

MMPA Dairy Farm Honored for Environmental Stewardship

Environmental stewardship is an everyday practice at MMPA member farm Gingrich Meadows. That dedication to protecting the environment recently earned the Osceola County dairy farm its own day in the spotlight.

The Gingrich family was presented with Michigan Farm Bureau's prestigious Proactive Leadership in Ecology Management Award December 1 at the MFB 86th Annual Meeting in Grand Rapids.

Now in its second year, the award goes to an individual, farm or partnership whose natural resources stewardship practices contribute to the protection of the environment, while maintaining or enhancing productivity and profitability. The winner is selected by MFB's Agricultural Ecology Department from nominations submitted by county Farm Bureaus.

The Osceola County Farm Bureau nominated the Gingrich family for the distinction.

"They've been leaders in environmental quality for a long time," says Osceola County Farm Bureau President Mark Bontekoe, "They're always doing a real good job in keeping their place updated on all the new technologies."

Nestled in Leroy across the road from Rose Lake, a popular vacation spot and residential area, Gingrich Meadows is home to 180 milking cows and about 800 acres of hay, corn and sorghum. The farm is owned by MMPA members Larry and Elaine Gingrich who farm with their children, Amy Martin and Shawn Gingrich.

"It is a great honor to receive this award," Amy says. "We work hard to be environmentally



Elaine and Larry Gingrich were presented with this John Deere Gator as an added bonus for receiving Michigan Farm Bureau's Proactive Leadership in Ecology Management Award during the MFB's annual meeting in Grand Rapids.

friendly and courteous to our neighbors. It is nice to be recognized for that."

In judging applicants, the MFB Agricultural Ecology Department was impressed by the many stewardship practices the Gingrich family employs, ranging from using no-till and minimum-till planting methods to restoring wildlife wetland habitat. The farm's voluntary participation in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP), was of particular interest to the judges. Gingrich Meadows is verified in the MAEAP Livestock and Farmstead Systems and is working toward verification in the MAEAP Cropping System.

"All farms are encouraged to become verified in MAEAP, but it's not mandatory. The fact that Larry Gingrich and his family were proactive in completing the MAEAP Livestock System as well as the Farmstead System and are now working toward verification in the Cropping System speaks volumes about their commitment to protecting the environment," says Matt Smego, MFB agricultural ecology specialist. "They truly embody the spirit of this award and are very deserving."

Fay Wilson, groundwater technician for the Osceola-Lake Conservation District, agrees. He's worked with the family over the

last 30 years and says they take a top-notch approach to every farm project, from managing six different manure systems to match nutrient values with crop needs, to safely storing their fuel and chemicals.

"They take good care of their land, and it shows," he says. The family also deserves praise for fostering good neighbor relations with Rose Lake tourists and residents, according to Fay.

"They know they need to set a good example, and they do set a good example for the farm community," he says.

Larry credits his farm's success to a couple key factors, one being the use of cover crops and two being the farm's manure management. The farm can store seven months worth of manure on-site, providing the family the luxury of only spreading manure when

conditions are optimal. In addition, the family purposely avoids spreading manure during times of peak population in the lake community.

"I want to leave the land better than I found it," Larry says. "I want to make sure the neighbors are happy and my kids and grandkids can go on."

As an added prize, the Gingrich family received a John Deere Gator sponsored by Voelker Implement Sales, Inc., CJD Farm Consulting, Dennings Associates, NTH Consultants, and Syngenta Crop Protection. Larry was also rewarded with a 14.4-volt tool pack sponsored by Grainger.

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