

EDC Names Simplot the 2026 Klaus Thiessen Impact Award Recipient

GRAND FORKS, ND, UNITED STATES, April 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation (EDC) has named J.R. Simplot Company the recipient of the 2026 Klaus Thiessen Impact Award. The honor was presented at the EDC's Annual Meeting on Thursday, March 26, 2026, recognizing the company's nearly four decades of investment in the Grand Forks region and enduring role in anchoring agribusiness growth across the Red River Valley.

Unit Director David Valdez accepted the award on behalf of the company. In advance of the event, EDC Board Chair Shawn Gaddie and President & CEO Keith Lund also presented the award recognition to Simplot's Global Food President, Graham Dugdale, in a virtual gathering. Rather than a traditional plaque, Simplot received a commissioned painting by Grand Forks artist Madeline Smestad. The artwork depicts the Simplot facility rising above the Sorlie Memorial Bridge, which is a visual tribute to the company's deep roots in the community.

"Simplot has been giving back to the region for nearly 40 years, investing hundreds of millions of dollars in the



The Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation Logo

community, employing hundreds of people, and generating an economic impact well beyond the footprint of its facility,” said Lund. “The growth the region has recognized in agribusiness over the last several years, we think it’s directly attributable to the foundation this company built over the last four decades. They have demonstrated, quietly and consistently, that the Red River Valley is not just a great place for agribusiness, but a great place for business, period.”

“Standing here tonight, I am reminded of something simple, but powerful; communities don’t just happen, they’re built. They’re built by people, partnerships, and a shared commitment to making each day a little better than the one before,” said Unit Director David Valdez while accepting the award. He continued, “Over the years, we’ve been fortunate to be part of so many efforts that reflect the heart of this community, supporting local schools, partnering with non-profits, volunteering at events, and stepping up whenever there was a need. But the truth is, the award we’re being recognized with is not just ours alone; it belongs to this town and the organizations that invite us to collaborate, the leaders who set a vision for progress, and to every person who shows up when it matters.”

Since 2014, the EDC board has presented the Klaus Thiessen Impact Award annually to recognize an outstanding business or individual who has made a positive impact on economic growth, vitality, and prosperity in the Grand Forks region. The award is named for Klaus Thiessen, the EDC’s longest-serving president & CEO, who led the organization for 14 years. Recent recipients include Altru Health System – 2025, Karl Bollingberg – 2024, Dave Molmen – 2023, Wes Rydell – 2022, Lonnie Laffen – 2021, and Acme Tools – 2020.

More information about the Klaus Thiessen Impact Award and previous recipients is available at <https://grandforks.org/inside-the-edc/klaus-thiessen-impact-award/>.

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