

# Calvin Graber

Calvin Graber, Parker, S.D., has been chosen as the 71<sup>st</sup> recipient of the Distinguished Service Award of the American Jersey Cattle Association (AJCA).

The Distinguished Service Award is presented by the Board of Directors to as many living AJCA members and/or members' families, who, in their opinion, have rendered *outstanding and unselfish service for many years and thereby made a notable contribution to the advancement of the Jersey breed in the United States.*

"The Distinguished Service Award was created specifically for an individual like Calvin Graber," wrote former AJCA President Chris Sorenson, Pine River, Wis., who worked with Graber in a variety of capacities over the years.

For more than five decades, service to farm, family, and faith has been central to Graber's life. Service to the national Jersey organizations includes terms on both the AJCA board and the National All-Jersey Inc. (NAJ) board and appointments to several key committees. This well-rounded, highly respected leader brings to the table expertise not just in dairying, but in crop farming and milk marketing as well.

One could read his resume, though, and never grasp the reason Cal is so effective in his work. His humble, down to earth personality sets people at ease. His story-telling abilities are legendary. And his briefings of activities at World Headquarters the farm back in South Dakota bring lighthearted joy to those who serve with him.

"Do not let the 'Good Old Boy' act fool you, though" wrote Eric Lyon, Toledo, Iowa, who first met Graber in the 1980s when the two worked with others to establish Dairyland Sires Inc.

"Many have been suckered by his 'oh shucks' image of a small rural town in the sticks, little dairy farm, and country boy routine. But the Graber World Headquarters is no joke. The family has built a large, well-run crop operation, fertilizer business, grain marketing network AND kept a small Jersey herd that has, for decades, turned out powerhouse genetics for sales and studs and won awards."

Graber's calm, stabilizing presence

and disarming humor in the board room often steered heated discussion back to solid ground, where consensus could be achieved, and wise decisions made. "Though his sense of humor and wit are unequalled, he brought an excellent busi-



ness and commonsense expertise to both boards," wrote former AJCA President David Chamberlain, Wyoming, N.Y. "His integrity and loyalty not only make him an excellent friend, but dedicated board member too."

Though the Graber enterprise is largely devoted to crops, Jerseys have been on the farm since 1927 and remain the cornerstone of the business. The foundation of the herd was developed from cows purchased from prominent Registered Jersey breeders in the 1930s and bulls from High Lawn Farm, Lee, Mass., in the 1940s and 1950s.

The herd has been on official DHIA test for more than 70 years, is a charter contributor to Project Equity and enrolled on REAP when it became available in 1995. The Grabers have sold 300-400 bulls as service sires to local herds over the past four decades and marketed genetics to Australia, Ecuador, and New Zealand. They have consigned to The All American Jersey Sale and the National Heifer Sale. The 35-cow is genotyped and bred with a focus on polled and A2A2 and BB beta casein genetics.

With agriculture in his family tree, Cal has always dreamed of farming, even as a child when he played with toy machinery in the sandbox with his brother, Jay. He had a rewarding career in 4-H and excelled in industrial arts in high school. He earned an associate degree from Freeman Junior College in 1974 and majored in dairy science at South Dakota State University (SDSU). After college, he joined the family business, which was incorporated in 1976. He now owns the farm as a 50/50 partnership with Jay. The Grabers farm 2,500 acres of irrigated and dry land, raising corn, soybeans and alfalfa and maintaining pasture for the cows. Graber also operates Graber Ag Leasing Inc.

Graber Jerseys has been selling milk to Associated Milk Producers Inc. (AMPI), the largest cheese cooperative in the U.S., for more than four decades. They switched to AMPI in 1977 because it was the first co-op in the area to offer a protein premium. His peers elected Calvin as a district delegate in 1978 and then chose him as a division representative 10 years later. He became a member of the AMPI corporate board in 1998, a position he retains today. He also chaired the Member Services Committee six years and was a delegate to the National Milk Producers Federation convention five times. As he worked on dairy industry causes, Cal had opportunity to promote Jersey advantages to an audience that was primarily familiar with Holsteins.

"For many years, as the only, or one of few, Jersey herds in South Dakota, Cal spent many hours and days standing alone to support the dairy industry and Jersey breed," noted Rodney Metzger and his family, who operate Summit Farm Inc., in nearby Lester, Iowa. It mattered naught as this mighty man has never been one to shy away from a challenge. "Anyone familiar with Cal knows he has a solution or story for every situation."

