

Eminent Farmer/Rancher Homemaker Honorees

BROOKINGS, S.D. - South Dakota State University Colleges of Agriculture and Biological Sciences and Education and Human Sciences celebrate four individuals for their contributions to South Dakota's communities and agriculture industry with the Eminent Farmer/Rancher and Eminent Homemaker Honor.

The 2015 Eminent Farmers/Ranchers honored are Gary Duffy, Oldham and Rebecca "Becky" Walth, Glenham. The 2015 Eminent Homemakers honored are Ida Slocum, Aurora and Helen Sweetser, Worthing.

Established in 1927, the Eminent Farmer/Rancher and Eminent Homemaker awards recognize individuals for their contributions of leadership and service to the community on the local, state and national level.

Each year SDSU selects four individuals to honor based on confidential nominations from across the state. The nominations are reviewed by a committee of SDSU faculty members, administrators and SDSU Extension personnel and are approved by the Deans of the Colleges of Agriculture and Biological Sciences and Education and Human Sciences.

The honorees photos join the more than 300 portraits of Eminent Farmers/Ranchers and Homemakers which are displayed in the "Hall of Fame" portrait gallery located in Berg Agricultural Hall on the campus of South Dakota State University.

Eminent Banquet Held Sept. 18, 2015

The 2015 honorees will be recognized during a banquet held September 18 at 5:30 p.m. at the McCrory Gardens Education and Visitor Center, Brookings.

Tickets are \$25 and are available from the Office of the SDSU Extension Associate Director, Berg Agricultural Hall 154, SDSU Brookings, S.D., 57007 or by calling, 605.688.4792.

Read on to learn about the honorees.

Gary Duffy, 2015 Eminent Farmer Kingsbury County



Oldham farmer, Gary Duffy, has focused much of his off-farm time on discovering ways to add value to crops and livestock raised by South Dakota farmers and ranchers.

"Because we are located in the middle of the nation, transportation costs eat up a lot of our profits. If we can process things in the state and export a finished product - whether that is ethanol or livestock - then at least we keep some value here at home to help South Dakota's economy grow and improve our citizens' lives," says the third generation Kingsbury County farmer and 2015 Eminent Farmer.

"For the state's corn farmers, ethanol provides us with a way to diversify our markets and process corn within the state and ship a product that is much more valuable than a kernel of corn," says Duffy, who raises corn, soybeans and a cow/calf herd with his cousin, Sheila Huntimer, and her husband, Jim. The operation includes 1,500 acres - some of which was land his grandfather farmed.

Over the years, Duffy has not only invested in ethanol plants, but through his involvement on the South Dakota Corn Utilization Council board of directors, he has traveled across the U.S. and internationally to establish markets for corn and dried distillers grains (DDGs), a co-product of ethanol.

In 2014, the South Dakota Corn Growers presented him

the Excellence in Agriculture award for his contributions to the corn industry in South Dakota. In 2007, the South Dakota chapter of Gamma Sigma Delta, the honorary society of agriculture, recognized him as a distinguished alumnus.

Along with his involvement in the S.D. Value Added and Corn Utilization Councils, Duffy has also served on the board of directors for the South Dakota Corn Growers Association and South Dakota Crop Improvement Association, and is a member of the South Dakota Soybean Association. Locally, he has served as a member of the Oldham School Board, on the Board of the Associated School Boards of South Dakota and was President of the Oldham City Council. He continues his service by being a member of the South Dakota Soybean Processors board of directors and well as being on the board of the East Dakota Water Development District.

To this day, Duffy also serves as a licensed sports official, refereeing high school basketball, volleyball and football games.

"Giving back is part of our family tradition," he says, noting that his uncle, Tom, served as a Kingsbury County Commissioner and his mother, Darleen, who was named Eminent Homemaker in 1998, was involved in Extension and 4-H.

"When there is a Presidential campaign, I want to get in on the ground floor to help shape policy in agriculture's favor," he says.

Back on his family's

operation, Shamrock Farms Inc., Duffy continues to farm full-time. "Even to this day, I enjoy watching crops grow. It still amazes me that you can put seed in the ground, watch it grow and turn around and harvest that crop - it's truly one of God's wonders."

When he returned to the farm in 1975, degree in hand, he farmed with his dad, Louis, and uncle, Tom. He says without their support and that of Jim and Sheila, he could not have been as involved off the farm.

Over time, the family increased the farm size by purchasing or leasing land from retiring family members and their children. "We've been able to keep all the land in the family," he says.

With his wife, Judy, Duffy has four stepsons: Sean, Matt, Tom and Aaron Chandler. The couple enjoys spending time with their six grandchildren.

Rebecca "Becky" Walth, 2015 Eminent Farmer/Rancher, Walworth County



With only five cows between the two of them, ranch kids, Rebecca "Becky" (Schneider) Walth and her husband, Allen, began building their Glenham farm/ranch together in 1977.

Today the couple farms and runs a 350 cow/calf herd on 6,000-plus acres on the banks of the Missouri River.

"What is most exciting about what the ranch is today is that together we built it from scratch," says Walth, the 2015 Eminent Farmer/Rancher.

She goes on to tell the story of how it all began. "When we married, I had two cows and he had two cows. When my dad, Rinel Schneider, loaded them up to bring them to the 200-acre ranch we'd just purchased from Allen's uncle, he said, 'You need to start with five.' So, he threw another cow into the trailer."

Using Walth's words, they grew the ranch "bit-by-bit and piece-by-piece."

"People ask us if we fish - I always laugh because we don't have time to fish - it's nose to the grindstone," Walth says.

What the fourth-generation South Dakota farmer/rancher has made time for outside of the ranch are her children and the state's cattle industry. She was a 4-H leader; is a current Federation Director and research chair of the South Dakota

Beef Industry Council; held offices on the South Dakota Cattlemen's Association, as well as the National Cattlemen's Beef Association; represents South Dakota State University on and is the North Central Secretary of the Council for Agriculture Research, Extension and Teaching; served as cooking chair of the National Beef Cook-off Committee; and has been a St. Jacobi Lutheran Sunday School teacher.

"It started with one position as the South Dakota Cattlemen's representative on the Beef Industry Council, and that led to another service position which led to another service position," Walth explains.

A 4-H alumnus, Walth says the organization gave her a strong foundation and influenced her decision to pursue a degree in Home Economics at South Dakota State University. She became a 4-H leader to provide the same experience for her now grown children, Steven Walth and Kristi Dwire.

"4-H was a very important part of my life growing up. As a parent, it was exciting to introduce our children to the program," Walth says. "As it did for me, 4-H opened our children's eyes to different opportunities - and it

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