

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

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NEWS RELEASE

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2015 Spencer Award Recipients Produce Organic Crops and Livestock

AMES, Iowa— A well-known farming couple from northeast Iowa has been chosen to receive the 2015 Spencer Award for Sustainable Agriculture. Tom and Irene Frantzen of New Hampton have devoted their life to ensuring their farm operation is both productive and sustainable.

The Spencer Award is one of the largest and longest running awards of its kind in Iowa. Administered by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, the award recognizes farmers, teachers and researchers who have made significant contributions to the environmental and economic stability of the Iowa farming community. The award will be presented at the Iowa Water Conference, March 23, 2016 in Ames.

The Frantzens have operated their family farm since 1976 and transitioned to organic in the late 1990s. They were certified organic in 2001. Their philosophy hasn't changed since day one: to be good stewards, to respect and care for the land and its people. The couple is actively involved in "establishing and nurturing niche markets and alternative productions," and is happy to share their knowledge and experience of organically farming corn and soybeans and raising hogs.

Leopold Center Director Mark Rasmussen is pleased to present the Spencer Award to the Frantzens. "Tom and Irene are the embodiment of the Spencer Award. They have made a substantial impact on the agriculture industry in the state and the nation. Iowa could benefit from more folks who do as much for the environment as the Frantzens," said Rasmussen.

To increase soil health on their cropland, the couple changed from the traditional corn-soybean cropping system to a longer crop rotation, adding alfalfa and small grains, which builds organic matter and nutrients.

The Frantzens are leaders in organic hog production, having converted from a traditional slat-floor, liquid manure system, to deep-bedded, hoop houses. The manure is mixed with straw bedding and used as a slow release fertilizer on their crop fields. They helped start the organic pork program at Organic Valley, the largest organic cooperative in the United States. They were among the first 10 farms in the country to send hogs to Niman Ranch, a California-based meat company specializing in sustainable, humanely treated animals.

Working with several researchers, they have been conducting trials in their swine operation since 2012, and are beginning a trial with small grain diets for swine. “The purpose behind this trial is to examine the viability of corn-free pork in niche markets,” states Irene. “Small farms need to be able to successfully produce niche livestock products.”

Iowa State University Extension organic specialist Kathleen Delate nominated the Frantzens for the Spencer Award. Delate first saw Tom give a presentation at a Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services (MOSES) conference, where he talked about his experience as an organic farmer. Delate then asked the couple to participate in a study she was conducting on organic fertilization. The Frantzens agreed enthusiastically and did their part as professionally and precisely as any scientist would.

Delate said in her nomination that one of their contributions to sustainable agriculture is their willingness to share. “They have had countless visitors to their farm... sharing their expertise from many years of on-farm research for both crops and livestock. They continue to work with local schools and FFA chapters, inviting classes to their farm to learn first-hand how farming can be profitable and fun.”

The Frantzens are leaving their land to Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) in their will, which ensures the land will continue be farmed the way the Frantzens intended, to be sustainable for generations to come.

The Spencer Award honors Norman and Margaretha Spencer, who farmed near Sioux County for 40 years. Although not a graduate of ISU, Norman Spencer maintained an active relationship with ISU’s College of Agriculture and several professors, encouraging them to conduct research on sustainable

practices and family farming. The award was established in 2001 by an endowment from the Spencer family, and includes a \$1,000 cash prize for each winner. Learn more about the award, and read a tribute to the Spencers written by their children, at <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/spencer-award>.

The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture was established in 1987 through the Iowa Groundwater Protection Act. It is a research and education center at Iowa State University created to identify and reduce negative farming impacts and to develop new ways to farm profitably while conserving natural resources. The Center's competitive grants program awards funds to researchers and investigators across Iowa, extending more than 500 competitive grants since 1988. For more information about the Leopold Center, visit the website: www.leopold.iastate.edu.