

# New Opportunities for Field Clamps

By Richard List,  
Ag Operations Manager

Storing sugarbeets in grower fields until Christmas? As cleaning/loading (Maus) operations have increased over the past few years, Michigan Sugar Company has had an increase in the number of tons delivered directly to the factories. In most situations, this would be good news, since beets going directly to the flumes should result in fewer costs for the Co-op; however, when the majority of our beets are delivered this way during long-term piling and continuing to Thanksgiving, managing our long-term storage piles (recovering pile shoulders and ends) at our factory sites can be a problem. To alleviate some of these issues, Michigan Sugar Company will have two new stackers ready for harvest in Caro.

In the future, if more cleaner/loader operations are allowed and the flumes of our factories are full, buying more property at our factory sites or converting more pilers to stackers are possible options. Another solution could be to leave a certain percentage of the cleaner/loader operation's sugarbeets in small piles (clamps) in grower fields for a few extra weeks. A cleaner/loader could deliver beets to the factories on a scheduled basis from Thanksgiving to the middle of December or later. Since our factories slice around 20,000 tons per day, there would be the potential to store 600,000 tons (20,000 x 30 days) in clamps in grower fields.

This past year, we did our first testing of clamp storage at two different locations. We left two clamps in a field near Ruth, one covered with straw and the other left uncovered. Most factory managers are very hesitant about allowing straw to enter their factories, but the cleaner/loaders did an excellent job of removing the straw. Another test was done in a field east of Sandusky. One clamp was covered with a special blanket material (used in Europe on some of their clamps) and the other was left uncovered. Sugars and purities were taken on the beets when they were harvested in mid-November. In early January, the remaining beets from the clamp were cleaned, loaded and again these sugarbeets were tested for sugar and purity. Tests showed almost no difference between early (at harvest) and late (from clamps) samples, as seen below.

STRAW COVERED	SUGAR	CJP	DELIVERED
Baseline	20.50	96.10	11/16/2012
Covered	20.60	96.04	01/03/2013
Uncovered	20.50	96.10	01/03/2013

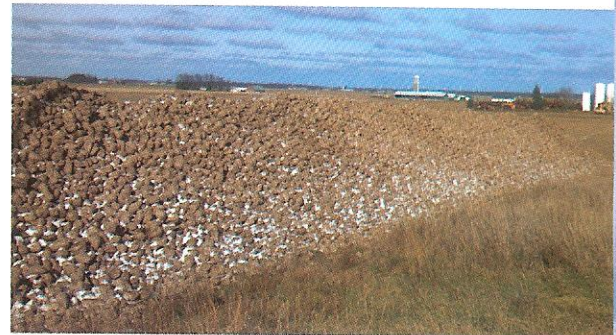
TARP COVERED	SUGAR	CJP	DELIVERED
Baseline	19.02	95.33	11/12/2012
Covered	19.40	94.68	01/02/2013
Uncovered	19.40	95.02	01/02/2013

The comparisons are the results of only one year of testing. If this is the direction Michigan Sugar Company wants to go, we must continue to look at sugars, purities, and shrinkage in clamp piles. Tonnage losses will be difficult to measure. By leaving beets in clamps until mid-December, we should alleviate lines at some of our piling stations.

If Michigan Sugar Company can accurately compare sugars, purities, and dehydration of sugarbeets stored in clamps to sugarbeets delivered during regular harvest, growers may be willing to leave their beets in clamps until Christmas.

There are a lot of "ifs"; however, these challenges could be part of the new direction at Michigan Sugar Company. ■

*At right, top to bottom: Uncovered clamp in field; covering a clamp with a tarp; straw-covered clamp.*



**Richard List**, Ag Operations Manager for Michigan Sugar Company, has been with the company for 17 years.

# Gardner Family Farming, LLC

## Yale, Michigan

### Three Generations and Growing Strong

Dennis Gardner and his wife, Reta, are third generation beet growers. They, along with Bruce and Gail Gardner, Dennis' parents, are co-owners of the Gardner Family Farming, LLC. The farm (formerly "Gardner Farms") was established in 1906 by Dennis' grandfather, Frank Gardner, and is located northeast of Yale, Michigan. Frank grew sugarbeets on the farm in the 1960s but eventually discontinued growing beets when the farm expanded to cattle. Dennis and Bruce began growing beets again in 1997 and continue growing them today, with 425 total shares owned, averaging 20-25 tons per acre with 16-18 percent sugar over the last five years.

