When you see headlines in the news regarding mental health, you see a lot of negativities about the challenging lifestyle, and the growing suicide rates. So, I am here to give you great news. The next generation of agriculture professionals is breaking the mental health stigma. It turns out, agriculture is “ushering in a new generation where there is acceptance and understanding of emotional wellbeing as part of the overall health,” says Shunkwiler.

The next generation of agriculture enthusiasts are better informed to have conversations about mental health, resources within mental health and building a healthier culture. This is great for our future and breaks the stigma around mental health within agriculture.

So, the next generation understands the importance of mental health, but what are we going to do now to help this issue? That is where this Minnesota Pork wants to have influence.

“It is our hope that through this partnership with the Center for Rural Behavioral Health we are able to increase accessible, relevant, and vital resources to support wellness for all members of our rural communities,” Resler says. As an organization,

Minnesota Pork wants to give leaders the tools to make mental health a priority on their farm.

“Our work at the center, is only as good as its consumed by people,” says Shunkwiler. This is a call to action for farmers to help spread the word.

Resources

If you or someone you know is in need, there are many options. The USDA has a Farm Stress program, where you can text FARMSTRESS to 898211 and they will find resources in your area to guide you through whatever your next steps need to be. The Minnesota Department of agriculture has a program where Mental Health professionals go to the farm to help where they are needed. This program is small, as there are only two people that are supposed to cover all farms in MN. That is why the Center is trying to recruit more people into the profession. To find a counselor to come out and help, visit farmcounseling.org.

A Final Note

This partnership with the Center for Rural and Behavioral Health is vital. My hope for the pork community is that we talk about mental health, we share resources, we help our neighbors and our employees, and we end farmer suicide and the stigma within agriculture. Pig farmers have led the charge for many initiatives within agriculture. How about another? Take care of yourselves, take care of others, and keep using your resilience. You matter, your work matters, and there is a place for you here.



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Young Leaders in Agriculture Conference Recap



Young Leaders

When you hear the word ‘conference’, what do you think of? For nearly 90 young agriculturalists, it meant three days of listening to compelling speakers, discussing issues affecting agriculture, and building their network through peers and industry professionals. The ninth annual Young Leaders in Agriculture Conference (YLAC), was held in Sioux Falls, South Dakota from June 19th through the 21st and was sponsored and run by the Minnesota Pork Board.

Attendees ranged from college students all across the country. Indiana Pork Producers Association intern Hannah McVay shared, “I am so thankful that YLAC brought me together with driven, like-minded people to learn how to be the future leaders of the agriculture industry”. She was grateful that she “was able to network with peers from multiple states around the country and multiple industry professionals”. Hannah along with many others gained new connections and made new friends within agriculture.

So, you want to be a top leader?

The conference started on a high note with best-selling author and speaker, Nathan Jamail. Nathan spoke on what the greatest coaches and leaders believe and how they use drive and a positive mindset to achieve their goals. He believes that “learners are earners” and that your attitude in whatever you do is important as it can change your whole perspective.

Attendees learned that there are two kinds of leaders: ones that want to be right and ones that want to do right; and each leader must decide which one they are going to be.

Nathan hopes to help young leaders understand that serving others without expecting something in return

is important in every aspect of your life. He says that to become a leader, you need to serve others and genuinely coach those that are seeking mentorship from you. Attendees left Nathan’s message with many notes and a positive attitude of what’s to come for the rest of the conference!

Caring For You & Your Team

Thad Shunkwiler found Minnesota Pork while on a mission to help rural citizens find mental health outlets. Thad was looking for one thing: people who care. People who care for themselves and for their teams. When he stumbled upon Minnesota Pork’s website, he found the “We Care” principles that outline that Minnesota Pork values our pigs, people, and planet. He knew he had come to the right place. Thad works with the Center for Rural Behavioral Health through Minnesota State University - Mankato. He is a professor for the university and a licensed therapist, but also used his own personal struggles to learn more about mental health in others.

Thad is on a mission to make mental health resources available to rural citizens, all over Minnesota. This has been a long process so far, but he gave us some advice on how to handle what life throws at you.

- **Be like a tennis ball.** Bounce back, be resilient, and have hope.
- **Embrace Healthy thoughts.** Accept change and stay optimistic.
- **Have gratitude.** Count your blessings and help others do so as well. As agriculture leaders, it is our duty that we are well in all areas, and that our team is well.

We can take care of others by making sure we are healthy, and at our best for those around us.





