

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Annual awards reflect on past year

ONE thing I look forward to each December is our *Missouri Ruralist* end-of-the-year awards. It's time to reflect on the positive and not-so-positive things happening in Missouri agriculture during the past year. Here are the top news events, people and ideas that shaped our industry in 2007.

Ag Story of the Year: Missouri's wild weather. Mother Nature dealt the state a four-hit blow: January ice storm, Easter freeze, May floods and lingering drought. The freeze was the most widespread and devastating to Missouri's agriculture industry. It went down as the costliest natural disaster on record for the state; more than \$400 million in grain, hay, fruit, vegetable and wine crops were lost.

High grain prices and Missouri farmers' planting of 3.5 million acres of corn — the most since 1960 — also made the headlines in 2007. Despite all the weather challenges, growers across the state harvested a bumper crop of 473 million bushels.

The debate and final passage of the 2007 Farm Bill turned out to be a con-

tinuing saga — stay tuned for a progress report in 2008.

Ag Person of the Year: It's easy to get caught up in the number crunching, business trends and critical issues in Missouri's agriculture industry. Then special individuals come along and we're reminded it's human subjects who bring stories to life.

We've never had a better lineup of deserving candidates for our "Ag Person of the Year." Zach Kinne, new national FFA president from Eagleville, gets our nod. His strong leadership skills and genuine passion for agriculture will serve Missouri and our nation well. Kinne is only the second national FFA president from the Show-Me State. The first was Leslie Fry of Louisiana in 1930-31. Another strong Missouri leader, Jerry Litton of Chillicothe, served as national FFA secretary in 1956-57. We look forward to great things from Zach.

Best Place to Raise Innovators: Purdy, in southwest Missouri, is home to Kip Cullers and Charles Fletcher.

Cullers' encore world-record-setting soybean yield of 154 bushels per acre

amazed us all again this year.

Fletcher converted his family dairy farm from conventional feeding to a pasture-based dairy in 1997 after attending a grazing school. Reduced feed costs improved the farm bottom line, and he has been able to double the size of the dairy. Fletcher was recognized as the 2007 Missouri Forage and Grassland Council's Grasslander of the Year. He also earned national recognition in the dairy industry, being named Innovative Dairy Farmer of the Year.

Spirit of Conservation Award: When it comes to protecting natural resources and raising quality ag products, two Missourians stand out this year. Kenny Brinker of Brinker Farms Inc., Auxvasse, earned the National Pork Industry Environmental Stewardship Award. Leon and Helen Kresiler of Oak Knoll Ranch, Salem, were regional winners in the National Cattlemen's Beef Association Environmental Stewardship Award Program.

Best Nickname Award: Word in the local co-op was members of the MU Tigers football team's offensive line have

dubbed themselves the "Missouri Beef Council." Local players in the starting lineup — Colin Brown of Braymer, and Tyler Luellen and Ryan Madison of Bethany — have an average weight of 310 pounds. Quarterback Chase Daniel, MU fans and beef producers all appreciate their "beefed up" efforts.



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