

**Presentation to Ron & Maria Rosmann 2006 Spencer Award for Sustainable Agriculture
Paul Mugge * November 20, 2006**

I'd like to thank the Spencer family for establishing this award. Sustainable agriculture is not something that gets honored very often. The purpose of the Spencer Award is to recognize significant contributions to the advancement of ecological and economic practices that will make agriculture sustainable and the family farm secure for the future. This year's recipients are a perfect match for that purpose.

I have known, respected and admired Ron and Maria for 20 years and it is my great pleasure to present this award to them.

Ron and Maria, with their sons, farm 600 acres near Harland, all of it certified organic. They raise corn, soybeans, oats, rye, barley, hay, popcorn, flax and many cover crops. They rotationally graze 90 organic red angus cows, and operate a 50-sow organic farrow-to-finish deep-bedded hog operation. They direct market organic meat and Maria operates the family's private label business. Both Ron and Maria have college degrees -- Maria in public relations and Ron in biology with a double minor in psychology and sociology.

They have three sons. David is an ISU graduate who works as a rural organizer for the Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement. Daniel just got an ISU agronomy degree and is farming with Ron and Maria. Mark is a junior in agronomy and history at ISU.

I'm going to list some of Ron and Maria's accomplishments and it's a brief and incomplete list in the interest of time.

They are active in 4-H, Ron attended national 4-H conference as a teenager and is a club leader in Shelby County. Ron also is active in the Midwest Sustainable Ag Working Group and has served on several soil and water conservation district committee over many years. And they have won several awards for their conservation efforts in buffer strips, terraces, windbreaks, rotational grazing and wildlife habitat.

Ron and Maria are very active in their local church. When it came time to restore the beautiful old church, Ron was the guy 100 feet up in the bucket working on the steeple. Now they're trying to build a new parish center and guess who is chair of that committee?

Ron and Maria sing every other week in church -- Ron on the guitar and Maria on the piano and the boys join in sometimes on their instruments.

Ron was a board member and former president of the Organic Farming Research Foundation in California and currently serves on the Shelby County Extension Council, Leopold Center Grassland Advisory Council and is treasurer of the newly organized Iowa Organic Association.

Ron and Maria have hosted more than 30 field days, sharing their farm and their philosophy with farmers and scientists from just down the road to China, Japan, Lithuania, Argentina, Brazil and North Korea. How many of you have heard Ron or Maria speak at a field day, conference or workshop? That's testimony to their prominence and expertise, but also to their willingness to share what they have learned and what they feel.

Ron and Maria are not just active, they are pioneers and innovators. Ron had been an advocate, defender and promoter of sustainable and organic agriculture for decades, testifying five times before the U.S. House and Senate committees and many times in Des Moines.

They were there at the beginning of Practical Farmers of Iowa in 1985. Ron served on the board from 1985 until 1990 and was the group's second president. He was a research cooperater from the outset, doing work on ridge tillage, no herbicides, weed control and more recently rotational grazing. Maria did the newsletter for PFI for several years, too.

They were pioneers in organic farming, certified since 1994 but Ron was experimenting and perfecting it before there were premium prices because it was the right thing to do.

But Ron is about much more than what works and what makes money. Ron has done what Aldo Leopold suggested: "Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient."

I don't know if Ron is aware of that statement, but he is the embodiment of that admonition, not just with farming, but with church, community, school and family. And that is why Ron and Maria are so deserving of this honor.

In all of these areas, Ron and Maria have been leaders. But it's not enough to be a leader -- you have to be going the right way. Some wise many once said, "Progress has very little to do with speed and a whole lot to do with direction." Ron and Maria have been leading in the right direction for over 30 years.

As I look over Ron's career, I notice that most of what I've done professionally, Ron did first and has been encouraging and advising me along the way.

When I became involved with PFI, Ron was already there as a leader.

When I began ridge-tillage, Ron was there.

When I began weed control without herbicides, Ron was there.

When I began transitioning to organic grain, Ron was already certified.

When I began thinking about raising hogs in deep-bedded systems, Ron was already doing it.

Now I'm thinking about organic livestock and guess who I'll look to for advice.

Lastly, I have a quote from Mr. Rosmann: "I was never satisfied just being a farmer; I always wanted to do more than that. I want to influence change and promote things that we shouldn't have lost -- family farms, small communities, vibrant rural economies, schools systems that have kids in them."

Ron and Maria have been pioneers, leaders and activists for sustainable farms and sustainable communities for more than three decades. They're not just talking about it, they're doing it. And they're living it and showing others the way.

They have influenced almost everyone in this room as well as farmers from around the world. And the world is a better place as a result.

** Paul Mugge operates a certified organic farm near Sutherland in northwest Iowa. He chairs the Leopold Center Advisory Board, which helps select the Spencer Award recipient each year.*