Learning & Teamwork

A large portion of our time at YLAC was spent being learners and problem solvers of the latest issues in agriculture. We were broken into groups based on our preferences on issues. Each group was given one of the following topics: labor shortages, antibiotic resistance, foreign animal disease preparedness, and sustainability. Each group was to research the topic, ask questions to provided subject matter experts, and put together a presentation on the issue and solution within their topic. We prepared by using the skills we learned from our communication training and presented the case study while also answering questions from our audience of other students and subject matter experts. New information was certainly poured onto us, and a greater understanding of today's issues was accomplished through these case studies.



Farmers Answering the Tough Questions

Along with subject matter experts answering our questions about our case study topics, we had a panel of farmers that were eager to give us their expertise on these subject areas. Brad Schloesser from the MN Agriculture and Rural Leadership program was the panel moderator. The farmers on the panel were Mike Boerboom of Boerboom Ag Resources, Seth Spronk of Spronk Brothers, Jessica and Brian Westbrook of Melrose Feed Mill, and Tim Schwartz of Schwartz Farms. Students put these farmers to the test asking all the important questions. Later, we mingled with the farmers to get to know them more and potentially get a deeper look into their point of view.

No bad days: Stacking good days upon good days to live a life of gratefulness and joy.

"You are here, you have a choice, you are loved." These are the three things that Hunter says are facts in life. After becoming a paraplegic in a skiing accident during the winter of 2019, Hunter Pinke was told by health

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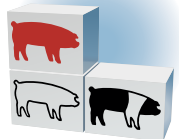
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professionals that he would have good days and bad days going forward. He told them they were wrong. He declared “I don’t have bad days.”

Hunter taught attendees to think positively about their life through sharing his own story. He explained that there is a difference between bad days and tough days and with the right attitude, you can choose to live a life full of joyful good days.

People often hear the “glass half full” concept, but Hunter takes the approach of being glad that he even has a glass. He believes we should use what we have in our glass to fill others’ glasses up, whether that is through service or simply giving compliments to others.



Know what you’re FOR

Attendees rounded out the Young Leaders in Agriculture Conference by listening to one of the top 20 speakers you shouldn’t miss, according to Forbes Magazine.

Author, speaker, and past-pastor, Jeff Henderson, shared his message on what we want to be known FOR and what we are known FOR. He explained that you can’t be known for everything, but you should be known for something and your attitude in life will determine that.

Along with the previous speakers, Jeff stands by the importance of serving others to become a well-respected leader. Lastly, Jeff shared that “asking big” can really change the outcome of a situation.

Networking Is Worth a Shot

When walking into the ballroom where all the YLAC sessions take place, one notices the buzz in the air of future agricultural leaders connecting. Questions like,

“Where do you go to school?,” and “What is your dream job?” circulate the room. Networking was a top priority for many students at the conference. There were 85 students in attendance at YLAC, all looking to absorb something new and meet other people.

Megan Meyer, one of the MN Pork interns, shared a bit about her time at YLAC.

“A unique experience that I was able to have been meeting the interns from the Indiana and Ohio Pork Boards. We shared similarities and differences between the two organizations and shared a deep passion for representing pig farmers. I also got to catch up with some old friends and meet tons of new friends as well. I exchanged numbers with many people, and I am confident that I will see these students again someday. Tuesday night we all loaded up and headed to Great Shots which is a fun golfing simulator sports complex in Sioux Falls. This was a great way to continue to network with our new friends and to enjoy fresh air and delicious pork tacos.”



Sponsors

As we celebrate yet another year of bringing young agriculturalists together to develop skills and build on their knowledge of agriculture, the Minnesota Pork Board would like to thank all sponsors that helped make the Young Leaders in Agriculture Conference a success. The 2023 sponsors are:

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Interns: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

John Altendorf, 2018

Where are you from and what college did you attend?

I am originally from Goodhue, MN, and graduated from Drake University in December 2020 with a double major in Political Science and Strategic Political Communications.

What year were you an intern for MN Pork?

I interned for MN Pork in the Summer of 2018.

Please share your background in agriculture.

I grew up raising livestock for 4-H and FFA while working on our neighbor's dairy farm. I benefited from growing up in a rural community where I saw first-hand the importance of agriculture and its impacts on the daily life of individuals and families in the area.

How did working for MN Pork contribute to your professional development and what you do now?

The opportunity to intern for Minnesota Pork was a pivotal moment in my professional development.

