

The 2024 NFBM Conference: One I Will Remember!

By Ron Dvergsten, 2024-25 NFRBMEA President

August 1, 2024

Those of you who were in La Crosse, WI for the 2024 National Farm Business Management Conference got to experience a dandy! Compliments to the entire 2024 National FBM Conference Planning committee, but especially to our NFRBMEA conference planners, Lynn Hoffmann and Brad Sirianni. Congratulations on putting on a conference I will remember for years to come. The conference theme of “*Success Through Exceptional Service*” was led by conference speakers that focused on creating a positive work environment built an extremely positive and interactive environment. Complimented by quality breakout sessions and small group discussion added the ability of being able to inter-mingle on a frequent basis. Everything combined created a conference “I Will Remember”.



Tina LeBrun

As President of NFRBMEA, I felt we made great progress as an organization via this year’s conference. We had a significant increase in conference attendance from NFRBMEA membership and had the largest number of first-time attenders from NFRBMEA that I can remember in a very long time. Also, for the first time since NFRBMEA has had an official seat on the National Council for Agriculture Education have we been able to have the Managing Director of the Council attend the National FBM Conference. We were thankful to have the current Managing Director of the National Council, Mellisa Rekeweg provide a presentation at the NFRBMEA Annual Meeting. She also was able to meet with Board of Directors and discuss current association issues and provided us with some valuable ideas in developing a strategic plan.

I also had the privilege to present Distinguished Service Awards to Deron Erickson, Tina LeBrun, and Myron Oftedahl. Congratulations to these individuals for providing great leadership and service well above the call of duty to the organization and to the FBM teaching profession.



Myron Oftedahl

However, the absolute highlight of the entire 2024 National FBM for me was to recognize Wayne and Deb Pike as Lifetime Members of NFRBMEA, only the third and fourth individuals that have been awarded by the Association this elite status!



Deron Erickson

Wayne has been a member since the 1970’s at the start of his FBM career and became the editor of *NUTS & BOLTS* in 1993 and continued in that role until 2008 when he accepted his 3-year term going through the Presidential offices. According to Wayne, the 2024 conference was his 38th National FBM Conference.

Considering that this Conference was only the 51st ever, that is amazing! Deb has served NFRBMEA officially since the late 1990’s. Starting off as co-editor of *NUTS & BOLTS* with Wayne, she later became our Web manager. After becoming editor of the *NUTS & BOLTS*, Membership Secretary and Historian duties were also added to encompass her current position as NFRBMEA Communications Director. Deb also serves as the Web manager for the annual National Farm Business Management Conference websites.

(“President’s Message” continued on page 2)



New Honorary Lifetime Members Wayne & Deb Pike

Congratulations Wayne and Deb! Thank you so much for the decades of service to NFRBMEA and the FBM education profession.

Deb announced this spring that she plans to step down from her role as Communications Director for NFRBMEA at the end of the 2024 calendar. The board has posted a job description for the Communications Directors position. The board is seeking applications to be submitted by the end of August with the hope of hiring a new Communications Director in September to allow a 3-month transition period. If you know of qualified individuals, please have them apply for the job posting.

An additional item I want to inform the membership of is that this spring NFRBMEA was asked to endorse the concept of pursuing a "National Center for Conservation Economics". The NFRBMEA members in attendance at the 2024 Annual Meeting voted to approve NFRBMEA endorsement for this endeavor.

I hope everyone has been able to take some time to enjoy the summer months.

-Ron

Attending NFBM Conference for the Very First Time

By Beth Berlin, Farm Business Management Instructor, Central Lakes College, Staples MN

Attending the National Farm Business Management Conference in La Crosse, Wisconsin was a wonderful professional experience. It was the first time I have ever attended the conference, and I'm so grateful I did. La Crosse provided a beautiful environment for learning and relaxing.

