

Six inducted into E. Idaho Ag Hall of Fame

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

FORT HALL – Six stalwarts of Idaho agriculture were inducted into the Eastern Idaho Agriculture Hall of Fame March 21 during a banquet in Fort Hall.

This year's inductees are Rick Phillips of Pocatello, Scott Brown of Soda Springs, Richard Larsen of Dubois, Marc Beitia of American Falls and Mark and Stephanie Mickelsen of Idaho Falls.

The EIAHF recognizes people who have made significant contributions to the industry over the years.

During the ceremony, Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke, a rancher from Oakley, encouraged farmers and ranchers to continue to speak up on behalf of the industry and remain engaged on issues important to agriculture.

"Agriculture only works because we work hard, we adapt to challenges and we lead by example," he said.

Bedke pointed out that 25 percent of the U.S. population were farmers in 1939, but that number is less than 2 percent today.

That means, he said, if you took a trip to Disneyland in 1939, one of every four cars you waved at was a fellow farmer.

"Today, you would have to pass 50 cars before you could wave at a fellow farmer," Bedke said. "It's paramount that we stay vocal and we stay involved...."

The EIAHF was formed in 1972 to honor men and women who have made extraordinary contributions to agriculture and Eastern Idaho.

About this year's inductees:

Mark and Stephanie Mickelsen

The Mickelsens produce potatoes, seed potatoes, canola and wheat on their Idaho Falls farm. According to their hall of fame bio, their commitment to excellence has driven them to explore and acquire land with optimal soil for potato farming, taking them to locations such as Wapello, Arco and Ashton.

According to the bio, the Mickelsens' farm has been an industry leader in the use of compost to improve soil health and they are also constantly working to improve their irrigation systems to help with energy and water savings; they have been able to reduce water use by 30 percent in some cases.

"Farmers neighboring Mark and Stephanie speak highly of their work ethic, their honesty and their ability to quickly and efficiently get crops planted and harvested," their hall of fame bio states.

"Mark and Stephanie have dedicated their lives to improving farming practices, while also advocating the advancement of agriculture in Idaho and across the nation," the bio states.

Mark has served as president of Bonneville County Farm Bureau and on the American Farm Bureau Federation water committee and is currently president of the Butte Market Canal Co. Stephanie is serving her second term in the Idaho Legislature and has served on the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation board of directors.

"They are notable examples to the agriculture community of Eastern Idaho and are truly deserving of this induction into the Hall of Fame," the bio states.

Scott Brown

Brown, a fourth-generation farmer, farms about 11,500 acres in Caribou County. The dryland operation, which is at an average elevation of 6,000 feet, grows barley, wheat and occasionally mustard.

The mission statement for his farm says "we will strive to make the opportunity to farm available to further generations and ... if we take care of the land and the farming operation, it will take care of us."

According to his hall of fame bio, Brown has an extensive record of industry leadership and advocacy experience representing the grain industry on local, state, national and international levels.

In addition to serving on the Idaho Barley Commission and Idaho Grain Producers Association, Brown has served on the National Barley Association, National Association of Wheat Growers, and was involved with the U.S. Grains Council.

"Besides being a well-respected farmer, Scott has an extensive track record in industry advocacy, representing the interests of Idaho farmers on local, state and national levels," his hall of fame bio states.

Richard J. Larsen

What began as a partnership with his brother, Blaine, in the hay industry, has evolved for Larsen into an international hay, potato and grain business. He currently farms over 5,000 acres, including organic and conventional products.

He has developed hay markets both nationally and internationally, reaching clients as far away as Asia.

According to his hall of fame bio, when presented with the challenge of transporting hay from Idaho to clients thousands of miles away, Larsen “instinctively thought of ways to put as much hay in a shipping container as physically possible.”

This led he and his brother to be among the first in the nation to develop and implement a hay pressing machine.

“Richard has always been progressive in his farming practices, which have helped him be a grower of organic and natural crops such as potatoes, alfalfa and barley,” his hall of fame bio states.

Marc Beitia

Beitia has been involved with agriculture throughout his life. He and his father started Beitia’s Suffolk Sheep in 1969 when the family moved to Pocatello from their ranch in Nevada.

He attended University of Idaho where, according to his hall of fame bio, he worked on every farm within the university’s campus. He was also an FFA and 4-H county fair judge throughout Idaho and eastern Oregon and Washington for nearly 20 years.

He began his teaching career in 1984 as an agricultural educator at Raft River High School in Malta. He later started the ag education program at American Falls High School, where his FFA programs have been recognized three times as a National Model of Excellence by the National FFA Association.

According to his bio, the AFHS FFA program is the only chapter west of the Mississippi to be recognized three times as a National Model of Excellence.

The American Falls FFA chapter has grown from an average of 120 members to an average of 320 members, which is 70 percent of the school’s student body. Beitia has taught more than 5,300 students during his 41-year teaching career.

Rick G. Phillips

From his early days on the family farm in Dayton, Phillips has spent his career working with, or promoting, agriculture in Idaho.

Phillips grew up on the family dairy farm in Dayton and later worked in ag finance. He later worked at the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, where he organized the Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom initiative.

He also helped develop the ag department's first international trade mission to Taiwan and he hand-carried 40 pounds of Idaho onions to introduce at Asia's largest food show in Tokyo.

Recently retired from the J.R. Simplot Co., where he worked since 1990, Phillips has helped promote multifaceted agriculture programs in food production, ranching, nutrients and technology in Eastern Idaho and internationally.

While at Simplot, he partnered with Farm Bureau to establish the Southeast Idaho Farmers Market, which is now the Portneuf Valley Farmers Market.

Ed Duren Memorial Award

Also honored with the Edward P. Duren Memorial Young Producer Award during this year's EIAHF event were Blake Skidmore of Terreton, Trey Orme of Ashton and Abby Rowe of American Falls.

The Edward P. Duren Memorial Young Producer Award recognizes innovative agriculture producers under the age of 40.

This award "is tip of the hat to those young producers in Eastern Idaho who we see are doing amazing things," said EIAHF board member Shane Bolgen. "We can't forget that all seasoned farmers and ranchers started out as young ranchers and farmers."

About this year's Ed Duren award recipients:

Trey Orme

Orme grew up the Orme family farm east of Ashton side by side with his dad raising wheat, barley, alfalfa and beef cattle.

He purchased his first farm ground, 320 acres, in 2015, where he continues to raise wheat and barley.

Abby Rowe

As a fifth-generation Idaho potato farmer, Rowe's farming roots run deep. She grew up on the original homestead of her ancestors that dates back to the Carey Act of 1908.

After graduation from university, she was able to bring her agronomy and management skills home to the family farm where she manages 800 acres of potatoes.

Blake Skidmore

Skidmore grew up helping on the family farm in all aspects of swathing, raking, baling and combining wheat.

He has also been involved in digging potatoes and running the cellar crew and was a key figure in the turning of 200 acres of flood-irrigated ground into a ditch feed linear.

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