

## Booming in Ag

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2020 HORIZON AWARD

# BOOMING IN AG



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Dr. Chris Boomsma serves as the director of education at the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America—or the “Tri-Societies.”

“In my current role, I lead a team tasked with taking the work performed by agronomy, crop, and soil scientists and effectively and innovatively delivering it to in-field practitioners and leaders so they can make timely, informed

decisions and take science-based actions,” says Boomsma.

He did not grow up on a farm—in fact, he grew up in a Chicago suburb. So how does a Chicago suburbanite end

up pursuing a career in agriculture? God had a plan.

When looking at what to do after high school, Boomsma considered a variety of paths, including joining the military

or pursuing a degree in engineering or meteorology. However, growing up, he'd heard farming stories from his grandparents and interacted with farmers from church. These small influences, and then a visit with Dordt's agriculture department, sealed the deal.

"If Dordt's agriculture program didn't exist, I am certain I would have never pursued an education in agriculture. When I visited Dordt, explored its agriculture and other science programs, experienced its campus life, and met its students, my decision was cemented, and I never looked back."

Little did Boomsma know just how much his experience at Dordt would shape his future.

"During my time at Dordt, I became fairly certain that I wanted to perform basic and applied research in the plant sciences in industry or academia. I double-checked my interest by taking research internships in industry and serving as a teaching assistant and tutor at Dordt. By the time I entered my senior year at Dordt, I was fully committed to attaining a Ph.D. since my career aspirations required it," he says. "It became an even easier decision when I was offered a fellowship for my Ph.D. studies."

While at Dordt, Boomsma also had the opportunity to do co-curricular activities such as play soccer and participate in Ag Club.

"From soccer matches to laboratory sessions to late-night debates and discussions, I benefited greatly from the people around me," he says.

He appreciated being surrounded

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– Dr. Chris Boomsma, director of education

by others who pushed him both academically, in his faith, and all areas of life.

"Having worked with various universities, I have learned that an education from Dordt is unique. Sure, my time at Dordt

gave me the skills and knowledge I needed for graduate school and beyond, but it did more than that. It provided a strong education. It gave me perspective. It helped me become a better communicator. It encouraged my philosophical and theological growth. It strengthened my faith. It prepared me to be an adult, a spouse, a parent, a teacher, a mentor, a scientist, and a leader. That is not an education you can get at every academic institution."

This preparation has led to valuable opportunities for

Boomsma as he has gained experience and connections in the agriculture industry.

"After graduating from Dordt, God opened a number of interesting doors that led to rooms full of opportunity."

He began his career with a research position at Argonne National Laboratory in Lemont, Illinois. Then, he started a Ph.D. program at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. After Boomsma received his Ph.D. in Agronomy and Plant Physiology, he dove into a career

heavy in research, serving at Dow AgroSciences, who named him "Future Giant of the Industry," and then back to Purdue University, before landing in his current position with the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America.

"There is a lot of great work done in the sciences that never gets effectively put into practice. It is the role of my team to make sure that doesn't happen in the agronomic, crop, and soil sciences. My team focuses on actionable education. The science we summarize, translate, and disseminate covers everything from plant gene editing to hemp production to greenhouse gas emissions to food system sustainability and resource conservation."

"Agriculture, in my opinion, is a field of work that can deeply challenge and grow a person's faith," he says. "I routinely see that with farmers, who operate their businesses among many unknowns, chief among them being the weather. Despite remarkable scientific advances, cutting-edge technologies, and government support, farming in North America remains a difficult, complex, and often underappreciated profession. The challenges and perils of farming are all the more evident in developing nations reliant on subsistence agriculture."

There have been many opportunities for Boomsma to experience the challenges and successes of agriculture throughout his career—from lecturing in Africa,

