



Rex Ricketts negotiates the mud on his farm near Hallsville, Mo., as he unloads cattle feed. Missouri Livestock Symposium will award the retired University of Missouri animal sciences professor the Ag Educator of the Year Lifetime Achievement Award at its 2019 symposium Dec. 6-7 in Kirksville. Photo by Rob Hill of Mizzou Alumni Association Magazine

Linda Geist

Zac Erwin

Ricketts receives 2019 Ag Educator Lifetime Achievement Award

KIRKSVILLE, Mo. – The Missouri Livestock Symposium announces that long-time dairy educator and agriculture industry leader Rex Ricketts of Hallsville will receive the 2019 Ag Educator Lifetime Achievement Award.

Ricketts will receive the award at 7 p.m. Dec. 6 at the 20th annual symposium at the William Matthew Middle School in Kirksville. Keynote speaker for the evening is Temple Grandin, prominent author and speaker on autism. She is an animal science professor at Colorado State University and consults on livestock handling equipment.

Ricketts retired as coordinator of the University of Missouri Extension Commercial Agriculture program in 2013 after 42 years of service. "His ability and energetic efforts to analyze a situation and outline constructive programs has contributed much to the Missouri agriculture," says Zac Erwin, MU Extension field specialist in livestock and one of the organizers of the symposium.

While Rickett's specialty is dairy, he worked extensively with swine, beef and agronomy educators and industry leaders across the state and nation, Erwin says. "Livestock teams that he organized at MU exemplify Rickett's focus on the land-grant mission of giving instruction and practical demonstrations of existing or improved practices or technologies in agriculture," Erwin says.

"Rickett's multi-disciplinary collaborations at MU continue to be emulated by other universities that want to move faculty from the narrow focus of their individual disciplines to a more integrated, holistic, perspective of agriculture. These teams developed products that continue to be used in agriculture today," Erwin says.

Ricketts grew up on 160-acre farm with a registered Jersey dairy herd at Fair Grove. During high school, he and his brothers showed many prize-winning cattle at fairs. He earned a B.S. in agriculture in 1963, master's degree in 1964 and doctorate in dairy husbandry in 1970 from MU.

In college, he was president of the ag and student dairy clubs. MU College of Agriculture named him the 1962-63 Outstanding Senior. He was a member of numerous honor societies and earned High Individual Award as part of the UMC Dairy Judging Team at an international contest in 1961.

Early employers included Cargill Nutrena Mills and Ralston Purina Company. In 1970, he became the MU Extension state dairy specialist. In 1985, MU Department of Dairy Sciences named him as chair. In 1989, Ricketts became MU Commercial Agriculture Programs coordinator.

While chair of the MU Department of Dairy Science, Ricketts led the Missouri Dairyman's Institute, the All Breeds Show and Sale, and Dairy Day programs. He strongly promoted the state Dairy Herd Improvement Association program and the Missouri Livestock and Poultry Health Council. He revamped the management and cropping system at MU's Foremost Dairy Research Center to increase feed production, increase milk production and improve labor efficiency. He worked closely with state breed and dairy products organizations, 4-H and FFA.

Ricketts served as a member of many national, state and university committees including chair, North Central Extension Group 1977; Coordinating Group National DHIA Program; chair, American Dairy Science Association Intersociety Extension Group, and North Central Committee for Improving Large Dairy Herd Improvement Practices. Missouri Dairy Hall of Honors bestowed the Dairy Leadership Award to him in 1993.

In June 1964, Rex and his wife Sondra, who holds a B.S. in education from MU, married. She retired after 28 years as a librarian. They live in Hallsville where their children were active in 4-H. They are members of Trinity Presbyterian Church. They have six grandchildren and three children, all Mizzou graduates.

Chad was the first graduate of the UMC food-engineering program. He owns and runs his own food engineering company in Tulsa, Okla.

Trina is an attorney shareholder with Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak and Stewart, P.C. in Kansas City, Mo. Neysa, the youngest, farms with her husband in Lawrence County and is a senior oncology specialist for Amgen.

About the Missouri Livestock Symposium

The Missouri Livestock Symposium runs Dec. 6-7 at the William Matthew Middle School in Kirksville. It offers outstanding programs for horse, beef cattle, forage, sheep, meat goat and stock dog owners and producers with speakers from across the country.

The symposium also features the largest agriculture trade show in the Midwest, a free beef meal at 6 p.m. Friday, Dec. 6, and a free lunch at noon Saturday.

For a complete schedule, go to <http://www.missourilivestock.com/>.