

Richard “Dick” Clauss

Richard “Dick” Clauss, Hilmar, Calif., has been named the recipient of the Award for Meritorious Service presented by the American Jersey Cattle Association (AJCA) and National All-Jersey Inc. (NAJ).

This award is given annually to a living individual(s) who, in the joint opinion of the Boards of Directors of the national Jersey organizations, *has made a notable contribution to the advancement of the Jersey breed and the livelihood of Jersey owners in the United States through research, education, development, marketing, or other significant activities of the allied dairy industry.*

In the history of the Jersey breed, domestically and internationally, there are few, if any, leaders whose record of focused and unselfish service can be matched by Richard “Dick” Clauss, summed G. Joe Lyon, Toledo, Iowa, in a letter supporting his fellow Jersey leader’s nomination for the award.

Working together on numerous Jersey causes over the years, Clauss and Lyon are two of just four individuals to serve as president of both the AJCA and NAJ and recipients of the former’s Distinguished Service Award.

In all, Clauss has given 17 years of service to the national Jersey organizations. Equally important is his involvement in a number of enterprises that have created inroads for Jersey growth over the past several decades.

“It is well known that Dick was the respected peer group leader among his fellow Hilmar area Jersey producers who led them through the process of organizing two business entities that continue to positively impact the Jersey business and the entire dairy industry—Hilmar Cheese Company and Jerseyland Sires,” noted Jim Quist, Fresno, Calif., president of the California Jersey Cattle Association, in his letter of nomination.

Clauss was at the helm of Hilmar Cheese as board chair for more than 30 years. The company he and 11 other Jersey producers established in 1984 has grown from a concept scribbled on a napkin at a local coffee shop to the largest single-site cheese processor in the world. An additional processing facility was opened in Dalhart, Texas, in 2007. Each day, Hilmar Cheese processes



more than 2 million gallons of milk from 260-plus dairy farms and 160,000 cows. The company employs more than 1,200 people and is visited by more than 30,000 cheese lovers every year. Products are sold in more than 50 countries around the world.

“Hilmar Cheese showed the world the value of Jersey milk,” wrote former AJCA-NAJ executive secretary Calvin Covington, Clemmons, N.C.

The company has and continues to provide an equitable milk market for thousands of Jersey cows and to create demand for thousands of Jersey cows, continued Covington. Its success provides the industry with a working textbook of the value of Jersey milk, expanding demand for Jersey milk and cows throughout the country.

When Clauss and his fellow Hilmar Cheese owners founded the company, they drew heavily on NAJ’s efforts—revolutionary at the time—to promote equitable pricing of milk based on its value for cheese manufacturing, Lyon explained. “To this day, they continue to credit NAJ for that important role in their early business success.”

That avant-garde spirit has served the company well. “Hilmar Cheese’s success in developing innovative ways to present whey—a byproduct of cheese manufactur-

ing—in the dairy ingredients market set the standard for improving not only environmental sustainability of cheese manufacturing, but profit margins for cheese plants as well,” Lyon continued. “This leadership example further strengthens the incentive for cheese plants to seek Jersey milk from source herds and to offer dairy herd owners a better price for that Jersey milk.”

Though he regularly dons a suit and tie and rubs elbows with industry influencers from across the globe, Clauss started his working life as a dairy farmer. In 1950, his family was milking 24 cows on a 40-acre farm in Hilmar. When his father, Hugo, was diagnosed with a terminal illness, his college plans were thwarted and he began working full-time on the dairy with his mother, Valentine. Clauss purchased his first Jerseys in 1954 and began producing Grade-A milk for the All-Jersey program three years later. Clauss Dairy Farm grew through a series of expansions over the years and numbered two farms and 785 cows by 1979.

Today, Dick and his wife, Sharon, own the home dairy and partner with their daughters, Kimberly Clauss and Karen Tate, in Sunwest Jerseys in Hilmar. They established Yosemite Jersey Dairy with their eldest daughter, Kirsten, and her husband, C.A. Russell, in Hilmar and also partner with them in Clauss Dairy Farms-Dalhart (CDFD) and CDFD-Exum Calf Ranch. Clauss Dairy Farm, Sunwest Jerseys and CDFD are all enrolled on REAP and milk a combined 7,200 Jersey cows.

It was the goal of breeding better cows suited to their particular needs—outstanding cheese yield—that led Clauss and 12 other Jersey breeders to establish Jerseyland Sires in 1979. Like Hilmar Cheese, the progeny testing program was novel for its time. After the group sorted pedigrees sent in response to an advertisement in the *Jersey Journal*, Clauss and two other breeders, Phil Fanelli and Duane Wickstrom, traveled to New England to purchase a bull for 10 of the Hilmar dairies. The sire selection committee made six subsequent trips to New England to purchase promising young bulls.

“Dick and his neighbors forming a young sire proving group and their famous ‘bull runs’ to bring home to California young

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bulls with exciting genetic potential was a catalyst for the AJCA to expand its role in young sire programs,” wrote Covington. The organization’s first regional young sire group, Dixieland Jersey Sires Inc., was organized in 1985, and two more were created in 1987.

