

Master Farmer award still rooted in tradition

Prairie
FARMER



GROWMARK

By JOSH FLINT

THIS month, five exceptional Illinois farmers were named *Prairie Farmer* Master Farmers. Doug and Tom Block of Pearl City; Randy Lambdin of Wolf Lake; Rick Nelson of Paxton; and Kent Schleich of Fairview are recipients of the 2009 Master Farmer Award.

Former *Prairie Farmer* editor Clifford Gregory started the program in 1925 as a way to recognize the finest farmers in both Illinois and Indiana. That first year, 23 were recognized. From the beginning, the award was unique in that a significant portion of the judges' scoring hinged on the farmers' community involvement. Today, the tradition remains.

The Master Farmer award was discontinued in the early 1930s due to economic hardship. Editors explained: "At that time, farmers were gripped with the despair of the Depression years. Citation for excellence would have seemed ironic when the farmer's principle concern was survival."

In 1968, the award was reinvigorated. Ten Illinois farmers were named Master Farmers. Average farm size that year was 675 acres. Of the 10 winners, only two were straight cash-grain operators. The top corn yield was 137 bushels. An impressive soybean yield was 30 bushels.

Things have definitely changed since 1968. However, many of the program's aspects remain the same. All of the 10 winners were pillars in their communities. Editors noted each of the men "would be last to claim perfection." In addition, editors noted each man's commitment to his family.

The Class of 2009 carries on these same traditions. Each farmer works tirelessly for his community. However, they would be the last to claim credit.

New partner

Prairie Farmer is pleased to announce that Growmark has joined as a financial sponsor of the 2009 Master Farmer Awards. Nothing changes as far as the principles and tradition of the program, but Growmark provides a good fit.

Like the Master Farmer award, the Growmark system was born during the 1920s, when grower cooperatives began

organizing. In 1927, nine local cooperatives came together to form the Illinois Farm Supply Co. Today, Growmark serves nearly 250,000 farm and other

customers with agronomic inputs, fuels, grain marketing services and more through local FS companies.



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LEGACY CONTINUES: The legacy of excellence continues with the 2009 Master Farmers: (from left) Rick Nelson, Randy Lambdin, Doug Block, Kent Schleich and Tom Block.