NACAA Achievement Award

The NACAA Achievement Award is for an outstanding paid member with less than 10 years Extension service by March 15, of the award year. **The successful applicant agrees to attend the NACAA Annual Meeting & Professional Improvement Conference in order to receive their award**.

Please complete the following information in three pages or less. Email the completed application to Bruce J. Black at brucejb@illinois.edu no later than January 5, 2023.

Date Employed by Extension: 6/1/2013

Number of years of Extension employment as of March 15, (2022): 8

Name: Nathan Johanning

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Position: Educator, Commercial Agriculture Location Unit 22, Madison, Monroe St. Clair Counties

1. Program Delivery and Impact (30 points)
(Issue identification, program development, networking, impacts measured)

Nathan Johanning has championed education and outreach in many areas of agriculture while serving as an Extension educator over the last 8 years. Three main areas of focus have included pumpkins, cover crops and no-till crop production. Johanning has taken his personal on-farm experiences to help relate to cropping system issues at hand for farmers across Illinois and the Midwest.

Illinois leads the U.S. in pumpkin production acreage, however when Johanning started in 2013 as an educator, Extension outreach and research on this crop was fairly limited. He saw an opportunity to revive pumpkin outreach and began by bringing back an in-field, pumpkin specific, field day. He utilized an older Extension demonstration center in his unit at the time, the Ewing Demonstration Center, to host the first field day in late summer of 2014. This first field day was a success with the help of industry donations and sponsors, bringing in over 100 growers and industry representatives showcasing over 50 pumpkin varieties and pest management trials and presentations.

Since that first field day, Johanning has continued to build the program by hosting in-field research and field days regularly every other year in 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2022, reaching a total of over 500 participants directly through these 5 field days. Over time, he has expanded the reach of the research and trial results beyond the field day event having published two variety trial reports, presented over ten variety and weed management updates at grower meetings across the Midwest, recorded and posted four trial videos online, and answered hours of grower calls and emails from across the Midwest.

Johanning has created a network of growers that trust his research and experience. As a result of this outreach, growers have indicated making positive changes on their farm to increase cover crop use, better utilize an IPM program for fungicide and insecticide applications, utilize preemergence herbicides and cover crops to increase weed control, reduce labor needs and increase yields, and simply increase the number of varieties and pumpkin acreage on their farm.

Cover crops have been another issue area Johanning has addressed in his programming. Since he started in Extension, Johanning was mentored by a retired, Extension educator and IEAA life member, the late- Mike Plumer. He sought his advice and expertise to connect him with research, local farmers, and university colleagues from around the Midwest. Johanning became active in the Midwest Cover Crops Council (MCCC), first attending their annual conference in the winter of 2014. He used that knowledge plus networking with the local cover crop seed industry to put together several field trials and cover crop field days. These programs were well received, drawing over 50 people at each event, even on some very cold and wet early spring and late fall days. Johanning engaged not only his own research but working with other Extension staff and SIU researchers and graduate students to present and share their knowledge.

Johanning used this experience to seek out funding to help further cover crop use. In 2016, he secured industry support to research new clover cover crop species and varieties for the region. In 2019 he was the recipient of a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant for 2 years to research no-till and cover crop systems in tomatoes and peppers. Most recently, Johanning secured funding from the Illinois Soybean Association in the fall of 2022 to lead a project evaluating planting dates and seeding rates of cereal rye and clover cover crops used before and after soybeans across 5 sites in Illinois. Securing this funding, totaling over $150,000, not only allowed this research to be conducted, but also supported multiple videos, reports, and grower presentations all surrounding new practices and concepts, providing innovative farmers with the information they need to successfully implement these systems on their farms.

Johanning has also expanded his network and role in the MCCC. He has annually attended their business meetings and in 2016 was elected to the role of Illinois state representative for the MCCC. As state representative, he has taken an active role on the board of directors, giving the annual state report and serving on multiple committees including as a co-editor, writing and revising the 3rd edition of the Midwest Cover Crops Pocket Guide, leading revisions and additions to the cover crop selector tool for Illinois, and co-authoring Illinois “Cover Crop Recipe” Factsheets.

1. Effective use of Mass Media for Program Delivery or Marketing (20 points)

Johanning has engaged in programming not only in-person, but through media to market and educate. He has utilized traditional media to reach out including writing educational articles for the regional ag newspapers such as Illinois AgriNews and Illinois Farmer Today. From there, Johanning has also had opportunities to work nationally through interviews for Prairie Farmer and Successful Farming for featured cover crop articles as well as written articles on pumpkins for Vegetable Grower News. Johanning has recorded multiple TV and radio interviews on various topics, especially pumpkins with several media outlets across the state, including having regular local TV coverage at many of the pumpkin field day events in the past.

Beyond the traditional media, Johanning has embraced newer trends and technology for reaching mass media audiences. He has recorded multiple podcasts including many pumpkin and cover crop episodes for The Vegetable Beet, a regional grower podcast series organized by university researchers in the Great Lakes region, and most recently in the fall of 2022, Johanning was interviewed on cover crop selection and planting for Successful Farming’s national podcast series. Johanning has also been active in generating educational videos from research projects shared online through team YouTube channels. His goal with these in-field videos has been to share fundamental knowledge learned through his research that can be directly applied to the farm. The five most popular videos have covered pumpkin weed management and variety selection, no-till transplanter set up, and no-till vegetable production research, and collectively, these videos have reached over 25,000 views.

1. Professional Improvement (20 points)
(Promotions earned, credit or non-credit courses and in-service relevant to position)

Johanning continually strives to stay current and active in his area of expertise. In 2019, Johanning was promoted to a level II Educator. Professionally, Johanning is a member of the North Central Weed Science Society attending annual meetings, along with the IEAA. With peers, Johanning actively engages with the Great Lakes Vegetable Working Group and the Midwest Cover Crops Council, presenting and learning from other academic researchers and peers across the Midwest through regular attendance at meetings and conferences. He has taken on an active role in projects within these groups to not only share his work but stay on top of current research and issues.

Johanning stays grounded and continues to improve his abilities through active listening and working with individual farmers. This coupled with his active role in-field research and his own personal farm experiences provide him with real world insights. There is no better way to relate a topic to a farmer than through a person’s own direct experience in the field. Experience engages you with weather, pest, equipment and cropping challenges and by large is the best teacher. One of Johanning’s most beneficial assets to answering farmer calls and as an engaging, relatable presenter, is his in-field experience.

1. Participation in IEAA/NACAA activities. (30 points)
(District-State-National meetings attended, committees chaired, offices held, awards won. Be specific)

Johanning has been an IEAA member since the fall of 2013 shortly after he started with Extension. He has served as both Junior and Senior Director for the Southern District for IEAA. He served as the advisory member to the Illinois Wheat Association (IWA) for 2016-2017 and currently is on the NACAA Agricultural Issues Committee. His role on the IWA allowed him to make many valuable farmer connections and networks he still uses. In 2017, Johanning won the IEAA Action Award. Across his membership, Johanning has helped to organize district meetings, touring local farms, natural areas, and vineyards, and state meetings in his area and actively participated in membership and professional development meetings of the association.