



2022 GROWMARK SUMMIT FOCUSES ON EMPOWERING, CONNECTING, AND GROWING LEADERS

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Nearly 400 FS board presidents, CEO/General Managers, and shareholders attended the reimaged GROWMARK System Summit at the Bloomington-Normal Marriott Hotel & Convention Center, August 4-5. Here are some highlights of the meeting.



Chairman of the Board and President John Reifsteck welcomed attendees and said how “refreshing” it was to be together in person. This was the first in-person gathering since 2019 and is a completely reimaged event from the GROWMARK Annual Meeting & Agribusiness Symposium, which was held in Chicago for over 40 years. He focused on the changes in the GROWMARK System since he was elected to the Board, and how we connect with our members and customers, empower our employees, and grow as a System.



GROWMARK CEO Mark Orr updated attendees on organization priorities and the initiatives that support them. “GROWMARK is focused on executing strategies that create value for our members, providing platforms that make it easy to conduct business, and empowering leaders to streamline processes and drive innovation,” he said. Priorities are: a seamless supply chain and logistics execution, a digitally-enabled and omni-channel approach to our business, leadership development and succession planning, strong and aligned Member Resources team, and corporate stewardship.



Mark Orr led a panel discussion with his staff: Wade Mittelstadt, Ann Kafer, Brad Drake, Mark Weilbacher, and Barry Schmidt. Topics covered included an update on myFS and myGROWMARK and other digital platforms; an overview of the aligned Member Resources team and the connection it provides with members and customers; efforts undertaken to address labor shortages throughout the System; and improvements in the System’s supply chain.



Keynote speaker Joe Theismann, told attendees the key to success is the choices made and how we adapt to our surroundings and circumstances. “Every member of the team helps win the game,” Theismann said, adding in his view, success is fueled by one’s attitude, passion, willingness to continually learn, hard work, and self-preparation. “Create discomfort and think outside the box; create different opportunities and avenues for success.”



General (Ret.) Stan McChrystal talked about the value of trusted relationships in decision-making and successful initiatives. He said making difficult decisions involves trust among those on the team, and being successful requires connection, communication, and creating opportunities. He told of a daily 90-minute briefing session in which everyone knows everything about a mission.

“You don’t have to tell someone what to do. They know what our objectives are – they will know what they can do to help get there,” he said.



“It looks like the GROWMARK System Summit owns this space!” Some of the branding included: a banner welcoming attendees, elevators wrapped with Connect Empower GROW, and movie theater-style posters flanked the walls of the parking garage walkway.



GROWMARK Director of Innovation, Heather Thompson, moderated the Strategic Innovation Powering the Future panel, which included Troy Koehler, GM, New Century FS; Scott Lenet, CEO, Touchdown Ventures; and Ron Hovsepian, CEO, Indigo Ag. The panel focused on three primary areas: venture capital and the Cooperative Ventures partnership between GROWMARK and CHS; sustainability and carbon initiatives; and implementation of innovative technology and programs through the local cooperative.

Planning is underway for the 2023 GROWMARK System Summit, July 27-29 at the Gaylord Opryland Hotel, Nashville.

Rod Wells, Vice President, Supply Chain and Logistics, moderated the Preparing for Supply Chain Challenges panel which featured critical information on how GROWMARK is addressing supply chain disruptions. Panelists were: Chuck Spencer, Executive Director, Government Relations; Kelvin Covington, VP, Energy; Kreg Ruhl, VP, Crop Nutrients, and Jeff Bunting, VP, Crop Protection. Challenges identified, among other things, included: the rate of disruption often overwhelms the supply chain; international sourcing of supplies and the cost to revive a complex manufacturing system in the United States; and truck driver shortages at a critical level.

