



Dear MGFA Members,

Today, I am announcing my retirement as Executive Director of the Minnesota Grain and Feed Association, effective March 31, 2019. Some of you may have seen my retirement notice in the Mill & Elevator News member magazine sent out late last week. It has certainly been an honor and a privilege to serve this association, which was known as the Farmers Elevator Association of Minnesota when I started back in 1981. The MGFA Board has chosen my executive assistant, Laura Lemke, to succeed me in the position of Executive Director. Laura, in her 12 years with the association, understands what this position requires and has a good working knowledge of the issues impacting this industry. I am very confident in her ability to “hit the ground running” and I will be working closely with her during this transitional period.

Obviously, a lot has changed in this grain elevator and feed mill industry over my 38 years managing this association and representing the interests of its members. My tenure began during the worst farm crisis since the Great Depression. Since then, I've witnessed an industry in consolidation mode, continued rail line abandonments, the introduction of larger and larger unit trains, the advent of the CRP, PIK program, the rise of ethanol, droughts, floods, a challenging regulatory environment, mind boggling central notification system, Hedge-to-Arrive fallout, continued consolidation and much, much more. Speaking of consolidation, when I started in 1981, there were 275 local cooperative grain elevator firms and 447 privately owned elevator and feed mill “firms” operating in Minnesota. Today, through mergers, consolidations, purchases and closures, that number has come down to 68 local co-op elevator “firms”, with over 200 branch locations (and counting) and approximately 165 privately owned facilities.

I also had the privilege getting to know a lot of interesting people in the broad agricultural community, as well as some exceptional people working as elevator and feed mill managers, owners, employees and directors. Through it all, I dedicated my career to representing the interests of this industry the best I could. I also worked hard at managing an association that would continually offer meaningful education, timely information and effective legislative and regulatory representation. But the time has come for me to move on to my next adventure.

My 38 years with the association has offered me some great personal development and career opportunities. I had the opportunity to be an active member and past president of several organizations, including the National Agricultural Association Executives' Council, the Midwest Society of Association Executives and the Minnesota Agricultural Interpretive Center – Farmamerica (Board Chair). I also currently serve on the Board of Directors for the National Grain and Feed Association and have previously served on the board of the Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation and Minnesota Agricultural Fertilizer Research and Education Council. I completed my Master's Degree from Mankato State University while employed by the MGFA early in my tenure. I secured my insurance license and managed our in-house insurance agency, which has been providing required grain (surety) bonds for over 80 years.

In 2015, I had the honor of being recognized by a Minnesota House of Representatives official resolution, in recognition of my service and dedication to Minnesota production agriculture. In 1994, I received the prestigious Copper Top Award from the Minneapolis Convention and Visitors Bureau, for my role as chairman of the 300+ host (volunteers) committee welcoming nearly 3000 people attending the American Society of Association Executives national convention. That same year, I was honored as Member of the Year by the Midwest Society of

Association Executives. Most recently, I had the distinct honor of receiving the Distinguished Service Award in front of a couple hundred professional friends at a post Farm Fest 2018 “Ag Mafia” gathering. The Ag Mafia is a loose knit group consisting of agricultural industry leaders, rural legislators, ag lobbyists and others involved in the Minnesota agricultural community.

I was appointed by the Commissioner of MN/DOT to serve on the Minnesota Freight Advisory Committee, a position I still hold. I am a member of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture Seed Program Advisory Group and serve as a member of the Southern Minnesota Center of Agriculture Advisory Board, based at South Central College.

In addition to my duties as MGFA Executive Director, I was intimately involved in creating and managing the Midwest Shippers Association for seven years (with its focus on specialty grains) and managing the Northwest Feed Manufacturers Association for several years. I was also fortunate enough and honored to travel the world promoting Minnesota agriculture, joining Governors’ Ventura, Pawlenty and Minnesota Commissioners of Agriculture on agricultural trade missions to China, Japan, Thailand, Mexico, Canada, Vietnam and Cuba.

Prior to my employment with the Minnesota Grain and Feed Association, I spend 5 years as a transportation and land-use planner with the Region Nine Development Commission based in Mankato. While at Region Nine, I was responsible for facilitating, what turned out to be, a successful \$22 million rehabilitation of the Milwaukee Road rail line running from Alden to Jackson Minnesota, now operated by the Canadian Pacific Railroad. **It was work on this project that got me noticed by a member of the MGFA board, who encouraged me to apply (along with 80 others) for the position of Executive Director and the rest, as they say, is history.**

I hope to visit with many of you before I go, while Laura and I travel the State over the next few months. In the mean-time, I want to thank you, the member, for your strong support and the confidence you have shown me over these years! I also want to thank MGFA Board of Directors, who through the years provided great support, input and guidance for me and for the association. I’d like to thank my staff over the years for their dedication shown to the mission of the association and to the best interests of the membership. Lastly, I’d like to thank my wife for her unwavering support of my career and the role she has played in annual convention planning and execution.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve this great industry!

With Best Regards,

Bob Zelenka, Executive Director