

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Minnesota Gets America's First A1-rated Horticultural Expo

Chris Beytes

Minnesota is getting the first major, large-scale global horticultural exposition in America approved by the International Association of Horticultural Producers (AIPH). The six-month-long Expo 2031 Minnesota is planned for May 1 to October 15, 2031, in Dakota County (home of Minneapolis-St. Paul). By the time the opening ribbon is cut, it will have been a 10-year effort.

"Think of an A1 Expo as the 'World Cup of horticulture,'" said Rachel Wakefield of AIPH. "A rare, global event lasting up to six months where countries create spectacular gardens and exhibits."

No word on how many countries will participate; at least 10 are required to meet A1 standards. The last A1 event, Expo 2023 Doha Qatar, attracted 72 exhibiting countries.

"Provisionally" approved by AIPH and recognized by the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE), the organizers will continue working towards federal recognition, finalizing site and transportation plans, and expanding partnerships across the horticultural, agricultural and technology sectors.

This is a big deal that's been in the planning stages since at least 2021. That explains why Wendy Meadley, CEO of Expo 2031 Minnesota, said, "This is more than a milestone; it is a celebration. What began as an application has become a movement, uniting leaders and communities across the United States and the world. With our federal partners, investors and horticultural community, we are ready to build a legacy event that connects cultures through the power of plants."

Speaking of plants, two of Minnesota's biggest horticulture companies have been involved: Bailey Nursery and Bachman's. Bailey's Ryan McEnaney is Board Chair; Susan Bachman West is Horticulture Advocate and Presenter.

Under the theme "Human/Nature: Where Humanity and Horticulture Meet," Expo 2031 will be held on a 165-acre site near the Mississippi River. The master plan introduces five ecological zones—tropical, arid, temperate, continental and North Star—designed to represent growing conditions from across the world, giving visitors the chance to encounter plants they wouldn't normally see in Minnesota. The gardens and

display will incorporate all USDA agricultural zones, ensuring that the country's wide-ranging climates and crops are represented. While horticulture remains central, the Expo will connect plants to broader themes of agriculture, food production and supply, energy, water treatment, health and wellbeing, and future technology.

Some 4 million visitors are expected over the six-month run, with more than \$2 billion in regional economic impact, but the site is being designed to leave a lasting legacy of permanent green spaces and educational facilities.

AIPH-approved A1 exhibitions have been held in the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Turkey, Japan, China and Thailand.

The last big Expo in the U.S. (which was not AIPH-sanctioned) was the Louisiana World Exposition in New Orleans in 1984. An international floral and garden exhibition took place in Columbus, Ohio, in 1992 called AmeriFlora (commemorating the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas).

To learn more about Expo 2031 Minnesota and to keep up with developments, visit expo2031.org. **GT**