

2024 Iowa Master Farm Homemakers Guild Inductees

Tracy Brader - IMFH Class of 2024

Des Moines County

by Joann Alumbaugh

Tracy Brader is an accomplished pitcher, but not for a baseball team. Whether helping her daughter Sydney with her sheep project, assisting with farm records, driving the tractor, fixing lunches and dinners or running for parts, she pitches in to help wherever she's needed. She and her husband Regan run a farm operation outside of Mediapolis, a small but thriving southeastern Iowa town. To her humble surprise, she was recently named a 2024 Iowa Master Farm Homemaker.

Brader started out as a pre-4-H leader before her kids could officially join. As they got older, she became a leader for the Barnyard Boys and Girls and then the Town & Kountry Kids. This petite, blond-haired, blue-eyed mom could easily pass for one of her 4-H'ers.

"I enjoy helping the kids with projects and teaching them about agriculture," she says. Brader also serves on the Ag Advisory Committee for the area FFA chapter, and previously served on the Farm Bureau board and Southeast Community College Ag Advisory Board.

Brader attended Iowa State University where she received a Bachelor of Science degree in agronomy and plant pathology. She put her education to good use as a crop consultant for Golden Furrow (now Nutrien) where she entered yield data, wrote variable-rate prescriptions, did soil tests and other tasks. As the demands of the farm and her family became greater, she decided to stay home.

Family of Five

Tracy and Regan are proud of their family and pleased their two boys, Dawson and Dylan, have chosen to be part of the farm operation. Dawson graduated from ISU in May 2023 and Dylan is starting his junior year at ISU. Sydney is still in high school, but also loves farm life. She enjoys showing horses and sheep at local, state and national shows. Tracy enjoys her "vacations" at livestock shows and supporting her kids in all their endeavors.

"We've been to Idaho to show sheep and Texas to show horses, among other places along the way," she says. They enjoy taking their camper to the fairs and appreciate family time together.

In addition to raising corn and soybeans, running a cow-calf operation as well as a 300-head feedlot, the Bradens own finishing buildings for Tri-Oak Foods (now JBS).

The Bradens met at ISU, when Tracy was a freshman and Regan was a junior. They married after college, built their beautiful home in 1999 and had Dawson in 2001. They still enjoy supporting their alma mater and cheering on the Cyclones.

Regan is not surprised that his wife is being honored as a Master Farm Homemaker. "It's well-deserved," he says. "She works really hard to keep everything moving."

Tracy Brader



Monica Lursen - IMFH Class of 2024

Butler County

by JoAnn Alumbaugh

Running a farm is hard enough with two people. It's even more challenging for one person, but Monica Lursen from Clarksville, Iowa, is up to the challenge.

This dynamic, competent go-getter was recently named a 2024 Iowa Master Farm Homemaker. She'll be the first to tell you she's not on this journey alone. She has two capable sons (Christopher and Patrick) and their wives who are buying into the operation. She has a strong network of advisers. And, she has a husband who is undoubtedly looking down from above and nodding his approval.

Keeping it together

Monica's husband, Larry, died in 2011. It was a devastating loss, but she decided to keep the farm and related businesses while working on a plan to bring Christopher, Patrick, and their families into the operation.

"I'd grown up on a farm, so I understood farming, but I had to learn all the little things that you don't even think about," she says. The "boys" were in their late-20s when Larry died, but they both wanted to farm — and each of them has a skill set that benefits the operation.

"In the years since Larry's death, Monica has grown their LLC farming operation to 2,200 acres of corn and soybeans," writes Marylou Ahrens, who nominated Monica for the award. "Monica has purchased two additional farms since Larry's death and added 350 acres to their farming LLC."

Monica had always been involved in the farm, but she also had a full-time career for 45 years as a registered dietitian. She has held numerous dietetic positions. Most recently, she was the nutritionist director and diabetes educator at a critical access hospital, and also served as executive director for the Iowa Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics from 1998 to 2021.

Larry gave back to his community in many ways. Monica, too, has served in numerous capacities for her church and community, even with full-time employment off the farm. She is active in Faith Lutheran Church in Shell Rock and the Iowa Corn Growers Association.

Education is key

Education is a high priority for Monica. She graduated from Iowa State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in dietetics. She honors her husband through an annual scholarship given to ISU students and gives one in her name as well. She continues to serve ISU through various College of Human Sciences work and ISU Extension Women in Ag programs.

Now that she's "retired," Monica does all the bookkeeping for the multiple farm entities in which her family is involved. She continues to oversee decisions related to the farm with the help of her sons and trusted advisers. She's also "Uber Oma," helping transport her grandchildren to their activities.

This energetic, hardworking farm woman sets a wonderful example for those around her, and she will no doubt accept the role of Iowa Master Farm Homemaker in the same way she's embraced all her endeavors.

Monica Lursen



Lynne Johnson - IMFH Class of 2024

Jefferson County

by JoAnn Alumbaugh

Following three family deaths in 2007, Lynne Johnson was determined to stay on the farm as she worked on numerous community projects.

