

One Step at a Time

OYDC runners-up Brad and Monica Crandall take farm improvements one step at a time



This year's 2007 OYDC Runners-Up, Brad and Monica Crandall, are working to constantly improve and gradually expand their family's dairy farm by taking on projects one at a time.

"Our goal is to prove that 250 cows can be both profitable and manageable," Brad says, of the Battle Creek area farm he and his brother, Mark, own in partnership with their father, Larry. "We address the most urgent needs first, one thing at a time, rather than risking the long term financial strength of the business with a large scale expansion. There is enough uncertainty in the dairy industry already, and we want to avoid being in a position where things have to go perfectly every year for us to survive, and prosper. We have always tried to remain as self-sufficient as possible."

Urban sprawl from nearby Battle Creek is always a concern, so the Crandalls have worked to create a buffer zone of farmland surrounding the dairy. Much of the land they farm is family owned. Brad and Mark own over 200 acres and rent most of the rest from their parents, so they are less concerned with losing critical farmland in the future. Brad credits his parents and grandparents with making excellent and timely land acquisition decisions as a key to the farm's long-term viability.

Still, there are many neighbors who live near the farm. With its location at the top of a rolling hill on a main road, the farm sits prominently where everyone can see it.

"One of our priorities is to keep our farm looking clean and neat so neighbors consider us an aesthetic asset to the area." Brad

says. "We are conscientious of our neighbors, and are careful not to spread manure before weekends and holidays, or when weather is a concern."

The Crandalls hope to have their farm Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) verified within the next few years and are working on the steps to do so. Working toward MAEAP verification will coincide with the Crandall's farm improvement plans.

"I think if you manage things properly you can coexist with neighbors and everybody can be happy," Brad says. "We have some manure management challenges with our older facilities that we need to address, and a new parlor would help to deal with some of our wastewater issues."

Within the next few years, the Crandalls plan to tear down some of the existing structures on the farm to make room for a new parlor and transition cow barn, which would then allow them to expand their herd by 60-100 cows.

"Our challenge has been the layout of our facilities," Brad explains. "There are a couple of barns that will have to be removed before building a new parlor and barn. Once we do that, we can tie everything together quite nicely."

"Right now we only have two groups of lactating cows – a high and low group," he adds. "We would like to add an early lactation group, as well as improve the dry cow and calving areas to a level that high producing cows require."

The high group is milked three times a day and the low twice. With the Crandalls' labor situation, Brad says, that scenario works better than milking both groups three times a day. The farm employs four full-time and seven part-time people.

Brad's wife, Monica, with help from Brad's mom Gloria, is the main bookkeeper on the farm.

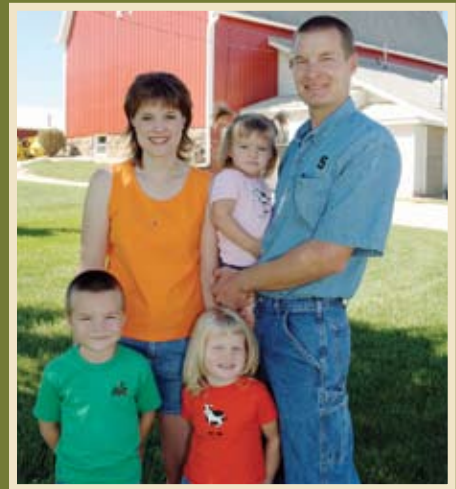
"With Brad's responsibilities on the farm, and me juggling bookkeeping, and staying home with the our three young children, Zachary, 5, Kylie, 4 and Isabel, 2, finding quality family time, is our top priority and biggest challenge," Monica says.

"One of our priorities on the farm is to try and balance our business goals with the fact that both my brother and I have young children that we want to spend time with," Brad says. "Making that work can be a challenge, but it helps that we all live within close proximity to the main farm."

The Crandall family has worked with Michigan State University Extension closely to set up partnership agreements, make financial decisions, and help with transition plans for the fifth generation centennial farm. Larry, a fourth generation dairy farmer, who now owns just 10 percent of the dairy, is a proponent of well thought out transition plans and wants to ensure his sons' future in the dairy business isn't hampered.

"It makes it easier and more comforting for our future to know that we have a plan in place," Brad says.

~ Crandall Dairy Farm ~



Brad and Monica Crandall with their children: Zachary, 5, Kylie, 4 and Isabel, 2

One Thing that Makes a Difference on Our Farm is...

We always keep the big picture in mind, whether it's by looking out for the future of the family as a whole, or by making sure family members and employees alike understand why we do what we do, why we try to do it at such a high level, and why it's worth the effort we put in.

~ *MMPA Members of* ~
District 4
Battle Creek-Homer Local

~ *Herd size* ~
250 milking and dry

~ *Replacements* ~
225

~ *Acres Farmed* ~
900

~ *Milking Set-Up* ~
Double-12 herringbone parlor built in 1957

~ *Ag and Dairy Involvement* ~
Through MMPA, Brad is the president of the Battle Creek-Homer Local, a delegate, the District 4 Secretary and a member of the State Resolutions Committee. He has served on the State Nominating Committee and currently serves on the Calhoun County Farm Bureau Board.