## **Champions of Independence**

### **Anticipating the Next Play**



Considering the rapid evolutionary pace of the seed industry, it's no longer good enough to just peer into the future. Much like a football team needs to anticipate the next play, successful organizations, or champions if you will, are willing to look around the corner to anticipate what lies ahead (although they can't visualize it), and to make plans to respond accordingly.

The theme of this year's Independent Professional Seed Association's annual conference is "Champions of Independence." In order to beat the competition, the need for IPSA, and its member companies, to look "around the corner" has never been greater. This sentiment was broadly shared by the large group assembled to participate in IPSA's strategic planning effort just a few short months ago.

Several findings of the strategic planning committee mirrored past discussions—that there is a need to grow and retain members, to provide educational topics that meet members' needs, to operate in a fiscally-responsible manner and to maintain the IPSA annual conference as a "must-attend" event in the seed industry.

However, the strategic planning committee also identified several new focuses to keep IPSA visible and viable for its members, including collaboration among members, developing member programs and benefits with a broad appeal, and continuing to advocate on behalf of regional, independent seed companies.

#### Collaboration

The topic of encouraging and fostering collaboration among IPSA members occupied much of the strategic planning meeting agenda. While collaboration is not new to IPSA (we have collaborated on agronomic research projects for nearly 25 years), the notion of how to collaborate in an evolving seed marketplace has changed.

One outcome of the meeting was that we revamped the IPSA vision statement to better define the association's role in creating collaborative programs for IPSA members:

IPSA believes that collaboration among members results in stronger independents! Collaboration efforts at IPSA are "opt-in" systems where member-companies determine when and how they choose to collaborate. Collaborative efforts are primarily directed "up the supply chain," rather than efforts in the marketplace that potentially diminish the brand equity of any seed company member.

As the dust settled, the planning committee also added a bullet to the IPSA strategic plan that specifically addresses collaboration. As we look toward the future, IPSA will focus on developing voluntary programs that are focused "up the supply chain" and create proprietary value in the marketplace for our members.

# **Member Programs/Benefits**

From IPSA's beginnings nearly 25 years ago, group buying programs or group services have been a cornerstone of the association's program offering. While interest in such programs remains high today, the marketplace is changing and requiring IPSA to change in response.

Our goal is to develop programs and services that collectively benefit IPSA members, while providing a competitive advantage compared to those companies who are not members of the association. A list of current and recent member programs and benefits includes:

- IPSA Advantage software program—a software solution tailored to the unique needs of regional seed brands;
- Benchmarking study—a partnership with Verdant Partners to provide financial and sales metrics to regional seed companies to identify strengths and performance gaps;
- Mike Albert vehicle leasing—a broad range of vehicle leasing programs and brands to meet the transportation needs of IPSA members;
- Buying programs on bags and boxes, etc.—a variety of programs are typically in place regarding bags (paper, poly, various sizes and configurations). IPSA launched a second Buckhorn seed box buying program for members in late December;

- Discard seed program—a new program announced late in 2011 in which IPSA is partnering with CP Bio Energy to secure discard seed from IPSA members for recycling in a cost-effective and responsible manner; and the
- Executive recruitment program—a recently-announced program through which IPSA members receive a discounted rate for recruitment services from Higher Plain Executive Placement to fill their top sales and management positions.

While every program may not be of vital importance to each IPSA member, the goal set out above is certainly being met by these program offerings.

## **Advocacy**

The concept of advocacy has been part of two strategic plans at IPSA, and the association's advocacy role continues to evolve. The current strategic plan states that IPSA advocates for independent seed businesses among genetic and trait providers, in public policy debates, with the media, and with other organizations.

Advocacy at IPSA takes several forms. On the one hand, IPSA leaders and staff meet regularly with genetic and trait providers to discuss new and ongoing programs and to advocate for broad licensing strategies that provide more choices in the marketplace. These meetings also discuss how IPSA can help these companies get their information in front of decision-makers at regional seed companies, via avenues such as the IPSA annual conference and the association's website.

IPSA has on occasion weighed in on policy matters that affect their members, typically in concert with the American Seed Trade Association and state and regional seed associations. The nature of IPSA's membership makes it a unique source of information for policy-makers at the state and federal levels.

The association also works with members of the industry media and the general press on behalf of regional seed companies, to help forge a better understanding of how regional seed companies compliment the marketplace by providing more choices from alternative genetic and trait platforms for their grower customers.

Armed with a new strategic plan addressing a seed marketplace that is evolving faster than ever

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before, IPSA strives to stay on top of the issues that matter, ensuring its members remain champions of independence.

### Where on the Web

More details on the Independent Professional Seed Association's programs can be found on the IPSA website at independentseeds.com or by contacting the IPSA office by phone at (402) 991-3550 or email at info@independentseeds.com.