



**Small Grains & Forages
Virtual Conference
Thursday, February 19, 2026
8:30 a.m. – 3:45 p.m.
Central Time Zone**

Speakers and Session Descriptions

8:30-8:40 Welcome and Introductions

8:40 – 9:40 a.m.

ALSH New Spring Products – SilageMaster Flex BMR Corn, Warm Season Forages, & Alfalfa *1 CCA CEU Credit in Crop Management**

Jayce Thompson, Genetic Advisor, Maximum Production Genetics
Matt Helgeson, Co-Owner, Product & Production Leader, ALSH
Lacey Nelson, Sales Agronomist, ALSH

Jayce will talk about on farm feed focused breeding and will dive into silage quality metrics that they find the most important.

Matt and Lacey will review the forage lineup including alfalfa, alfalfa mixes, and warm season grass products. They will discuss how each of these crops fit different forage needs and cropping systems.



Jayce Thompson is a Genetic Advisor for Independent, family-owned seed corn germplasm provider. MPG provides elite on farm feed-focused seed corn germplasm with a secondary focus on yield stable corn hybrids.



Matt Helgeson is a co-owner of Albert Lea Seed. He grew up on a family farm in North Central Iowa and received agriculture degrees at Iowa State University. Matt worked at Pioneer as a research assistant prior to starting with Albert Lea Seed in 2015. As the Product and Production Leader, Matt manages product selection, procurement, and seed production for the forage, cover crop, turf, and native seed portfolio.



Lacey Nelson is a Sales Agronomist with Albert Lea Seed, specializing in forages. She grew up on her family's small dairy farm near Ellendale, MN, where she and her sister continue to manage the farm's daily operations. Lacey earned her degree in Crop Science with a minor in Dairy Science from the University of Wisconsin–River Falls. Her background in both crop production and dairy farming gives her a practical, hands-on perspective when working with forage growers.

9:45 – 10:45 a.m. Oat Varieties and Growing Your Best Oats *1 CCA CEU Credit in Crop Management**

Mac Ehrhardt, Owner & Board Chair, ALSH
Dr. Margaret Smith, Agronomist, ALSH

Speakers will highlight oats varieties, including some new options, available from Albert Lea Seed for 2026 and production methods to grow great food-grade oats. Factors influencing great oats---in addition to variety selection---include: position in your crop sequence, planting dates and rates, tillage, fertility, and pest management.



Mac Ehrhardt is a 3rd-generation owner of Albert Lea Seed House in Albert Lea, MN. He grew up in the seed business and received his formal agricultural education at the University of California, Davis. Mac has worked full-time at the Albert Lea Seed House since 1991. After serving as its President for 20 years, he stepped into the role of Chairman in 2023 and remains involved in sales, production, and management. He has served on the boards of several organizations.



Dr. Margaret Smith was raised on a diverse farm in southcentral Iowa. She studied agronomy at Iowa State University and earned the PhD in Crop Ecology and Crop Production from the University of Wisconsin. Her professional experiences include University Extension, research, and both resident and distance teaching. She also co manages an organic crop farm in Northcentral Iowa with her husband. She served in the Peace Corps in Swaziland (now, eSwatini) and currently volunteers in the organic, sustainable agriculture, and natural conservation communities. Margaret previously held the role of Forages and Small Grains Agronomist at Albert Lea Seed and is now serving as a technical agronomist with a more limited time commitment to the company.

10:50 – 11:50 a.m.

Cool-Season Small Grains for Forage 1 CCA CEU Credit in Nutrient Management*

Dr. Marta Kohmann, Extension Forage Specialist, UW-Madison

In this section, we will go over the potential of small grains to be used as forage. We will address basic management principles, such as N fertilization, and the most current research in Wisconsin - including the use and management of allelopathic cereal rye in forage systems. We will also go over integrating small grains in alfalfa-based systems, and how they can be used to maximize production.



