

## Five Generations of Farmers

### We're proud to power Mason farm that dates to 1861

Farming is in the Cheney family's blood. It has been for five generations — and counting.

The 2,800-acre Mason farm that grows corn, soybeans and sunflowers has been home to a handful of Cheney families dating back to 1861.

**“I was hooked from the beginning. I guess it was in my blood at an early age and never left.”**

The Cheney farm is one of Michigan's 676 certified sesquicentennial farms — owned by the same family for 150 years. There are about 7,000 registered

centennial farms (100 years) and four of them are registered as bicentennial farms (200 years).

Dave Cheney, the farm's current owner, is proud of his farming heritage and plans on passing the torch to his 29-year-old nephew Chris Nammack.

“I've never wanted to be anything else other than a farmer,” he said.

#### **Hooked at an Early Age**

At an age when some kids are saving for cars, Dave Cheney used his money to purchase a baler when he was in the eighth grade.

He baled hay and his father Richard paid for his work.

“I was hooked from the beginning,” the younger Cheney said. “I guess it was in my blood at an early age and never left.”



Dave Cheney family has been farming outside of Mason for over 150 years.

## New Renewable Energy Era Begins

A new Clean Energy Plan for Consumers Energy has received a green light from state regulators, putting a new era in motion for renewable energy in Michigan.

The plan puts Consumers Energy on a path to eliminate coal; reduce carbon emissions by more than 90 percent; and meet customers' future electricity capacity needs with 90 percent clean energy resources by 2040. The Michigan Public Service Commission has approved the plan, which also had support from leading Michigan environmental and business groups.

“Consumers Energy is proud to take a stand with our Clean Energy Plan that reflects our Triple Bottom Line strategy — making a commitment to people, the planet and Michigan's



Our plan establishes Michigan as a national clean energy leader.

prosperity,” said Patti Poppe, Consumers Energy's president and CEO. “This plan establishes Michigan as a national clean energy leader and provides benefits to homes and businesses, as we supply affordable,



Cheney family farm.



Mason-Dansville electric line was dedicated in 1927.

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Cheney said his family, like many other farmers in Mason, has a great relationship with Consumers Energy.

Our deep ties with the farming community go all the way back to Feb. 4, 1927 when a seven-mile electric line was constructed between Mason and Dansville to provide power to local farmers.

Until then, the only farmers with electricity lived on the edge of the village.

### Long, Proud Partnership

In 1949, Consumers Energy brought electricity to its 100,000th farm

customer, becoming the first utility in the nation to reach that milestone.

Today, we serve upward of 30,000 farm customers, more than any utility in Michigan.

While the original Mason-Dansville line didn't run

through the Cheney farm, Dave Cheney said Consumers Energy has supported farmers over the years.

"It's been a solid relationship," he said. "And I look forward to building on it in the future."

Additionally, farmers also have had positive interactions with the Centennial Farm Program which fulfills requests for signs that certify farms as centennial, sesquicentennial or bicentennial.

"Michigan farms are part of the bedrock of our economy as well as deeply ingrained in our culture and sense of place," said Larry J. Wagenaar, Executive Director and CEO of the Historical Society of Michigan, which oversees the program.

"The Centennial Farm Program is an outstanding opportunity for us to recognize farms and farm families that have stood the test of time.

"Having the support and partnership of the Consumers Energy Foundation has also been critical in the program's success."

Cheney is proud of the 150-year sign in front of his family's farm.

"It's something that I wanted to put up — as a remembrance to all the hard work that took place here and what is taking place here today," he said. "It's a point of pride. A lot of people have had a hand in making this place successful. It's a thank you to them."

For more information on the ways we are helping the agricultural community, go to [ConsumersEnergy.com/farm](http://ConsumersEnergy.com/farm).

## Get a Sign that Marks Your Time

### How many centennial, sesquicentennial and bicentennial farms are there in Michigan?

Since the program was created, nearly 7,000 farms have been certified. Out of those farms, 676 have been certified as Sesquicentennial and four certified as Bicentennial.

### Q: What's the oldest farm in Michigan?

The oldest farm in Michigan still owned and operated by the same family is the Alexander and William Macomb Farm, located in Grosse Ile Township in Wayne County. This farm was founded just

two days after the Declaration of Independence was ratified—on July 6, 1776.

### Q: What farm has the most generations?

Although the Historical Society of Michigan does not have a way to confirm this, it is safe to assume that the Macomb farm described above has the most generations. Currently, the farm is on its eighth generation.

### Has there been an increase over the last several years of farmers asking for signs?

The Centennial Farm Program moved from state government to the non-



profit Historical Society of Michigan (HSM) in 2008. Within the years that HSM has run the program, they have on average certified 61 Centennial farms, 38 Sesquicentennial farms and provided replacement signs for 38 Centennial and Sesquicentennial farms per year.

The number of Centennial certifications vary from year to year, but usually fall between 50 and 70. Those certification numbers remained steady since the program's establishment by the state in 1948.

