During the 1970s, pioneers in the agricultural aviation industry were looking for more horsepower, less weight and better reliability. Pratt & Whitney Canada (P&WC) responded to the challenges of our industry with experience, passion and commitment. From the early days of having a P&WC maintenance representative dedicated to the ag industry, to the creation of an internal Ag Advisory Board, to the company’s amazing support of the NAAA Live Auction today, P&WC has more than lived up to the principles of the Agrinaut Award. The award recognizes a “state of the art” achievement in the field of ag aircraft operations that has benefited the industry.

Many of us older souls grew up with the great smell of 100 octane and the sound of a throaty P&W 1340 warming up in the morning. We grew to love that sound. For many, that has been replaced by the smell of Jet A and the whine of a PT6 turbine engine. While not as romantic, the PT6 brought bigger loads, faster speeds, a smoother, quieter ride and way, way better reliability. The PT6 puts money in the pocket and brings us home safely each night.

Both Air Tractor and Thrush take advantage of the P&WC line of engines to build ever bigger ag aircraft. P&WC’s in-flight shutdown rate of one per 1 million hours of flight is the envy of all turbo prop engines. With engine models ranging from 500 horsepower to 2,000 horsepower, P&WC strives to fit every aerial applicators’ need. The agricultural aviation industry is based on service to its customers. Service that provides crop protection on the day and hour it is needed. That kind of service requires dependability, and PT6 engines have provided that. But P&WC has taken that further. The ability to perform hot sections on the wing helps operators meet the needs of their customers, whether they are scheduled applications or emergency calls. The 24-hour hotline has never left our questions unanswered. Their staff has demonstrated they have the knowledge and training to lead any mechanic through the diagnostic steps necessary to pinpoint, and fix, a maintenance issue.

Our industry has a near zero tolerance for any carelessness, incapacity or neglect. Working around irrigation systems, over trees and under wires occasionally leads to prop strikes. Major repairs take time most operators do not have. Again, P&WC answered the call with a very affordable engine rental program. They keep a significant rental pool available to provide access to engines whenever and wherever they are needed. This represents a substantial investment by P&WC.

But P&WC is not just focused on the immediate “keep ‘em flying” needs of aerial applicators. The company realizes each operator is dependent on a vibrant National Agricultural Aviation Association (NAAA) to keep us flying today and into the future. P&WC has partnered with and invested in NAAA in a most generous manner.

Everyone knows the reliability of the aircraft and engine is only as good as the pilot at the controls. Only one training program in the world helps ag pilots work on the skills required to come home each night: the Professional Aerial Applicators’ Support System. Since PAASS debuted during the fall of 1998 and winter of ’99, the rate of accidents per 100,000 ag hours flown has gotten better and better. P&WC recognizes the importance of that recurring education and has provided financial support for several years. The manufacturer has become a fixture at the NAAA Convention, offering a full day of engine maintenance training at each convention and generously donating four Hot Section Inspections and two new engines to NAAA’s Live Auction over the last four years.

On this, the 50th anniversary of the PT6, it is very fitting to recognize the significant contributions P&WC has made in support of the ag aviation industry. Pratt & Whitney Canada has earned this Agrinaut Award. Bringing successful ag pilots home safely millions of times is proof of that.

Mike Schiffer is the co-owner of Al’s Aerial Spraying in Ovid, Mich. All six of Mike and Al’s ag planes have PT6 engines.