LEARNING BY DOING: In 2007, Lynne Johnson bought the family farm from her mother-in-law and "learned by doing" in managing crops, cattle and hogs.

Though soft-spoken, gentle and outgoing, this 2024 Iowa Master Farm Homemaker honoree has overcome more adversity than most. In 2007, her husband, Doug, her mother and her father-in-law passed away, and she was just 54. Those life-changing events might have been overwhelming for some people, but Lynne moved forward, determined to stay on the farm where she and Doug had raised their family. She continues to be actively involved in the farm enterprise as well as community projects.

"Doug had served on the board of the Jefferson County Health Center Hospital for several years, so I knew there was a need for a local kidney dialysis treatment center," Lynne says. "After he passed in 2007, I worked with a local bank to establish a special account that could accept donations toward building a center. Within one year, we had enough money to build and open the Doug Johnson Dialysis Center next to the hospital. It is well-used and helps many people."

The start

Lynn and Doug married in 1976 and moved to his family's Century Farm. At the time, she was teaching home economics and consumer sciences at Fairfield High School, and she continued to teach for the next four years before their first son, Eric, was born. During this same time, she taught microwave cooking at Indian Hills Community College.

"From 1985 to 1994, I owned and operated a half-acre red raspberry patch, opening it to U-pick customers and selling berries to local grocery stores," she says. "My family and I raised sweet corn as well, which I then sold in town and at local farmers markets."

Lynne has served on the Jefferson County Extension Council and the Jefferson County Rural Water District. In 1992, she was elected to the board of Access Energy Electric Cooperative.

As if her background isn't already diverse enough, Lynne earned a degree in Spanish from the University of Iowa from 1999 to 2001 and participated in two 6-week language courses in Spain.

Buying the farm

In 2007, Lynne bought the family farm from her mother-in-law, took over management of the crops, cattle and hogs, and "learned by doing."

"I learned to always consult with at least three knowledgeable sources before making a decision — and found good renters for the land." Lynne says.

Besides being actively involved in the farm, Lynne helps with the Jefferson County Fair's open class exhibits, is involved in the Word of Life Lutheran Church and is a member of the Fairfield Chamber of Commerce.

Lynne has three children. In addition to Eric, who is a web designer for Shopify, she has a daughter, Jami, who is a graphic designer for ISU. Another son, Kristofor, is in the process of implementing regenerative agriculture on the home farm.

"He's just started his first herd of pastured, rotationally grazed cattle," Lynne says proudly.

Although she has a lot of irons in the fire, one gets the impression she wouldn't have it any other way. She is always ready to lend a helping hand when needed, whether for her family, her community or her church.

Lynne Johnson



Barb Walker - IMFH Class of 2024

Black Hawk County
by JoAnn Alumbaugh

Barb Walker and her husband, Brett, who run a first-generation farm near Waverly, met after college in an exercise class. Barb was teaching in Hudson, Iowa, at the time and Brett was working for the Farm Credit System.

Thirty-six years later, they still exercise together at 4:30 a.m. nearly every morning. That cohesiveness underpins their relationship as a couple as well as the bond they have with their grown children. It also helps explain why Barb is being honored as a 2024 Iowa Master Farm Homemaker.

Family first

Family is a priority for the Walkers, just as it is for all Iowa Master Farm Homemakers. When their kids were younger, they'd share the highs and lows of their day every night at dinner. The kids took an active role in meal planning when they were younger and still love spending time together.

"Barb is the glue that holds the family together," Brett says. "She finds ways to make every outing special and memorable."

Her caring nature is an inherent trait. When Barb was attending the University of Northern Iowa, her roommate was a quadriplegic. Barb helped her all through college and was a personal attendant at her wedding.

That giving nature continues. When someone needs a meal, whether it's a relative or an acquaintance in town, Barb is there.

"I was on bedrest when I was pregnant, so once you've received help, it's a lot easier to help others," she says. "Sometimes people don't see what they need, so it's important to be there and help out where you can."

Barb was a full-time elementary school teacher before one of her kids had health issues. At that point, she filled in at school and has served as a long-term substitute since that time.

The Walkers have four grown children: Emily, who is married to Jake Van Diest; Hannah, who is married to Tyler Hemmingson; Madison, who is married to Jake Wilde; and Seth, who is married to Abby. They also are blessed with six grandchildren. Whenever a family member needs help, Barb is right there. She and her daughters run a business together by renting out wedding décor.

Legacy of community involvement

The Walker children showed beef cattle in 4-H and were involved in band, sang in the choir and participated in multiple sports.

"Education holds a paramount place in our family, ingrained within us as a cornerstone of success and growth," Madison writes. "With pride, we stand as a testament to this belief, each of us proudly donning the cap and gown of college graduates."

Barb credits her mom, Imogene Burgardt, and mother-in-law, Loy Walker, as being wonderful role models for her and laying a strong foundation built on values. No doubt, she's providing that same groundwork for her own children as well as many others.

Barb Walker

