



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 man 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.*