



## Three Honored with Siehl Prize for Excellence in Agriculture

By Lucas Sjoström

Turkey industry leaders for a half-century, a food technology innovator at a Fortune 500 company, and the researcher defending the world's wheat from diseases are this year's recipients for the prestigious Siehl Prize for Excellence in Agriculture. This year's recipients, **Ted Huisinga** and **Ray Norling** (production agriculture), **Phillip Minerich** (agribusiness), and **Yue Jin** (knowledge), were honored May 23 at the **University of Minnesota** McNamara Alumni Center.

The Siehl Prize, created in the early 1990's with a gift from New Ulm, MN area livestock breeder and businessperson **Eldon Siehl**, celebrates achievements in agriculture with a \$50,000 cash award for each winner, along with a sculpture, and lapel pin.

### 2013 PRODUCTION AGRICULTURE: TED HUISINGA AND RAY NORLING

In 1945, three men founded the Willmar Poultry and Egg Company on a single word: Innovation. Today, the Willmar Poultry Company (WPC) is the world's leading producer of day old turkey poulters and a Willmar-based business with a dozen related subsidiaries. Laureates Ted Huisinga and Ray Norling are the nephew and son, respectively, of two of the founders.



Ted and Ray continue at the helm of Life-Science Innovations, the umbrella organization for their business units, as they have been since the 1960s. Huisinga is known for his four decades serving the USDA's National Poultry Improvement Plan and **Minnesota Board of Animal Health** working to model disease prevention, surveillance, and response programs. Both men are past presidents of the **Minnesota Turkey Growers Association**. The National Turkey Federation recognized them with the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007.

Ted joined the company in 1951 after attending the University of Minnesota following an Army tour in Japan. He majored in music education, specializing in the trombone. Ray graduated from Gustavus Adolphus College in 1956. He accepted a two-week assignment from Ted and his uncle **Albert Huisinga** at WPC to get their books in order. Now in year 55 with the company, he claims to be semi-retired.

"Ray and I were surprised to hear we won because we didn't know that we had even been nominated. When it sunk in, our first instinct was to ask that our employees – past and present – receive the recognition instead of us," Huisinga explained. "Innovation, invention, and collaboration are more than hot words of the day. They have been a major driver of our success, and will continue to be the driver for the future of agriculture. Eldon Siehl understood that and we are honored to have received an award in his name."

"Lucky, lucky, lucky," is how Ted Huisinga described the situation when he first met **Dr. Ben Pomeroy**, legendary University of Minnesota poultry researcher, during his award acceptance speech. That relationship flourished as Huisinga and Pomeroy worked together in many capacities. He credited the relationship built between the University of Minnesota, state regulatory agencies, and the state's turkey companies to what's been achieved at WPC and in Minnesota's turkey industry. "You just don't see that same kind of intense collaboration in other states or industries," said Huisinga.

In 1978, a fire threatened the future of WPC. Through the ashes, Huisinga and Norling built a state-of-the-art hatchery, which for the first time ever, incorporated computerized environmental controls. Today, the company hatches 100 million poulters each year.

It took nine years to research a way to robotically and economically treat and vaccinate poulters before they went to farms. **Marc Gorans**, the son of a local turkey farmer, worked with no salary to perfect the technology with funding from WPC. Together, they created Nova-Tech Engineering in 1992. The partnership now sends robotic technology all over the world; Willmar products now make it all the way to China.

In 1986, the company discovered revolutionary technology to vaccinate against bacteria such as Salmonella and E. Coli. Today, Epitopix markets its products across many animal species and has applications for humans as well.

Recently, the company has diversified. In 2005, Life-Science Innovations joined with Nova-Tech Engineering to revitalize a 100-year old campus that formerly housed a state psychiatric hospital. The goal of the initiative was to lure top-notch talent and new businesses to Willmar by updating the 110-acre piece of real estate containing 40 buildings.

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# MEMBER IN FOCUS



**WEBSITE:** [www.penton.com](http://www.penton.com)

**LOCATION:** Penton Ag offices are in Bloomington, MN; St Charles, IL; Overland Park, KS; and Clarksdale, MS. Penton Headquarters location is in New York.

The Penton Ag Division is made up of the state farm publications throughout the Midwest, West, and East. Publications include *The Farmer* (in Minnesota), *Farm Industry News*, *Beef*, *Farm Future*, *Feedstuffs*, *National Hog Farmer*, *Corn & Soybean Digest*, *Hay & Forage Grower*, and the Farm Press publications. Several of the farm publications originated here in Minnesota.

