

Wilfred, Walter, and Roger Owens of Owens Farms Inc.

Wilfred, Walter, and Roger Owens of Owens Farms Inc., Frederic, Wis., will be honored as the 76th recipients of the Master Breeder Award of the American Jersey Cattle Association (AJCA) at the Jersey Breeders' Recognition Banquet in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. on June 29.

The Master Breeder Award is bestowed annually to a living AJCA member, family, partnership or corporation that, in the opinion of the Board of Directors, *has bred outstanding animals for many years and thereby made a notable contribution to the advancement of the Jersey breed in the United States.*

Brothers Wilfred, Walter, and Roger Owens have dedicated their lifetimes to helping bring the Jersey cow to the profitable and efficient individual she is today. Years of breeding and sound genetics have created household names such as "Rebel," "Rocket," and "Saber." They've helped numerous dairy producers get their start in the Jersey breed and assisted others in expanding their genetic pools.

"The Owens Farms prefix is well-known in the United States, as well as around the world. Their bulls were highly talked about on the 2016 World Jersey Conference tour that my wife and I attended with Walter and his wife, Joyce," wrote past AJCA President Chris Sorenson, Pine River, Wis. "We didn't just see several daughters at the farms in Europe, as well as the Isle of Jersey, but Jersey breeders from around the world shared stories of their "Rocket" daughters with Walter. That says a lot about farm breeding recognition."

"The Owens Family has set a very high standard in the breeding of high quality Registered Jerseys™ as well as in their leadership of Jersey and overall dairy industry activities for many years," said the late Darold L. "Doc" Strandberg of Avon Road Jerseys, Alma Center, Wis.

An outstanding history is behind Owens Farms Inc. In 1912, the late Wilfred Owens (grandfather of the Master Breeder Award recipients) purchased 160 acres,

which included buildings, livestock, and machinery. That start-up purchase has grown to 1,500 acres of land and additional rented cropland today.

In 1936, Harold (father of this year's recipients) took over the farm and a few years later began converting the mixed

the Midwest who have acquired solid production-focused cows and heifers from the Owens herd. Of all these female progeny, over 3,000 carry the Owens herd prefixes – O.F. since 1972 and Sunny Slope in years prior.

In addition to the females, the "Gertrude" line has over 145 bulls registered with 52 having daughter performance information. All but one of these bulls carry the O.F. prefix and have a combined total of over 34,000 daughters recorded in their latest genetic evaluations.

A well-known individual from this cow family is O.F. Lester Ladyslipper, Excellent-94%. She is a past All American Premier Performance Cow, 1999 Wisconsin Cow of the Year, 2015 Jersey Journal Great Cow Contest finalist, and renowned donor dam and bull mother. Her sons and maternal grandsons have over 11,000 proof daughters to date and

the female line has an upwards of 150 individuals, 125 of which carry the O.F. prefix.

Another influential individual hailing from Owens Farms Inc. is O.F. Berretta Rebekah, Excellent-90%. The dam of industry-known sires, O.F. Barber Rocket (9JE202), GJPI +3, and O.F. Mannix Rebel-ET (14JE365), GJPI +26, "Rebekah" is the most influential bull mother to date from the Owens herd. Rocket has over 13,700 daughters in 1,900 herds from 10 countries, while Rebel finished his legacy with 7,500 daughters in 1,100 herds in 5 countries.

An additional significant sire in the Jersey breed originating from Owens Farms Inc., was O.F. Montana Saber-ET GPJI -69. His daughters numbered over 8,500 and could be seen in 970 separate herds. During the November 2004 genetic evaluations, "Rebel," "Rocket," and "Saber" were all ranked in the Top 20 for JPI at #1, #12, and #19 respectively.

"The Owens family have consistently focused on profitability and functionality in their breeding program. It is committed dairy farm families like the Owens who



breed herd to Jerseys. While many of the females were unregistered, Harold kept Registered Jersey™ bulls and purchased registered females occasionally to assist in progressing the genetics of his herd. Since then, the Owens family has been dedicated to helping advance the Jersey breed and promoting it to other dairy producers.

"My observation of the Owens family is of the upmost respect of how a family farm with humble beginnings, quickly grew into a multi-generational successful, large commercial operation," penned Devan Funk, ABS Global Inc., global dairy sire acquisition manager in a letter of support.

From a young age, Wilfred, Walter, and Roger were involved with the operation. In 1959, a young Wilfred purchased Basil Commando Gertrude, Very Good-85%, as a project heifer from the Minnesota Invitational Jersey Sale. She became the true matriarch of the Owens Farms Inc. herd, living to 14-years-old and having more than 20 direct maternal generations including over 3,500 registered females to date.