An important take-away for this first-time attendee of a National Farm Business Management Conference was the importance of connections. Connecting with fellow instructors and professionals from across the country brought so much value. Being able to learn from each other, discover how others manage financial information, and simply enjoying conversation with others who can relate to our daily work was nice. I was able to build professional connections to build my skills and knowledge base. Many presenters throughout the conference allowed us to see how others manage farm financial data, gave insight on how to manage tough situations, working cohesively as a team is valuable, and provided conversation of the importance we each play in the success of a farm.

Several speakers at the conference provided inspiration and motivation to connect better. Tracy

Stock encouraged us to create a better workplace, to see things and improve. Tom Thibodeau energized us, inspired us, and motivated us to serve and lead. You couldn't walk away without feeling like you could do better, could be better, and could make a difference professionally, personally, all while making a positive impact in your community. What an amazing presentation that well deserved the standing ovation he received. We were also fortunate to hear from John McHugh who was so well spoken

and told stories we could relate to and encouraged us to improve our connections. The task of showing compassion and concern is so simple but so often forgotten in today's world. John reminded us to take that second to extend good customer service no matter what type of college or private sector work environment we are in. The modest task to listen and express a few words of gratitude can go such a long way.

I walked away from this conference feeling energized. Having time to enjoy the views of the Mississippi River, and being fortunate enough to take time to enjoy La Crosse by hiking the Granddad Bluff Park rejuvenated me. To top it all off, seeing US Air Force jets race through the sky over La Crosse reminded me how lucky I am to collaborate with hard working farmers in the land of the free.



View of La Crosse from Granddad Bluff

Photo: Beth Berlin

Supporting Producers with Economic Data on Climate Smart Practices: A Benchmark in Farm Business Management

By Keith Olander, Executive Director, AgCentric

Farm Business Management (FBM) continues to be a cornerstone for agricultural producers, offering them vital real-time educational resources right at their kitchen tables. This includes everything from benchmarking and unbiased feedback to aiding in data-driven decisions. In Minnesota, we've taken these offerings a step further by enhancing our benchmarking and data analysis capabilities to support the adoption of what are now broadly referred to as "Climate Smart Practices."



The term "Climate Smart Practices" covers a wide array of methods, but commonly includes strategies like the implementation of cover crops and water quality certification. We've made significant strides in these areas by establishing special data cohorts of producers who maintain detailed records, allowing for effective benchmarking against their peers. Notably, our Cover Crops cohort includes over 140 producers. We have recently completed the second year of a three-year dataset that enables producers to evaluate the impact of this practice on their farm's profitability.

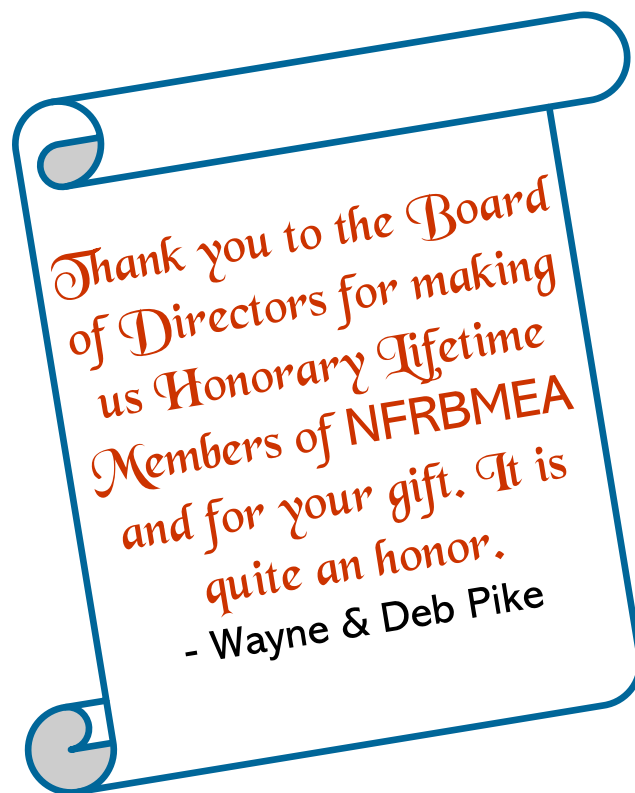
Moreover, our Department of Agriculture offers a "Water Quality Certified" status, providing certified producers with exemptions from future water-related regulations for ten years and better chances when applying for state-level grants aimed at funding climate smart initiatives. Of the more than 1,400 certified farms, 126 are engaged in farm business management. This cohort has consistently outperformed their peers in profitability over five years, testament to the program's effectiveness. These successes not only boost the profile of individual producers but also enhance the credibility of FBM with various stakeholders, including legislators, college administrators, lenders, and commodity groups. The positive outcomes have been so significant that they have paved the way for additional projects with specific focuses, further enhancing the value offered to FBM students.

