



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI - 2023

MAC EHRHARDT

CLASS 1980

Born in 1962 to George and Anne Ehrhardt, Mac grew up in Albert Lea watching his father work hard at growing the family business (Albert Lea Seed House) and watching his mother pour her energy into building the Albert Lea Community Theater. Mac worked weekends and summers at the family business but upon graduating from Albert Lea High School in 1980 had no expectation of making a career in the seed business.

After high school he attended College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine for two years before transferring to Columbia University, NY and graduating with a B.A. in English. He worked for the Governor of New York for two years before returning to school at the University of California, Davis to study organic and sustainable agriculture at one of the first Organic Agriculture programs in the U.S. During this time Mac and his wife Sophie had internships at two organic farms, learning how farmers were producing high-value crops without using pesticides or synthetic inputs.

In 1991 Mac returned to Albert Lea Seed House and began working for his father alongside his brother Tom. Albert Lea Seed was then in the business of contracting, cleaning, and selling diverse types of seed to farmers in southern Minnesota and northern Iowa. These included not just corn and soybean seed, but also oats, wheat, barley, rye, alfalfa, red clover, and dozens of other farm seeds that are used as cover crops and forages. This diversity of farm seed was a natural fit for organic farmers, who typically use longer and more diverse rotations than non-organic farmers.

Mac's brother Tom applied for the first Organic Certification for Albert Lea Seed, in 1996. Albert Lea Seed continued to offer a diverse selection of farm seed with a focus on certified organic seed. With the hard work of a growing number of employees and the help of people throughout the seed industry, Albert Lea Seed has become one of the largest providers of certified organic seed in the United States. In 2022 they purchased a competitor, Blue River Organic Seed, and integrated it into their company. They are now the largest provider of certified organic seed corn, soybean seed, and alfalfa seed in the United States, with customers in 48 states and offices and warehouses in Ames, Iowa as well as Albert Lea. In 2023 they formed a new company, Encore Genetics, which has a corn breeding program focused on the needs of organic farmers.

Mac served on the boards of the Minnesota Seed Producers and Processor's Association, Freeborn County Corn and Soybean Growers, the Land Stewardship Project, and was a founding board member of NorthStar Genetics. He has also served as the Organic Chair of the American Seed Trade Association, and currently serves on the Board of High Mowing Seed. He also devoted hundreds of hours to the development of youth soccer in Albert Lea by coaching and serving on the A.L. Youth Soccer Association.

Mac and his wife, Sophie split their time between Albert Lea, MN and Montpelier, VT. They have two adult children: Izzy and Sam.