

Mewes Leaves His Mark

North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA) past president Jason Mewes set the bar high for himself and for the association during his four years as president. During his 4 one-year terms, membership in the association doubled; Nancy Johnson was hired as the full-time executive director; and the North Dakota Soybean Grower magazine was launched. "I'm proud of the work we did during my time on the board," says Mewes. "It really has nothing to do with me; it's just a combination of having good people and then having the extra interest in soybeans during our time on the board that really helped drive things."

Soybean acres have doubled in North Dakota over the last 10 years or so, and that's been reflected in the NDSGA's membership. Mewes says reaching the 850-member mark gives North Dakota a second American Soybean Association (ASA) director, and he thinks Monte Peterson will do a great job as a complement to Ed Erickson, Jr. on the ASA board. While North Dakota has become the No. 4 soybean-acreage state, Mewes says the association has moved up in the membership ranks, but not that high. "We have to keep working on getting membership numbers up,"



says Mewes. "It gives us more seats at ASA's table, which gives us more influence."

The Colgate, N.D., farmer also calls the North Dakota Soybean Grower magazine the "lifeblood" of the association over the last four years since publication started. "Prior to that, a lot of meetings were spent trying to come up with fundraising ideas, and now, with the magazine in place and the support of the North Dakota Soybean Council and advertisers," Mewes says, "it's really been a

great thing for our association. I look forward to seeing the magazine grow in the future."

Other state soybean grower associations are also noticing the membership growth. "For so long, North Dakota was always an afterthought on the national level. Now that soybeans are gaining prominence in the state, we're trying to gain prominence as an association," says Mewes. "As you do that, you end up butting heads with people that have been in leadership for a long time.

It's our job as an association to fight for North Dakota and do what's best for our growers, and that's what we're trying to do."

This year, the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association made a concerted effort to get some resolutions that were important to North Dakota through the national body. At the Commodity Classic in Phoenix this year, it really hit home to Mewes that the issues North Dakota growers face are dramatically different from what everyone else sees. For instance, the NDSGA put forward a resolution that the ASA does not support; that resolution unlinks crop insurance premium subsidies from conservation compliance.

Mewes says that South Dakota fights some of the same battles that North Dakota does with wetland determinations and water in general, but Minnesota is a little bit on the other side. "Minnesota has had their water under control for decades, so they don't really understand the issues we're facing," according to Mewes. "We ran into some resistance on the Minnesota side trying to gain support."

The main reason soybean growers should join the NDSGA is to support the industry that is important to them. The association focuses on policies and

issues that are specific to soybeans. That's why North Dakota soybean growers should have a voice and be at the NDSGA's table.

The move to a full-time executive director was a big step forward for the association. To move forward with the NDSGA's goals, Mewes explained that the board decided that it needed someone to spend more than part time on the job. "We've had Nancy on staff now for a little over two years, and we're to the point now where business has grown, and we're thinking we might need to hire an assistant for her," says

Mewes. "So, it's kind of exciting to watch the growth of the association."

Mewes thinks that the NDSGA's new leadership will do a great job. "The whole board, in general, is made up of a great group of guys that really has the best interests of North Dakota's farmers at heart." Mewes expects a kind of empty feeling for a while, with fewer phone calls and emails, but he says that it will be good for him to get back to focusing on his farm. "I made friends that I'll have forever. Of the 15 guys who were on the board, I think I'll stay in

touch with every one of them," says Mewes. "It's just a bond you form by spending those hours and those days together with people, and you really come to realize that, even though we come from all over the state, our interests are the same; we're basically the same at heart, and it's really fun to bond with guys like that."

Mewes believes that anyone can serve on the board of an association, such as the NDSGA, and be a leader. "The key is to find something you're passionate about, and once you find what you're

passionate about, the leader within you starts to come out. And it's kind of fun to see that with the guys on the board. Each one of them will find an issue or an area that they're excited about and go to work on that, and they do good work."

Mewes' only advice to the association's new leaders is to keep growing and to not be afraid to try new things: "Never be afraid to fail, and the key is to keep a good relationship with our staff and also with the Soybean Council because that partnership is vitally important to us."

