BELLE GLADE

George Wedgworth relishes talking about the time he decided to have a little fun with environmentalists who have opposed the powerful sugar industry in the Glades for decades.

“I told them when the muck is all gone, we will build condos. They’ll be gated communities, and we will name them after you. I said it with a straight face. Then I see Charles Lee quoted in the newspaper saying, ‘We’ve got to stop this development.’”

“I did it to aggravate him,” says Wedgworth, 73, who founded and heads the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida.

He succeeded. Lee, executive vice president of the Audubon Society of Florida, takes the idea seriously even today.

“I’m not sure I agree with George Wedgworth on many things, but on the question of urban development being worse than growing sugar, we would agree on that,” he said recently.

Wedgworth can’t be blamed for trying to bring some levity to the battles he’s fought as chief executive and president of the 54-grower cooperative he began in July 1960.

As its chief, he has been on the front lines of the industry’s biggest political, environmental, economic and labor-related battles. Throughout, the co-op has been a stable group, with five of its original board members still serving today.

The co-op’s first year, 1962-63, saw production of 77,617 tons of sugar from 21,649 acres. Last season, it produced 373,895 tons from 75,558 acres, about 20 percent of Florida’s sugar production. Over that same period, the co-op’s annual revenue from sugar and molasses sales has grown to more than $150 million.

The co-op will mark its 40th crop year in April.

“I’m a great believer in teamwork. One person can’t do it all,” Wedgworth says. “It has to be a team whether it’s a cooperative or a company.”

Wedgworth’s perspective is unique among the heads of Florida’s three sugar firms. Unlike the bosses at West Palm Beach-based Florida Crystals Corp. and Clewiston-based U.S. Sugar Corp., Wedgworth grew up in the Glades. He was (Continued on Page 5)
Message from the Chair

Dear Alumni and Friends:

The MSU College of Agriculture and Natural Resources has for several months been undergoing strategic review of its programs. This review was necessary to address a challenging fiscal situation brought on by State budget reductions. It was also undertaken to ensure a future with strong, vibrant programs that continue to meet the needs of our students and stakeholders.

Through this review, the MSU Department of Agricultural Engineering faculty has been evaluating alternative administrative structures for delivering programs. You may have heard that one alternative proposed by CANR Dean Jeffrey Armstrong was to eliminate the Department of Agricultural Engineering and redeploy faculty and programs to other academic units. I am happy to say that such an alternative is no longer under consideration as we seek solutions that advance program excellence.

I am working with our Agricultural Engineering faculty members to refine a plan for a department tightly focused on core areas of excellence in teaching, research and extension in agricultural engineering. In refocusing our efforts, we will strengthen our ability to see the areas of agricultural engineering that are within the core mission of the department. I look forward to increased collaborations with other institutions that are similarly focused. We remain committed to maintaining strong academic programs for undergraduate and graduate students and to meaningful research and outreach that meet the needs of our stakeholders.

I sincerely appreciate the support shown by many of my colleagues as we have worked through this difficult and critical process. I am optimistic that the MSU Department of Agricultural Engineering will continue to maintain a leadership position in advancing the field of agricultural engineering.

Sincerely,
Ajit K. Srivastava, PhD, P.E.
Professor and Chairperson

Biosystems Engineering Launches New Careers Website:

Employers seeking Biosystems Engineers can find the perfect candidate by posting their full-time, part-time and internship positions on our new Careers website free of charge. The site offers the opportunity to find a graduate or undergraduate quickly and easily. Graduates and undergraduates are also invited to post their resume or search for a job at no cost.

The website was specifically designed for the Biosystems Engineer but may expand to include Technical System Management as well as Electrical Technology. Check out our site and let us know what you think, http://cvmweb.cvm.msu.edu:8081/jobs_ag2/careers_home.htm.
Every year, each department in the College of Engineering selects one faculty member to receive the Withrow Award for Teaching Excellence. This year the honor went to Agricultural Engineering professor, John Gerrish.

