



## **Grand Award – Medium Company Crave Brothers Farm and Farmstead Cheese**

When Bob and Sarah Crave sold their small dairy to make ends meet, they never dreamed that one day, their four sons would own and operate an award-winning dairy and cheese-making operation, with 3,000 acres and 2,000 milk cows. But back then, when the family cows were sold, the boys went to work for neighbors and eventually began farming on their own. Theirs is a story of perseverance, hard work, innovation, and especially family values.

Brothers Charles and George Crave began farming in 1978 with 57 cows on 160 rented acres. In 1980, they bought a 220-acre farm in Waterloo and began building that operation with 90 cows. Brother Tom joined the team in 1981 and Mark joined in 1988. Today, the business also includes three members of the next generation – Jordan, Andrew, and Patrick – and another generation is on the way.

The addition of the cheese plant in 2001 was spurred by a desire to add value to their high quality milk. George became a licensed cheese maker and manages the cheese plant. Today, Crave Brothers Farmstead Cheese wins state, national and international awards.

Mark is the farm's general manager, Charles handles administration and bookkeeping, and Tom oversees crop production and maintenance. Over the years, the number of employees in the business has grown from four to forty to eighty today. And all of those employees are thought of as family. Continuing education, health insurance and paid vacations are part of the employee benefits package.

In 2007, when their dairy numbered over a thousand cows, the brothers made the decision to install a manure digester. This innovative technology allows their business to turn waste into energy. In fact, it produces enough energy to power the entire dairy farm and cheese making plant **and** an additional 300 homes in the community. Other innovative initiatives include land stewardship, total mixed rations, forage management and storage systems, and barns with curtain sides and free stalls. The brothers' philosophy is to produce the highest quality milk and cheese through farming that emphasizes cow comfort and working in harmony with the land. Sustainability is a Crave Brothers byword.

In 2009, the farm hosted Wisconsin's Farm Technology Days, attracting over 50,000 visitors to their operation. Crave Brothers have won state and national awards and have traveled the world to teach others their dairy management techniques.

The judges were especially impressed by the Crave family's pursuit of innovative practices, their contributions to the dairy industry, and their commitment to environmental sustainability.

The Grand Award in the Medium Company category goes to Crave Brothers Farm and Farmstead Cheese, of Waterloo.

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