

# CAMA'S AGRI-MARKETER OF THE YEAR

by Dan Muys, *ON Communication*

At a time when farm businesses are becoming increasingly large and more complex, Neil Douglas is a relentless advocate for “the little guy.” Which is why throughout his career Douglas has worked to strengthen independent dealers (retailers) and the value they bring to farmers and the agriculture industry overall.

Douglas inherently understands the depth and longevity of the relationship that independent dealers have with their farmer customers. While he can see how the agriculture industry is changing rapidly, he also believes there is a void that needs to be filled with trusted information and trusted partnerships.

In his role as Vice-President at **Univar Canada**, Douglas has worked hard to build up that strength and make a difference for independent retailers — the foundation of Univar’s business.

For his leadership, determination and visionary approach to empowering independent retailers, **CAMA** is proud to honour Neil Douglas with its prestigious **Agri-Marketer of the Year Award**.

The Agri-Marketer of the Year Award honours outstanding accomplishments in the field of Canadian agricultural marketing. The award recognizes innovative leadership and exceptional performance in facing the challenges presented by marketing in today’s constantly changing agricultural world.

The award is recognition of Douglas’ groundbreaking efforts at Univar to bolster the capacity and capabilities of independent dealers to be competitive by launching a program called “The Network.” The cornerstones of The Network are real-time knowledge, concrete analysis and professional development education for independent dealers. Among the key benefits The Network offers are instant availability for dealers to Human Resource experts, a stable of independent business consultants and the crown jewel of smart business decision making — market research.

In addition, Douglas has made a steady stream of agronomic information and education available to independent retailers through Univar’s CropWeb. All of this allows them to compete on a level playing field with “the big boys” — the large multinational



Neil Douglas

agri-businesses.

Douglas led a tri-lateral approach of bringing substantive value to dealer customers, supply partners and Univar employees. The results have been clear. Genuine value to independent dealers that has generated internal focus and pride, more prosperous Univar customers and more informed and motivated suppliers.

It’s a deeply held belief in people and their potential that comes from Douglas’ upbringing. Growing up on a farm in Minnedosa, Manitoba he was framed those principles and the value of hard work.

Douglas has been blazing the trail ever since. He joined **Hoechst** as his first job in agri-business and pounded the pavement on farm calls and dealer calls.

Douglas then joined **Advanta Seeds** as National Sales Manager — implementing several innovative marketing solutions on tight budgets and overseeing the revamp of the Advanta branding prior to its acquisition.

Douglas’ next role was Regional Sales Manager — Eastern Prairies at **BASF** where he continued his reputation for innovative programs that educated the market.

At **Pioneer Hybrid**, Neil was an Account Manager where he became a master of word-of-mouth message marketing. That’s because, unlike the controlled marketing avenues of the past, such as standard print, radio and direct mails, the core media of Pioneer Hybrid was its independent field people.

Douglas always has his eye on what’s next for the industry. He says that while all industries change and it’s natural to reminisce, he doesn’t believe bigger is always better.

“It will be interesting to watch how the trend lines of our industry development shadow those of other industries. Currently we are seeing farm operations grow in size, basically through land acquisitions of varying sorts and I think reflective of the mergers and takeovers that grew the supply chains’ dominance over the past two decades. It’s only natural that the ground zero element of agriculture would follow suit. But like other business sectors, “bigger” didn’t translate into “simpler,” in fact, in many cases business has become more complex, certainly in agriculture,” says Douglas.

Therein lies the opportunity. That’s how Douglas sees it. Douglas will continue to champion local retailer as experts to growers in their area and ensure they can keep ahead of the curve by equipping them with information, technology and real-time competitive supply. **AM**