One of the most appealing incentives for an FBM producer (student) to participate in these cohorts is

having 50% of their tuition paid while gaining access to the comprehensive tools FBM provides to all its crop and livestock producers.

This approach of providing actionable data to producers, while also aggregating it to inform the public, has proven immensely valuable. It has led to increased public funding for the overall support of our programs. As we move forward, our focus will remain on enhancing financial viability for the long term, leveraging the trust and accuracy of our data to meet the needs of a diverse public audience.

By continuing to invest in these practices and data-driven decision-making, FBM not only aids individual farm profitability but also contributes significantly to sustainable agricultural practices statewide. For reports on these practices visit: <https://www.agcentric.org/farm-business-management/annual-fbm-reports/>



My Conference Highlights

By Jason Schroeder, FBM instructor, South Central College

Attending the National Farm Business Management Conference in La Crosse, WI, was a great professional development opportunity for me. The theme for the conference was *Success Through Exceptional Service*. As a first-time attendee, I was particularly impressed by the farmer panel, which offered a wealth of insights into how the Farm Business Management program directly benefits our students. The panelists shared real-world examples of how the program equips our students with essential skills in business management and financial planning. Hearing their firsthand accounts made it clear to me that the FBM program is instrumental in giving our students the tools to make the best-informed decisions for their farm operations.

In addition, there were two standout presenters on servant leadership and compassion in the workplace.

The first presenter, Tom Thibodeau, Viterbo

University, did a presentation on servant leadership that was particularly impactful. The presenter emphasized the importance of leaders prioritizing the needs and development of their team members. I realized I also need to prioritize the needs and the development of my students, my co-workers, and others that I serve with on various committees and in volunteer organizations. By doing this, I can be a more impactful leader and a better farm business management instructor for my students.



Tom Thibodeau Photo: Deb Pike



John McHugh

The second presenter, John McHugh, Kwik Trip, spoke on purpose and compassion in the workplace. He provided valuable insights into how fostering a culture of empathy and understanding can significantly enhance team dynamics and service. The speaker illustrated how compassion extends beyond kindness; it involves creating an environment where employees/people feel valued. This is especially relevant in today's agricultural settings, where the pressures and stresses of farming can be considerable. My takeaways from the sessions on servant leadership

and compassion will undoubtedly influence my approach to working with and supporting students as we help our students navigate uncertain times in agriculture.

Finally, conference attendees had the option of three different tours in the La Crosse area. I participated in the Kwik Trip/Cargill Tour. It was impressive to tour Kwik Trip's main production facilities and to see river barges loaded with grain on the Mississippi River at Cargill. An added bonus was watching the Blue Angels practice for an upcoming air show while at Cargill facility.

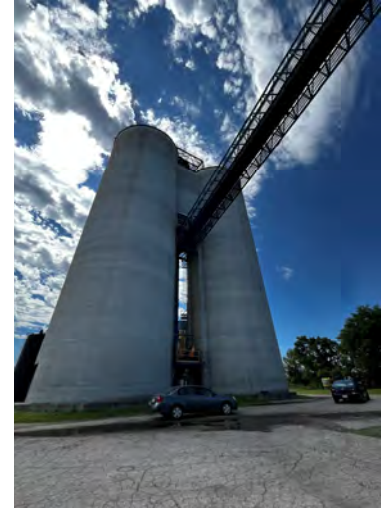


Photo: Deb Pike

I would like to personally thank the planning committee for planning an exceptional conference!