Comprised of 23 franchises that serve the U.S. agriculture market, Penton Agriculture is the largest and most diversified agriculture information business in North America. Through a robust network of live events, digital products, data, marketing services, broadcasting and publications, Penton Ag is connected to an estimated 85% of the nation's annual agricultural gross domestic product.

## Q & A with Allen Barkve, General Manager

### Farm Progress:

#### How is Penton Media funded?

Our company's revenue is derived from advertising, marketing services, promotional sponsorships, and exhibit fees. Our customers support all the best-read sources of timely information that appear in farmers' mailboxes, online, and inboxes every day of the year.



#### What are the key trends affecting your industry?

The fiscal challenges of the United States Postal Service, especially related to service in rural counties, is a trend that has obviously very direct implications for our business, and of course our farmer and rancher readers.

Also, our media company is very engaged in the vast dialogue regarding the rising demand for food on a world level, and how our dedicated farmers and ranchers will provide food to meet the steep, growing demand. We strive to objectively communicate real world and fact-

based content to our audience, whether the content appears in closely targeted newsletters or broad based television shows.

#### What is new at Penton?

Penton's major acquisition of Farm Progress in November 2012, from Fairfax in Australia, nearly doubled Penton's ag media business. This establishes Penton as the largest and most diversified leader in agricultural media with publications, interactive media, major farm shows, television, radio, and marketing services. The agricultural division of Penton is also comprised of food industry and restaurant media groups. Ag is one of five divisions within Penton.

#### What are your legislative priorities?

As a farm media company, our role is to report on legislative news and issues and developments as it relates to our readers in print and online. Our editors are very well known for their reporting and their commentary on legislative action as it relates to farmers, ranchers and agribusiness at the local, national, and global level. Our properties also provide lively forums for well-researched and informed opinions at trade events and farm shows throughout the year.



The Minnesota Agri-Growth Council is an advocate for the state's food and agriculture industry. Founded in 1968, the Council is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that represents the shared interests of its 200-plus members, which include food and agriculture businesses, organizations and producers, as well as the service industries that support them.

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“Ray and I feel a deep sense of responsibility to our community and really wanted Nova-Tech to expand in Kandiyohi County,” Huisinga said. “The jobs that have been created at our technology companies have helped our community and we are proud of that. We understand the benefits of having agriculture and technology companies rubbing elbows, so to speak.”

Nominator **Steve Olson**, Minnesota Turkey Growers Association Executive Director, noted that Ted and Ray work together well and have been very successful. Maybe that’s partly because they were both born on November 25 ten years apart, the heart of Thanksgiving season.

### 2013 KNOWLEDGE: YUE JIN

In 2010, Yue Jin made one of the most significant discoveries in cereal rust research over the last century, according to nominator **Ronnie Coffman**, himself a cereal researcher from Cornell. Jin identified



the alternate host of the stripe rust fungus. While textbooks say that the fungus (*Puccinia striiformis*) has no alternate host, Jin observed that there were heavy rust infections in grasses near the barberry plants at the University of Minnesota arboretum.

Jin conducted research to prove the link between stripe rust and barberry, wheat, and grasses. The connection also opened the door for more research on the very important plant pathogen around the world. But his body of work far exceeds his 2010 discovery.

Originally from a small Inner Mongolia village, Yue Jin has an immense knowledge of the African stem rust problem, particularly gene discovery for resistance breeding.

Yue Jin received his bachelor of science degree (1982) from the Inner Mongolia Agricultural University. He earned master’s degrees in plant pathology (1988) and applied statistics (1990) and his doctorate in plant pathology (1990) from North Dakota State University (NDSU).

From 1990 to 1995 he worked as a post-doctoral fellow at NDSU and from 1995 to 2003 as an assistant and then associate professor at South Dakota State University. Since 2003 he has been a research plant pathologist in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Cereal Disease Lab in St. Paul, as well as an adjunct faculty member in the University of Minnesota’s plant pathology department. Outside his research, he is an avid mushroom hunter, fisherman, and golfer.

Jin has been the lead scientist worldwide battling against the Ug99 African rust strain. With wheat’s importance, he is battling a disease that affects many lives and countries. Ug99 is said to be the biggest threat to the world’s wheat in over 50 years. “I was not very alarmed [by the Ug99 discovery],” Jin explained in his accepting remarks, “Until we started testing our spring wheat in Minnesota and the Dakotas.”

