

2015 Iowa Master Farm Homemakers Guild Inductees

Chris Cornelius - IMFH Class of 2015

Jackson County

Combining family duties with church, community commitments and her role in helping manage a farming operation and family-owned seed company is no small task. Chris Cornelius has accomplished that and more. She is described as “an excellent role model for girls and young women in our community in all she does.”

Chris and husband Chuck raised two sons, who along with their wives are now involved with the farming and seed corn business at Andrew (near Bellevue) in Jackson County. The boys graduated from Iowa State University. Chris works in the seed business daily answering phone calls, servicing customers and assisting with marketing. Cornelius Seed was founded 80 years ago by Chuck’s great-grandfather and grandfather.

Serving her community in many ways, Chris is considered detailed, energetic, dependable and a great asset to her family. Helping with daily activities of raising crops and livestock, Chris has also worked in the company’s corn breeding nursery for 27 years hand-pollinating corn.

Supporting Chris’ nomination for the Master Farm Homemaker Award, Wanda Cornelius, her mother-in-law, tells how Chris and Chuck restored a one-room schoolhouse. Chuck’s father and uncle attended that school. Now students from local schools visit the historic schoolhouse and tour the Cornelius Seed plant and farm, learning about agriculture.

As chairwoman of the Jackson County Conservation Board and a member of Friends of Jackson County Conservation, Chris is involved with conservation and outdoor recreation projects in the county.

The family’s farming operation is conservation oriented, with corn and soybeans on the contour, grass waterways, buffers, terraces, no-till and other soil saving practices.

They run a 300 head cow-calf herd for the conservation benefits of raising cattle on hilly land. Hay is in the rotation; they maintain permanent pastures; and calves are fed out on the farm. “Taking care of natural resources has always been important to our family,” she says.

Active in 4-H growing up, Chris developed leadership skills and honed them volunteering in her local community as an adult. Chris was a 4-H leader and is an avid photographer. She’s taught many young people those skills and served as a photography judge. Chuck and Chris met through 4-H as seniors in high school.

Chuck and Chris began the Little Hawk basketball tournament for boys and girls 17 years ago. Today, the annual event is managed by sons Will and J.C.; proceeds from the tournament support Andrew Community School youth programs.

Farm safety is a topic dear to Chris, who severely injured her hand harvesting corn in 1996. She gives farm safety talks to young schoolchildren, working with FFA chapters and other groups. An active member of Salem Lutheran Church in Andrew, she serves on the church council.

Mari Lynn Heineman - IMFH Class of 2015

Boone County

At the Heineman farmstead near Ogden in central Iowa, Mari Lynn Heineman efficiently juggles all the bookkeeping for the family farm, takes care of their beautiful farm home, cooks noon meals for her husband and three sons, and still finds time to serve the community.

Mari Lynn and her husband, Paul, are part of a 4,500 acre crop operation that's been in the Heineman family for five generations. Their partners include twin sons, Andrew and Marcus, Paul's brother Craig and his wife, Martha, and their son, Brett. Paul's father John, at 91, still helps at the farm daily and youngest son Grant may choose to join the partnership when he graduates from ISU.

"The bookkeeping takes about 15 hours a week. As the farm grows, it requires additional records for more employees, payroll and all the forms required," explains Mari Lynn.

She grew up on a crop and livestock operation south of Stanhope that the partnership now farms for her parents. After graduation from the University of Iowa in marketing, she worked for a trucking company, was a marketing officer at a bank in Boone and then became a national bank examiner.

Mari Lynn's face lights up as she talks about her family. She considers raising her sons as her greatest achievement, and is excited to see them give back to the community as she and Paul have. For the past 10 years, she has served as treasurer for Zion Lutheran Church in Ogden. For 15 years, she has also been a member of the church's preschool board, serving as president and treasurer.

Mari Lynn led efforts to found the self-supported ELM Street Preschool (Educating Little Miracles), which has earned the state's highest rating.

Mari Lynn helped grow the Westside Hustlers 4-H club to 49 members as its co-leader and treasurer. In 2013 she received the Fran Thompson Memorial Outstanding Leader Award in Boone County.

Nancy Johnson - IMFH Class of 2015

Jackson County

As a farmwife and partner with husband Lester in their cattle and crop operation, and an active volunteer in her community, Nancy Johnson wears many hats.

This summer found Nancy at a time of transition in life with a career change. For years she worked as a fourth-generation member of the Cornelius family seed business. Founded by her great-grandfather and grandfather in 1935, the Cornelius Seed Co. is located up the road from her home. When her children were younger, Nancy worked part time as a bookkeeper. In recent years she worked full time for the seed company.