He stepped up to the plate in service to the national Jersey organizations in 1995 when he was elected as Director of District 9 on the AJCA board. He was re-elected in 1999 and appointed chair of the Finance Committee in 2000 by then AJCA President Paul Chittenden. As finance chair until 2002, he automatically served on the NAJ

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## Distinguished Service Award

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board as an ex-officio officer.

He was appointed to the NAJ board in 2005 by then AJCA president, the late Donald S. Sherman, and reappointed to additional four-year terms by former AJCA presidents Chamberlain and Sorenson. He has also served as finance chair for NAJ since 2017 and on the Jersey entities' Joint Operations Committee for six years.

Among other qualities, Graber brought insight on finances and the processing side of dairy to his Jersey volunteerism. NAJ projects that were dear to his heart were revival of the Queen of Quality program in the mid-2000s, Constituent Day on Capitol Hill in 2014, and a pair of Congressional fly-ins in 2017 and 2019.

Graber has rolled up his sleeves to advance the Jersey community in other ways as well. He helped to reorganize the South Dakota Jersey Cattle Association in 1980 and has served as its president and vice president. He is co-founder and the inaugural president of Dairyland Jersey Sires and has judged the National Jersey Queen Contest many times. He lent a hand with operation of the 2007 AJCA-NAJ Annual Meetings hosted by his Iowa neighbors in Sioux Falls, S.D.

He has sat on the World Dairy Expo Board since 2019 and been a 4-H leader in Turner County for more than 40 years.

Calvin and his wife, Linda, were named AJCC Young Jersey Breeders in 1987. They earned the South Dakota Outstanding Young Farmers award that same year and then laurels for National Outstanding Young Farmers the following year. In 1990, the Grabers won the AMPI Young Cooperators contest.

While he holds all achievements dear, Cal is most proud of his loving family. He has been married to his life partner and self-proclaimed "trophy wife" for 40 years. They have raised four amazing children and are grandparents to eight, with another due this summer. This proud father boasts all four children were crowned as Turner County 4-H King or Queen, graduated as high school valedictorian, and earned summa cum laude honors from college. Eldest daughter, Tracy, and her husband, Brett Petersen, a childhood neighbor, have five children and operate PBP Farms, a large-scale crop farm, with his family. Ryan joined the operation in 2007, but tragically passed away in a farm accident in 2009. Kayla, a family practice doctor, and her husband, Dr. Adam Norenberg, both practice medicine in Sioux Falls and have three children. Katelyn and her husband, Luke Hurlley, are both working on medical doctorates at SDSU and operate a hog

finishing business.

"I can think of no one more deserving of the Distinguished Service Award than Calvin Graber," wrote current NAJ Vice President James Huffard III, Crockett, Va. "He is a gentleman in the truest sense and a dedicated servant of the Jersey breed. He has spent countless hours promoting our breed and always has the business of the organizations as priority."

"Calvin IS the very definition of distinguished."