The staff provided me with the ability to tailor my experience to my unique interest in ag policy. Specifically, Minnesota Pork presented me with the tools needed to bridge the gap between farmers and policy

makers while advocating on producer's behalf for policies that benefit pig farmers at the state- and federal-level.

Please share what other professional experiences you have had and where you are now in your career and personal life.

Minnesota Pork affirmed my passion for a career combining my passions for politics and agriculture. Due to their willingness to invest in me, I secured internships with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) in Washington, DC, and Iowa Pork Producers Association (IPPA) in Des Moines, Iowa. Currently, I work as an Agriculture Legislative Assistant for Congressman Brad Finstad (MN-01) where I advise him on policies impacting farmers and rural communities in southern Minnesota.

What is one piece of advice that you have for young professionals that want to obtain a career in agriculture?

As an increasing number of people become detached from the farm, the ag industry needs a pipeline of talented young professionals to meet our workforce needs and advocate for the honorable profession we are proud contribute to. My advice would be to avoid placing a ceiling on your ability to achieve your goals and contribute to the industry in a meaningful way. I did not grow up on a farm nor did I obtain a degree in agriculture. Let your passion for the industry, and the people, guide your career aspirations.



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Interns: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Sarah Hetke, 2014

Where are you from and what college did you attend?

I'm from Howard Lake, MN and attended the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities



What year were you an intern for MN Pork?

I interned in the summer of 2014.

Please share your background in agriculture.

My uncle raised corn, soybeans, and steers on the farm where he and my dad grew up. My dad would help during the busy planting and harvest season so growing up I spent a lot of time riding along and learning. My dad had raised pigs before I was born, and I heard a lot of stories that piqued my interest. When I joined FFA, I received some feeder pigs through our "Greenhand Ring" to start my SAE project. It grew from there as we bred the gilts and sold feeder pigs to others in our area and finished a few pigs each year to sell pork locally. This along with working at the CHS Miracle of Birth Center at the Minnesota State Fair sparked my passion for the pork industry. I'm also proud to have previously served as the Minnesota Pork Ambassador.

How did working for MN Pork contribute to your professional development?

The MN Pork internship was a great experience as it allowed interaction with consumers, pig farmers from across the state and leadership experience through volunteer coordination and helping with the pork ambassador program. Many of those skills I still use today in my professional career.

Please share what other professional experiences you have had and where you are now in your career and personal life.

After graduating from the University of Minnesota I worked for Wakefield Pork. I moved to Wisconsin where I worked for Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation and Compeer Financial in public relations and marketing roles. Today, I work for Dairy Management Inc. as director of farmer outreach. Growing my understanding of checkoff's role and responsibility with MN Pork directly connects to my role today as I coordinate communications pieces to share with dairy farmers that highlight how checkoff is serving them.

What is one piece of advice that you have for young professionals that want to obtain a career in agriculture?

My advice for young professionals is to try a wide variety of career options through student jobs, internships, and mentorship. There is never a better time than in high school and college to explore career opportunities, even if it is just a one-day job shadow. You'll never regret learning and growing your network and agriculture professionals are often more than enthusiastic about helping young people.

2023 Scholarship Recipient Bios

Allison Schwieger will be a junior at South Dakota State University double majoring in Agronomy and Agricultural Science with minors in Agricultural Business and Precision Agriculture. Allison grew up in Fairmont, MN where her family owns and operates a wean to finish pig farm, as well as farming corn and soybeans.



ALISON SCHWIEGE

“Through my work in the industry moving forward, I hope to leave a lasting impact on those that I work with, including consumers, my clients, and coworkers, agriculture has granted me so many opportunities, and so I hope to represent it well in the coming years.” - Allison Schwieger



KARMEN SPERR

Karmen will be a senior at South Dakota State University this fall. She is majoring in Agricultural Communication and Agriculture Leadership. Karmen got her start in agriculture growing up on a farm in west central Minnesota where her family raised pigs and grew corn and soybeans. She quickly got involved with FFA and 4-H, where her interest in agriculture continued to grow. Karmen said, “I was able to learn so much through these organizations and created connections with other young people interested in agriculture”. She has further expressed these interests through her involvement with Little International, Swine Club, Sigma Alpha Sorority, and CAFES Ambassadors.

“I want to help reduce the gap that currently exists between producers and consumers and help lawmakers be informed about agricultural policies to ensure that decisions affecting farmers are being made with full intention.” - Karmen Sperr

Brynn will be a third-year student at South Dakota State University studying Animal Science and Agricultural Communication with a minor in Swine Science.



