



National Association for Plant Breeding PRIVATE SECTOR PLANT BREEDING IMPACT AWARD 2026

LAURA GRAPES Bayer Creve Coeur MO

The NAPB Private Sector Plant Breeding Impact Award recognizes an individual whose accomplishments as a scientist in the private sector have had extraordinary impact in the field of plant breeding in areas such as germplasm development, cultivar release, technological innovation and leadership.

The 2026 recipient of the Private Sector Plant Breeding Impact Award is Dr. Laura Grapes, Bayer. Grapes currently serves as Agronomy Lead for Bayer's North America, Australia and New Zealand Crop Science business.

With over two decades of experience spanning quantitative genetics, plant breeding, product development and agronomy, Grapes is helping shape a future-ready agronomy organization that supports Bayer's portfolio, customer experience and digitally enabled go-to-market approaches.

Grapes has led teams responsible for seed product development pipelines across multiple row crops and vegetables in North America, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. These teams drove pre-commercial seed and trait pipelines through technical and operational transformations to increase genetic gain, optimize product placement and strengthen multi-brand commercial portfolios by developing and implementing new technologies bridging phenomics, genomics, agronomy and data science.

As an example of her impact, a colleague states: *"Laura took on the very challenging role of leading Bayer's vegetable R&D in Europe, Middle East, Africa and was immediately presented with a challenge of epic proportion to tomato growers. At that time, Tomato Brown Rugose Fruit Virus was threatening to decimate the global tomato industry. Laura quickly took the lead to help develop and implement a novel multigene-resistance strategy involving quickly introducing multiple resistance genes into elite inbreds by marker-assisted backcrossing, with testing for effectiveness in a specialized European quarantine facility she helped establish. Her leadership was critical in accelerating the three-year conversion of the entire tomato pipeline to multi-gene resistance, and launching the first high-quality, resistant hybrids."*

Grapes is an advocate for breeding through leadership in talent development, inclusion and professional networks. While her current role is broader than plant breeding alone, Grapes builds on that foundation, leading integrated agronomy capabilities to connect product value, field insights and commercial execution — extending breeding innovation to practical outcomes for farmers today and tomorrow.



Grapes actively advocates for the future of breeding through leadership in talent development, inclusive approaches and professional networks. Currently, while her role is broader than plant breeding alone, Grapes continues to build on that foundation by leading integrated agronomy capabilities that connect product value, field insights and commercial execution — extending the impact of breeding innovation into practical outcomes for farmers today and tomorrow.

As summarized by a colleague: “Laura Grapes represents the best of what modern plant breeding can deliver: scientific excellence that leads to great impact for farmers. Her work has strengthened breeding systems globally, accelerated delivery of innovative products, and helped address pressing challenges facing agriculture today.”

Grapes received a B.S. in Animal Science (Agricultural Economics minor) at Virginia Tech and a PhD in Genetics, Statistics minor at Iowa State University, Ames, IA, where she was also a USDA National Needs Fellow in Animal Biotechnology & Quantitative Genetics.



Dr. Laura Grapes, Bayer, the 2026 recipient of the National Association for Plant Breeding Private Sector Plant Breeding Impact Award.



Dr. Laura Grapes, Bayer, the 2026 recipient of the National Association for Plant Breeding Private Sector Plant Breeding Impact Award in her research greenhouse.



Dr. Laura Grapes, Bayer, the 2026 recipient of the National Association for Plant Breeding Private Sector Plant Breeding Impact Award in corn research plots , Kenya Highlands, Oct 2014.



Dr. Laura Grapes, Bayer, the 2026 recipient of the National Association for Plant Breeding Private Sector Plant Breeding Impact Award at the opening ceremony of the Digital Phenotyping facility in Spain.