## Distinguished Service Awards

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| 1954 | W. W. Trout, Springfield, Ohio*                    |
| 1955 | Harold J. Turner, Bethel, Vt.*                     |
| 1956 | Judge Peter J. Shields, Sacramento, Calif.*        |
| 1957 | R. C. Calloway, Baton Rouge, La.*                  |
| 1958 | Lynn Copeland, Nashville, Tenn.*                   |
| 1959 | Chester Folck, Springfield, Ohio*                  |
| 1960 | Ernest Greenough, Merced, Calif.*                  |
| 1961 | Paul Jackson, Wilmington, Ohio*                    |
| 1962 | Harriet J. Groos, Vancouver, Wash.*                |
| 1963 | R. K. Stout, Lansing, Mich.*                       |
| 1964 | Herbert G. Myers, Boise, Idaho*                    |
| 1965 | Charles S. Kelly, Hudson, Wis.*                    |
| 1966 | Joseph F. Sawyer, Galt, Calif.*                    |
| 1967 | Henry P. Knolle, Sandia, Texas*                    |
| 1968 | H. I. Sawyer, Hughson, Calif.*                     |
| 1969 | M. L. Baird, Springfield, Ohio*                    |
| 1970 | E. Lea Marsh, Jr., Old Lyme, Conn.*                |
| 1971 | Stanley N. Chittenden, New Lebanon, N.Y.*          |
| 1972 | Arthur Dieterich, Sherman, Texas*                  |
| 1973 | Amzi Rankin, Jr., Faunsdale, Ala.*                 |
| 1974 | Capt. T. J. and Elizabeth Bay, Lynden, Wash.*      |
| 1975 | Mrs. Thomas H. Carruthers, III, Glendale, Ohio*    |
| 1975 | Paul Sparrow, Athens, Tenn.*                       |
| 1976 | Wyatt A. Williams, Orange, Va.*                    |
| 1977 | Dr. J. H. Arnold, Newnan, Ga.*                     |
| 1977 | Reuben R. Cowles, Statesville, N.C.*               |
| 1978 | Jean E. Lemmermen, Tiffin, Ohio*                   |
| 1979 | John Weir Jr., Geuda Springs, Kan.*                |
| 1980 | Clyde K. Chappell, Knoxville, Tenn.*               |
| 1980 | Newell Mills, Fallon, Nev.*                        |
| 1981 | Harold Wright, White River Junction, Vt.*          |
| 1982 | C. L. Collins, Jr., Sylacauga, Ala.*               |
| 1983 | Ray Chamberlain, Wyoming, N.Y.*                    |
| 1984 | Dr. C. A. Ernstrom, Logan, Utah*                   |
| 1985 | J. F. Cavanaugh, Columbus, Ohio*                   |
| 1986 | W. Charles McGinnis, Mountville, S.C.*             |
| 1987 | G. Joe Lyon, Toledo, Iowa*                         |
| 1988 | Dr. John Wilk, Raleigh, N.C.*                      |
| 1989 | Robert Lord, Woodstock, Vt.*                       |
| 1990 | Dr. H. Duane Norman, Fulton, Md.                   |
| 1991 | Edwin L. Crotty, Trenton, N.J.                     |
| 1992 | Richard A. Riggs, Evansville, Ind.*                |
| 1993 | Maurice E. Core, Columbus, Ohio*                   |
| 1994 | John Giacomini, Eureka, Calif.*                    |
| 1995 | W. R. Lutz, Newton, N.C.*                          |
| 1996 | Max Gordon, Winchester, Ind.*                      |
| 1997 | Harold Owens, Frederic, Wis.*                      |
| 1998 | Richard Clauss, Hilmar, Calif.                     |
| 1999 | Elmer D. Larson, Burlington, Wash.*                |
| 2000 | Dr. J. J. Malnati, Newberry, S.C.*                 |
| 2001 | Harold W. Roller, Weyers Cave, Va.*                |
| 2002 | Ray R. Schooley, Marshfield, Mo.                   |
| 2003 | D.L. Strandberg, D.V.M., Alma Center, Wis.*        |
| 2004 | Neal F. Schirm, Canal Winchester, Ohio*            |
| 2005 | J. Lawrence Benson, New Lebanon, N.Y.              |
| 2006 | Ted Luther, Mount Ulla, N.C.*                      |
| 2007 | Alvin Moss, Litchfield Park, Ariz.*                |
| 2008 | David W. Spahr, Findlay, Ohio                      |
| 2009 | Dr. Robert C. and Helene C. Dreisbach, Mercer, Pa. |
| 2010 | Paul Chittenden, Schodack Landing, N.Y.            |
| 2011 | Donald Sherman, Hilmar, Calif.*                    |
| 2012 | John Palmer, Cornish, Maine*                       |
| 2013 | James Ahlem, Hilmar, Calif.                        |
| 2014 | Glen and Marilyn Easter, Laurens, S.C.             |
| 2015 | George and Shirley Barlass, Janesville, Wis.       |
| 2016 | Charles D. "Chuck" Ahlem, Hilmar, Calif.           |
| 2017 | Craig Rhein, Pine Grove, Pa.                       |
| 2018 | David Endres, Lodi, Wis.                           |
| 2018 | Chris Sorenson, Pine River, Wis.                   |
| 2019 | David Norman, Liberty, Pa.                         |
| 2020 | Clint Collins, III, Gulf Shores, Ala.              |
| 2021 | Calvin Graber, Parker, S.D.                        |

\* deceased