Membership Update

By Deb Pike, NFRBMEA Communications Director

If you weren't able to attend the 2024 NFBM Conference and would like to pay your 2024-25 dues, or you would like to join NFRBMEA, you can find a membership form at: www.nfrbmea.org/docs/MemberFormWeb_2024-25.pdf. Make checks payable to "NFRBMEA, Inc."

The membership lists on the website will be updated as soon as I have my ducks (or dalmatians) in a row. Thanks for your patience!



Image: Deb Pike, partially generated with Adobe Firefly AI

A special thanks to our additional contributors in this issue: Beth Berlin, Jason Schroeder, and Wayne Pike. We appreciate your taking the time to submit articles and share your perspectives with us.

We welcome content from our members to include in the *NUTS & BOLTS*, and we want to hear from you! We look forward to seeing what you have to share with us!

Farm Transition - Decide and Do It

By Wayne Pike, Minnesota Farm Advocate

Five years ago, I retired from my career as farm business management instructor for Riverland Community College. Then I was recruited to become a farm advocate. A farm advocate is an independent contractor working with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. We work with farm families and individuals on almost any issue that concerns them. There is no fee for the people we help as we are paid a “volunteer” hourly rate by the Department of Ag. Most of the people who call me have not been in the farm business management program and, if they haven’t, I encourage them to get enrolled now.

I have been surprised over the years about the number of calls I get from farm people who find themselves in a desperate situation when it comes to their farm transition plan, or most often, their lack of a plan. It almost makes me want to suggest that there ought to be a law that urges people to plan, but that isn’t going to happen. Besides, the price they pay for not planning is probably more severe than any penalty the law could deliver.

In the first three minutes of a phone call from those who find themselves in a farm transition, I usually can put their problem into one or more of those “D” categories. As a reminder to you, those are “Death, Divorce, Disability, Dementia, Denial, Delay and Diversion.” The first four of these are somewhat unavoidable and can throw a monkey wrench into the best thought out plans. However, the other three come into play at all stages of their lives and careers.

For example, at some stage in our lives, we may all experience denial. We may deny the fact that someone key to our operation will die before what we consider to be their time; and that someone maybe even ourselves. We may deny the possibility that a key person may suffer through a costly divorce. We may deny the possibility of a physical disability or the sinister onset of dementia.

All these things we deny can end up causing us to delay any decision to avert an end to the story in which no one lives happily ever after. As we note in our society, our propensity for diversion from important matters often overwhelms the real necessity to learn and make responsible decisions for our future.

I refer now to Jim Molenaar, my fbm and farm advocate colleague, (and renown author), who leads the effort to expand and encourage knowledge and action when it comes to farm transition planning. His leadership in this area should inspire farm management instructors to impress upon their students the responsibility they take on about transition as they build their estates.

I think that I speak for all farm advocates when I claim that we would rather not get these desperate calls for transition problems that will not have a happy ending.



Saddle Up for Next Year’s NFBM Conference!

By Brent Roiger, NFBM Conference Planner



Howdy! We should all probably get used to some Texas greetings. Plans are ongoing for the 2025 National Farm Business Management Conference, to be held in Fort Worth June 9-12. There are a ton of things to see and do in Fort Worth and I am looking forward to visiting the Stockyards National Historic

District to see one of the twice daily cattle drives through town. I’ll probably stop in at the famous Billy Bob’s Texas Honky Tonk Kitchen for a cold one as well!

The Sheraton Fort Worth is our likely hotel and conference center, and it is only about two blocks off the TEXRail which connects DFW Airport to Downtown Fort Worth. There is also a free downtown shuttle called Molly the Trolley to get out and explore Fort Worth. In walking distance from the hotel is a JFK tribute and the Fort Worth Water Gardens, just to name a couple other sites to see.

Tours and speakers are currently being planned with more information to come after our next planning committee meeting in early September. Please visit the website: www.nfbm-conference.org/2025/. Hope y’all will be attending next year’s conference! YEE-HAW!!!

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Questions or comments? E-mail us at comments@nfrbmea.org

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