

Charles D. “Chuck” Ahlem

Charles D. “Chuck” Ahlem of Hilmar, Calif., is the 66th recipient of the Distinguished Service Award of the American Jersey Cattle Association (AJCA).

The Distinguished Service Award is presented by the Board of Directors to as many living AJCA members and/or members’ families, who, in their opinion, have rendered outstanding and unselfish service for many years and thereby made a notable contribution to the advancement of the Jersey breed in the United States.

“There are many ways an individual can lead and serve the Jersey cow and her owners,” wrote Jim Quist, president of the California Jersey Cattle Association, in his letter recommending Ahlem for the award. “Some are active in Jersey organizations on local, national and international levels. Others—including our nominee—contribute to the advancement of the breed through policy development in the larger field of agriculture by way of their professional and personal relationships.”

Ahlem and his son, Mark, and their family milk 6,000 Jersey cows at Charles Ahlem Ranch and four other dairies—Ahlem West, CMA Livestock, Double Cross Dairy and Bamboo Jerseys—in Merced County, California. Ahlem is a charter member of Equity. The Jersey herds are enrolled on REAP.

Chuck Ahlem is a natural leader, endowed with a strong work ethic, clear vision and disposition that encourages others to bring their best to the table. His resume of service is lengthy. He represented dairy on the California State Board of Food and Agriculture from 1994-2003, traveling to China, Vietnam, Korea and Japan as part of a trade mission led by then California Secretary of Agriculture Veneman in 1996. He was then appointed to the USDA Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee by Veneman in 2003, when she was the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

Ahlem also sat on the California Milk Advisory Board, is a past director of California Agriculture in the Classroom and established the California Dairy Quality Assurance Program. He is a member of the California Dairy Council and the California Milk Manufacturing Board and chairs Dairy Cares. He sits on the advisory board of the Cal Poly College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences and



was a member of the president’s advisory committee for agriculture and natural resources at the University of California. He also serves as an advisory member of the California Animal Health and Food Safety Board.

Ahlem is a past president of Merced County Farm Bureau and also served on the organization’s state board. He was a member of the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, has sat on the Sustainable Conservation Board since 2003 and is a trustee for Farm Foundation. It was Ahlem’s leadership experience and forward-thinking view of agriculture that prompted former California Governor Schwarzenegger to appoint him undersecretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture during his administration in 2004.

It is Ahlem’s roots as a Jersey breeder that provide a voice for the breed in his dealings in the agriculture industry. He earned a bachelor’s degree in dairy science from California State University-Fresno and established a farm in partnership with his brother, Bill, in 1972. Their brother, Jim, joined the partnership six years later. That partnership was later split into three independent businesses that are still in operation today.

Chuck has been a key player in the founding of two businesses that have greatly improved the value of Jersey milk and the Jersey cow and played a vital role in breed growth over the past decade—the

Hilmar Cheese Company and its expansion to Dalhart, Texas, and Jerseyland Sires.

Ahlem was one of the 12 Jersey breeders who established Hilmar Cheese in 1984 to maximize the value of their high-solids milk. The company opened a second processing facility in Dalhart in 2007 and today is the largest single-site cheese producer in the world. Jerseyland Sires was officially founded in 1979 by 13 Jersey breeders as a means of proving high-pedigreed sires in herds in the Hilmar area. The company hired its first general manager in 2014 and releases more than 30 young bulls each year for initial sampling, building on the base of more than 60,000 cows and heifers in member herds in Hilmar and Dalhart. Additional semen is sold through Alta Genetics and Select Sires Inc.

Chuck paired up with many of these same Jersey breeders on another venture in 2007—the Dalhart Heifer Ranch—to raise heifers in the more dairy-friendly Texas panhandle than the home state of California. The facility can house up to 27,000 heifers, ranging from six month-of-age to confirmed pregnant.

Ahlem has also adopted many innovative ideas and technologies on his own dairies that have saved time and labor, improved efficiency, and boosted profits. He was among the first dairy producers to install a rotary parlor, a move that improved cow comfort and movement in the parlor. The Ahlem dairies served as a prototype for robotic application of post-dip iodine, reducing costs of the most expensive item on the list of parlor supplies and enabling workers to better tend to other details during milking. A new irrigation system that mechanically moves sprinklers reduced water usage and labor, allowed wastewater to be used for irrigation and increased production in one fell swoop.

Employees at the Ahlem-owned dairies recently participated in a dairy stockmanship program designed to help employees interact with farm animals. After participating in the program, employee injuries from cattle dropped 50%, workers expressed more responsibility in their jobs and cow care and comfort improved. This work resulted in Hilmar Jerseys receiving the Innovative Dairy Farmer of the Year by International Dairy Foods Association in 2015.