Dr. Gerrish can often be found in Farrall Hall working with students late into the night. He believes in the school of hard knocks, and holds students to high standards. As a result, students come away confident in themselves and prepared to succeed. Students say: “He is more of a mentor than a professor.” "He has helped me to trust myself and my work...even though that Dutch system of learning (as Gerrish describes it) seems like torture at the time!" Often the broadest smiles seen on Dr. Gerrish's face are not due to his personal success, but rather the success of those whom he has taught. He has been a true "work horse" for undergraduate engineering education, refining the Biosystems Engineering program and structuring the senior capstone design course into an outstanding career-building experience for students.

Selection of the recipient is based primarily on nominations from students; a department selection committee, composed of a majority of students, along with alumni, faculty, or advisers, reviews the nomination and makes a recommendation to the department chairperson. The following criteria are considered:

- Command of course content
- Delivery of course materials
- Ability to elicit enthusiastic learning
- Effective advising and mentoring
- Creation of an effective learning environment
- Availability to students
- Guidance of student organizations and projects

Congratulations Dr. Gerrish for your distinguished service to the department, student body and university!

**Faculty/Staff News:**

**John Gerrish** is in his terminal year of consulting and will officially retire in December 31, 2003. Dr. Gerrish joined the department in 1967. He earned his BS and MS degrees in Electrical Engineering from Stevens Inst. of Tech. He received his PhD from MSU in 1972. Dr. Gerrish became an Asst. Prof. in 1972, Assoc. Prof. in 1978 and Full Prof. in 1989. He was instrumental in ABET certification for the department and will be sorely missed.

**Ted Loudon** began his terminal year of consulting on June 1, 2003 and will officially retire in 2004. Dr. Loudon joined the department in 1971. He received his BS in Ag. Eng. and MS in Civil Eng. from the University of Wyoming in 1963 and 1966. Dr. Loudon became an Asst. Prof. in 1973, Assoc. Prof. in 1977 and Full Prof. in 1986. He worked on Wastewater Treatment, Irrigation, Drainage and Water Quality.

**Howard Person** has retired as of June 1, 2003. Dr. Person joined the department in 1979. He received his BS in Ag. Eng. and MS in Water Resources from Iowa State in 1970 and 1972. He received his PhD from Univ. of Minnesota in 1980. He worked on Livestock Facilities, Environmental Control and Management of Manure and Organic Residues.

**New Faculty/Staff:**

**Bill Balluff** is our new Systems Analyst and came from the Information Technology Management Program within the Eli Broad College of Business.
Congratulations to:

Mr. Richard Ledebuhr, on receiving the service award from the Michigan Horticulture Society for his contributions to the Michigan fruit and vegetable industry.

Evangelyn Alocilja, Steve Marquie, Cynthia Meeusen, Spring Younts and Daniel Grooms received Patent No. 6,537,802 on March 25, 2003 for Method and Apparatus For the Detection of Volatile Products in a Sample.

On behalf of the Department of Agricultural Engineering and ASEE’s Biological and Agricultural Engineering Division, we would like to congratulate Assistant Professor Vangie Alocilja for being named the 2003 recipient of the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) Award for Excellence in Teaching Materials and Methods in Biological and Agricultural Engineering. Qualifications and eligibility requirements were based upon the quality and effectiveness of instructional materials and methods. It should be noted that the ASEE’s 4-person awards committee was unanimous in their decision. The award was presented at the annual ASEE Conference, June 23-25, 2003 in Nashville, Tennessee. Congratulations Vangie for this well-deserved honor. Her teaching is a real gift to the students, department and the profession.

Professor Truman Surbrook and Instructor Jonathan Althouse was honored at a reception on April 23, 2003 recognizing them for their book Interpreting the National Electrical Code, Sixth Edition. This book is a national publication used for electrical training in the United States. Every year the scholarly work of faculty members at Michigan State University enriches the collections of libraries throughout the United States and the world. MSU Libraries have made a special attempt to acquire, exhibit, and make available copies of all MSU faculty books, CDs, musical works and other such publications. The Department of Agricultural Engineering is very proud to have recognized authors.

