

# Communications, Marketing and Membership Report to the NGFA Board of Directors September 2024

## I. Communications

**Email:** Since March 2024, emails sent by the NGFA show an open rate of 35 percent and a click rate of 4.5 percent. The open rate is slightly lower than average for comparative audiences, but the click rate is higher than average, according to MailChimp analytics.

**Website:** According to Google Analytics, NGFA website users increased 24.6 percent this year to 25K compared to the same period in 2023 (March 1-Aug. 18). The NGFA homepage, annual convention, and Trade Rules seminar pages were the most visited.

**Social Media:** NGFA has three social media platforms: Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. Available Hootsuite data show that between March 1-Aug. 18, 2024, compared to the same period the previous year, fans and followers, pages and profile reach and impressions all significantly increased. Posts with the highest engagement rates include content related to the annual convention in March 2024 and the CAP visit to the Japanese embassy in June 2024.

**Press:** Between March 1-Aug. 18, 2024, mentions of the NGFA in online and print publications peaked during Stand Up 4 Grain Safety Week in March 2024 and with the announcement of Sheryl Wallace's new role at Ardent Mills in May 2024. Radio mentions peaked in April due to a Mike Seyfert interview on NASS reports, the CARB proposal and other issues and peaked again in early August 2024 due to rail-related interviews with NGFA's Max Fisher. TV news peaked with an RFD-TV rail interview with Max Fisher in August 2024.

**Communications Survey:** In 2024, NGFA collaborated with Roots & Legacies on a Communications Discovery and Analysis project. The Communications, Marketing, and Membership Committee played a pivotal role as a focus group, evaluating the initial phase of the survey and contributing to the development of questions for the second phase, which targeted the entire NGFA membership. To encourage participation, NGFA launched a marketing campaign in May 2024, resulting in 377 responses. These were analyzed by Roots & Legacies, leading to actionable recommendations. The findings revealed that while NGFA members are generally satisfied with the current communication channels and the information provided, there is a clear demand for more personalized communications, greater insight into the activities of NGFA committees, and increased opportunities for interaction and networking with NGFA staff and fellow members. Additionally, members expressed an interest in receiving more detailed analyses of policy measures and their potential impact on grain and feed businesses.

In July, NGFA launched a new information system that allows members to select topics of interest and receive timely updates throughout the week outside of the weekly NGFA Newsletter. These topics align directly with NGFA committees, allowing committee-related work and issues to be shared with all members.

## II. **Marketing**

**Membership marketing:** The membership, marketing and communications team has identified several updates to be made to the Membership pages of NGFA's website. These updates will more clearly demonstrate the value of membership to prospective members, clarify NGFA's unique dues structure and application process, and provide resources aimed at helping existing members maximize their membership. Updates will be made to the following pages before the Board meets in Colorado Springs: <https://www.ngfa.org/join-the-ngfa/>, <https://www.ngfa.org/benefits/>, and <https://www.ngfa.org/get-involved/>.

The guiding principle for these changes was to draw stronger connections between membership and member benefits, with a focus on highlighting the specific benefits most applicable to each member type: whereas prospective Active member companies might be most interested in arbitration, prospective Associate member companies will be most interested in business development opportunities. Along these lines, prospective Active members will need to be familiar with the dues worksheet, while prospective Associate members will not. This information will be useful not only for prospective members but also for current members re-evaluating their membership.

**Member dues communications:** A new and improved dues payment communications plan went into effect this summer. Members are now contacted at regular intervals in each dues cycle: 90, 60 and 30 days before dues are due, the beginning of the dues cycle, and 30, 60, and 90 days past due when applicable. These communications are sent via a combination of email, mail, and NGFA newsletter. Communications sent at 30- and 60-days past due focus on the benefits of NGFA membership and explain the member termination process; members are terminated at 90 days past due. Recent improvements to NGFA's database and email system allow these communications to be separated by dues cycle (January and July) and payment status, allowing staff to precisely target the communications with improved results.

