

Five receive governor's awards for excellence in agriculture

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – Five Idahoans received governor's awards for their contributions to the state's agricultural industry Feb. 22 during the Larry Branen Idaho Ag Summit.

Governor's Excellence in Agriculture awards are presented during the annual event to people who have made outstanding contributions to Idaho's farm and ranch industry.

"Every one of these people is a fabulous, fabulous, fabulous ambassador for those of us in agriculture," Idaho State Department of Agriculture Director Celia Gould said about this year's award recipients.

Lifetime Achievement

Bob Naerebout, former executive director of the Idaho Dairymen's Association, received a lifetime achievement award. Dairy is the state's top agricultural commodity in terms of farm-gate revenue.

"Bob Naerebout has spent his entire career advocating for the dairy industry," his award bio states.

While serving as IDA director, it adds, "Bob represented dairy farmer interests in public policy and regulatory discussions, navigated through challenging legal situations and created an innovative agricultural association, which earned him renowned credibility locally, regionally and nationally. Bob has worked on and successfully passed countless pieces of legislation during his time with IDA."

"Bob is a well-respected member of communities throughout Idaho as they related to agriculture and the environment," the award bio states.

Technical Innovation

Gary Fornshell, who has been involved in aquaculture education his entire professional career, received an award for technical innovation. He has served as a University of Idaho aquaculture Extension specialist in Twin Falls for the past 28 years.

According to his award bio, Fornshell has "represented the aquaculture industry as a credible voice before ... Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and media and consumers."

“He has digested sometimes difficult research results into language producers and processors could understand and apply,” his award bio adds. “Gary has been a vocal advocate for Idaho aquaculture not only locally, but regionally and nationally as well ... Gary’s leadership, expertise and eagerness to take on and complete projects has had a huge impact on aquaculture throughout the nation.”

Marketing Innovation

Tom Iverson, who farms in Bonners Ferry, received an award for marketing innovation. He and his son, Ty, run T&T Farms, which grows wheat, barley, canola and hay.

“In his years farming, Tom has nearly doubled the size of the family farm and expanded the operation to include more diverse crops and custom farming,” his award bio states.

It adds that Iverson was one of the first farmers in the area to adopt conservation practices on the farm.

While serving as director for the former Idaho Wheat Growers Association (now the Idaho Grain Producers Association), he also recognized the need to create an advocacy group for barley – the Idaho Barley Commission – to support this major cereal crop in Idaho. He was also instrumental in the establishment of the National Barley Growers Association.

“Tom has been instrumental in the development of the grain industry in Idaho,” his award bio states.

Environmental Stewardship

Genesee farmer Russ Zenner, who has farmed in the Palouse region of Idaho for more than 40 years, received an award for environmental stewardship.

“Russ has spent his entire farming career trying to improve the farming methods used on the Palouse,” his award bio states.

According to the bio, the rolling hills of the Palouse have been seriously degraded and eroded from years of intensive tillage, short rotations and poor management of residues.

“A tireless advocate for the environmental benefits of seeding directly into standing stubble and minimal soil disturbance, Russ has influenced many farmers in the region,” his award bio states. “Russ also pioneered diversity in rotations, extending typical two-year wheat-pea rotations to include spring cereals, pulses and oilseeds.”

Education and Advocacy

Mark and Wendy Pratt, who operate a cow-calf operation near Blackfoot, received an award for education and advocacy.

Mark has served as the agricultural education teacher at Firth High School and then as a farm business instructor at Idaho State University. In addition to feeding the cattle during the winter and calving season, Wendy also assisted with irrigating, cutting and hauling hay, sorting cattle and moving cattle.

Even though the ranch keeps them busy, both are actively involved in various organizations, their award bio states.

“Mark and Wendy, both fourth-generation Idahoans, recognize the importance of educating the general public about agriculture and take every opportunity to do so,” the bio states.

Pat Takasugi Leadership Award

During the summit, Blackfoot beekeeper Jay Miller was presented with the Pat Takasugi Leadership Award, which is named after the late director of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture and given to someone who has shown strong leadership for Idaho agriculture.

Miller has served as president and commissioner of the Idaho Honey Industry Association and currently serves as vice president of the American Beekeeping Federation.

Tell Agriculture’s Story

The couple hundred people who attended the 2022 Idaho Ag Summit, which is presented by the Leadership Idaho Agriculture Foundation, were encouraged by a keynote speaker to tell the stories of the many creative and innovative things happening on the farm and ranch.

As farmers, ranchers and ag-related businesses, “You are the keeper of the (stories),” said Jenny Mesirow, senior vice president of government affairs for the Farm Credit Council, the national trade association that represents Farm Credit institutions at the national level. “Start telling them. If we don’t tell our story as American agriculture ... then we will get lost in the conversation.”

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