

AgInnovator

Bemidji, Minn.—One of Minnesota's most unique grower groups has been awarded the 2008 AURI Ag Innovator of the Year.

Northern Excellence Seed, LLC, was selected by the AURI board of directors as this year's recipient, recognizing their uniqueness and their commitment to innovation.

The 29-member cooperative was formed in 2002 and today contracts for 18,000 acres of Kentucky bluegrass, ryegrass, timothy and other specialty grass seeds.

The Northern Excellence processing plant in Williams cleans and bags about 8 million pounds of seed. The cleaning and processing also generates about 2 million pounds of grass-seed chaff and screenings that require disposal. Instead of paying \$10,000 to \$15,000 per year for disposal, Northern Excellence is currently installing equipment to gasify the chaff and straw to make electricity. The Lake of the Woods County business is one of the first companies in Minnesota to generate on-site power from biomass, and it may be the only factory in the country to gasify grass-seed waste.



Brent Benike, (left) Northern Excellence Seed general manager accepts the 2008 Ag Innovator of the Year award from AURI board chair Al Christopherson.

Converting waste into watts will furnish energy to run the seed-cleaning plant, and will save the company at least \$60,000 a year in electricity and waste disposal costs, says Brent Benike, general manager of Northern Excellence Seed.

"When you farm in Northern Minnesota your whole life, you have no choice but to be innovative," Benike says. "You have to be able to adapt either through processing or how you use your crops."

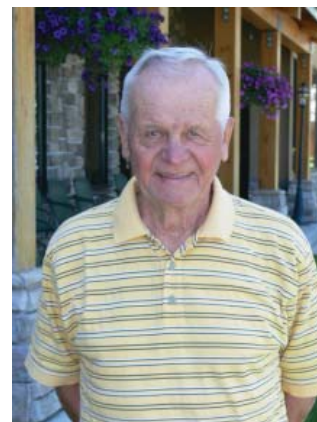
The Ag Innovator award is given each year to the AURI client that has shown innovation in their product or process, utilizes significant amounts of agricultural products and has made a positive impact on Minnesota.

continued...

SageAdvice

Bemidji, Minn.—One of Minnesota's most respected agricultural voices is cautioning Americans about the need for greater energy conservation.

Former U.S. Agriculture Secretary Bob Bergland told attendees at the June gathering of Minnesota's Renewable Energy Roundtable that increased energy production from alternative sources won't be enough to solve the current high cost of energy. "It's become kind of a creed that we are going to solve our energy import problems by increasing domestic production," Bergland says. "Renewables are important, but my big thing is to push back on energy demand."



Bergland

"We need a national campaign on energy-saving technology. We are not savers—it's not in our nature."

Bergland was Agriculture Secretary from 1977 to 1981, serving under President Jimmy Carter. He served during the energy crisis that led to an explosion in gas prices and a sudden focus on energy conservation. Bergland said Carter gave a speech to the nation in the 1970's outlining how each American needed to conserve. "He was booed, he was ridiculed," Bergland says.

Now the conservation message is again gaining traction in addition to the need for developing more domestic energy alternatives.

Bergland was one of the presenters at the Renewable Energy Roundtable event held at Bemidji State University's Beaux Arts Ballroom on June 19. The Roundtable is a working group of scientists, educators, community developers, state agency representatives and members of industry who are working collectively to further develop the renewable energy industry in Minnesota.

The Roundtable features teams working in the area of financing, public policy, talent development, infrastructure as well as research.

AgNewsUpdate

Innovator continued...

“They were innovative in identifying new grasses to produce by looking at varieties such as perennial ryegrass,” says Michael Sparby, AURI project development director. “Then they had the willingness as a young cooperative to take a look at waste streams to reduce their energy loads. They’ve demonstrated that they are growing the industry as well as pursuing further utilization of their waste streams.”

The award was presented at a June 18th ceremony in Bemidji. Northern Excellence Seed is the 7th Minnesota company to receive the award. Previous winners include Pet Care Systems, Mississippi Topsoils, FUMPA Biofuels and USA Solutions.



Steve Helmstetter of Roosevelt is one of 29 growers raising grass seed for Northern Excellence Seed.



“Ag Innovation Update” is a publication of the *Agricultural Utilization Research Institute*. For more information, contact AURI’s Southeast Office in Waseca at (507) 835-8990.



AURI
P.O. Box 251
Waseca, MN 56093

AURI on the Web!  **www.auri.org**
WWW. 