

Rodney Weinzierl Intro

Rail and Marine Summit

June 13, 2023

It is a privilege for me today to introduce this year's **Diolkos Award** recipient which recognizes an individual with outstanding vision and leadership not only within the supply chain but who equally has contributed to his/her community. After more than 30 years working with Rodney Weinzierl, I feel uniquely qualified to help you understand why he is so deserving of such a prestigious award. I could relate a lot of stories about Mr. Weinzierl, memories made in those years of traveling together representing Illinois corn farmers, sitting in meetings together quietly and strategically working towards a goal, and sharing after hours' time at cookouts, hayrides, and weddings. Let me share a bit of what I know:

Rod is a farm kid from central Illinois. He has a humble beginning as the only son among a family of daughters, eventually becoming the third-generation farming corn and soybeans near Bloomington. He works alongside his wife, Kathy, to manage the local food pantry and serves on his church board of directors. He is father to three adult daughters all involved in agriculture one of which was able to join us today. He is a quiet man, working to improve his own farm for the fourth generation to come home and farm. He even finds time to dabble with wine making and brewing his own beer in his spare time. But there is much more.

Having just celebrated his 35-year anniversary working for IL Corn, Rod has a number of visionary credits to his name, though in Illinois Corn's 50th anniversary history book, Illinois Corn Growers get all the credit. Rod works to be a strategic thinker, a problem solver, a true leader in the U.S. corn industry. And he does so behind the scenes with his vision focused on results for family farmers rather than personal accolades.

Mr. Zea spoke of Rod's contributions to our waterway industry but let me highlight a few others. To his credit Rod has developed a close working relationship with the University of Illinois to understand critical crop insurance issues and developed opportunities to make these risk management tools perform better for farmers. He assured success by making sure these new programs not only benefit corn producers but save taxpayers money. Rod has led the collaboration with other ag groups in understanding water quality issues, doing needed research and implementing voluntary solutions to avoid costly regulations to producers in the state.

He is the driver for various consumer and farmer friendly sustainability programs that position agriculture as a solution rather than a cause. These dual-purpose environmental initiatives, designed and drafted in the IL Corn office, are just another great example of his vision and leadership. Finally, in our new world of electrification, Rod has positioned IL Corn to be a leader working with our Illinois congressional delegation to protect and preserve biofuels like ethanol which is a key market for Illinois corn farmers.

Rodney Weinzierl, known as the "Corn Whisperer" on twitter, wakes up every day and thinks about how to make sure Illinois corn farmers have a seat at all the important tables and that Illinois corn farmers are starting from a level playing field. I can tell you from experience no previous work is ever good enough. He is driven to do better and if that means blazing a new trail then so be it.

The Diolkos Wagonway was a game changer for the transport of goods at the time, it also sounds like a humble wagon path, two well-spaced tracks paving the way across Corinth. Rod is improving agriculture through the same kind of creative thinking, innovation, and broader societal goals.