**128<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention:** The 128<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention net income was approximately \$70,000 above budget. Despite a slight reduction in attendance and reduced sponsorships the financials were helped by three factors: an increase in non-member attendees, an increase in Ag Village exhibitors and booth staff, and an increase in attendees registering after the early bird deadline. We anticipate all three trends continuing at the 129<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, to be held at the Omni La Costa (Carlsbad, CA) March 9 – 11, 2025.

**2024 Summer Legislative Fly In:** The 2024 Summer Legislative Fly In was held June 3-5 in Washington, DC. Participants included the Executive Committee, the CAP class of '24 - '25, the BMOC, Ag Policy and Legislative Affairs, and Trade and Crop Technology committees, as well as several state executives. Please note that all Board members are

invited to attend the fly in each year. Dates for the 2025 Summer Legislative Fly In will be announced in early 2025.

**CONVEY24:** Convey 24 was held July 24 – 26 in Omaha, NE at the Hilton Omaha and was record-breaking in all attendance categories (attendee, exhibitor, booth worker). Preliminary financial data shows NGFA exceeding the budgeted net income goal. Final data will be available at the March '25 Board meeting.

NGFA has signed contracts for CONVEY25 and CONVEY26, both to be held at the Hilton Omaha in Omaha, NE. Information regarding CONVEY25 will be distributed in early Spring 2025.

**Harvest Safety Week 2024:** Harvest Safety Week 2024 was held August 19 – 23 and featured the theme “Participate, Prepare, Protect.” Two new safety videos, a webinar and a presentation were created specifically for the week and distributed to NGFA’s full 5,000+ marketing list. This year, thanks to the funding from the National Grain and Feed Foundation, the email communications were augmented with digital billboards and radio ads in targeted markets in the Midwest. Engagement metrics will be available at the March '25 Board meeting.

**Upcoming Meetings & Events:** Exhibitor registration for CEC 2024 opened August 1<sup>st</sup>; attendee registration will open September 10<sup>th</sup>. The event will be held Dec. 10 – 12 in Kansas City, MO.

The January Executive Committee meeting will be held Tuesday January 7<sup>th</sup> at the Fairmont Tremblant (Quebec, Canada). Travel information will be sent out in October.

The 129<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention will be held at the Omni La Costa (Carlsbad, CA) March 9 – 11, 2025. Confirmed speakers include political analyst David Wasserman and CSX CEO Joe Hinrichs. Registration will open in early December.

### III. **Membership Recruiting and Retention**

The 2024 Board Meeting started the '24-'25 membership recruiting year. Since March '24, 12 new-member firms have joined the association. They are:

Active member:

1. Green Bison Soy Processing
2. Liberty Basin
3. White River Land Corp
4. Cain A.M. Bickley LLC
5. Keystone Cooperative, Inc
6. Lakeside Grain Trading, LLC
7. Agro.Club
8. Quality Roasting, LLC
9. Chief Ethanol Fuels

Active – Broker Member

1. Professional Ag Hedging

## 2. Orchard Point Commodities

Associate member:

### 1. Mid-Iowa Grain Inspection

**Dues payment processes:** Since March, Membership has been working on implementing the updated dues initiative as well as validating current member data to best get information to the correct contacts. We have been doing continuous outreach to train, educate, and assist our membership with the new cycle schedule and modes of payment. We continue to streamline our online payment portal and online communications to ensure they are user friendly and easy to navigate.

**Membership goals:** Goals for the remainder of the '24-'25 membership year are:

- Focus on recruiting new Active memberships.
  - Emphasize recruitment of soy oil processors, southeastern poultry producers, and members in the PNW region who are affected by the Snake River Dam issues.
- Engage NGFA industry leadership in discussions about potential untapped sectors that could provide new recruiting opportunities.
- Strengthen connections with existing members who are not actively engaged with the association beyond writing their membership check.
  - This goal will be accomplished through an association-wide membership marketing campaign and targeted communications with the companies in question, including in-person visits from Membership and NGFA CEO.