BRYNN LOZINSKI

Brynn grew up on a diversified livestock farm and was heavily involved in 4-H and FFA. Brynn started working in pig barns nearly five years ago and started growing her understanding of the industry. That paired with many opportunities like attending state pork congress events, National Pork Industry Conference, and World Pork Expo, have fueled her to want to stay within the pork industry as she goes through the next level of her education.



MORGAN THOELE

Morgan Thoele will be attending South Dakota State University to major in Agricultural Business and Animal Production. Thoele grew up on her family farm with commercial pig finishing barns and cattle. Her interest in agriculture was sparked through being able to work with the animals. Morgan hopes to leave an impact in agriculture and get more people involved and help others learn more about what the industry has to offer.

Zoey Schnetzel will be a senior at South Dakota State University and majors in Agricultural Communications and has minors in Animal Science, Journalism with Photography Emphasis, and Entrepreneurship. Growing up on a small sheep farm, Zoey was surrounded by agriculture. Once she was old enough to join 4-H, she got involved in the sheep and swine projects. These areas quickly became a strong passion for Zoey and she loved sharing them with others. Studying either agriculture communications or agriculture education was the clear choice for Zoey.



ZOEY SCHNETZEL

“In the near future I hope to work on behalf of a check off, such as Minnesota Pork, as I really value the relationship connection between farmers and consumers”.

- Zoey Schnetzel

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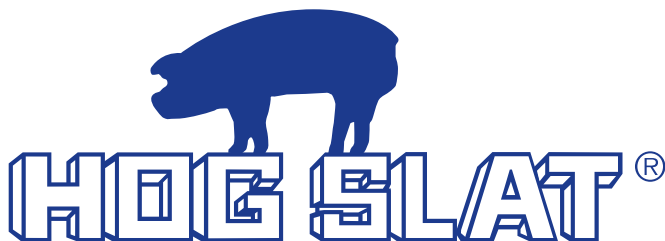


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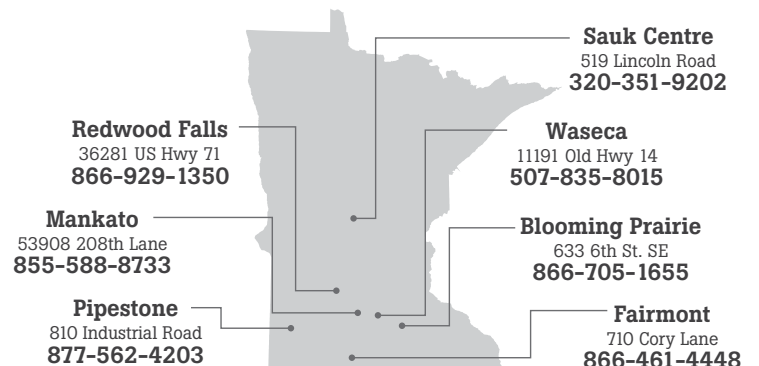


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SPREADING THE MESSAGE OF PORK AND PROTEIN THROUGH FITNESS

By Megan Meyer

As pig farmers, we know how delicious, nutritious, and affordable pork is. We work hard every day to provide a safe and wholesome product, in the most sustainable way possible. I mean, just look at these basic health facts:

- Tenderloins and sirloins are heart healthy.
- A tenderloin is as lean as a boneless, skinless chicken breast.
- Pork helps preserve lean muscles to help with weight management.
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strong, but mentally strong for whatever life throws at her as she raises her family. She hopes to inspire women, specifically mothers to show up for themselves so that they can show up for the people they love.

Lindsey specializes in inspiring women. She tries to keep it real with her followers. She embraces her flaws and shows others that she too is human, and on a journey along with them. Her motto? “Do your best and forget the rest”. The goal of Nourish Move Love is to nourish your soul with God’s word and your body with real food, to move your body and create movement in your life, and to love yourself and others unconditionally. NML is a movement to show you care for yourself and others, much like the We Care principles set by the Pork Board.

Pork fits perfectly into a person’s diet, especially an active person. Lindsey doesn’t adhere to any specific dietary restrictions or

guidelines for her and her followers; but she always says, ‘strive for protein and produce at every meal/snack.’

