

## **Jack & Pauline McConnell: 2007 Farmers of the Year**

It was in 1908 when Hardy & Lora McConnell traded their ranch in Tumescal Canyon (between Lake Elsinor and Corona) for 200 acres in the Imperial Valley, none of which had been leveled. They brought with them their two sons, Leslie and Foster, to help start a farm on what was still sand dunes on the east side of the valley. The family lived in an old shack on the property until they built their home on what is now McConnell Road. Lora McConnell grew tired of not having electricity so she raised turkeys in order to pay for a primitive electrical system until later on when Leslie paid to be connected to the Holtville line. Their son Foster died during the flu epidemic in 1918 but Leslie went on to marry Carolyn Heil of El Centro and continued working on the farm. Leslie and Carolyn had two children: Jack and Loris.

John “Jack” Leslie McConnell was born on July 8, 1922. Jack grew up living and working on the family farm and even led teams of horses down to his father who was using fresnos to help construct the All American Canal, the lifeline of Imperial Valley agriculture. He traveled the world serving our country as a Merchant Marine during World War II. Jack met Pauline Kiler on a double date and so the story goes that Pauline’s date was driving the small car, Jack’s date was sitting on his lap, and Pauline and Jack were secretly holding hands! Jack and Pauline were married on April 14, 1946 and have been pillars in the agriculture community of the Imperial Valley ever since.

This husband and wife team has strived to maintain the productive family farm and pass on their knowledge of agriculture to the fourth and even fifth generations of their family. Six generations of McConnells have lived on this ranch that celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2008.

Jack and Pauline were blessed with four children: John and Janet who have sadly already passed on, and Jim and Paula. They have seven grandchildren and eight great-grand children. Daughter Paula and grandson Bryan currently work in the agriculture industry.

Jack has served on the Imperial County Farm Bureau Board of Directors for well over 50 years and was the President from 1979 to 1980. He has

been active on numerous committees, including the water committee, and is a great membership recruiter for the organization. Pauline is also a past President of the Farm Bureau Women and helped design and build the display booth at the California Mid-Winter Fair for many years, of which she was also a member of the board. They have been very instrumental in the Farm Bureau's Annual Scholarship Fundraiser Barbecue for the 54 years it has been in existence and also hosted an Egyptian farmer at their home through the Farm Bureau so that he could learn about California agriculture. Together they fought on behalf of Imperial Valley agriculture with issues such as the 160 acre limitation and ag labor support. Jack was a delegate to the Annual California Farm Bureau Federation Convention for many years.

Jack and Pauline have always been avid supporters of agriculture education. They have both been leaders for 4-H and Future Farmers of America and helped students with projects as well as donating straw and hay. They even hosted a young Japanese student who was studying to become a farmer. People from all over the world including Japan, Europe, South America and the United States have come to the McConnells for their educational farm tours of the Imperial Valley. Promoting positive interaction between the farming and urban communities has always been important to them.

In addition to the Farm Bureau, Jack has been a member of the Imperial County Deputy Reserve, Native Sons of the Golden West, the Masons, the Commandery, the Micro Midget Racing Association, the Dairy Association and more. Pauline has been involved with numerous organizations as well including the Womens Ten Thousand Club, Eastern Star, Native Daughters of the Golden West, Republican Women and the Methodist Church.

The McConnells have strived to be innovative and efficient farmers. Through forward thinking with an understanding of the importance of water conservation, they designed, built and implemented an irrigation system on their 500 acre ranch that does not allow for any water to be wasted. All fields have been re-leveled so irrigation water and/or tail water can be moved from one field to the next. A holding reservoir has been installed to capture any water not being used at the time so that no irrigation water leaves the ranch. The McConnells' conservation efforts were recognized by the University of California and put in a video on conservation. The McConnell Ranch worked with the University and field

station on many efforts such as developing a liner for tail ditches to limit runoff and measuring water flow leaving the fields. They also worked with the Field station to develop Tifton Grass, a highly effective feed for horses, as a profitable crop for the Valley. They helped in the development of methods of planting, fertilization, irrigation, pest control and marketing for this crop.

It is because of their commitment to the Imperial Valley and promoting its agriculture industry, as well as their efforts toward education, conservation and the continuation of the family farm way of life that has lasted for six generations of McConnells and almost 100 years, that the Imperial County Farm Bureau is proud to honor Jack and Pauline McConnell, together as a couple, with the 3rd Annual Jim Kuhn Memorial Farmer of the Year Award.

**Congratulations Jack & Pauline!**