Manure management receives special emphasis as an integral aspect of the farm. It’s a social as well as a technical issue, and it has the attention of several segments of society besides farmers. As a result Professor William Bickert has recently been appointed Director of Manure and Nutrient Management Programs by Jeffrey Armstrong, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Congratulations Dr. Bickert on your new duties.

William Bickert has received the 2003 Michigan Dairy Industry Service Award that is presented annually recognizing outstanding service to the Michigan Dairy Industry. This award has been presented annually since 1986. Congratulations again Dr. Bickert.

The multi-state project NE-1008, “Technology and Principles for Assessing and Retaining Postharvest Quality of Fruits and Vegetables” received the 2003 USDA Secretary’s Honor Award. The Honor Awards highlight the dedication and talents of USDA employees who contribute in so many ways to improving the world around us. These annual awards are the most prestigious given by the USDA. Dan Guyer, Ajit Srivastava, and Vangie Alocilja collaborated on this project. Congratulations to Dan, Ajit, and Vangie!
Wedgworth believes in dealing with controversy head-on (Continued from Page 1)

born in Starkeville, Miss., and his family moved to Belle Glade in 1930, when George was 2 and his father, Herman, became a plant pathologist at the University of Florida’s agricultural center.

Within two years, Herman Wedgworth quit his $1,800-a-year job and started his own vegetable farm.

It’s an upbringing that George Wedgworth, a 1946 graduate of Belle Glade High School, has never moved away from, despite his success and wealth. He won’t disclose his income, but says, “I’m paid way too much.”

With labor and trade acumen second to none in the industry, Wedgworth still prefers the simpler lifestyle of an old Florida farmer over that of a sugar magnate. He only recently traded in his early ’90s Oldsmobile for a new Buick.

Wedgworth and his wife, Peggy, who met in the ninth grade, live in Belle Glade in the one-story concrete block house George’s mother, Ruth, built in 1941. The white, five-bedroom house faces two-lane East Canal Street and overlooks the sugar cane fields and smokestacks of the co-op’s sugar mill.

Wedgworth lived away from the Glades only when he and Peggy attended what was then called Michigan State College, now Michigan State University. He was graduated with honors in 1950 with a degree in agricultural engineering.

“When I go anywhere else, I try to go back to Belle Glade. I’ve been away a long time, but I’ve always wanted to come back,” says Wedgworth, the father of four grown children - two sons and two daughters. He and his wife have 11 grandchildren.

Wedgworth’s youngest son, Dennis, a Duke University graduate, runs the family businesses. The elder Wedgworth sees to business at the co-op, Belle Glade’s largest employer, with 900 employees.

True to his philosophy on teamwork, Wedgworth has done two multimillion-dollar deals with rival Florida Crystals, owned by the Fanjul family of Palm Beach.

Florida Crystals and the co-op last year bought the company that makes Domino Sugar and its three refineries for $205 million. That followed a 1998 partnership in which they bought Refined Sugars Inc., a Yonkers, N.Y., refinery, for a reported $65 million.

“They have a higher profile than we do politically,” Wedgworth says of the Fanjuls, “but (the co-op and the family) got a lot in common with sugar.”

Wedgworth, with a reputation for being feisty and thorough, believes in dealing with controversy head-on, whether the issue is phosphorus levels in Lake Okeechobee or ash residue from burning cane fields before harvesting.

“He likes getting to the bottom of things,” says Belle Glade grower Rick Roth, 49, a co-op board member whose family has known the Wedgeworths for decades. “He’s been a true visionary who takes time to understand how all the pieces fit together.”

Dalton Yancey, executive vice president of the Florida Sugar Cane League, the industry’s longtime Washington lobbyist, echoed those sentiments.
His parents, Wedgworth says, “came here from Michigan State College (where Herman was an associate professor) with nothing but the shirts on their backs. They both came from meager backgrounds, and they thrived on a challenge.”

Wedgworth does, too. He and farm manager Vernie Boots, a mechanic, built the first mobile celery harvesting unit in 1950. The machine, no longer in use, allowed picking and packing to be done in the field, saving time and money.