Ug99 is a strain of stem rust fungus that burrows into wheat and barley tissues to damage or kill the plant. While it was discovered in Uganda in 1999, it has been found in Iran and southern Africa. It is now threatening India and China, with over one billion people in each country.

Jin found that many of our current varieties were susceptible to the wheat rust, with those released after 1996 even more vulnerable. It is thought up to 80 percent of the world’s wheat crop is at risk.

Minnesota lies in a unique position to battle this world-wide threat. Our cold winters will kill any spores that would

escape the Cereal Disease Laboratory on the St. Paul Campus. The CDL and a lab in Winnipeg are therefore the only two places allowed to study samples of the rust fungi in North America, but only from December to February.

To end his acceptance speech, Jin thanked the crowd on behalf of his fellow plant pathologists, “We’ve learned, first-hand, what scab and rust can do to wheat and barley crops. Remember, there are hosts of other diseases threatening every stable food crop out there, from rice to banana. It should not be a surprise that this is right at the top when people start looking at the issues surrounding food security. I want to interpret this award as acknowledgement of what plant pathology has been able to, and will continue to, offer in our quest for food security.”

### 2013 AGRIBUSINESS: PHILLIP MINERICH

Disbelief is the word Phillip Minerich used to describe how he felt when his friend **Dr. Al Levine**, the Dean of the **College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences** at the University of Minnesota and **Agri-Growth** Board Member, called to tell him he won the award.



“I never imagined I would be chosen,” Minerich explained, noting that he really admired the 2012 laureates and their speeches during the acceptance ceremony. But there’s no doubt he’s also made an impact on his industry.

As Vice President of Research and Development at **Hormel Foods**, Minerich oversees all product process and package development, applied research, microbiology, chemistry and sensory labs, thermal process development, and all food safety

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#### SAVE THE DATE!

**2013 Annual Meeting: November 5  
Minneapolis Convention Center**

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related research. In his position as a researcher, he is always looking to the future and keeps a crystal ball on the corner of his desk to keep him motivated

"I don't see hurdles as obstacles, but rather as challenges," Minerich explained. "Life is full of challenges and a lot of people miss opportunities when they don't tackle the hurdle. That's when real discovery happens." He sees discoveries like the punch line to a good joke. You can be lead far in one direction, but a punch line sends you somewhere new and is always obvious in retrospect.

Minerich's studies began at The Ohio State University in 1972. In 1976, his BS degree in Food Technology led him to a job in Hormel Food's Quality Control Department in Austin, MN. He was promoted to Corporate Manager of Sanitation in 1983, and joined the Research and Development Division in 1988. He also earned master's and doctorate degrees in food science at the University of Minnesota, in 1990 and 2002, respectively. In 2003 he was promoted to director of research and moved into his current role in 2006.

Food safety and hunger relief are at the crux of two of his most important achievements. His team significantly reduced safety risks in sliced meat using a new technology, high pressure processing, that eliminates the need for preservatives resulting in Hormel's "Natural Choice" brand. Minerich also lead the team who worked to create "Spammy," a poultry spread that is shelf stable and fortified with vitamins and could be mixed directly into any country's cultural diet. It was developed specifically to help address hunger and child malnutrition issues in Guatemala.

Enhanced microwave cooking technology, high pressure processing technology, and reduced packaging are all among the big ways Phil contributed to Hormel's success over the past 37 years, according to Hormel Food's Chariman, President, and CEO, **Jeffrey Ettinger**.

"I'm very proud to have spent my entire career with this company," Minerich said. "Hormel takes its food safety very seriously, giving people like me an opportunity to make an impact in food safety in many ways. I've been fortunate to work with many intelligent people in our company, and with universities, research institutions, and trade organizations around the world to implement food safety strategies to reduce risk.

Minerich believes we still have a lot of work to do. He notes that obesity is a world-wide issue, not a national one. On our planet, 60% of people are overweight or obese, but 40% are not. "I challenge the people and nutritionists who manage their own weight to teach weight management to others."

To help, Minerich is donating 40% of his Siehl Prize money to **Dr. Francisco Diez-Gonzalez** and **Dr. Ted Labuza**, both at the University of Minnesota, to continue their food safety research and help teach food safety practices to Hispanic populations. The remaining 60% of his prize money is being donated to **Dr. Noel Solomons**, Director of CeSSIAM (Center for Studies of Sensory Impairment, Aging and Metabolism) to explore ways to improve the health of pregnant and lactating Guatemalan women.