

Master Farmer Award Seeks Missouri's Best

New annual program has July 1 entry deadline

ST. LOUIS, MO.

Farmers work every day for better, more efficient methods of raising crops and livestock. A new Missouri Master Farmer Award program will recognize the top-notch producers in the state. Four individuals will earn \$1,000 cash prizes and industry-wide recognition each year, starting in 2008.

Gov. Matt Blunt officially announced the launch of the new Missouri Master Farmer Award program today at the Missouri Governor's Conference on Agriculture. "Today's announcement in St. Louis will be a great opportunity for Missouri farmers to be recognized for their hard work and commitment to Missouri's No. 1 industry," said Katie Smith, director of the Missouri Department of Agriculture. "Our state's farmers are true innovators when it comes to new ideas and technologies. They set precedence for farmers and agriculture industry leaders all over the world with the success of their farming operations. These Master Farmers will be able to share their success stories and challenges with generations to come."

Coordinators of the award program are Missouri Ruralist magazine and University of Missouri Extension, with support from the Missouri Department of Agriculture. Gold sponsor, FCS Financial, will help fund the awards and educational program.

"FCS Financial is proud to be the gold sponsor for Missouri's Master Farmer Program," said Daryl Oldvader, CEO of FCS Financial, Jefferson City. "This program offers Missouri another valuable opportunity to transfer the intellectual wealth of our top farmers to the next generation."

The Master Farmer Award program is created for all Missourians involved in agriculture – crop farmers, livestock producers, vegetable and fruit growers, tree farmers and vineyard owners.

Judging committees will be looking for the best managers with innovative ideas, sound business skills, financial recordkeeping, soil and water conservation practices, agricultural leadership and community service.

"This program will recognize farmers who have not only been successful in farming but who are also assets to their communities and to agriculture," said Ron Plain, MU Extension economist. "This is not meant to be a lifetime achievement award but to recognize currently active farmers."

An awards banquet for the first winners is planned for the 2009 Missouri Governor's Conference on Agriculture. Also planned is an educational roundtable discussion with representatives from Agricultural Leadership of Tomorrow (ALOT), young farmer groups, FFA and MU Extension 4-H.

"The long-range goal is to build a Master Farmer-young farmer mentoring program," said Jerilyn Johnson, editor, Missouri Ruralist. "It's important to build connections and create new opportunities to keep the next generation engaged in agriculture."

First established in 1925, the Master Farmer Award is the nation's longest running agriculture award program. States with award programs include Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, West Virginia, and now Missouri.

The nomination deadline is July 1. For information and a nomination form, visit the Web site www.missouriruralist.com and click on "Master Farmer." Web links and nomination forms also are available at MU Extension centers and FCS Financial offices throughout the state, and the Missouri Department of Agriculture in Jefferson City. Δ