Today, Dennis and Bruce crop farm 1,700 acres of owned and rented ground. In addition to sugarbeets, the Gardners grow soybeans, wheat, and corn. The general crop rotation is soybeans-sugarbeets-wheat or corn. Occasionally, beets are planted after corn. The farm uses minimum tillage when working their ground. This year, they made the switch from 30 to 22-inch rows for all of their crops. Dennis decided to make the switch due to the benefits of narrow rows that he had observed from research data. When planting their beets, Dennis uses Beta and Crystal seed with the varieties dependent on the needs for each field. Along with correct varieties, Dennis believes timing is a vital key for a successful crop. Equipment must be ready to go when the weather allows for planting. Good timing of field work and planting allows the crop to successfully establish and be healthy enough to fight off any potential disease pressures. Watching the crop diligently aids in the proper timing of chemical applications for weeds, insects, and diseases.

Harvesting for Dennis changed last year when the farm purchased a Ropa Tiger and Big Bear. Along with his beets, Dennis custom harvested 800 acres for other area sugarbeet growers. All of the beets harvested by him are delivered to the Croswell beet receiving station. The beets are delivered throughout the harvest period, beginning with early delivery and finishing during long-term piling by grower-owned trucks. All of the growers for whom he custom harvests use their trucks to help deliver each other's beets to make the harvest run smoother and more efficiently.

Dennis keeps himself busy within the agricultural industry by being part of the Soybean Promotion Committee Board which is responsible for managing soybean check-off money. Just this past winter Dennis was elected to the Michigan Sugar Company East District Board by his fellow growers. Dennis is also involved in the community; he and his family sing in the church choir at Colonial Woods Missionary Church. He is also a member of a quartet with his parents and his sister, Michelle. Dennis is a past member of the Trustee Board for Trinity Missionary Church. When he is not working on the farm, he spends his time with his family. Dennis and Reta have been



*Gardner Family Farming, LLC, with the farm shop in the background. One of the farm's original barns was remodeled into their modern-day shop.*



*Above: Dennis Gardner planting his sugarbeets near Croswell in early 2013. Right: Dennis with his wife, Reta, and four daughters.*

blessed with four daughters; Kristin, Jenna, Dana, and Lauren. They like to vacation at their summer home in St. Helen, Michigan.

The future goals of the farm are to expand to 2,500 acres and possibly purchase a Ropa Maus to run in the Croswell area. Their main goal is to keep the farm within the family for years to come as the new farm name would suggest. Although his daughters are still young, they have shown keen interest in the farm and enjoy taking turns riding in the Tiger with Dennis during harvest. After all, what better way to learn how to farm and operate farm equipment than by spending time around the farm equipment with their father? ■



**Glenn Martus** is an agriculturist at Michigan Sugar Company in Croswell. He joined the Company in September 2011.

## Zwerk and Sons Farm

### Vassar, Michigan

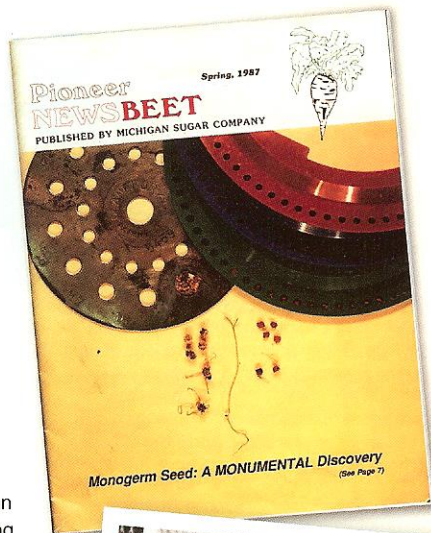
#### Past, Present ... and Future!

Zwerk and Sons Farm of Vassar, Michigan, has grown sugarbeets for 68 years, so "beet season" is nothing new and still requires "all hands on deck" when it begins. In 1987, Michigan Sugar Company had written an article on the Zwerks regarding a harvester review. They had purchased a WIC harvester to harvest their beets in a timely fashion. In 1986, they reported harvesting 434 acres of sugarbeets, farming a total of 3,200 acres. Zwerks planted their beets with a 12-row, 28-inch John Deere planter, and they hauled those beets to the factory with two tandems and one tri-axle truck that averaged 17 tons/load. Arnold Zwerk and his sons Mike and Larry had a great yield that year with 25.8 tons per acre and finished harvest in 21 days.

