

## Agricultural education program named top in South



**BEST IN THE SOUTH:** Through innovations like alternative fuels for vehicles, Dr. Cliff Ricketts has led the MTSU Agricultural Education department to a No. 1 ranking in the South and among the best in the nation.

**photo by Ken Robinson**

**by Randy Weiler**

For the first time, MTSU'S Agricultural Education program has been named No. 1 in the Southeast.

The award, which was presented in December in San Diego by the National Association of Agricultural Education, was accepted by Dr. Cliff Ricketts, professor, agribusiness and agriscience, at the organization's national meeting.

"The Southeast includes (schools such as) Texas A&M, the University of Florida, University of Georgia, University of Tennessee, University of Kentucky, and others," Ricketts said. "It's an extremely nice honor to be selected the top agricultural education program."

Dr. Harley Foutch, chair of agribusiness and agriculture, added "The agricultural education program has been unique since its inception in 1975. Agricultural education students select a major from agribusiness, animal science, or plant and soil science and minor in secondary education.

"By taking additional selected courses, they meet state licensure requirements to teach at the high school level. Since agricultural education students major in one of the three majors offered by the school, this award is in recognition of the entire school and its efforts to best meet the needs of our students. It provides a very positive reflection of our faculty, our students, and our program. It provides another avenue for the university to be recognized at the national level."

It is the top honor any university or college can receive from this

national association, that selects six regional winners and does not choose an overall national winner, Ricketts said.

Those making the selection considered material that was authored by Ricketts, recommendation letters, and media coverage generated by MTSU Agricultural Education projects.

Other things instrumental in the selection process included:

- \* Ricketts coordinating the agriscience- for-science credit with Tennessee agricultural education teachers -- the first such effort in the country, and the integration of academic and vocation education is now part of the federal vocational legislation.

"We became a model for the nation," Ricketts said. "We have led the country in curriculum development. From 1920 to 1970, we had four ag classes. From 1970 to 1984, we had seven ag classes. Now we have 25 different ag classes. We have made a lot of impact nationwide and been an agent for change."

- \* Ricketts wrote and co-authored two books for Albany, N.Y.-based Delmar Publishers, the largest agricultural textbook company in the world. He wrote *Leadership, Personal Development and Career Success* and co-authored, along with Dr. Omri Rawlins, *Introduction to Agribusiness*. Ricketts is writing two other books for Delmar Publishers that will be out this fall.

- \* The work of MTSU students with alternative energy. In the past 20 years, MTSU agriculture and agricultural education students have built engines that run on ethanol from corn, methane from cow manure, soybean oil, and hydrogen from water. MTSU has held the world land speed record for a hydrogen-fuel vehicle since 1991 and also holds the speed record for a vehicle that runs on soybean oil. Currently, research is being conducted by Ricketts and his students to build a new multi-fuel hybrid vehicle. It will have an electric drive train that will use hydrogen from water, the sun, wind, and gravitational motion as power sources.

The program is one of the few in the nation that has a corporate sponsor. Tractor Supply Company (TSC) has funded research since 1991, and MTSU Sponsored Program matches the TSC amount. The funding is used for the alternative fuel research. Bridgestone Tire supplies the tires for all vehicles.

MTSU has developed an educational partnership with TSC and exhibits with the Nashville-based company during the National Future Farmers of America Convention and annual store managers' meeting at Nashville's Opryland Hotel. This year, the event will be the first weekend in March.

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