Wedgworth also founded the Florida Celery Exchange in the 1950s. The cooperative put an end to growers selling against each other.

“I found that we could grow beautiful, beautiful celery, and then the salesmen would give it away. My mother said, ‘Well, if you are going to be critical of our sales methods, I am going to put you in charge of it.’”

The exchange soon was born. But celery, like other vegetables, is a fragile crop. When the U.S. government decided it no longer wanted to be dependent on sugar from Cuba following Fidel Castro’s takeover, Wedgworth saw an opportunity to move into growing the more stable commodity.

In 1960, he called 16 Glades vegetable growers about forming a sugar cooperative. With 52 growers on board initially, the Glades Sugar House broke ground in October 1961.

“George is one of the first people who started the movement in the 1960s to expand the industry beyond just U.S. Sugar and (the Fanjul family’s) Okeelanta which existed at that time,” said Jim Terrill, executive vice president of U.S. Sugar Corp. “He’s a pioneer.”

Haunted by childhood tragedy

Wedgworth’s early years were marked by tragedy. He still is haunted by a day in 1938.

“I was with my father when he got killed. He was at the (vegetable) packing house and a crane was lifting a 10-ton ice machine. My cousin and I were playing in the packing house. I heard the accident. I remember seeing him under those beams,” George says, choking up.

“My mother stepped right in to run the (family’s thriving vegetable farm). She was keeping the books already,” Wedgworth recalls. “Her kids were 5, 10 and 15 when he died. She didn’t come home until 9 or 10 o’clock at night.”

Wedgworth says his parents had a profound influence on him. Their drive became his - and showed itself when he was a youngster in 4-H. He started with six cows and had a herd of 26 by high school.

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The big switch to sugar cane

By the end of the decade, Wedgworth Farms, as well as many other former vegetable growers, had switched to growing nothing but sugar cane.

Sugar growers shared some hot political issues with the rest of agriculture. A big issue was the poor working and living conditions of migrant laborers, including cane cutters, the so-called guest workers from the British West Indies, mostly Jamaica. In 1970, Wedgworth testified before the U.S. Senate subcommittee on migratory labor on behalf of Florida vegetable and sugar cane growers to counter some of the charges against the industry. In that testimony, he ripped into newscaster Chet Huntley’s report titled Migrant - An NBC White Paper, saying it was filled with “inaccuracies and bias.”

The Palm Beach Post-Times ran the complete text of Wedgworth’s testimony. He was quoted as saying: “I feel that there was much ‘sneaky journalism’ involved in the film, which took exceptional circumstance or incident - many times out of context - and implied that Florida was ‘rampant with conditions bordering on slavery and racism’ and that no one in Florida was making any constructive effort to help the migrant. These accusations and innuendoes are just not so.”
By the late ’70s, the sugar industry began harvesting mechanically. The co-op had totally mechanized its harvest by the 1991-92 crop, ending the need for the hand-cutting of cane - and saving $10 million a year. But disputes over labor contracts from the 1980s continue to this day, with the last of a group of lawsuits brought on behalf of cane-cutters scheduled to be heard in May.

The sugar industry’s burning of cane fields, a part of the harvesting process to clear away debris, also has been controversial. In the 1960s, the American Lung Association alleged that the ash and smoke from the burning was killing people.

Wedgworth remembers the day in 1968 when he received a letter signed by then-Gov. Claude Kirk saying the industry must “cease and desist” from burning cane fields.

“Nat Reed was head of the state Department of Pollution,” Wedgworth said. “I called him and said, ‘Mr. Reed . . . it would shut us down and put over 25,000 people out of work. We’re going to find the best people we can to tell us what we’re doing. If we’re doing something wrong, we’ll correct it.’ ”

Out of that came a burn permit process regulated by the state’s Forestry Department and a network of 37 air samplers in Palm Beach, Hendry and Broward counties that still operates today, measuring particles.

“We’re still burning,” Wedgworth says. “We had to change some of our techniques. But we’re still burning.”

