

2007 AG-CHEM OPERATOR OF THE YEAR

Matt Missling of Crystal Valley Co-op is award winner



Matt Missling was all smiles accepting the 2007 Ag-Chem Operator of the Year award. Behind him is Mark Sharitz, Ag-Chem director of marketing.

Matt Missling received the 2007 Ag-Chem Operator of the Year award partly because of his attempt to provide customers with near perfect application. "Technology is so good today that farmers demand perfection," Missling says.

"I didn't believe that application would become so high tech when I started," Missling says. He refers to the precision, global positioning and electronic equipment installed on most of today's application equipment and the rigs that he operates. Missling started his application responsibilities in 1996 with LaSalle Farmers Grain Cooperative, which merged into Crystal Valley Cooperative two years ago.

Missling is based out of the Madelia, Minn., location. Crystal Valley Co-op has a total of nine small-town locations west of Mankato, Minn., with headquarters at Lake Crystal. The other locations are at Darfur, Elysian, Janesville, LaSalle, Nicollet, Vernon Center, Waldorf and Madelia.

Missling received his Ag-Chem Operator of the Year award at the

Agricultural Retailers Association annual conference in Las Vegas during December. He was one of four finalists honored by Ag-Chem, a division of AGCO Corporation. Besides an expense-paid trip with his wife to the conference in Las Vegas, he also won a new Harley Davidson motorcycle from Ag-Chem.

Judging to select Missling as the winner was based on criteria of experience, quality of work, customer service, community involvement, customer appreciation and overall dedication to his job.

Missling provides various types of application to between 35,000 and 45,000 acres annually. His season starts with dry fertilizer application, moves to post-emergence high-clearance spraying, goes back to dry fertilizer application in the fall and ends with anhydrous ammonia toolbar application work. He jumps from operating a Loral Air Max 2000 to Wilmar Eagle 8650 to a Caterpillar Challenger 75C tractor. The co-op recently acquired a new Ag-Chem RoGator Model 1074, which

Missling says he is really looking forward to operating next season.

The biggest acreage is the post-emergence spraying for weed and insect control. Missling says scheduling as much work as possible within the shortest time frame still requires 14-hour days. What adds to the challenge is that good service one year results in customers expecting even better service the next year. "Customers demand that we get there exactly when they want us there," Missling explains, "and sometimes they are only calling us two hours ahead of time. That is the most challenging part of the job."

Equipment dependability and quick repair service is a must, Missling notes. Because the location only has one piece of application equipment to handle the majority of each type of application work, "we cannot afford to break down in season." If an applicator happens to break, Missling gives Ziegler CAT credit for having a repair technician to the co-op the same day.

The agronomy department at Madelia only has four full-time employees,



Matt Misling and his wife, Michelle, hopped on the Harley Davidson motorcycle in the Ag-Chem display at the ARA conference.

which requires each employee to handle more than one specialized task to provide quality service.

Missling has always stepped up to provide the best in customer service, according to his co-workers. He's also known for pitching in with non-agronomy tasks when and how needed, including liquid propane delivery.

Pitching in as needed also describes his involvement with civic and religious activities for his hometown area. "I've always figured if I cannot dedicate enough time to do the job fully, then it's better that I fill in as needed," Missling says. The time he can dedicate to serving Trinity Lutheran Church is appreciated.

Missling's wife, Michelle, is understanding of his responsibilities and the requirement for working long hours. She grew up on a farm and knew the hours associated with agriculture before she married Matt. She works at a local day care center, and the couple has two children, Allyson, age seven, and Trey, age two.

The three other finalists for Ag-Chem Operator of the Year

were Tom Dehart, Crop Production Services, Clay City, Ill.; Norv Kolbo, All Points Cooperative, Gothenburg, Neb.; and Arthur Van Damme, Viterra, Beausejour, Manitoba, Canada. Each of them has many years of experience—a lot of it making application to corn and soybeans,

including the Canadian finalist.

They all have strong credentials and received exceptional references to earn a finalist position from among several dozen entries. Dehart has been an applicator for 14 years; Kolbo has 24 years of experience, and Van Damme has been on the job for 15 years. **AG**



The four finalists for Operator of the Year were (from left) Norv Kolbo, Gothenburg, Neb.; Matt Misling, Madelia, Minn.; Arthur Van Damme, Beausejour, Manitoba, Canada; and Tom Dehart, Clay City, Ill.