For more information visit: [hsmichigan.org/programs/centennial-farm-program/apply-or-order](http://hsmichigan.org/programs/centennial-farm-program/apply-or-order)



## Increasing Production While Saving Money

Over the last several decades Benthem Brothers, a family owned farm for three generations, has grown from 30 cows to almost 3,000 cows.

The influx of cows over the years has generated the need for more power for the farm, located in McBain. And the Benthem family has worked with Consumers Energy's Energy Efficiency team to identify incentives that have helped it save \$104,803 over the last year.

"We definitely reinvested the incentive program back into the dairy and the ongoing electrical savings are helping us

operate more efficiently, which really matters," said Jason Benthem, co-owner of Benthem Brothers Dairy.

A few years ago, the dairy farm's equipment could only handle milking 100 cows per hour. The farm owners learned how to use energy-efficient equipment

to increase their milking production to 300 cows per hour, improving operations and lowering their energy bill. A milking parlor was upgraded as well to keep up with the high demand.

In all, 13 different types of energy efficient equipment were installed, including: low-energy livestock waterers, interior and exterior LED lighting retrofits and new construction interior and exterior LED lighting. They also utilized the Buy Michigan bonus and received an extra 30 percent bonus incentive by buying Michigan made high-efficiency recirculation fans with thermostat controls.

Benthem said the upgrade almost immediately helped the cows become more comfortable and milk production increased. The project has helped save 687,598 kWh annually.

"It's been great," said Benthem. "We are thankful that these programs and incentives came along for us at the right time."

## Free Stray Voltage Inspections Available

### What is stray voltage?

Stray voltage is a term used to describe Neutral to Earth Voltage (NEV). NEV is a measureable level of voltage, which may occur between a metal object and the adjacent floor or earth.



It is often called stray voltage when measured between two points that can be simultaneously contacted by livestock.

Simply stated, voltage is the pressure that pushes electrical current through wiring systems, lights and electrical equipment.

When a person or animal feels a tingle or shock, the person or

animal is actually feeling electrical current flowing through the body or portion of the body.

Sometimes a condition within the wiring on a farm, the wiring at a neighbor's property, or the power lines supplying a farm may cause the voltage between equipment and the adjacent earth or floor to increase to the point where it can be felt by an animal or person.

This stray voltage can range from a slight tingling or burning sensation at a cut to an uncomfortable jolt for animals. If a person feels an uncomfortable jolt, the problem is probably not NEV but a serious problem with the wiring system or equipment.

### What can I do to help reduce my risk of having stray voltage on my farm?

The most important thing you, as an owner, can do is properly maintain your wiring system. Over time, your electrical equipment and wiring can become hazardous due to physical damage, corrosion and overloading, especially in a farm environment.

Having a qualified person who can inspect your equipment and wiring on a periodic basis is highly recommended. They can identify potential electrical problems that may be hazardous to your livestock and create future stray voltage issues.

### What is Consumers Energy doing to protect my farm from stray voltage?

If you have a farm with livestock, chances are your electrical service has an isolated Neutral. This Neutral isolation is completed at the transformer that serves your farm. There are more than 12,000 farms throughout the state that have a separated Neutral service. Our Agricultural Services department conducts thousands of inspections per year to ensure the Neutral separations are maintained and working properly.

### How can I have my farm tested for stray voltage?

Contact the Agricultural Services department at 800-252-8658 to schedule your free inspection.

# New Renewable Energy Era Begins

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reliable and clean energy and create innovative solutions to our state's energy needs.”

## Clean Energy Plan's highlights

### Coal Free & Reduce Carbon

**Emissions:** Carbon emissions from power plants will be reduced more than 90 percent by 2040. Two coal-fired generating units at the Karn generating facility near Bay City will be retired in 2023 – nearly a decade ahead of schedule – while the three Campbell generating units near Holland are planned to close between 2031 and 2040 making Consumers Energy coal free.

**Clean Energy:** Meeting 90 percent of customers' electricity capacity needs through clean energy resources like renewable energy, energy waste reduction and energy storage by 2040; with the addition of 5,000 megawatts of solar energy through competitive bidding even earlier by 2030.

### Innovative Energy Solutions:



We plan to meet 90 percent of our customers' electricity capacity needs through clean energy resources like renewable energy, energy waste reduction and energy storage by 2040.

Consumers Energy will use tools such as incentives for customers to use energy more efficiently to avoid the need to invest in new, large power plants. The company's energy efficiency programs already have helped customers save about \$2.5 billion since 2009. Customers can participate in the programs to

reduce energy waste, shift energy use to more affordable times, invest in charging infrastructure for electric vehicles and support new renewable energy sources.

**Learn more at:**  
[MICleanEnergyPlan.com](http://MICleanEnergyPlan.com)

# Helping You Roll Out Your Goods

No matter what you grow, we can help with:

- Farm energy service requests or upgrades.
- Free stray voltage electrical inspections.
- Advising clients on equipment needs.

Visit [ConsumersEnergy.com/farm](http://ConsumersEnergy.com/farm) or call 800-252-8658