

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE Winner



Minnesota native and Pork magazine editor, Marlys Miller, merges her pork production knowledge

with communication skillfulness to provide U.S. pork producers the information and commentary necessary for the 21st century.

Miller's dedication to accurately report and analyze pork production trends and issues are among the reasons for her selection as the Minnesota Pork Industry's 2010 Distinguished Service award recipient.

Some may remember Miller as the very first Rice County Pork Queen or as the 4-H extension agent who worked two summers in Rock County. For most people, however, Miller is recognizable through her 22-year history at Pork magazine as associate editor and editor, and her nearly four years at the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) as editor of producer communications.

Miller grew up on a Morristown, Minn., crop and livestock farm and graduated from the University of Minnesota (U of M) with degrees in agricultural journalism and animal science. She and husband, Tony Smick, live in Madison, Wis., although her ties to Minnesota remain strong through family and career.

"I've always had a soft spot for the Minnesota pork industry and Minnesota pork producers," she said. "They are innovative folks and I've always held them in high regard."

Her parents raised purebred Chester Whites, and Miller, a sister and two brothers all took part in showing pigs through 4-H and open class. She combined her interest in pork production and writing by pursuing a journalism career. Among her career mentors are older brother and National Hog Farmer magazine editor, Dale Miller, plus several encouraging U of M professors who both challenged and advocated for their students.

After college graduation, Miller wrote hog marketing analysis and hedging advice for the weekly newsletter, PorkPro, a former Oster Communications publication. She built on her experience as a pork producer at the NPPC by discovering how legislation, regulation and pork promotion influenced a pork producer's success just as much as rate of gain and litter weights.

As editorial leader for a national pork publication, Miller strives to balance industry support and advocacy while confronting readers with legislative and consumer

realities. Her editorial decisions for Pork magazine, and its affiliated e-newsletter, Web site, social network and Internet presence, challenge pork producers to broaden their understanding of what drives the swine industry by listening to consumers and becoming activists for their farm businesses.

"I fully support the pork industry, after all, we're all in this together, but sometimes it's necessary to challenge the industry on an issue or practice, and they might not like it," she said.

Pork's online communication delivery tools, such as Twitter and www.porkmag.com, have resulted in more public educational outreach. For example, in response to an HBO documentary, "Death on a Factory Farm," Miller utilized Pork's online media to counter misinformation and further explain pork production practices to the general public. Her efforts resulted in supportive replies and comments from the non-farming audience, including their appreciation for clarifying the film's material.

To help write their own futures, Miller's advice to pork producers is to speak up for their industry and its role in food production, be active in trade associations, listen to consumers, be open to change, and to view their own animal care practices with fresh eyes.

Her experience reporting on public policy demonstrates the importance of speaking with a common voice to achieve results. Resources in the legislative arena, she says, should focus on a message that all pork producers can support – feeding people – rather than trying to impose a production method or type of product on all pork producers.

"That is how you make progress and keep from getting beat up," she said. "There are not enough people (in agriculture) to remain dissected. Agriculture needs to join together more and speak in support of what we do – feed Americans and the world efficiently."



Marlys Miller's enjoyment working with pigs led to her career in agricultural journalism.



Marlys Miller served as the very first Rice County Pork Queen.

