

Building synergy

Agribusiness Club award winner always educating

By Karen Binder
AGRINEWS PUBLICATIONS

O'FALLON, Ill. — Dean Dittmar is an admitted “data guy.”

Just ask him about the history of the St. Louis Agribusiness Club's Leaders of the Year, and he will quickly refer to a page in the club's directory that he meticulously maintains.

With two years until his retirement from the Illinois State Board of Education's Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education position, Dittmar, 52, also can point out that he's presented more than 576 workshops and shared his ag education expertise with more than 14,000 participants in southern Illinois.

And as the 2016 winner of the agribusiness club's 2016 Leader of the Year award, Dittmar also notes that he is the only ag educator bestowed with the award.

“It's an honor to receive such a distinguished award from my peers and from the industry that I have such a passion for,” he told *AgriNews* from his office in O'Fallon. “I look at the list, and as the only educator, I feel very humbled by receiving this recognition.”

He joins a list that includes a U.S. senator, congressmen, CEOs and leaders



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Winner of the 2016 St. Louis Agribusiness Leader of the Year is Dean Dittmar, the club's longtime coordinator, a past president and employed as a program adviser for the Illinois State Board of Education's Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education in O'Fallon.

of industry and national industry organizations. The club's mission is to provide educational, networking and professional development opportunities for its 400 members in Missouri and Illinois.

FARM ROOTS

Dittmar's roots in agriculture start with his family's farm near Galena in northwest Illinois where they ran a dairy, beef and grain operation. A successful FFA chapter president, he honed his passion for ag education at the University of Illinois.

He spent “an incredibly rewarding and memorable time” from 1985 to 1990 as the ag teacher at Waterloo High School before taking his current ag education field position with the state board.

During his professional tenure, he's helped foster an indelible working relationship with Illinois Farm Bureau's Ag in the Classroom program in 28 counties with 6,177 students in his district. There are only 12 school districts out of 86 in his district without ag programs, including those in Chester, Dupon, O'Fallon, Murphysboro and Herrin.

“We're taking state dollars and leveraging that with pri-

vate dollars,” Dittmar said. “It's everyone contributing together.”

Another milestone he's helped establish is helping schools apply for grants for ag-related capital investments for such items as greenhouses, ag mechanics labs and laptops.

He also has slipped into his educator role with the club to ensure that regular studies measuring the importance of agribusiness in the regional economy are completed. Within the club's territory there are \$171 billion worth of agricultural products sold, as noted by the U.S. Agricultural Census 2012.

Dittmar even has an ag tie to meeting his wife, Eva, whose romance was initially sparked over an Eggciting Embryology classroom kit. Today, the couple enjoys traveling with their two daughters in competitive gymnastic events.

“Balancing work, family and packed schedules means making every minute count. I wouldn't have it any other way,” Dittmar said.

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