This fall Nancy started teaching family and consumer sciences full time at Maquoketa High School. She and Lester later this year will become first time grandparents. Now she's received the Iowa Master Farm Homemaker Award, as her mother, Wanda Cornelius, did in 1982.

"I loved those years working with our family in the seed business," says Nancy. "But teaching full-time is something I always wanted to do. When the position opened at Maquoketa, I decided to apply."

As a warmup, Nancy volunteered and taught yoga the past few years at the YMCA, sharing her enthusiasm and telling others how the activity has improved her life. An Iowa State University graduate, Nancy taught family and consumer science from 1986 through 1989 to high school students. When daughter, Megan, was born, Nancy quit teaching and began working part time at the seed business.

Nancy has been involved in the Jackson County Extension 4-H program since she was a member herself as a young girl and has continued to give back.

Nancy and Lester raised two children who participated in 4-H projects. Nancy has served on the Jackson County Extension Council, helped with the Andrew Achievers 4-H club and judged at county fairs. She received the Charles Butterworth Young Leader Award. Nancy's family and her husband's family have both been selected as the Better Sieverding Family of the Year in Jackson County.

"Nancy has been a volunteer we can always count on when we need a helping hand. Her dedication for 4-H shines through when she works with youth and volunteers," says Amber Matthiesen, 4-H youth specialist in Jackson County.

"Nancy has been a key to the success of Jackson County Extension and 4-H." The family attends church together; Nancy is treasurer of the Salem Lutheran Church Council. She served as organist, as did her father. She served on the YMCA advisory board and chaired the community Foundation of Jackson County.

When her kids were in 4-H, the group was her favorite community activity, and she taught 4-Hers to sew. For five summers, the Coneliuses hosted exchange students in the Communicating for Agriculture program. Nancy also served on ISU's College of Family and Consumer Sciences Alumni Advisory Board.

The Community Foundation is a philanthropic organization that helps fund needed programs in Jackson County. "We have an active board," says Nancy, "Funding projects like park improvements, a grade-level reading program through our local schools and other local initiatives."

Son Tim farms with Nancy and Lester and owns and operates Tim Johnson Cattle Co., a registered Reg Angus herd. Daughter Megan Kilburg is married and works for Monsanto at Williamsburg. Megan, Tim and son-in-law Andrew Kilburg are ISU graduates, as is Nancy. The Johnsons have a young farm employee helping them, Kendall Steines, an ISU student. "He's pretty much a part of our family," says Nancy.

In a letter supporting their mother's nomination for the Master Farm Homemaker Award, Megan and Tim wrote, "Our mom instilled in us very important life qualities, such as working hard, and being compassionate, selfless and understanding of others. She's been our Number One supporter throughout our lives. She always encouraged us to be the best we could be. We aren't sure how she did it all when we were younger or how she does it now, but she has supper on the table and is always willing to do what is needed for our family and our farming operation."

Lucille Van Dyke - IMFH Class of 2015

Poweshiek County

Lucille Van Dyke starts every summer morning on her farm at the north edge of Grinnell tending her chicken flock, working in her vegetable garden, and picking any ripe raspberries, grapes or apples to preserve for the winter. Lucille also takes care of the laying hens and sells eggs to local families. Pretty amazing feats, considering she will be 94 years old in December!

Lucille operates her 60 acre farm with her son, Donald, and her daughter, Sharon. Don's daughter Jessica rounds out the tight-knit family team. They grow grain, chickens and horses; 4-H kids and students at Grinnell College board their horses and enjoy the Van Dyke indoor riding arena.

Lucille and her late husband, Jake, purchased the farm in 1955. Lucille made a big noon meal every day for the family and any other workers lucky enough to enjoy her delicious meals. "Mom still cooks a huge Sunday dinner for our family and makes enough for threshers," says Sharon.

Lucille grew up on a farm near Searsboro and took "normal" training at William Penn College to become a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse for three years. Her teaching career ended in 1943 when Lucille married Jake Van Dyke. They rented a small farm with no electricity or indoor bathroom, where they farmed with horses and milked cows by hand for 12 years until they bought the Grinnell farm she lives on today.

Lucille has always given back to her community; she's served as a leader and judge for Poweshiek County 4-H for more than 50 years.

Lucille's working farm has hosted young people through 4-H programs, and Grinnell College students from around the world.

Lucille is very active in the Newburg-Chester Congregational Church. She's a church representative to the Church Women United of Grinnell, packs shoeboxes for needy children in other countries, and makes stuffed animals and neck pillows for the local hospital.