More environmental issues

Today, environmental issues loom the largest for sugar growers. The $8 billion Everglades Restoration Project, aimed at meeting the water-related needs of the region for the next 50 years and restoring the Everglades, was signed by then-President Clinton in December 2000.

Before that, Wedgworth and about 20 other agricultural leaders – and environmentalists, including Reed of Hobe Sound - had signed a letter asking Congress to include Everglades restoration in the Water Resource and Development Act of 2000.

“We were very pleased . . . that we got a document with my signature on it along with Nat Reed’s,” Wedgworth says. “If we had continued to throw darts at each other, nothing would get done. It was a great day.”

Wedgworth said that was shattered, however, when environmental groups began raising questions about the restoration project right after the agreement was signed.

“Now I am afraid they’re not satisfied,” Wedgworth says. He said the sugar industry has its own questions about how water storage and recovery wells will work and is waiting for engineers and water managers to conduct pilot projects.

Wedgworth doesn’t expect to be around to see the end of conflict and controversy in the sugar industry, but considers it part of the business. In 1996, the industry fought a proposed penny-a-pound tax on sugar that voters defeated.

Environmental groups pushed for the tax to pay for Everglades cleanup. The $35 million campaign was costly for both sides.

“It was unfortunate that the environmental groups attacked the industry when we could have accomplished a lot more for the Everglades if we could have sat down across the table to try to determine what’s good for the Everglades,” he says.

“We have always had our doors wide open for those discussions,” he adds. “They’re the ones who attacked the industry with a referendum that could have damaged our company to the extent we would not still be here if it had passed.

“The way to help the Everglades is to stay out of fighting each other, and roll up our sleeves and do something that is good for the Everglades.”

When he’s not fighting the industry’s battles, Wedgworth and his wife – who considers herself his polar opposite because of her more laid-back personality - like to escape to their ranch in Okeechobee County on the weekends.

“Last weekend he put up 25 birdhouses for bluebirds. He plays tennis and he relaxes more up there,” says Peggy Wedgworth. “He’s got his computers, and he checks his e-mail. He drives the tractor and mows the pastures.”

The seemingly tireless Wedgworth recovered well from open-heart surgery in 1978 and doesn’t plan to retire.

Peggy expects him to continue his 50-hours-plus work weeks.

“I think he was motivated by his mother. He saw how she worked and kept everything going. Right now with the sugar mill, he loves what he’s doing. That makes a lot of difference.”

susan_salisbury@pbpost.com
Alumni News:

Arthur Ehrmantrant (BS Agr, ’60) is retired and living in New Jersey and has spent 2 to 4 months a year touring North America in a motorhome and still going.

Harry Zechman (Ag E) is managing the engineering and R & D for small, growing specialty chemical firm - Stoner, Inc.

Hope (Herrera) Croskey (BSAE ‘77, MS, ‘78) recently joined Spicer Group, Inc. as Project Manager for the Governmental Services Group that specializes in watershed management.

Bill Splinter received the 2003 Honoree of the Nebraska Hall of Agricultural Achievement on April 11, 2003.


Nicole McPherson, BE 1997, recently passed her Professional Engineering Exam.

MSU Nominates Scholars for National Award

Whether their decisions to apply for the prestigious Rhodes, Marshall and Mitchell scholarships was motivated by personal goals or desire to affect change in the economic, social or political systems of nations throughout the world, this year’s scholarship candidates from MSU have one thing in common: they say their MSU education is helping them succeed.

A faculty committee has nominated four seniors and one MSU graduate for these distinguished awards, which provide opportunities to study in the United Kingdom.

Amy Silder, a biosystems engineering major in the colleges of Engineering and Agriculture and Natural Resources, was nominated for the Mitchell Scholarship. She is the daughter of Michael and June Silder. She is active in athletics, including varsity women’s crew, and was named to the Academic All-Big Ten list in 2001-2002. She also is a Student Athlete Advisory Council peer leader, served as a research assistant in biosystems engineering, and is an active member of the Honors College. She received a National Merit Special Scholarship to attend MSU.

