



## WISCONSIN ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL AGRICULTURAL CONSULTANTS

December 18, 2017

### **Progress is being made. Change is good.**

Mantras I repeat to colleagues, clients, friends and myself when facing issues in our industry – especially in the area of water quality. Progress isn't always apparent, especially when we are focused on the latest headline involving a manure spill, well contamination or fish kill. The impacts of our mistakes range from minor to catastrophic. Our reactions run the spectrum. Where does this lead? Are we making progress? Are we going backwards? All valid questions.

From my perspective, it leads to the position we occupy as consultants in the industry of production agriculture. Collective actions taken by our organization over the past decades has brought us to an interesting point in WAPAC's existence. We have been quite effective in applying our members body of knowledge across the physical and technical landscape of the state with tangible results. We are regularly involved in strategy sessions, task forces and review of matters that directly impact our clients and all farmers in Wisconsin and beyond. This is a fundamental purpose of our organization which we are achieving today. Which begs the question of where are we going in the future?

The next generation of consultants will be facing the challenges of the consolidation we have seen by our clients of the past decades. Livestock and crop farms have reaped the benefits of available capital, new technologies, labor and favorable regulation to create a well primed industry that is the basis of agriculture's \$88 billion annual contribution to Wisconsin's economy. We play an important role in this equation. There are new problems we deal with on a daily basis that are indirect costs that come with the evolution. There will be problems in the future that are not on our radar today. Regardless of what the problems are, solutions will require new strategies and knowledge, some of which we do not have available today. Our desire as advisors and consultants is to provide results at the end of the day. Education, collaboration and sharing innovative solutions will be crucial if we are to deliver those results. A new tool for us is to engage directly in the political process. Our early results have been very effective and require our continued commitment to the process. WAPAC is well positioned to serve in these roles.

A challenge in sharing and collaboration is consolidation and integration of our businesses and our farms. Competition between various service providers is beneficial in many ways but can create information silos that can stifle progress and innovation. WAPAC and many professional groups recognize duties and responsibilities to our clients, our profession and society as a whole. It is critical for us to remember all sectors we are serving as we create solutions for ourselves and our clients. The models of how our services are delivered have changed since

WAPAC began thirty years ago and will change over the decades to come. The collaborative model has served us well up to this point. Collaboration beyond our comfortable silos will be crucial to achieve the objectives our farming community espouses when it comes to addressing clean water. Taking ownership of our contributions to the problems we create is the first step in developing solutions. Some of us are ahead of the pack and are part of the solution. Some are looking at the problems and wringing our hands wondering what can be done. We all have clients that represent the full spectrum of pride and embarrassment when it comes to stewardship of our soil, water and livestock resources. We are all versed in improving herd averages or crop yields. Addressing the low producers or low production areas first often has the biggest financial impact. Try taking this perspective when dealing with the ignored nutrient management or conservation plan. We might get to the desired outcome much sooner than expected and set the stage for the next increment of improvement. That story resonates across the board and provides the fuel for collaboration, sharing and progress toward our goals. I welcome your suggestions of how we as a group can facilitate this conversation with our clients and our colleagues. Taking that story outside of WAPAC can have a significant positive impact on reaching our water quality goals.

Bill Stangel

WAPAC President 2017-18