

Alaska State Fair Farm Family of the Year Past Recipients

The Alaska State Fair Farm Family of the Year award was established in 2000 to honor an Alaska farming family and show appreciation for all the hardworking Alaskans committed to agriculture and aquaculture in the state. Nominations are accepted annually, and the winner must meet criteria such as production of quality Alaska Grown product, community and agricultural organization involvement, and overall image.

2000 Huppert Family

Paul Huppert came to Alaska in 1952 and homesteaded in the Mat-Su Valley. He worked as Produce Manager for Matanuska Maid until the Produce Division was sold in 1964. Paul purchased the Produce Division and formed Palmer Produce. Today many members of the Huppert family are involved in the farming enterprise including Paul's son Gerald Huppert, his daughter Paula Giauque, his grandson Josh Lutz, and his granddaughter Terri Bernowski.

2001 VanderWeele Farms – Ben & Suus VanderWeele

Ben and his wife Suus began their farming operation in the Mat-Su Valley in 1967. Today the VanderWeele operation consists of 160 cultivated acres that are operated by Ben, Suus, and their three children – Glenn, Rodger & Michelle and 25-30 seasonal employees. VanderWeele Farms successfully produces a variety of vegetables including potatoes, carrots, lettuces, cabbages and onions.

2002 Havemeister Farms – Bob & Jeanne Havemeister

Bob's parents, Arnold & Emmy arrived in the Mat-Su Valley in May, 1935, one of 200 Colony families selected by the federal government to settle and farm here during the Depression. Today the farm covers 200 acres owned and leased, and the Havemeisters milk about half of their 150 cow herd, producing approximately 2.2 million pounds of milk/year. The current operation is a high-tech dairy that tags and logs in the cows and tracks milk production, age and offspring.

2003 Rempel Family Farm – Mark Rempel

The Rempel Family Farm came into operation in 1960 when Mark Rempel's father, Dietrich, purchased the acreage from the federal government. Mark bought the farm in 1990, became organic in 1992 and USDA Certified Organic in 1995. Today Mark operates 12 acres producing 70 varieties of organic vegetables. The Rempel Family Farm booth is always popular at area farmers markets.

2004 P & M Gardens

P and M Gardens opened in 1976. Today it consists of a nursery wholesale operation with 10 acres of land, 200,000 square feet of growing houses, a retail store, shipping and warehouse area and a fleet of trucks that deliver plants across the state. The success of P & M Gardens has led to the need for over 70 employees during the peak season.

2005 Calypso Farm and Ecology Center – Tom Zimmer & Susan Willrud

Calypso Farm began in 2000 as an effort to educate the community about local food supplies. Today Calypso is home to a fast-growing Community Support Agriculture (CSA) operation which has supported as many as 45 shareholders. The farm consists of 2.5 cultivated, terraced acres in a forested area 10 miles out of Fairbanks. In addition to growing food, Calypso works collaboratively with local organizations to provide hands-on educational and research opportunities in ecology and sustainable agriculture.

2006 Wrigley Farms – Rex & Bryce Wrigley & their families

Wrigley Farms was formed in 1983 when Rex & Bryce moved their families to Delta Junction from Idaho. Over the years Wrigley Farms has successfully produced oats, oat hay, barley, brome, broccoli, potatoes and hogs. Rex and Bryce are both active in their area Soil & Water Conservation District and Farm Bureau Chapter. The family is also active in their church and community.

2007 Insanity Acres – Bob & Randy & Peterson & their families

The Peterson family moved to Delta Junction from Missouri in 1996. They raise oats and barley for grain, seed grasses, hay and potatoes. They family is very active in their community, including involvement in the Salcha-Delta Soil & Water Conservation District, the Delta Farm Bureau, the Delta Chamber of Commerce and the Delta Fair.

2008 Lewis Farm – Brad & Pam Lewis

Brad Lewis is a third generation Palmer farmer whose acreage in the past has produced lettuce, radishes, and a variety of other vegetables. For the past 16 years Brad and his wife Pam have been perfecting their 30 acre patch of premium potatoes. Brad's son Wendel successfully ran a greenhouse operation in Palmer, selling corn, tomatoes, cucumbers and flower baskets.

2009 Oberg-Kenley Family – Clyde & June Oberg, Carol Kenley & Family

June & Clyde Oberg began selling milk to Matanuska Maid from their Fishhook Dairy in 1954. Daughter Carol (Oberg) Kenley and her seven children rejuvenated farming on the Oberg-Kenley acreage in the mid 80's. The family demonstrates their

commitment and passion for agriculture with their popular vegetable baskets, beautiful farmers' market booths, 4-H & FFA leadership roles and State Fair participation.

2010 The Pyrah Family

The Pyrah's began farming their now 277 acre U-Pick operation in 1979. In addition to the over 30 varieties of vegetables available for picking, the farm also sells sod and hay. The families' commitment to their community is demonstrated at the annual fall farm festival, a cornerstone event featuring a wide variety of family-friendly activities for all ages.

2011 Gray Owl Farm – Craige & Kathy Baker

The Baker's opened Gray Owl Farm in 1998 and have been serving the community of Palmer and surrounding areas with exceptional nursery and greenhouse products ever since. The farm has diversified into production of sod, vegetables, peonies and much more. Craige & Kathy are committed to educating the public about agriculture and provide farm tours to hundreds of elementary school students each year.

2012 Diamond M Ranch – Carrol & JoAnne Martin

The Martin's began Diamond M Ranch on the Kenai Peninsula in 1975 and have been leaders in the 4-H and Livestock communities ever since. Carrol and JoAnne are known for raising superior Quarter Horses and high quality beef cows. They have demonstrated a lifelong commitment to expanding agriculture education and youth programs.