

## News Release

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### Ohio Crop Farmer Wins National Sustainable Farming Award

**Mt. Vernon, Ohio** – A tireless innovator and one of Ohio’s greatest examples of profitable, sustainable farmers, Rex Spray was named the North Central Region winner of 2006 Patrick Madden Award. The honor, awarded to exemplary farmers in four U.S. regions by the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, USDA, will be given on Aug. 16 at a national conference in Wisconsin.



Spray has used progressive farming techniques for decades, receiving organic certification in the 1970s as Ohio’s first enrollee. While he was one of few organic crop farmers in Ohio for years, the recent explosive interest in organic farming has shone the spotlight anew on Spray’s progressive efforts.

“Rex’s decades of dedication to increasing the quality of his products makes him an ideal model for others,” says Bill Wilcke, North Central Region SARE coordinator. “He uses innovative practices to improve natural resources like the soil and has been a vocal advocate for sustainable farming.”

Spray began farming with his brother, Glen, in the mid-1950s. Following popular farming dictates, the brothers used agri-chemicals to manage pests on their crops. Yet, it didn’t sit right with them, and the Sprays decided there had to be a better way to farm.

“One day, my brother and I got to talking and I said, ‘Let’s just quit using this stuff. We used to do it without it,’ “ Spray recalls. “So we did.”

Until they perfected their crop rotation – now soybeans, corn, wheat, and hay in alternating grasses and legumes to improve fertility – they experienced some yield declines. But, after two years, they improved their rotation, tillage and fertility management on their 680 acres.

Spray also raises beef cattle, which he sells to Ohio’s only certified organic slaughterhouse. But one of his biggest farming successes came from a source he never anticipated – tofu. To maximize profits, Spray erected a new building in which he installed a bean cleaner and grain cleaner, then began preparing and bagging beans for tofu. “That was the high-dollar product that really got us going,” he said.

Spray has been credited for inspiring other farmers to transition to organic, says Carol Goland, executive director of the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, who nominated Rex for the award. “Many farmers in Ohio will identify Rex as a primary influence,” she said. “Rex has never turned anyone away from visiting his farm. He once hosted a group of Japanese businessmen developing an organic tofu product in Japan who came to learn how he was able to grow such high-quality organic soybeans.”

For two years in the mid-80s, Ohio State researchers Deb and Ben Stinner researched Spray's crops and soil management, further expanding Spray's reach.

"It really gave us solid backing and credibility," Spray says. "It showed people what we were doing and how we were doing it. It showed that we had as much profit or more than the conventional farmers. The whole attitude changed. After that, we got so many more people involved in it and it turned into quite a movement."

Spray is joined by other regional Madden Award winners, including:

- Alex and Betsy Hitt, vegetable growers in Graham, N.C.
- Paul Muller of Full Belly Farm, a community farm in Capay Valley, Calif.
- Edwin and Marion Fry, organic crop and dairy producers in Chestertown, Md.

**Editors: For more information or high-resolution images, contact Valerie Berton (info above).**

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