“Pork is a great source of lean protein that my entire family enjoys (I’m all about family friendly meals and recipes). I also love how simple pork recipes can be as a busy mom of 3 littles”, Lindsey says. “And in this season of life I’m all about easy and healthy recipes!” she adds. Her favorite pork dish is pork tenderloin because it is “easy to feed a family and crowd and always tastes great!” But she finds herself making pork sausage for her kiddos.

Lindsey tags Minnesota Pork in her social media posts and even collaborates with our Instagram page to post her workouts. Lindsey posts recipes using pork as inspiration for her followers.

Lindsey keeps it real and cares for her followers and those trying to better themselves, much like Minnesota’s pig farmers. Nourish Move Love has been excellent for reaching a new fitness audience and spreading the word about pork as a nutritious, flexible family meal.

Life gets busy, but trying to live healthy is essential to both our physical and mental health. Consider checking out Lindsey’s free at-home workouts to fit into your busy schedule and know that Lindsey’s goals align with Minnesota Pork’s.

However, sometimes our message doesn’t always get out to consumers, especially in the fitness community. So, Minnesota Pork called in some reinforcements to partner with and raise awareness in the fitness community. Lindsey Bomgren is a fitness influencer and the founder of the health and fitness company, “Nourish Move Love”. Nourish Move Love (NML) creates free at-home workouts for busy women. NML provides health and fitness content to over one million women each year.

Lindsey has been an athlete her entire life. After completing her college volleyball career and marathon training, she got her personal training and group fitness certifications and found a passion for group fitness.

“I just loved getting to hang out with people for 30-60 uninterrupted minutes and sweating it out...everyone was just there to work hard, have fun, and become a better version of themselves,” said Bomgren.

She realized that attending group fitness classes isn’t accessible to everyone. She wanted to bring the group fitness ‘feel’ to free, at-home workouts that everyone can utilize. Much like Minnesota pig farmers strive to bring affordable, nutritious foods to consumers and make their food accessible to all.

As a fitness influencer, wife, and mother of three, Lindsey realizes that fitness makes her a better person and not only makes her physically





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Team Members Assemble at World Pork Expo

A meeting of the minds was held on the first week of June this year. That is, World Pork Expo in Des Moines, IA. Farmers, industry professionals, and many others gathered at the Iowa State Fairgrounds to share their wisdom, hear about solutions, and ask questions. Once again World Pork Expo held seminars, panels (some of which Minnesota was represented), a trade show, and of course plenty of food and socialization.



As someone who is new to the pork industry, I took it all in and asked many questions. I was very grateful to meet so many people, including Minnesota pig farmers. I also attended a luncheon where I learned about the “Beagle Brigade”. I was fascinated to learn that pig farmers can rely on little dogs to ensure that foreign diseases do not enter the country. Dogs aren’t just for playing fetch these days! National Pork Producers Association is looking forward to World Pork Expo next year, June 5-7. Mark your calendars!

By Megan Meyer

SAVE THE DATE!

MINNESOTA PORK CONGRESS 2024



Date: Tuesday and Wednesday, February 13-14, 2024

Trade Show Location: Mayo Clinic Event Center, Mankato, Minnesota

Minnesota Pork has hotel room blocks at the following Mankato hotels:

- AmericInn Hotel: \$159
- Comfort Inn & Suites: \$109
- Country Inn & Suites: \$149 - \$159
- Holiday Inn Express: \$155 - \$170



The Hilton Garden Inn in downtown Mankato does not have any more available rooms. There are other hotels within Mankato you can contact to book rooms. Please reach out to Pam Voelkel at (507) 345-8814 if an above hotel informs you they are full so Minnesota Pork can remove them from the list or negotiate more rooms.

These special room rates will only be available as a part of the Minnesota Pork Congress block until January 12, 2024.



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**To be your
voice, we need
your voice.**

John Anderson,
Minnesota Pork
Producer and
SIP Investor

“We invest in the Strategic Investment Program (SIP) to have a voice on critical policy issues impacting our farm. As a medium-sized producer, we don’t have the time or capital to individually address many of the issues the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) and the Minnesota Pork Producers Association (MPPA) take on for the pork industry. By investing in SIP, we expand our reach through a unified voice to protect our livelihood and maintain a viable industry for the future. Whether it is educating newly elected leaders, countering activist information, expanding trade markets or fighting through the courts, our pork organizations give us a strong opportunity to influence issues on state, national and international levels. I would encourage all pork producers to invest in SIP and get engaged with NPPC and MPPA. You get way more out of it than what you put in.”

