

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 2, 2019



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Midwest Food Manufacturers Assemble in Wisconsin Dells

Convention Returns to Kalahari Convention Center, Leinenkugel Brewing Company President Dick Leinenkugel to Keynote

The Midwest Food Products Association ([MWFPA](http://mwfpa.org)) 115th Annual Convention and 92nd Annual Processing Crops Conference will take place at the Kalahari Convention Center in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin from December 3-5, 2019. It is expected to attract nearly 900 attendees and 130 exhibitors. MWFPA is a trade association representing the business interests of food processors and their vendors in Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

The association held its 2018 convention at the same location. "With the Kalahari's convention center having been newly-expanded, we are happy to once again make it our destination for the convention and processing crops conference," said MWFPA President Jason Culotta.

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A major expansion of convention was completed earlier this year, doubling the size of the center and creating several spacious new venues for large conventions and trade shows. "We knew that some of our large group clients, like the Midwest Food Products Association, were reaching capacity and had the opportunity to grow," said Tifani Jones, corporate director of sales, Kalahari Resorts and Conventions. "We invested in the convention center expansion with the goal to meet and exceed the needs and expectations of our groups with even more space, more amenities, and more second-to-none service. We'd like to say, 'welcome back' to attendees and we hope you enjoy the transformed convention center."

The MWFPA convention brings together leaders in the food processing industry to discuss trends, view new technologies, share expertise, and network with professionals in different companies and disciplines. It features a trade show exhibiting the newest equipment and technology in the food industry.

Convention participants will have an opportunity to attend 19 educational sessions that cover today's most pertinent industry topics presented by premier industry experts. Topic will include regulatory and legislative issues, food safety, hemp production as well as marijuana and CBD in the workplace, Blockchain, cyber security and more.

The event kicks off on Wednesday, December 4, with keynote speaker Keni Thomas, the former Army Ranger whose Army unit's mission in Mogadishu, Somalia was the basis for the highly successful movie "Blackhawk Down". Thomas and his fellow Rangers distinguished themselves there in an 18-hour firefight.

Wednesday's luncheon keynote will feature Randall D. Jones who is the Associate Administrator/Chief Operating Officer of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

At its Thursday, December 5 breakfast the convention will hear an address by Leinenkugel Brewing Company President and Chief Beer Merchant, Dick Leinenkugel. He will describe how he gained and applied leadership lessons from his family, the Marines and in business to help guide the Jacob Leinenkugel Brewing Company into a craft brewing leader with the number one summer seasonal craft beer in the nation.

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Prior to Leinenkugel's appearance, MWFPA will name the winners of its annual Safety Awards program. Each year MWFPA member plants compete for annual safety awards by monitoring safety protocols based on data each plant submits to the United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Awards are presented to those plants exhibiting outstanding records for employee safety.

As part of its convention activities, MWFPA will again host a silent auction to raise money for its scholarship fund as part of the "Chairman's Reception" Wednesday evening. "The MWFPA Scholarship program demonstrates the association's continued commitment to foster educational opportunities for the children of its members," said Culotta. "In 2019 we were able to award \$26,000 in scholarships to students wishing to pursue an education beyond high school, including vocational and technical colleges, two-and four-year colleges and private trade schools. Applicants may attend these schools with any major of study."

The convention also returns one of its more popular events, a forklift rodeo - but with a new twist. MWFPA will host ***the world's first virtual reality forklift rodeo***. Contestants will sit in the forklift "cockpit" while wearing a VR (virtual reality) headset. This will place them into a highly realistic, virtual reality, 3-D warehousing scenario requiring them to complete a variety of tasks, while navigating an obstacle course and virtual warehouse.

According to Culotta, "Forklift rodeos celebrate operator excellence, showcasing the importance of operator skills, while raising awareness of forklift safety. The virtual reality rodeo will enable us to do this in a fun and unique way."

Spectators will be able to follow the progress of their favorite drivers on a large projection screen. Trophies, cash prizes and the coveted rodeo belt buckle await the top finishers.

The rodeo will take place from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Wednesday, December 4.

The convention concludes on Thursday with keynote speaker and comedian, Dan Diebert.

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Processing Crops Conference

MWFPA's Processing Crops Conference kicks off on Tuesday, December 3, prior to the convention's opening and runs through Wednesday, December 4. It offers an in-depth look at the raw products side of the food manufacturing industry.

Agricultural researchers from the universities of Minnesota and Wisconsin will join food manufacturers and seed-industry representatives to presenting their findings on the latest crop-growing, soil and water quality challenges in the Midwest.

Among the highlights of this year's program will be presentations on consumer trends in vegetable consumption, the agricultural economic outlook and its implications for processing vegetables, complying with pollinator protection label language and groundwater quantity.

Additional information and registration for the convention can be accessed via the convention website at <https://mwfpa.org/convention-2019/>.

ABOUT MWFPA

The Midwest Food Products Association represents the business interests of the region's dynamic food products industry. The association lobbies on legislative and regulatory matters; promotes safe food processing practices; investigates new technologies; funds industry research; and plans industry events. It represents over 100 processing facilities in Wisconsin, Illinois and Minnesota.