(continued to page XX)

Distinguished Service Award

(continued from page XX)

It was Ahlem's innovative spirit and willingness to embrace agriculture technology that prompted the board of the California Exposition and State Fair to unanimously nominate him for the Agriculturist of the Year Award in 2015.

Ahlem is sought for presentations on a wide range of agricultural topics, from industry preparedness for foot and mouth disease at a National Institute for Animal Agriculture conference in 2013 to genetically modified organisms, environmental issues and sustainability efforts at the National Food Policy Conference in 2015.

He and his wife, Druann, and their family will be recognized at the Jersey Breeders' Recognition Banquet on June 30.

Distinguished Service Awards

1954	W. W. Trout, Springfield, Ohio*
1955	Harold J. Turner, Bethel, Vt.*
1956	Judge Peter J. Shields, Sacramento, Calif.*
1957	R. C. Calloway, Baton Rouge, La.*
1958	Lynn Copeland, Nashville, Tenn.*
1959	Chester Folck, Springfield, Ohio*
1960	Ernest Greenough, Merced, Calif.*
1961	Paul Jackson, Wilmington, Ohio*
1962	Harriet J. Groos, Vancouver, Wash.*
1963	R. K. Stout, Lansing, Mich.*
1964	Herbert G. Myers, Boise, Idaho*
1965	Charles S. Kelly, Hudson, Wis.*
1966	Joseph F. Sawyer, Galt, Calif.*
1967	Henry P. Knolle, Sandia, Texas*
1968	H. I. Sawyer, Hughson, Calif.*
1969	M. L. Baird, Springfield, Ohio*
1970	E. Lea Marsh, Jr., Old Lyme, Conn.*
1971	Stanley N. Chittenden, New Lebanon, N.Y.*
1972	Arthur Dieterich, Sherman, Texas*
1973	Amzi Rankin, Jr., Faunsdale, Ala.*
1974	Capt. T. J. and Elizabeth Bay, Lynden, Wash.*
1975	Mrs. Thomas H. Carruthers, III, Glendale, Ohio*
1975	Paul Sparrow, Athens, Tenn.*
1976	Wyatt A. Williams, Orange, Va.*
1977	Dr. J. H. Arnold, Newnan, Ga.*
1977	Reuben R. Cowles, Statesville, N.C.*
1978	Jean E. Lemmermen, Tiffin, Ohio*
1979	John Weir Jr., Geuda Springs, Kan.*
1980	Clyde K. Chappell, Knoxville, Tenn.*
1980	Newell Mills, Fallon, Nev.*
1981	Harold Wright, White River Junction, Vt.
1982	C. L. Collins, Jr., Sylacauga, Ala.*
1983	Ray Chamberlain, Wyoming, N.Y.*
1984	Dr. C. A. Ernstrom, Logan, Utah*
1985	J. F. Cavanaugh, Columbus, Ohio*
1986	W. Charles McGinnis, Mountville, S.C.*
1987	G. Joe Lyon, Toledo, Iowa
1988	Dr. John Wilk, Raleigh, N.C.
1989	Robert Lord, Woodstock, Vt.*
1990	Dr. H. Duane Norman, Fulton, Md.
1991	Edwin L. Crotty, Trenton, N.J.
1992	Richard A. Riggs, Evansville, Ind.*
1993	Maurice E. Core, Columbus, Ohio
1994	John Giacomini, Eureka, Calif.*
1995	W. R. Lutz, Newton, N.C.*
1996	Max Gordon, Winchester, Ind.*
1997	Harold Owens, Frederic, Wis.*
1998	Richard Clauss, Hilmar, Calif.
1999	Elmer D. Larson, Burlington, Wash.*
2000	Dr. J. J. Malnati, Newberry, S.C.*
2001	Harold W. Roller, Weyers Cave, Va.
2002	Ray R. Schooley, Marshfield, Mo.
2003	D.L. Strandberg, D.V.M., Alma Center, Wis.
2004	Neal F. Schirm, Canal Winchester, Ohio*
2005	J. Lawrence Benson, New Lebanon, N.Y.
2006	Ted Luther, Mount Ulla, N.C.*
2007	Alvin Moss, Litchfield Park, Ariz.*
2008	David W. Spahr, Findlay, Ohio
2009	Dr. Robert C. and Helene C. Dreisbach, Mercer, Pa.
2010	Paul Chittenden, Schodack Landing, N.Y.
2011	Donald Sherman, Hilmar, Calif.*
2012	John Palmer, Cornish, Maine*
2013	James Ahlem, Hilmar, Calif.
2014	Glen and Marilyn Easter, Laurens, S.C.
2015	George and Shirley Barlass, Janesville, Wis.
2016	Charles D. "Chuck" Ahlem, Hilmar, Calif.

* deceased