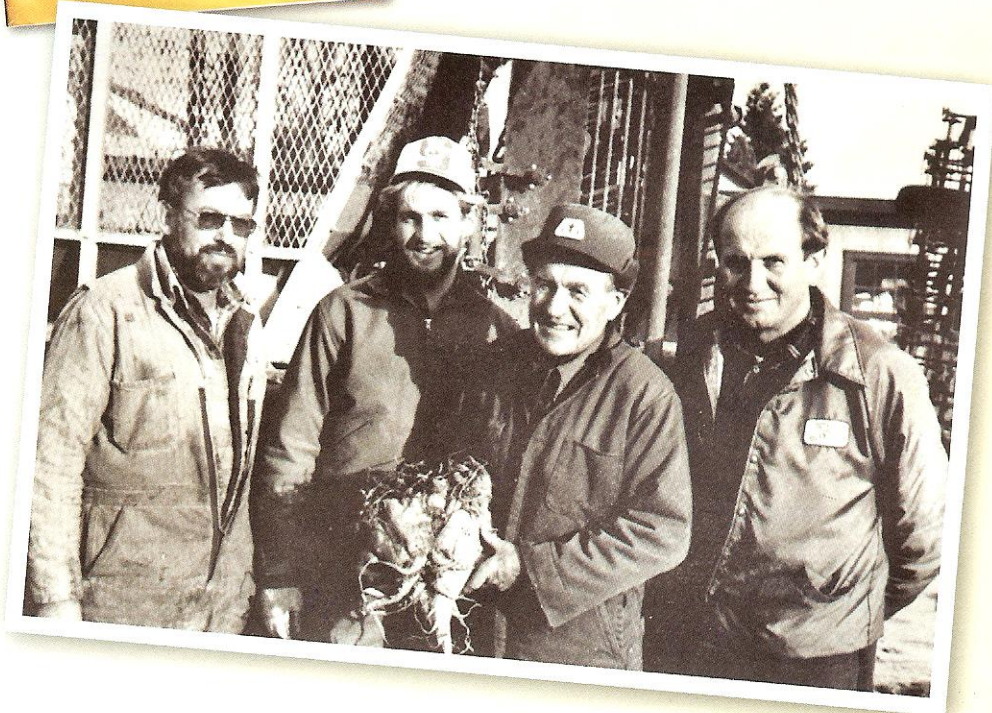
Today, Zwerk and Sons Farm has turned to the next generation. Partners Marty Zwerk, Jeff Schluckbier, and Dave Rupprecht operate the farm. Arnold Zwerk has since passed away, but Mike and Larry are still active on the farm helping when they can. The farm is a bit different than it was just 26 years ago, growing around 1,200 acres of sugarbeets and farming a total of 6,700 acres of land. The Zwerks plant those beets with a 22-inch, 48-row John Deere planter, which saves them time when the soil condition is ideal for planting. Last fall, they harvested their beet crop with a 22-inch, 12-row Amity harvester. They use three beet carts to keep the trucks full and the harvester empty. For the sugarbeet haul, Zwerks use eight semi-trucks averaging 40 tons per load. They like to take their beets to the factory sites as often as they can.

The choice to switch to narrow rows was made a few years ago, and with the 48-row planter, it was given a lot of thought. Taking into consideration an improved yield and higher sugars, the decision turned out to be a good one. For the upcoming harvest, they have decided to go with a self-propelled harvester. The Zwerk farm requires significant manpower during the sugarbeet season and fall, due to the number of acres they manage. With roughly ten employees, they know that their Ropa harvester will help to not only save time and money, but also keep fatigue and stress at bay during the busy harvest season. The Zwerks hope that with the new harvester, they can keep their crew working in the beets and have the option to send a few workers to a different crop to help with the entire fall harvest.

Taking advantage of auto-steer has also saved time and money for the Zwerks in the long run. Whether it is fewer tracks through the field or having the ability to shut off row units in the spring, technology is changing and it can be very easily introduced into everyday farming practices. ■



*This photo, published in the Spring 1987 issue of The Pioneer Newsbeet, demonstrates the longevity of the Zwerk and Sons Farm. Featuring a 23-pound sugarbeet held by Arnold Zwerk who is flanked by, left to right, his son, Larry, his grandson, Marty, and son, Mike.*



*Zwerk and Sons Farm is currently operated by, left to right, Dave Rupprecht, Jeff Schluckbier, and Marty Zwerk.*



**Dexter Auernhamer** is an agriculturist at Michigan Sugar Company in Caro. He joined the Company in February 2010.

## Get to Know Our Newest Board Members

by Julie Perry, Executive Assistant of Administration

*NEW TIGER 2013*

**Michael McCormack**, of Sunfield, Michigan, was appointed to Michigan Sugar Company's Board of Directors last December to serve the balance of Loren Humm's term in the West District (Region 2) of our growing area. Loren passed away last October.

Mike farms with his brother, John, in the southern area of Ionia and Clinton counties. John handles the dairy side of their partnership with his two sons, Justin and Jason McCormack, while Mike handles the crop side (sugarbeets [500 acres], cucumbers, corn, and alfalfa), with the help of his stepson, Eric ("Louie") Bullen. Pam, Mike's wife of 12 years, is a retired legal secretary, and now helps with the operation. Mike refers to her as the "Topper Chick." Outside of farming, Mike serves on the Danby Township Board of Appeals and their Planning Commission.

