

FAMILY OF THE YEAR winner

Gary and Jane Thome's ability to have family members return to their Adams swine and crop farm is a result of planning, analyzing and allowing their children to make the final decision on whether they wanted to pursue agricultural careers.

The Thome's sons and daughters-in-law, Matt and Amy and Pat and Gretchen, are partners in the farming enterprise. The Thome's daughter Sarah, an elementary teacher, and their youngest son, Peter, an agricultural education major in college, both maintain a keen interest in farm activities.

The family's enthusiastic involvement in pork promotions, industry leadership and swine production are reasons for their selection as the Minnesota Pork Industry's 2010 Family of the Year.

The Thome's swine enterprise includes co-ownership with another family in a sow unit that supplies nursery pigs. The pigs are raised to feeder weight in the Thomes' nursery barns and are then moved to their finishing barns or to custom growers' barns. They also raise corn, soybean and custom farm additional acres.

All four Thome children were Mower County Pork Ambassadors and Peter served as the Minnesota State Pork Ambassador. When growing up, the children's responsibilities included daily chores and they showed pigs in 4-H and FFA. Jane says conversation at the supper table usually revolved around the pigs and farm work.

The Thomes volunteer at the annual Mower County Pork Cookout and at other pork grilling events. Gary says that family member involvement in civic and community organizations also provide opportunities to educate others about pork production's economic contribution. Also, Pat is on the Minnesota Pork Board executive board, Matt has taken part in the National Hog Farmer World Pork Expo New Product Review Panel, and Gary has a long history volunteering at the National Barrow Show in Austin.

To successfully maintain relationships in the partnership, the Thomes hire a firm to conduct company meetings at least yearly. All family members review the previous year's results and discuss future plans. Less formal family meetings take place throughout the year.

The Thomes delegate specific duties to each active farming partner. Matt is in charge of nursery management, pig flow, marketing and grower relations. Pat focuses on crop production, equipment and facility maintenance, and manure management. The brothers



Mower County pork producers Jane and Gary Thome of Adams are the 2010 Minnesota Pork Industry's Family of the Year. Family members are (back row, left to right) Phil Limpert (friend of Sarah Thome), Matt, Sarah, Peter and Pat, (front row, left to right) Amy (Matt) with son Will, Jane with granddaughter Katie (Matt and Amy), Gary with granddaughter Ella (Matt and Amy) and Gretchen (Pat) with their son Brandon.

share employee management and training. Gary's role is accounting, cash flows, marketing and business analysis.

Gary's experience as a farm business management instructor and swine specialist at Riverland Community College, Austin, helped form a cooperative partnership among the families.

"Our farm business relationship stems back to things I have seen work and not work with the other families over the past 30 years," he said.

Gary grew up raising purebred Durocs and he continued raising pigs after earning a degree in agricultural education and becoming a teacher. Jane came from a town background but quickly took responsibility for the sows and feeder pigs. As newlyweds, she recalls a wise older neighbor telling Gary that if his wife doesn't care for farm life, he should be willing to move to town.

"That was 35 years ago," Jane said. "I felt it was a partnership from the start."

When their youngest child was three and the oldest was 13, Jane returned to college, earning her registered nursing degree. She works part time on the surgical and medical floors at Austin Medical Center.

Matt and Amy have three children, Ella, Katie and Will, and Pat and Gretchen have a son, Brandon. Amy works at the Mayo Clinic and Gretchen works at Hormel's corporate office. Matt has bachelor degrees in animal science and agribusiness, and Pat has degrees in agriculture and agricultural engineering.

The Thome brothers understand the sacrifices and risk their parents made to bring two more families into the farming business, and it's a lesson that Pat says will be repeated should their children want to be the next generation of Thome pork producers.

"We are prepared to give them the opportunity too," Pat said.

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