

Welcome to New England



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**EASTERN STATES EXPOSITION AGRICULTURAL ADVENTURERS AWARD
2018 WINNERS: CRANE BROTHERS FARMS, EXETER, MAINE**

The New England Fellowship of Agricultural Adventurers presented Crane Brothers Farms, of Exeter, Maine, with the 2018 Agricultural Adventurers Award at the Annual Meeting of Eastern States Exposition (ESE), May 17, in West Springfield, Mass.

The award, sponsored by ESE, was presented to the four-generation enterprise known throughout the Northeast for its large-scale, state-of-the-art potato and grain production and for the contributions Crane family members continue to make to agriculture and the public sphere at the community, regional and national levels.

The Crane Brothers story begins with Mildred and George Crane who in the 1950s sold their farm to sons Vernon and Neil. They formed Crane Brothers Farms and grew peas, beans and other vegetables for a cannery in nearby Corinna, Maine. In 1961, they entered into a contract with Frito Lay to produce chip potatoes for a plant in Fall River, Mass. In the mid-1970s Frito built what, at the time, was considered the largest snack food plant in the world in Killingly, Conn., and Crane Brothers Farms would keep pace with the plant's needs by growing and expanding their potato acreage and becoming one of the largest suppliers of chip potatoes in the Northeast.

Crane Brothers today has the second oldest standing supply contract with Frito Lay in the United States. Vern and Neil's sons Steve and Jim graduated from the University of Maine and returned to gradually take over management of the operation, which grew with the purchase of other farms in the central Maine area around Exeter and in the Oxford County region in western Maine. They also added acreage through rental agreements to the point where today they plant upwards of 3,200 acres of potatoes, corn and small grains, which are rotated as part of the farms' sophisticated crop health management program. Some 70 percent of the acres of land are irrigated.

Jim's sons Andy and Ryan have finished college at the University of Maine and Purdue respectively and have joined the operation, representing the fourth generation of Cranes on the land. Jim and Steve are the leaders of the team, while their fathers Vernon and Neil are active during the production season and spend winters in the South.

Crane Brothers has a fleet of 30 trucks, 20 tractors and a vast array of modern tillage machinery, planters, sprayers, combines, diggers and other rolling equipment. Their grading and storage facilities are strictly state-of-the-art in order to conform to Frito Lay's exacting quality standards. In the current year the farm will ship between 250,000 and 300,000 hundredweight of potatoes to the Frito plant and market 250,000 bushels of corn and small grains to mills in the New England region.

The operation has succeeded by aggressive adoption of the latest advances in agronomy, cutting edge practices in culture and the latest harvest technology. Proprietary seed stock is provided by Frito Lay and is planted for fall, winter and springtime shipment. Potatoes grown in western Maine are shipped from the fields to the fryer without going into storage. Central Maine crops are stored for both short and long-term usage in facilities located in three different towns.

Beyond the farms' complex operations, the Cranes are involved in many activities of benefit to their industry and the broader community. Neil has served on the U.S. Potato Board, including a stint as chairman, and president of the Maine Association of Conservation Districts. Steve has been on the National Potato Council, of which he was president in 2012. Neil has been a board member of the Maine Farmland Trust and the USDA-ASCS state committee. Ryan currently holds a seat on the Penobscot County Conservation Committee, in addition to being a member of the state Integrated Pest Management Board. Cranes have held office on local boards of selectmen, school boards and other committees. Jim presently sits on the Advisory Council of Farm Credit East and he has also served several years as vice president of Maine Farm Bureau.

In a mission statement, Crane Brothers Farms sets forth three key goals: A fair rate of return on invested resources to its owners; a safe and fulfilling environment to work and live in; and a farm capable of producing sustained income for future generations. This mission will be accomplished when: Those employed in the business complete their careers with financial security, and value our family and business associations; the business grows and adapts, remains financially viable and is successfully passed to successors with qualifications and interest that assure continuation of its heritage; and, to continue to be an industry leader and to grow the business through traditional contracts, new customers and through niche market opportunities.

The Fellowship of Agricultural Adventurers has honored outstanding leaders in New England agriculture since 1953. A special committee, appointed by the trustees of Eastern States Exposition, selects its annual fellow on the basis of innovation, pioneering and lifetime dedication to the betterment of agriculture.

The Big E takes place September 14-30, 2018, in West Springfield, Mass. For more information and to interact with the Fair through social media, visit www.TheBigE.com.

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