There had been a 45-year gap in sugarbeet production in Mike's area of the state. About ten years ago, the McCormacks had an opportunity to grow for Monitor Sugar Company. They needed more diversity in their operation and Mike felt a more "high-end" crop would reward them for the extra effort they put into it. He says, "Sugarbeets are very responsive to management. Once we started raising sugarbeets, we became better farmers." He shared that it is a "great privilege" to be able to grow sugarbeets as "they are our mainstay."

Injuries from a 1985 car accident require Mike to use a wheelchair, but Mike and Pam are not idle souls by any means. Pam has climbed Kilimanjaro and Mike has been skiing in the Himalayas. Skiing is one of the things he enjoys most. He said it "provides a sense of freedom and speed that I don't experience in other ways." He is a ski mentor, both for the able-bodied and disabled.

In addition to sugarbeets, which Mike says is truly one of his passions, and skiing, he loves flying his Cessna Cardinal that he purchased in Salt Lake City. Mike had "stopped" at an airport in Ionia on June 23, 1991, and one thing led to another. He received his pilot's license in 1993.

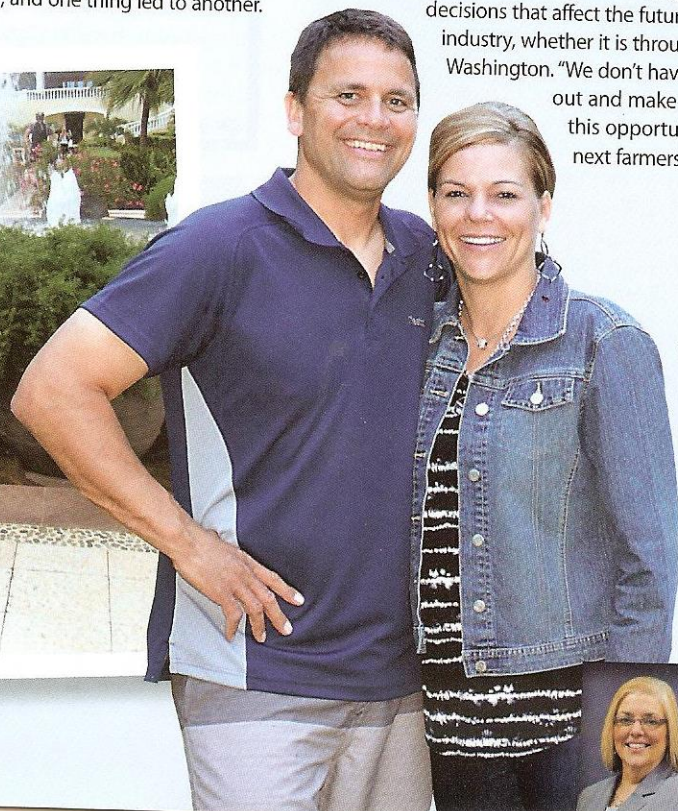
**Clark Gerstacker**, of Midland, Michigan, was elected to Michigan Sugar Company's Board of Directors, at its annual meeting in January. Clark represents Region 3 of the West District, replacing Gene Meylan, who retired from the Board.

Clark and his brother, Kirk, grow 1,500 acres of corn, sugarbeets (200 acres), soybeans, and dry beans in Midland and Bay counties. It is a fourth generation, centennial farm operation, founded in 1892. Sugarbeets have been grown on their farm for 50 years. Clark is married to his wife of 16 years, Jennifer, and they have a daughter, Peyton (13), and a son, Hudson (8).

In addition to farming, Clark has served on the Michigan Corn Growers Association Board; Corn Marketing Program of Michigan; and the National Corn Growers Association. He has a B.A. from the College of Business, at Michigan State University.

Clark has been involved in sugarbeet production since his involvement in 4-H as a youth. When asked about the upcoming generation of farmers, he shared this bit of advice — "Don't give up on getting your kids back on the farm. With technology, there are opportunities we haven't had in the past. I spent seven years with Frito-Lay, in Allen Park, as a manufacturing manager. Then, in April of 1997, I moved back home, got married and changed careers — all in the same week!"

Clark says, "I am excited about the opportunity to work with the Co-op in this capacity, on the Board of Directors. We are all working to ensure that the opportunity to grow sugarbeets is there, not only for us, but as an industry and a cooperative." He feels it is also a way for him to give back to the industry that provides his livelihood. "Being a Board member means weighing decisions that affect the future and success of this cooperative and industry, whether it is through making policies or involvement in Washington. "We don't have anything given to us. We have to go out and make it happen. We are here to make sure this opportunity is here — not for us, but for the next farmers coming up!" ■



« Far left: Mike and Pam McCormack. Left: Clark and Jennifer Gerstacker.



**Julie Perry** is the Executive Assistant of Administration and Editor of *The Newsbeet* at Michigan Sugar Company. She has been with the company for 15 years.