



The Crandall family: Mark, Sara, Logen, Brad, Monica holding Kylie, Zach, Larry and Gloria.

Crandall Dairy Farms

DHI Progressive Dairy Producers of the Year

Keeping an open mind and utilizing suggestions from industry professionals has resulted in some major changes at Crandall Dairy Farms, LLC — as well as helping them earn NorthStar Cooperative's 2003 DHI Progressive Dairy Producers of the Year award.

Owned by Larry Crandall and his sons, Mark and Brad, the 250-cow dairy has shown the greatest dollar value increase over the last five years out of all Michigan farms on DHI. During that time, the Crandall family increased their herd's milk production by 5,020 pounds with a dollar value increase of \$541. The herd's current rolling average is 30,550, which was attained on a 2X-milking schedule.

"Winning the award is an honor," Larry says. "It was earned by the boys and their excellent management techniques."

Five generations of Crandalls have dairy farmed at the family's

Centennial Farm in Battle Creek. For the Crandall family, with their history came older facilities, which began to affect the dairy's bottom line.

In the early 1990s, milk production at the dairy hit a plateau and began to drop. The herd had been given the proper nutrition and care that should have resulted in higher production, but old facilities were affecting cow comfort and, as a result, actually lowered production.

The existing barns had poor ventilation, making them hot in the summer and cold in the winter. A concrete floor, small stalls and inadequate watering and feeding areas made problems even worse.

"We were losing good cows due to comfort issues," Brad says. "We were kidding ourselves by thinking we could improve production without investing in a new barn. We expected more out of the animals than they could give with the comfort they had."

Expert Advice

Knowing they had to do something about the cows' current housing situation, the Crandalls turned to MSU Dairy Extension agent, Phil Taylor and district Extension agent Roger Betz. The agents worked with the Crandall family by going over various scenarios for improving the farm.

"They came up with strategies to help us decide what we wanted to do," Brad says. "It helped us tremendously in planning the new facility."

Phil and Roger also set the Crandalls up to use the Microtel Farm Accounting system, which helped track expenses while the facility was under construction. Today, the farm uses Microtel to evaluate cost of production and keep track of expenses. Brad's wife Monica, shares bookkeeping responsibilities with his mother, Gloria.

“All of the different people we work with – MMPA, NorthStar, MSU Extension, nutritionist, veterinarian – are there to help us make the right decisions,” Mark says. “All we have to do is open our ears, keep an open mind and adapt their suggestions to our operation.”

Facility Upgrades

The farm’s major improvement and investment is the new freestall barn, completed in March 2002. Curtain sides allow for adequate ventilation and the cows are more comfortable lounging in 204 large stalls with sand bedding. A larger feed bunk and greater water accessibility also help to keep the herd healthy.

“The new freestall barn was the big ‘X’ factor that moved the farm forward,” Mark says. “Milk production has jumped 20 percent within the last 2 years.” The farm’s cull rate has dropped over 20 percent with the new freestall barn.

“It’s nice to see that the investment we made paid off,” Brad adds. “It’s clear the cows are more comfortable. The reduction in stress on both people and animals is phenomenal.”

The addition of headlocks in the freestall barn has reduced both cow and people stress when AI breeding the cows. The headlock system has allowed Brad to implement a timed breeding program using Ovsynch.

“We didn’t have headlocks in the old barn, so any reproductive work involved literally chasing and catching every animal,” Brad says.

In addition to the new freestall barn, improvements were made for the younger cows. A new transition barn has helped the farm’s heifer breeding program by reducing stress. The Crandalls are

considering building a new dry cow barn and a new parlor as a next step to their farm improvement plan.

Brad says the new facilities allow the Crandalls to focus more time on management and making improvements instead of “just trying to get by.”

Doing it Right

Milk quality is important to the Crandall family because it reflects the health of their cows and is one area they can increase farm income. The Crandall farm has received the MMPA Five-Star Award, and this year received the MMPA Silver Award for milk quality.

“We try to do everything right,” Brad says. “Quality milk comes from healthy cows.”

While each family member has specific regular duties, all work as a team with each other and the farm’s employees to ensure a quality product is produced.

Participation in community and farming organizations is important to the Crandall family.

Their team management style allows them to get involved without worrying too much about what is happening back at the farm.

At least one member of the family has been involved in MMPA activities since 1967, when Larry first became a delegate for the Battle Creek Local. He has also served as the District 4 Chairman and on the Resolutions Committee. Larry and Gloria were named MMPA’s Outstanding Young Dairy Couple in 1975. In the mid-1990’s Larry passed the MMPA torch to Brad, who now serves as a local delegate and has previously served on the Resolutions Committee.

Brad and Monica have two children, Zach, 2, and Kylie, 5 months. Mark’s wife Sara is a special needs elementary teacher at Pennfield Elementary School. Mark and Sara have a daughter, Logen, 2, and are expecting another child in May.

Nicole Mackinder of NorthStar Cooperative contributed to this article.



The Crandall Farm's new freestall barn helped to increase cow comfort and raise milk production levels.