

Industry Leaders and Scholarship Recipients Honored at the 2025 International Fuel Ethanol Workshop & Expo

BBI International awards Harrison, Mueller, Schwarck, Jerke and two recipients of the Kathy Bryan Memorial Scholarship during the Fuel Ethanol Workshop & Expo

OMAHA, NE, UNITED STATES, June 10, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- At the world's largest ethanol conference, BBI International recognized outstanding contributions to the biofuels industry by naming Gillian Harrison, Steffen Mueller, Rick Schwarck and Michael Jerke as recipients of the event's prestigious industry awards, as well as two exceptional students—Isaac Harder and Claire Weibye—as the 2025 Kathy Bryan Memorial Scholarship honorees.



Honorees

Gillian Harrison, CEO of Whitefox Technologies, received the Women in Ethanol Award for her visionary leadership in expanding Whitefox from a startup into a key player in the global ethanol market. A graduate of the University of Kent with a degree in English & Spanish Law, Harrison has driven innovation through customer partnerships, cost reduction strategies, and capacity expansions. Under her leadership, Whitefox launched the groundbreaking ICE XL membrane dehydration system—boosting efficiency and lowering energy use across ethanol plants. To date, Whitefox's technology has enabled the production of more than 1.2 billion gallons of ethanol and prevented over 500,000 tons of CO₂ emissions.

Harrison's nominator praised her industry impact and advocacy for women in ethanol, noting her active role in advancing the dialogue on decarbonization and next-generation biofuel technologies.

"Now in its third year, the Women in Ethanol Award is designed to lift up and commend the

women making critical and everyday impacts in this industry,” said Anna Simet, director of content at BBI International. “Women make up 31% of the ethanol workforce—well above average for the energy industry—and it’s largely due to inspiration drawn from those like Gillian and our other nominees. I look forward to seeing that needle continue to move in coming years.”

Steffen Mueller, principal economist at the University of Illinois at Chicago, received the Award of Excellence for his academic and policy-shaping contributions. Mueller coauthored the land use change module for Argonne National Laboratory’s GREET model and has published over 30 peer-reviewed studies that have guided critical ethanol policy decisions. He has served on the California LCFS Expert Working Group on Land Use and led pivotal research into the health impacts of aromatics in fuel. His work on life cycle emissions and land use modeling has deepened scientific understanding and advanced the sustainability of ethanol.

Rick Schwarck, president and cofounder of Absolute Energy, received the Distinguished Service Award for a career defined by advocacy and innovation. A longstanding leader in the ethanol sector, Schwarck has earned accolades including the TOBI Award (2012, 2013), ACE Grassroots Award (2016), and the Renewable Fuels Association Industry Award (2024). Known for uniting the industry during turbulent times, Schwarck has collaborated with researchers to spotlight the dangers of toxic gasoline compounds and the health benefits of ethanol. He has served on numerous boards supporting state, national and international efforts to promote renewable fuels.

Michael Jerke, CEO of Southwest Iowa Renewable Energy, was honored with the High Octane Award for his enduring commitment to ethanol. With over two decades of industry experience, Jerke has held leadership roles at five ethanol firms and was a founding board member of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association. He has consistently championed ethanol policy, participating in fly-ins to Washington, D.C., and welcoming national leaders—including President Trump—to advocate for year-round E15 sales and fewer refinery exemptions. Jerke's leadership has ensured that ethanol remains a powerful economic engine for farmers and rural communities.

Kathy Bryan Memorial Scholarship Recipients

Isaac Harder of Plainview High School, Nebraska, will attend Northeast Community College to study pre-engineering. A four-year honor roll student and decorated Future Farmers of America member, Harder has earned recognition for academic excellence, state-level speech and leadership competitions, and his involvement in agricultural mechanics. His passion for biofuels stems from hands-on experience and a desire to drive innovation in production efficiency at ethanol plants nationwide.

Claire Weibye, a graduate of Lincoln East High School, Nebraska, will begin her studies in chemical engineering at Iowa State University this fall. A high-achieving student, she completed numerous AP courses and earned multiple academic honors, including Academic All-Conference and a varsity letter in swimming. Weibye has held key leadership roles through Youth Leadership

Lincoln and Key Club and served as editor of her school newspaper. She plans to combine her engineering education and passion for sustainability to contribute meaningfully to the biofuels sector.

“This year’s award recipients represent the very best of the ethanol industry—visionary leadership, scientific integrity, tireless advocacy and a deep commitment to sustainability,” said John Nelson, chief operating officer at BBI International. “These individuals and future leaders inspire the entire industry to keep pushing forward. It’s an honor to celebrate their contributions on the FEW stage.”

The 41st annual FEW began on Monday, June 9, and will run through Wednesday, June 11 at the CHI Health Center. As the FEW continues to grow, the event has more than 500 biofuel producers, 2,400 professionals registered, and 370 companies displayed on the expo hall floor.

About BBI International

BBI International produces globally recognized bioenergy events and trade magazines. In addition to the International Biomass Conference & Expo and its allied regional events, BBI owns and operates the largest, longest-running ethanol conference in the world—the International Fuel Ethanol Workshop & Expo (FEW), Biodiesel Summit: Sustainable Aviation Fuels & Renewable Diesel, UAS Summit & Expo, National Carbon Capture Conference & Expo, and North American SAF Conference & Expo. The company publishes Biomass Magazine, Ethanol Producer Magazine, Biodiesel Magazine, UAS Magazine, Carbon Capture Magazine and SAF Magazine as well as several ancillary products including maps, directories, e-newsletters and other Web-based industry resources.

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