

Family of the Year Award - Hugoson Pork

A large portion of what makes the farming community so unique in comparison to other professions is the generational aspect of families continually passing responsibilities down to younger generations. There is a huge sense of pride that comes with being able to say, "I am a fifth generation farmer." This holds true with the Hugoson family based in Granada, Minnesota, where Kevin and Mary Hugoson, along with their two children, Angie and Eric and their families, continue the family tradition of farming.

The official business title, Hugoson Pork, was incorporated in 1989, but the history of the farm runs much deeper. The Hugoson farm has been in the family since 1881 when Kevin's great-grandparents immigrated to the United States from Sweden. The farm, homesteaded in 1888, has been passed down through the generations.

Fourth generation pig farmer, Kevin Hugoson, grew up farming with his father and took over the 250 sow farrow-to-finish farm with his wife, Mary, in 1985. Growth over the years provided the opportunity for their two children and their families to come back to the farm and be involved.

"I am most proud of the fact that our kids have chosen to come back to the farm," states Kevin. "Our kids are the fifth generation to be involved with this farm, and being able to continue to have further generations on the farm is really exciting."

It was a two-man show in the beginning and from there the farm continued to progress. Kevin handled the production side of the business with hands-on work and spending time in the barns. At that point in time, the farm was quite traditional in that all employees were involved in almost everything; this has evolved to a more modern approach where each employee's duties are specialized. Now, Kevin spends much of his time working with the management team and managing people.

For the better portion of two decades, Mary's duties were primarily in the office spanning from accounting to record-keeping, and HR to payroll until 2008 when Angie began her career at the family farm.

Though returning to the family farm was not something Angie had originally planned for, she found herself back at the farm taking over site-assessments, payroll, and bookkeeping, along with human resources work. At the time, human resources did not have a large presence in the farm, but as growth was imminent, Angie recognized its importance and spearheaded their

efforts in this arena. Societal changes made her realize their hiring process and handling of unique situations needed more consistency.

Today, Angie oversees operations by analyzing current business practices to make sure they are efficient and aligned with the farm's strategic plan and vision. Through these efforts, she helps the organization create a positive work culture. Making sure people are in positions that highlight their strengths and creating a culture where people love coming to work and want to be there are two of her main focuses.

Cody Toothaker, Angie's husband, also found his place to make a difference on the family farm, utilizing his skills as an agronomist and passion for grain farming. He holds a position managing the feed mill and procurement of ingredients while also overseeing the crop-side of the business working with permitting and manure management.

Eric Hugoson's ideology differed from Angie's in that he always planned on returning to the farm. After graduating college with his business degree, he returned home in 2011 and spent time in different facets of production where he currently spends most his time on wean-to-finish operations. His responsibilities range from grower relations to contracts and audits to biosecurity practices.

Eric adds, "Being the fifth generation on this farm is very cool, and I feel very fortunate to work with my family and have a part in the farm's growth."

Last year as a family, the Hugoson's sat down and contemplated where the farm was, where they envisioned it going, and how they planned to get there. This process led them to create values and a mission statement both for Hugoson Pork and for their family. Since companies are impacted greatly from top leadership, the family values and mission statement were created first.

Faith, respect, hard work, trust, affirmation, and love encompass the six family values paired with the family mission statement: "We work hard together through love, respect, and faith in God. We are stewards to each other and the communities we serve to make it a better place for generations to come."

Following the family-focused process, the Hugoson's, along with members of their leadership team, began the formation of the Hugoson Pork mission statement and values. The extensive process spanned several months and began with each person listing their own mission statement for the farm; each statement was reviewed, and certain bits and pieces were chosen

from each to make up the final statement: “Through honesty, hard work and stewardship, we create opportunities for our employees, their families and the communities we serve. As a family farm, we provide superior care for our pigs through the use of leading-edge technology to produce a safe, wholesome food product.”

The six final values followed a similar process refining the list down until it encompassed Hugoson Pork to a ‘t’. The six values include honesty, teamwork, safety, respect for people and animals, hard work, and communication.

The crossover between each set of values and the mission statements appears with no surprise, due to the solid foundation the Hugoson’s have formed within their family and the business.

“We truly believe that if we have and live out these values, it is going to be a recipe for success for our organization, and a place that people can call home and be proud to work at,” Angie says. “If each employee can be good at all of these and strive to practice them each day, we believe we will excel for generations to come.”

The newly structured mission statement and values encouraged the Hugoson’s to hone in on the inner workings of the business and make sure each aspect aligned with their beliefs. Along with team table-talk discussions revolving around the values, performance reviews now look differently, also. Every three months, employees discuss how they exhibited, and are working on, each value with leadership members.

“Both within our family and within our work culture, we are always working on ourselves,” Kevin explains. “To get better and grow, you need to make changes. Recent changes have been a work in progress, but we are excited about where this will lead us.”

Mary adds, “If the employees are focusing on these values at work, it will also make them better people in the community. We want to grow ourselves and our employees in all areas of life.”

Staying involved in the community and with pork-related activities is something the Hugoson’s feel strongly about. The families’ involvement spans across many sectors whether it be Kevin’s past service on the Minnesota Pork Producers Association (MPPA) executive board, Angie’s current role on the Minnesota Pork Board’s (MPB) executive board, multiple member’s involvement with the Martin County Pork Producers, and advocating for pork and pig farmers at Oink Outings. Their dedication to immersing themselves in the community and within the industry is clearly evident.

“It is important to be advocates for our industry,” Angie notes. “There was a time when we didn’t have to be because people were really connected to the farm. They understood it and trusted it. Now, constant communication is necessary because so many people are removed from the farm.”

Angie sums up what the Hugoson family hopes the public knows when they think of Hugoson Pork:

“We want the public to know that we truly care about our employees, growers, their families, and our community, and we hope we can give people opportunities they might not have elsewhere. Negative public perception has been something that has plagued our industry; we want people not only in our community, but in the world we feed, to know that we truly care about our animals and work extremely hard to not only deliver an exceptional product, but take care of our environment and resources at the same time.”

Today’s pig farming landscape is much different than it was even a decade ago. The main struggle that existed in the 1980’s was simply making sure the pigs were healthy. Now, the primary struggles are people-focused; there are external influences such as public perception, permitting, and regulations that always must be top-of-mind. Through these hindrances, the Hugoson family has remained steadfast and embraced change. As the family roles continue to evolve over the next decade, Kevin and Mary are confident and excited for their children to continue the family farm operations.

“My hope for their future is that the kids and their families will enjoy it,” states Kevin. “Looking in from the outside, it’s not going to get any easier. I want them to enjoy agriculture and pork production, but still be able to endure all the challenges, and I know they will.”