

# Michigan Agri-Weekly

*Agriculture, Sustainability and the Environment*

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## **Three farmers earn distinction as 2008 Master Farmers**

Highly successful farmers carry a very high level of integrity in both business and their personal lives. Many are involved in leadership roles in both agriculture and in their communities. They are truly “masters” at what they do. *Michigan Farmer* magazine, Michigan Agri-Business Association and Michigan Farm Radio Network recently partnered to honor Todd Young of Howard City, John Crumbaugh of Wheeler and Kurt Ewald of Unionville as 2008 Master Farmers.

The awardees were nominated by peers and chosen by a committee of agriculture industry leaders based on farm management, innovation, conservation and leadership. They were honored at a luncheon in front of more than 400 guests at the Michigan Agri-Business Association’s Winter Conference in Lansing, Jan. 16.

Master Farmers received a plaque, Carhartt jacket and a \$1,000 check, sponsored by Mosaic, Carhartt, Greenstone Farm Credit Services and Great Lakes Hybirds, Inc.

### **JOHN CRUMBAUGH**

John Crumbaugh relies on numbers heavily when making farm decisions. He has a spreadsheet for everything that is grown and sold on the farm and every enterprise has to stand on its own. If something is not making money, Crumbaugh finds out why and either fixes it or abandons it.

Crumbaugh started farming 1,200 acres with his parents. Today, Crumbaugh and his wife, Amy, operate several businesses stemming from their 9,500-acre cash cropping enterprise in Gratiot County. As the farming operation grew, they turned some of their land into pepper production and bought a pepper processing plant and supplied the fresh market. They later converted to the processed market and today grow 200 acres of banana peppers that are sold to a processor that supplies Subway stores.

Crumbaugh incorporates the latest in planting technology using variable rate applications on all his fields.

In the spring of 2007, two, 4,800-head hog finish barns and one sow barn were added. The farm is already MAEAP certified in cropping systems and is in process of completing the livestock criteria.

Don Siedl, grain manager for USBio Energy, nominated Crumbaugh for the award and describes him as a true professional who values relationships with suppliers and employees.

### **KURT EWALD**

Kurt Ewald of Unionville is meticulous in record keeping.

Pat Anderson, CEO of the Cooperative Elevator Company who nominated Ewald, says he’s extremely organized and runs his farming operation using a combination of knowledge, experience, direct communication and technology. He uses technology as a tool to gain efficiencies.

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In the beginning he was partners with his father, Kurt, and his uncle Norman. The team managed about 1,000 acres of land and 500 to 700 steers annually, which he later sold. In the early 1980s, Ewald bought out his uncle's portion of the business and he purchased his dad's interests 10 years later.

Today, Lakke Ewald Farms consists of nearly 5,000 acres of sugarbeets, dry beans, corn, wheat and soybeans. About 4,000 of those acres are rented from nearly 30 landowners. He maintains good relationships with the landowners by knowing what each one expects to be done and good communication.

For agronomy issues, Ewald relies on Cooperative Elevator, where he chairs the board. He's severed on the Akron Township planning and zoning committee, as well as the school board and other leadership positions.

He's an advocate and activist to bring high speed internet to rural communities.

In mid-1990s Kurt teamed up with a retired schoolteacher to produce a video "Farm Machines at Work", aimed at teaching elementary-school age children about the business of farming.

## **TODD YOUNG**

Todd Young has a routine for running Sandyland Farms in Howard City, but it's also his forward-thinking and ad hoc ability to tackle challenges and changes that has allowed his potato, carrot and row crop business to grow.

Dale Dosenberry of the Wilbur-Ellis Company, who nominated Young for the award, says his organization of planting, irrigation scheduling, harvesting and everything in between is done in a very precise manner – making sure crops get everything they need to maximize production and limit risk.

Young and his brother and business partner, Tim, operate the multi-generational farm. The original 80-acre farm is now 4,000 acres, and they rent another 200 acres.

Ben Kudwa, executive director of the Michigan Potato Industry Commission, describes Todd as a farm innovator from crops selected and farming practices to managing employees and marketing, while maintaining a high involvement in industry activities.

The farm ships potatoes to processors in seven states as far away as Florida.

Young soil samples every year to determine nutrient needs using management zones. Each zone is treated according to the soil needs using a computer-controlled variable rate spreader for fertilizer and lime.

Sandyland Farms has a strong commitment to environmental stewardship. The farm has a chemical containment building and diked tanks with load out pads. The farm won one of only two national environmental stewardship awards in 2006 from the National Potato Council.

For additional information or pictures contact Jennifer Vincent, editor of *Michigan Farmer*, 989-224-1235.

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Brought to you by  
Michigan Agri-Business Association  
and Bayer CropScience  
Jim Byrum, MABA President  
(517) 336-0223, e-mail: [jim@miagbiz.org](mailto:jim@miagbiz.org)

