

Meeker's Aquaculture receives award from province for innovation excellence

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EVANSVILLE—Meeker's Aquaculture, of Evansville, is one of five regional farm-based operations to be recognized with provincial awards for innovation excellence.

Meeker's Aquaculture was one of the five regional winners of the Premier's Awards for Innovation Excellence, announced last Friday in Espanola. These



Mike Meeker

fresh ideas are contributing to the local economy, boosting the agri-food industry and giving consumers more choice.

"These innovations help to strengthen our local agri-food sector, which is such an important contributor to Ontario's economy," said Mike Brown, MPP for Algoma-Manitoulin, in making the award announcement.

Meeker's Aquaculture has
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developed environmentally friendly compost by mixing byproducts from Ontario's fish and forestry industries, after proprietor Mike Meeker thought there had to be a better destination for these by-products than the local landfill.

Mr. Meeker experimented by churning fish offal and sawdust together in a modified cement truck on his farm. The result is a successful compost product that has a high nutrient value for lawns, flowerbeds and field crops.

Today, approximately 1.5 million pounds of fish byproduct from other fish producers in Northern Ontario are used in compost production. Up to 40 tonnes of compost are produced each week.

The product, sold in 30-pound tote bags, has attracted big retail partners like Costco, and has drawn praise for its quality from organic growers.

"It is really nice to get an award like that, especially to be recognized with the other real farmers, who I feel are the most creative problem solvers in the world because they solve their own problems by necessity," Mr. Meeker told the Recorder. "Farmers have an independent state of mind—they are not looking for the government or other agencies to solve their problems, they do it themselves."

"It means a lot to win an award like this through a farm organization," said Mr. Meeker. "I may get the recognition, but I so much help in getting this far. No matter what you want to do on the Island, all you have to do is ask your neigh-

bours for their help. All the help I needed, for example, in the areas of hydraulics and welding, I got all the help I needed through the community."

"Along with a lot of help, I received a lot of support, particularly from people like Brian Bell (of the Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs). He got interested in this project and put me in touch with University of Guelph experts, in getting the compost business started," continued Mr. Meeker. "This whole project has been a good example of the government helping and receiv-

ing community support."

"I almost feel guilty getting this award because so many people had a part—we could fill two pages with the names of those who helped out," said Mr. Meeker.

The Premier's Agri-Food Innovation Excellence awards are part of a \$2.5-million, five-year program, now in its third year, established to recognize innovators who contribute to the success of Ontario's agri-food sector.

Local events across the province are recognizing 55 regional award winners, who are receiving \$5,000

each for their innovations.