"Gertrude" has maternal descendants born in herds from Virginia to Oregon, in addition to the numerous herds in

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help make today's Jersey cow what she is. Such people need to be publicly recognized for blazing the trail," penned Calvin Covington, past Executive Secretary of the AJCA.

The Owens family can proudly state they are one of few farms to have bred both a national champion and a number one JPI sire of the breed with "Ladyslipper" and "Rocket."

As a result of exceptional management and genetic strategies, the Owens' marketed their animals throughout the United States. The AJCA has recorded approximately 1,900 females have been sold over the past 35-plus years, with 230 buyers representing 18 states. Around 180 of these buyers were from Wisconsin, 24 from Minnesota, and the final 16 states span across the country from Maine to California and south to Florida.

The Owens family has been dedicated to helping others grow and develop their own herds by occasionally offering animals to public auction and numerous private treaty sales. One of the earliest, most notable individuals was consigned by Walter Owens to the All American Sale in 1975, Sunny Slopes Designers Ladygirl, Excellent-92%. "Ladygirl" had earned championship laurels at both the Wisconsin and Minnesota State Fairs and was purchased by Avon Road Jerseys, Alma Center, Wis.

"The Owens family was one of the real pioneers in the business-focused approach with Jerseys, proving it could be done and encouraging that trend," wrote David Brandau, past AJCA-NAJ Area Representative, Wilton, Wis. "Their careful herd management, starting with breeding profitable Registered Jerseys™, positioned them to also serve as a trusted source of solid production-bred cows and heifers for herds that followed their example in milking Jerseys."

The Owens began DHIA testing in 1948, with an annual herd average of 330 lbs. fat per cow that year. Seventy years later, their December 2018 Rolling Herd Average (actual) with 721 cows on test was 18,870M, 5.02%, 947F, 3.88%, 732P. The most recent lactation average for 2018 with 650 completed lactations was 19,829M, 1,000F, and 760P (305 2x M.E. basis).

Owens Farms Inc. is an avid supporter of AJCA programs. They are a REAP herd and utilize JerseyTags on the operation. Years ago, they utilized the Genetic Recovery program to register the remaining cows in their herd. In addition, the Owens family was among the earliest and most passionate advocates and supporters of the Equity program and continue to be today.

"There is perhaps no other herd that has provided so many profitable solid milking females to new/expanding Jersey herds over the past 40+ years as Owens Farms Inc., where they continue to provide an example of effectively growing a family farm to provide career opportunities for the next generation of the ownership family to join the operation," said Brian Barlass, past president of the Wisconsin Jersey Breeders Association.

Wilfred, Walter, and Roger have worked tirelessly to pave the way for the next generation. Capitalizing on the Jersey longevity and well-managed calf and heifer programs, the farm has been able to expand both the herd numbers and acreage needed to support the growing family farm. Recently, several members of the next generation, from multiple households, have made the decision to join the operation. These individuals have made career and personal commitments to long-term roles on the dairy.

Each of the Owens brothers takes pride in giving back to the community and various organizations. Wilfred has served as a 4-H leader for 37 years and has been on the Polk County 4-H Leaders Federation Board for 26. He also has served on the board of directors for the Polk-Burnett County Electric Coop. Roger has served as a 4-H leader, been on the Frederic School Board, involved with the Lorain Volunteer Fire Department since 1990 and captain since 2011, and Lorain Town Board starting in 1999 and serving as chairman since 2015. Walter was the local 4-H dairy judging coach for over 37 years and served on the Board of Directors of the UW-River Falls Ag Alumni Association. As a member of the Polk-Burnett County DHI Board, Walter served 10 years as president of the organization.

Above all, this dynamic trio is devoted to the betterment and giving back to the Jersey breed. Each of them has served on the Wisconsin Jersey Breeders Association board of directors, as well as terms as president for Walter and Roger. Wilfred was on the AJCA Board of Directors for 6 years where he chaired the Registration Committee while on the board. Walter has served as an AJCA Director since 2012, currently as the AJCA Vice President and serves on the Finance and Development Committees. He was chair of the finance committee for three years. Walter is also a member of the Select Sires Jersey sire committee. Roger represents the Jersey breed on the World Dairy Expo Cattle Exhibitors Committee.

The Owens are fully supported by their families. Wilfred and his wife, Linda, have two sons, Steven and Douglas. Walter and Joyce have three children, Brandon, Jeff,

and Michelle. Roger and wife, Kim, also have three children Christopher, Jessica, and Julia.

"Recognition of the Owens brothers with the Master Breeder award simultaneously looks back on the effective growth of Jerseys as a profitable dairy breed over the past 50 years, and affirms a vision for the further development of the breed reaching even greater heights of influence within the dairy industry in future years," wrote Herby D. Lutz, Select Sires Inc. sire analyst in a letter of support.