Jerseyland Sires made its mark in the sire business with the release of Highland Magic Duncan, who topped the list of Active A.I. bulls for six genetic evaluations. Today, Jerseyland Sires releases more than 30 young bulls annually and also sells semen through Alta Genetics and Select Sires Inc.

Individuals like Clauss confirm that one can positively impact the entire dairy industry by undertaking endeavors that improve profitability of the farm and community, when the approach is from the proper perspective, noted Quist.

An endeavor that thrived from participation by Clauss and his peers is the Genetic Recovery program, approved by AJCA members in 1974.

When Clauss enrolled his own ‘commercial’ Jersey herd in the Genetic Recovery program, others in the Hilmar area followed suit, thereby strengthening the financial stability of AJCA operations and providing an extraordinary input of individual Jersey cow information from official production testing and AJCA type appraisal to the U.S. dairy genetic evaluation system, summed Lyon.

Clauss’ service to the national Jersey organizations began in 1980, when he was first elected NAJ director. His colleagues chose him to serve as president of the organization from 1984-1994. He presided over the AJCA from 1994-1997. Many of the decisions made by Clauss and other Jersey leaders during those 17 years laid the groundwork for breed success today.

“Dick’s vision and leadership prepared the organizations for the 21st century and the rapidly changing dynamics of the dairy industry,” Covington recalled. “As the first president of the American Jersey Cattle Association (when the name was changed in 1994), he helped efficiently shift the culture and operations of the organizations from a ‘club’ to a ‘business’ mindset. More impressive, he did this while still maintaining the organizations’ long-standing purposes and the support of the membership.

“It was Dick’s encouragement, and extra push, that led to the development of the REAP program (introduced in 1995). More importantly, it was his presidential leadership that resulted in REAP being quickly approved by the board and implemented by staff. Plus, it received early and widespread acceptance by membership.”

During his leadership tenure, NAJ worked diligently to get multiple component pricing adopted in the Federal Order system. In 1988, while he was NAJ president, the first Federal Milk Marketing Order implemented component pricing—a pricing structure that would eventually be applied to 85% of the country’s milk through Federal Order Reform in 2000.

“In fulfilling his many formal leadership roles, Dick Clauss is always the astute dairy business owner and the diplomatically gracious gentleman, one whose leadership by example everyone is pleased to follow,” remarked Lyon.

“Dick is one of the most unselfish people I know,” noted Covington. “He is the same whether in a 40-cow tie stall barn in Vermont buying a bull or sitting around a board table conferring with the world’s dairy leaders.”

Though he does not seek the limelight or call attention to himself, his leadership contributions have been recognized outside the Jersey world as well. In 1995, he was named Dairyman of the Year by World Dairy Expo and Los Lecheros Dairyman of the Year by California Polytechnic State University. Three years later, National Dairy Shrine presented him with the Guest of Honor award. The Hilmar Chamber of Commerce pronounced him Citizen of the Year in 1996 and the International Dairy Foods Association named him Innovative Dairy Farmer of the Year in 2000.

“During the past 25 years, the population of Jersey cattle has more than doubled in the U.S. Participation in AJCA and NAJ programs is at record levels. Demand for Jersey genetics grows each year. The Jersey breed no longer takes a back seat, but has a front row seat,” Covington summed.

“Yes, many people and events have made all of this possible. However, there is one person—Dick Clauss—who has had a greater impact and made more contributions than any other.”

AJCA-NAJ Award for Meritorious Service

- 1999 Morris B. Ewing, Tucson, Ariz.*
- 2000 Allen D. Meyer, West Fargo, N.D.*
- 2001 Calvin Covington, Ocala, Fla.
- 2002 John Jeter, Hilmar, Calif.
- 2003 Charlene Nardone, Orient, Ohio*
- 2003 Merlin D. Woodruff, Urbana, Ohio*
- 2004 Michael L. Brown, Seattle, Wash.
- 2005 Rodger S. Hoyt, Delaware, Ohio*
- 2006 Dr. Clarence S. Olson, Madison, Wis.
- 2007 Dr. John C. Wilk, Raleigh, N.C.
- 2008 Henry H. Dowlen, Lewisburg, Tenn.
- 2009 Dr. Ronald E. Pearson, Blacksburg, Va.
- 2010 Dr. Joseph A. Lineweaver, Radford, Va.
- 2011 David Brandau, Wilton, Wis.
- 2011 David Parkinson, Sahuarita, Ariz.
- 2012 Dr. H. Duane Norman, Fulton, Md.
- 2012 Dr. Curtis P. Van Tassell, Beltsville, Md.
- 2013 Dr. Robert Cropp and Dr. Edward Jesse, Madison, Wis.
- 2014 Richard “Dick” Smith, Waunakee, Wis.
- 2015 Paula M. England, Columbus, Ohio
- 2016 Richard “Dick” Clauss, Hilmar, Calif.

* deceased