



MICHIGAN
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ASSOCIATION™

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TOM SILER

Our team recently completed inspections for this year's small grain seed crop, and one concerning trend stood out while reviewing the reports. Rye contamination in seed fields continues to increase.

Inspectors found rye contamination in ~2% of small grain fields in 2024, 3% in 2025, and over 9% of fields inspected in 2026. While the levels observed are often low and easily rogued by hand, the trend shows potential for more serious problems in the future. This increase in rye contamination goes hand in hand with the increase in cover crop adaptation. Rye is a great cover crop to scavenge nutrient, prevent erosion, and suppress weeds. However, small grain seed producers should practice caution before considering incorporating rye into their operation. Rye is nearly impossible to clean out of wheat seed and can lead to dockage for customers at the elevator. Any member that produces small grain seed should be aware of the common ways rye could enter their system.

1. Volunteer rye from previous crops – Rye, whether for seed, forage, or cover, is prohibited from being grown the season prior to most certified small grain seed crops. However, even if rye was planted in previous years, the seed has the potential to remain viable in the soil for multiple seasons, making proper termination/removal necessary to prevent volunteer plants from jeopardizing a future seed crop.

2. Fertilizer applications – Rye cover crops are commonly established by broadcasting the seed with a fertilizer spreader. If a local co-op or custom applicator uses the same spreader for both rye seed and fertilizer applications, any seed remaining in the equipment has the potential to contaminate future fields. Confirming that a borrowed/rented spreader has been thoroughly cleaned and is free of rye seed before application is a simple step that can help prevent unintended contamination of seed fields.
3. Equipment transfer – Combines, grain carts, trucks, seed drills, or other equipment can easily transfer seed from one field to another. Thoroughly cleaning all equipment that has previously come into contact with rye, before it enters a seed field, can help to prevent future rye contamination of a seed crop.

If rye does end up contaminating a small grain seed crop, the last method of control is in the field before harvest. Rye is much taller than other small grains, so it can be easily identified after heading. Like other small grains, rye tillers, and each tiller has the capability to produce a head with viable seed. The best practice is to uproot and remove the entire plant from the field, but if you decide to cut the seed heads off, remember to look down into the canopy for the smaller heads on shorter tillers. A quick walk through the field before inspections and harvest can go a long way in ensuring a pure, high-quality seed crop.

The President's Post

BY JEFF MARTUS, MCIA PRESIDENT

Looking Beyond Harvest



The 2026 planting season and wheat harvest are behind us, with yet another strong showing from MCIA varieties and brands. Before we move on to the next

season, I want to talk about an eye-opening experience I was called to participate in this winter: succession planning.

Succession planning is an important step in preparing your farm or business for both the things we see coming and those we do not. Succession planning is meant to prepare your organization for leadership and employee changes such as expected or unexpected retirements, resignations, or deaths. It involves identifying individuals who can fill critical roles quickly to keep businesses functioning through unexpected change.

On the more positive side, succession planning helps carve the path for the future by identifying individuals, whether family members or employees, who have the talent and skills to prepare for larger responsibilities. Experienced individuals, people such as yourself, need to be able to

pass on institutional knowledge, skills, and relationships so they are not lost when you or they are gone. I have seen it happen many times when I hear, "Dad always did that," or, "I don't know how to do that because she always did that." It's important to train and inform others about what is being done and why. One interesting thing I learned in the process is that it is important to let those who are identified, know that they are part of the future. Employees and family members who know they are part of the future tend to maintain better morale because they know they have a place in it.

At MCIA, we have displayed a solid example of properly applying these concepts. With the retirement of Randy Judd as manager, Jim Palmer stepped in and filled shoes that seemed irreplaceable. More recently, Chris Tiedje retired, creating another significant role to fill. We were able to take the loss of 37 years of experience and smoothly transition those responsibilities to Tom Siler without missing a beat. That didn't happen by accident. Careful planning, training, and mentoring allowed these two transitions to take place and set MCIA up for a bright future. I, along with the rest of the directors, will be challenging our team at the next directors meeting to lay out the next succession plan so that we can ensure the future of MCIA is as bright as ever.

NEW HIRE

Welcome Allyson!



We are pleased to welcome Allyson Lickman to the Michigan Crop Improvement Association team as our part-time Laboratory Analyst for the summer.

Allyson is assisting with the planting, maintenance, and evaluation of laboratory seed samples while Lauren Mezo is on maternity leave. Allyson's responsibilities include preparing and planting germination and purity tests, evaluating and recording laboratory seed sample results, and supporting our daily laboratory operations.