Master Breeders

1944	William MacPherson, Thomasville, Ga.*
1945	W. R. Kenan, Jr., Lockport, N.Y.*
1946	George W. Sisson, Jr., Potsdam, N.Y.*
1947	E. S. Brigham, St. Albans, Vt.*
1948	Guy Miller, Modesto, Calif.*
1949	Dr. Howard D. Odum, Chapel Hill, N.C.*
1950	Judge J. G. Adams, Asheville, N.C.*
1951	N. M. Tibbles, Independence, Ore.*
1952	Frank W. Barber, Fayetteville, Tenn.*
1953	Herman F. Heep, Buda, Texas*
1954	Dale Dean, Ridgeway, Mich.*
1955	Maurice Pollak, Lincroft, N.J.*
1956	J. L. Hutcheson, Jr., Rossville, Ga.*
1957	John R. Sibley, Spencer, Mass.*
1958	J. Chester Elliff, Tullia, Texas*
1959	A. W. Sweet, Sixes, Ore.*
1960	Col. H. G. Wilde, Lenox, Mass.*
1961	C. Edward Knolle, Sandia, Texas*
1962	Russel Hoar, Newark, Ohio*
1963	William Ross Proctor, Pittstown, N.J.*
1964	Clifton F. Russell, Rossville, Ga.*
1965	Chester Folck, Springfield, Ohio*
1966	C. Scott Mayfield, Athens, Tenn.*
1967	E. E. Greenough, Merced, Calif.*
1968	Henry Uihlein, Lake Placid, N.Y.*
1969	Charles S. Kelly, Hudson, Wis.*
1970	H. Fowler Hupman, Springfield, Ohio*
1971	Milton Humberd, Cleveland, Tenn.*
1972	Willis Rupert, New Waterford, Ohio*
1973	Earl Hutchinson, Tunbridge, Vt.*
1974	Antone J. Regli, Ferndale, Calif.*
1975	Mrs. Diana Ryan, Newport, R.I.*
1976	James and Georgia Pappas, Modesto, Calif.*
1977	Mrs. H. G. Wilde, Lenox, Mass.*
1978	Henry W. Black, West Baldwin, Maine*
1979	John Bishop VI, Columbus, N.J.*
1980	Mrs. A. G. Rankin* and Sons, Faunsdale, Ala.
1981	W. L. Payton, Stephenville, Texas*
1982	Curtis Hobson, Athens, Tenn.*
1983	Stanley N. Chittenden, New Lebanon, N.Y.*
1984	Walter H.* and Joan Brown, Hughson, Calif.
1985	Newell Mills, Fallon, Nev.*
1986	John R. Owen, Lewisburg, Tenn.*
1987	Robert S. Pike* and Family, Cornish, Maine
1988	Ray Chamberlain, Wyoming, N.Y.*
1989	Ralph* and Betty Reichert, Riley, Kans.
1990	Stanley K. Bansen, Dayton, Ore.*
1991	Henry P. Knolle, Sandia, Texas*
1992	Phil V. Fanelli, Hilmar, Calif.*
1993	Dr. J. J. Malnati, Newberry, S.C.*
1994	Walter* and Sally Goodrich, West Danville, Vt.
1995	Edward*, Harold, and Donald* Wright, White River Junction, Vt.
1996	Elmer D. Larson, Roy, Wash.*
1997	Albert Bradford, Turner, Maine*
1998	Robert Stiles Family, Clear Brook, Va.
1999	Robert and Barbara Howard, Tillamook, Ore.*
2000	Charles L. Lutz, Newton, N.C.*
2001	Duane Kuhlman, Snohomish, Wash.
2002	Duane Wickstrom, Hilmar, Calif.
2003	James Chaney, Bowling Green, Ky.*
2004	Charles J. Steer, Cottage Grove, Tenn.
2005	William G. Mason Family, Buhl, Idaho*
2006	Aaron F. Richards, Farmington, Utah*
2007	Robert Bignami, Orland, Calif. and Harlan Askeland*, Orland, Calif.
2008	James S. Huffard III, Crockett, Va.
2009	Ahlem Farms Partnership and Ed Fisher*, Hilmar, Calif.
2010	Donald* and Elsa Sherman, Hilmar, Calif.
2011	Dan Bansen, Dayton, Ore.
2012	Dutch Hollow Farms, Schodack Landing, N.Y.
2013	Bearl and Joanne Seals, Cloverdale, Ore.
2014	Silver Spring Farm, Syracuse, N.Y.
2015	Lyon Jerseys LLC, Toledo, Iowa
2016	Eric Leonard Silva, Beaver, Ore.
2017	David Allen, Reedsburg, Wis.
2018	Ron and Christy Ratliff, Garnett, Kan.
2019	Wilfred, Walter, and Roger Owens, Frederic, Wis.

* deceased

