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AMERICAN AG LAW ASSOCIATION PRESENTS AWARDS

The American Agricultural Law Association (AALA) awards acknowledge members from professional sectors, including private practice, academia, government and nongovernmental organizations. The Excellence in Agricultural Law Awards recognize AALA members for outstanding contributions to the legal profession and the agricultural community. Scholarship awards recognize excellence in scholarly writing. This year's awards were presented Nov. 13 during the association's annual educational symposium in Kansas City, Missouri, which included a virtual attendance option.

Don Downing, a former Missouri chief deputy attorney general and managing partner of the St. Louis office of Gray, Ritter & Graham, P.C., received the Excellence in Agricultural Law Award in Private Practice. His practice has focused on complex commercial and class action litigation. He has represented large and small businesses in complex commercial disputes, including class actions, banks in insurance coverage litigation and other commercial disputes, Big Four accounting firms in securities and malpractice litigation, and cities, school districts and other public entities in actions against providers of products and services. He has also represented farmers in numerous cases. In 2020, as the court-appointed Chair of the plaintiffs' executive committee in the dicamba crop damage multidistrict litigation, he led negotiations on behalf of farmers in several states that resulted in a \$400 million settlement agreement with Monsanto.

In 2017, in the first certified state class action bellwether trial, he and the three other co-lead plaintiff counsel won a \$217.7 million verdict on behalf of Kansas corn farmers. That verdict amount equaled 100% of actual damages requested by co-lead counsel. Following the verdict, he was named a recipient of a 2018 "Influential Lawyer" award by *Missouri Lawyers Weekly*.

A native of Kennett, Missouri, Downing earned a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of Missouri in 1979 and his law degree from the University of Missouri School of Law in 1982, where he served as an editor on the *Missouri Law Review*. After graduation from law school, he served as a law clerk for the Hon. Edward L. Filippine, district judge for the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri.

He is licensed to practice in Missouri and Illinois, as well as before the Supreme Court of the United States, the Eighth Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals, the U.S. District Court for the Eastern and Western Districts of Missouri, and the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Illinois.

Downing is a Fellow of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers and a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers. He is a *Missouri Lawyers Weekly* 2020 ICON Award recipient.

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Wayne Hayenga, a faculty member at the Texas A&M University System, received the Excellence in Agricultural Law Award in Academia. His primary activities are in teaching and coordinating educational programs in estate and income tax management. In years past, he was involved in agricultural finance and other agribusiness educational programs. As a lawyer, he specializes in business organization and estate and income tax planning. He works extensively with family-owned businesses in developing plans for the orderly administration and income and estate tax savings methods to pass operating businesses from generation to generation.

A sought-after teacher and speaker throughout the state and nation, in the past several years he has discussed estate planning and other legal topics with many professional organizations and business owner groups. He was awarded the Faculty Distinguished Achievement Award from the Former Students Association of Texas A&M University and a Presidential Citation from the State Bar of Texas for his work.

His educational background includes a bachelor's degree in agriculture, master's degree in agricultural economics from the University of Illinois, and an MBA in finance and a doctorate in agricultural economics from Michigan State University. Most recently, he has completed a Juris Doctor from Southern Methodist University.

Co-writers Victoria Rose Messer, general counsel for the High Plains Water District in Lubbock, Texas, and Jason T. Hill, owner of JT Hill & Co. in Lubbock, Texas, both were recognized for excellence in scholarly writing for "Decoding Water Law: Ten Areas of Texas Water Law Every Ag Lawyer Should Know."

Messer is a native of the Texas Panhandle, growing up in Hereford and Canyon. She received her bachelor's degree in political science from Texas Tech University in December 2012 and her Juris Doctor from Texas Tech University School of Law in May 2016.

At the High Plains Water District, Messer is responsible for assisting and advising the district on groundwater law and policy issues, grant acquisitions, state and federal compliance, and legal matters. She has been a member of AALA since 2014, first joining as a student and continuing her involvement throughout her career. She has been involved in multiple committees with AALA.

Hill began his career in water early in life, working on his family's irrigated cotton and milo operation on the South Plains of Texas, gaining firsthand understanding of the relationship between water availability and family, local and regional prosperity. Since graduating from Baylor Law School, he has built a practice focused on water, handling everything from drafting major legislation to litigation and appellate challenges.

Hill's trial and appellate experience includes cases involving water rights interpretation and transaction disputes, governmental immunity, water reuse, and interbasin transfers. He currently resides in Austin and manages his firm, which has offices in Austin and San Angelo.

Established in 1980, the American Agricultural Law Association is a national professional association serving as the premier association for agricultural law and policy professionals. Its mission is to inform and engage the law and policy professionals who serve all facets of the agricultural and food communities. For more information, visit aglaw-assn.org.

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