## HORIZON AWARD

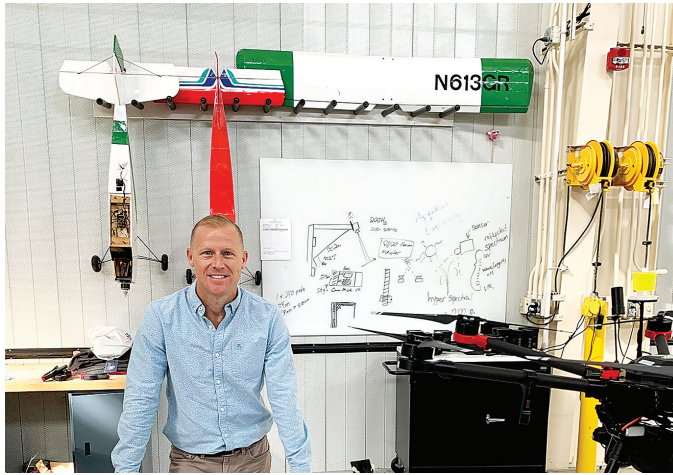
Chris Boomsma's work exemplifies what Dordt's Horizon Award recognizes—young alumni who are emerging as leaders and innovators, working effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in every area of their lives, including their work. Dordt seeks to provide insight and develop talents that will sustain lifelong responsible service in God's kingdom.

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Boomsma says Dordt helped him develop academic skills for graduate school and also pushed him toward philosophical and theological growth.

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**"Dordt prepared me to move forward with conviction, purpose, and faith, and that has had a profound impact on my life," says Boomsma.**

to performing research in biotechnology and precision agriculture, to coordinating start-ups with venture capitalists. Over time, he has found a deeper appreciation for the verse "give us this day our daily bread."

"Growing season after growing season, a farmer employs the art and science of agriculture and mixes it with a heavy dose of faith," he says. "Overall, I find it very gratifying to perform research and educate in the areas of food security, environmental conservation and improvement, and farm and rural sustainability. It is a profession that routinely allows me to use my passions and talents in the service of God and his redemptive work."

Others have also recognized how Boomsma has been equipped for Christ-centered renewal in the world of agriculture.

One of his nominators for the Horizon Award shared, "Chris is a master teacher, but one whose products are educational resources that deliver economic, agronomic, environmental, and social sustainability insights to North American production systems. Despite his youth, leadership aptitude is also evident in serving on director boards like the American Society of Agronomy and the American Seed Trade Association."

Boomsma's skills go beyond scientific knowledge. A nominator wrote that Boomsma has "superb analytical and exceptional writing skills" in addition to recognizable leadership qualities.

These skills have allowed Boomsma to work with many in the industry, such as agronomists and conservationists, with non-profits and government, and more.

"For a kid from a suburb on the south side of Chicago, it has been quite a journey thus far. Now, as I look back on it, I see how God orchestrated it all, using my skills and knowledge to serve in his world in ways I never anticipated or thought possible," says Boomsma.

BETHANY VAN VOORST

## DOING REAL WORK FOR REAL PEOPLE WITH REAL NEEDS

People who step up and reach out: that's who Dordt alumni and families are. There are countless stories of these people making a difference in their corner of Defender Nation.



Willa, the daughter of alumni Chris ('09) and Jessica (Veenstra, '09) Vogel in Minneapolis, is a kindergartner on a mission to raise money for her school. And this isn't just any fundraiser. She's created a flower stand that also offers root beer floats and is selling homemade hot cocoa to friends and family. Her goal? To help families who need tuition assistance be able to attend her school.

Recent graduate Ebby Prewitt ('20) partnered with students at her high school alma mater, Des Moines Christian School, to send letters to residents and healthcare workers in nursing homes during the early days of the pandemic. Ebby made an impact by blessing others through a note from someone that cares during a time when these residents have limited contact with family and friends outside their home.

Chad Meekhof, who is currently enrolled in Dordt's sport leadership program, is a history and outdoor education teacher at Rehoboth Christian High School in New Mexico. Like many teachers, he thought creatively about how to prepare for a unique year of learning. He built an outdoor teaching platform, lecture podium, chalkboard, and firepit so learning could happen outside for his students. Chad's outdoor education curriculum is designed so students gain a deeper appreciation for God's creation.

We often hear that community is what makes Dordt so special, and that's so much broader than what happens on campus for two or four years. It's how you are taking community into new spaces. You're expanding the community reach by drawing others in as you live out community in tangible, serviceable ways. Dordt alumni, students, and families are doing real work for real people with real needs.

*Alicia J. Bowar*

ALICIA BOWAR ('05), ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF ALUMNI AND PARENT RELATIONS



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**Willa Vogel's goal was to raise \$250 for her school. So far, she has raised \$420.**