

## Distinguished Service Award

The Distinguished Service Award is given annually to an individual who has served the Renville County agricultural community with noteworthy accomplishments. This year's recipient was unlikely to end up serving the farmers of Renville County, yet that is what he did for over 34 years.

It was 1977 and at the age of 26 he was living in California with his wife and daughter, while back in MN he was told by a cousin that the county ASCS offices were hiring. He applied for a job as a County Operations Trainee and after a 6 month training program he was offered the position as County Executive Director for Renville County.

To some, he may have looked like an FFA Green Hand but the farming community gave him a chance to prove himself and that is what he excelled at doing. One of his first challenges as County Executive Director was to move ASCS into the automation age. Renville County has one of the largest workloads of any county in the state and that meant a lot of information had to be loaded into the computer system. In the mid 80's, at one time the office employed 25 full and part time employees to do the data loading and this also included a night shift. It took a lot of time and effort to manage the staff and coordinating the data loading process. By developing great teamwork the Renville County office would become an example for the rest of the state.

The mid 80's were a very challenging time for agriculture and the government came out with a lot of different programs to help farmers. Administering programs such as set aside acres, direct payments, and commodity credit corporation storage loans would become a normal routine, as was enrollment in the farmer owned reserve program, grain forfeitures and later the counter cyclical program. From time to time he was called on to administer programs with rules and regulations that needed to be enforced. He was willing to let the farmers know when the regulations didn't seem to make sense, but that they were the rules that he had to administer, and for that the agricultural community is thankful.

He has a way of communicating so that others could feel good about the issue in question. It was his role to enforce regulations such as clipping of cover crops on set aside acres. One farmer recalls a visit by him when the cover crop appeared to be heading out, which was not allowed. He warned the farmer with his soft tone saying that, "While the oats in the field appear from the road to be heading out, upon inspection there is evidence that it was clipped once, but it needs to be clipped immediately to remain in compliance with the program."

One program that was very challenging to administer was the Payment-in-Kind (PIK) program. This was taking place when the computer data loading process was also going on and was a demanding time for ASCS staff, but through his leadership, producers were able to get their PIK Certificates processed and payments made.

The late 80's and early 90's brought about 2 major disaster programs in 1988 and 1993. The major portion of the 1993 Disaster Legislation was the 0-92 option. It was a very difficult decision time for producers and the information campaigns and meetings delivered by him helped farmers to make some very difficult decisions.

The late 90's brought on the LDP days. The most memorable was in early October when producers were lined up out the door to sign up for an LDP that day. The FSA staff and with his leadership and helping hand were available to farmers well past the normal office closing time to provide the service to farmers to sign up.

The 2002 Farm Bill allowed producers a number of options to sign up into the program. The major change was to bring soybeans and other specified crops to become a base crop. Farmers and landowners had to decide between 5 different options. There were countless number of informational meetings developed and presented by him to allow farmers and landowners to make informed decisions.

Over 34 years he has seen 3 name changes to the Agency, 3 locations for the office, countless number of automation changes, 7 different Farm Bills and a number of difficult programs to administer. Through it all, service to the farmers of Renville County has been a top priority for him. Through his leadership and dedication to staff at the county office, he provided a great working environment through some difficult times and it reflected on the service they as a team provided to the farmers and ranchers of Renville County.

A former Renville County farm boy, Kevin Beekman, who himself was is a former County Executive Director and is now Chief Program Specialist at the MN FSA State Office shared with us this about Byron Hogberg, " His leadership and management ability are well known throughout the state. State leaders asked Byron to be a training county for other Management Trainees. Throughout his career in Renville County, Byron has been a trainer for about 15 management trainees. Many of these trainees are still working in various county offices throughout the state and some have even found their way to the USDA State Office in St. Paul. Byron has been recognized on a number of occasions for the training he has provided to other "Hogberg want-to-be's".

Another past State Director, John Monson exclaimed, “I can share that Byron was always the consummate professional. When we brought our National FSA Administrator to Renville County, back in 2002, to meet with Southern Minnesota Sugar Beet Coop leadership, Byron took an extremely tough challenge and turned it into a highlight in my career. The people we met, the agenda he set and the soft touch with everyone around allowed us to quickly understand the issues facing the region and to make the right decision to stand behind the sugar beet farmers in that region.” John Monson also stated, “My favorite golf outing of the year is the day I get to spend with Byron in Olivia, getting beat, making steaks and talking trash with all the guys. Byron was one of the best County Directors for FSA I have ever met. As a State Director, he was my mentor.”

The farmers, ranchers, livestock producers and Agricultural Community in Renville County have long known how fortunate they have been to have an individual like Byron leading the FSA office. On their behalf, The Renville County Corn and Soybean Growers Association are proud to present Byron Hogberg with the 2012 Distinguished Service Award.