Marta Kohmann has a background as a generalist agronomist, making her uniquely qualified to work with a systems-level approach. She has experience a variety of fields within forage management, quantifying benefits from adoption of legumes in subtropical environments, understanding animal selection in multi-species pastures, and evaluating the effects of prescribed fire in rangelands. Marta joined UW-Madison in 2023, and is currently working with perennial pastures, alfalfa, and cover crops managed for persistence and production.

12:10 – 1:10 p.m.

Warm Season Forages to Bridge the Summer Slump 1 CCA CEU Credit in Nutrient Management*

Kent Solberg, Farmer & Senior Technical Advisor, Sustainable Farming Association of MN

Kent's session will review warm season annual forage options, considerations for forage selection, designing multi-species blend, management considerations and uses.



Kent and his wife Linda own and operate an award-winning pasture-based livestock farm in central Minnesota. Kent has a passion for the land and has been involved in regenerative agriculture, soil health, adaptive grazing management, and integrated crop and livestock systems for over 25 years. He has worked for a number of regenerative agricultural and government organizations throughout his career consulting with hundreds of farmers in 10 states and 3 countries, and currently consults and instructs with the Sustainable Farming Association and Soil Health Academy. He has also served as adjunct faculty teaching courses on soil health, forages, grazing, and livestock management.

1:15 – 1:35 p.m.

Warm Season Forages in My Grass-Based Dairy .5 CCA CEU Credit in Nutrient Management*

Mark Hostetler, Farmer & ALSH Regional Sales Manager, Great Lakes Region

Mark will cover balancing the needs of a grazing dairy with the production of warm season annuals and management strategies for success



Mark, his wife Kristina, and their two children milk cows for Organic Valley at Mark's family's farm in north central Indiana. Mark has been involved in managing grassfed organic dairy cows for 16 years. His first experience was working at and managing the herd at Traders Point Creamery in Zionsville Indiana from 2010-2016 and transitioned the family farm to organic during that time. Once back on the family farm, they updated infrastructure that hadn't been a working dairy since the late 50's and now have a herd of 60 cows on 140 acres.

1:40 – 2:40 p.m.

Maintaining Persistence and Productivity in Forage Stands 1 CCA CEU Credit in Nutrient Management*

Dr. Amanda Grev, Forage Extension Specialist, University of Maryland

This presentation will discuss some of the major factors affecting forage persistence and productivity over time, including soil fertility and pH, common forage diseases, and management factors such as cutting/grazing height and harvest timing.



Dr. Amanda Grev joined the University of Maryland Extension team in 2019 as the Forage Extension Specialist. Originally from Minnesota, Dr. Grev received her M.S. and Ph.D. in Animal Science at the University of Minnesota, where her research focused on animal nutrition, forages, and pasture management. In her current role, she works to support forage producers, livestock owners, and industry professionals across the region through a combination of research and Extension programming in the areas of forage production and pasture management.

2:45 – 3:45 p.m.

Designing Cover Crop Mixes 1 CCA CEU Credit in Crop Management*

Dr. Brook Wilke, Associate Director for Science and Agronomy, Michigan State U, Kellogg Biological Station

Brook will share details of reliable cover crop options in Upper Midwest row crop systems that range from single species to complex mixtures. He will highlight some of the particular benefits and challenges for each cover crop, including some tips for success and will also share estimated cost of implementation so growers can understand how much they need to invest in seed to plant these different cover crops.



Dr. Brook Wilke earned a Ph.D. in Agroecology at the Kellogg Biological Station in 2010 and has served KBS in the role of Farm Manager (2013-2020) and Associate Director of the KBS Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR) Program (Present). Brook oversees agronomy and science activities for KBS LTAR and conducts research on agronomic innovations that enhance efficiency and sustainability of cropping systems. In addition to growing up on a family scale crop and livestock farm, Dr. Wilke has extensive experience in agricultural systems ranging from organic vegetables and local markets to pasture-based livestock and cropping systems, including educational activities related to these systems.

**CCA CEU Credits are available for attending the live virtual conference. Credits are not available for watching the recordings.*

Schedule is subject to change.