Allyson brings many years of seed testing experience to MCIA. She previously worked at Oregon State University's Seed Laboratory, SGS Canada Inc., and Universal Seed Company, where she specialized in seed purity, germination, and viability testing. She is also an AOSA Certified Viability Technologist.

This fall, Allyson will begin her new role as a 7th Grade Science teacher at Lincoln Middle School in the Ypsilanti area. We are pleased to have her expertise and enthusiasm on our team this summer and appreciate her contributions to the MCIA laboratory.

When she is not in the laboratory, Allyson enjoys hiking, wildlife photography, and sharing her passion for science through education.

Fun Fact

Michigan Sugar Company produces over 1.3 billion pounds of sugar annually. This helps satisfy the average American who consumes 60 pounds of added sugar each year. If you are counting, that's 17-20 teaspoons a day!



Thirty Years in the Fields



In the late summer of 1997, I took my very first trip out to the Pacific Northwest, focusing on MCIA's seed production in the farming communities around Boise, Caldwell and Twin Falls, Idaho. By the time this article is printed, I will have just returned from my 30th trip to the state. Over nearly three decades, I have missed this annual trek only once, 2020, when the plague attacked our country.

The week before I take this trip, my wife often softly jabs me with a reminder that I am going on "vacation". While I admit it is usually an enjoyable trip, the work that gets done makes it far from a vacation. A full week of driving from field to field, combined with walking mile after mile of dry bean seed rows in the scorching August heat, often trudging through mud from active irrigation, make the end of the day dinners welcoming and the hotel bed even more so.

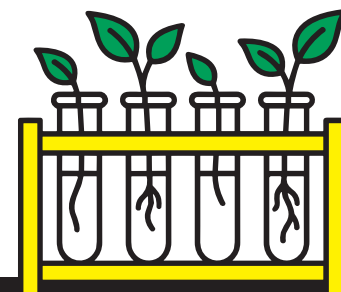
The point of these annual trips is multifaceted, and I try to accomplish three main goals each year. Thoroughly inspecting our seed production, building relationships with industry partners, and exclusive interaction with our MSU dry bean experts, are the most important parts of the trip. Let me detail each for you.

First, I am there to inspect our Foundation dry bean seed production to verify that the varieties are behaving exactly how they should. I look for any hidden genetic problems in the Foundation seed that would cause major issues the next year for our certified seed growers. Off-types, poor plant structure, stem breakage or lack of uniformity are examples of problems we have caught in the past. This is hands-on work that requires a trained eye and a strong level of focus throughout the day. The moment you let your guard down is the moment you will miss a small problem that is magnified and multiplied the following growing season. Catching and solving an issue immediately is precisely how we keep a variety viable for years to come.

The second reason is to build and strengthen personal relationships with our cooperators. In this business, a contract is only as strong as the connection behind it. By showing up in their fields year after year, I attempt to build the kind of rapport that ensures when we run into an issue or need urgent attention for any reason, our concerns receive an immediate response. In other words, we get action when others may get placed at the back of the line.

The third important outcome of these trips is the exclusive interaction I get with the people I travel with. I have spent many hours in the field, the truck, or waiting around airports with elite plant breeders and technicians. For many years, Dr. Jim Kelly, Evan Wright, and I made these trips together, and they both have taught me more about dry beans than a normal person should ever know. Now, the new MSU Dry Bean Breeder, Dr. Francisco Villegas-Hoyos, has entered the picture. Traveling together gives me an up-close, invaluable opportunity to relay the specific traits and characteristics that our MCIA member dry bean seed growers desire back home.

Checking off these three vital goals each year is what turns this trip into an incredibly rewarding time that I genuinely enjoy. While it is far from a vacation, the long hours spent driving, walking fields, and sweating the details, are a necessary investment in our seed supply. It all comes down to a single purpose which is keeping MCIA at the forefront of seed quality. We focus on the details out west so that you can plant with confidence back home.



UPDATE

From the Seed Lab

JOYCE HIEBERT

Cereal grains are arriving at a steady pace into the lab during this run of dry weather. It's early days yet, but so far, the grain quality has been excellent. Currently we are looking at an average of 97% germination rates, and 95% purity rates.

We have seen only a small amount of fusarium fungi on the grain seedlings during germination exams, less than previous years. A small percentage of off types in the purity samples (i.e. red wheat in white wheat) has been observed.

Overall, the cereal grains have looked great so far!



Fusarium Fungi on Wheat.



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**Michigan Crop Improvement
Association**

Calendar of Events 2026

August 17

Soybean and Dry Bean Applications Due

Final Orders for Wheat Seed Stock Due

MCIA Office

September 7

Labor Day

MCIA Office Closed

November 30

Wheat Royalties Due

MCIA Office