2002-2003 Biosystems Engineering Undergraduate Scholarship Recipients

The F.W. Bakker-Arkema Minority Scholarship Award was presented to Eric LaChapelle

The A.W. Farrall Faculty Award was presented to Aaron Kaeb and Ian Radtke

The Clarence and Thelma Hansen Scholarship was presented to Paul Forton, Andrew Lauwers, Andrew Stoeckle, Nicholas Tipper

The Robert E. Maddex Biosystems Engineering Distinguished Freshman Award was presented to Erin Robertson

The George E. and Betty L. Merva Scholarship was presented to Andrew Kaye

The Howard F. and Esther L. McColly Scholarship was presented to Carmen Gacchina, Andrew Knowles, Corin Malzahn, Christie Sampson, Erin Ward

Farewell by Barb DeLong:

I came here in February of 2000 and up until then hadn’t experienced the true knowledge of septic tanks, food safety, sand-laden manure separators, 1/4 scale tractors, composting, extrusion, E. coli, salmonella, stray voltage, or tasted the best sweet cherries and I realize there is a lot more to learn, but my time is up. Because of the budget cuts that MSU and CANR is facing, I’m being bumped from my position out of Agricultural Engineering and back out into the University as a whole. I know my successor will enjoy working here as much as I have!

I want to thank all of you for bringing me into your family 3 1/2 years ago. Thank you for your friendships, guidance, experience, laughs, and listening ears, these memories will always be treasured. Wherever I go, I hope that we cross paths again.

I hope that during my time here I have put a smile on your face or given you a different outlook on things and hope that my weirdness hasn’t damaged you for life. May you all have happy lives, enjoy your leisure time and I will see you at the next bowling tournament in the Spring of 2004!
Since 2000, Our Biosystems Engineering students have consistently garnered top awards in this annual event, and 2003 was no exception. This year Dr. Kirk Dolan's student, Senior Maureen Beck and Dr. Alocilja's Professorial Assistant, Freshman Shannon McGraw, presented their reflective posters at the forum.

Maureen's poster presentation, Estimation of Kinetic Parameters for Bean Texture, deals with the conversion of a small-scale to a large-scale commercial process for sugar beans. Sugar beans are a popular snack item in Asia, similar to honey-coated peanuts in the United States. Maureen's work can help Michigan dry-bean industry expand their market by providing critical data to process the value-added beans here, and then export them to Asia. Maureen was invited to present her poster at the IVth International Conference on Plant Biomechanics, July 20-25, 2003.

Shannon McGraw received the Merit Award for her poster entitled ”Conductometric Biosensor for Detecting Bovine Viral Diarrhea Virus”. The biosensor device can be used to detect bovine viral diarrhea virus, which is an economically devastating viral pathogen in cattle. At present, there is no cure for the disease, hence early detection is necessary to allow for the implementation of control measures. Current methods require 5-7 days to get results; the biosensor will yield results in 6 minutes. Receiving such an award as a freshman is quite a feat.

Congratulations to Ian Radtke, Nick Tipper, Josh Brood, Maureen Beck, James Bossard, Aaron Kaeb, Corin Malzahn, Andy Lauwers, Matt Lindsey, Brian Smith, Tyson Franks, Adam Shed, Jerery Sova on their hard work and dedication at the 2003 ASAE International Student Design Competition. The 1/4 Scale Team has the first ever perfect score in the maneuverability course. Scored 6th place in the tractor pulling competition and 3rd place in the X-tractor pulling competition. They finished 5th place overall in the 32 school competition. The final accomplishment was being selected by the contestants and judges to receive the Best Appearance Award. Special thanks to the Faculty Advisors: Gary Van Ee, Richard Ledebuhr and Frank Galbavi. Congratulations again on a GREAT PERFORMANCE!
The Department of Agricultural Engineering would like to thank all the generous people that have the foresight to support the Department and its various endowments and scholarships.

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NOMINATIONS REQUESTED FOR

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS AWARD

This annual recognition will be bestowed upon an alumnus who has distinguished himself/herself as a leader through professional contributions, public service, and personal accomplishments. Contributions to the Biological/Agricultural Engineering profession shall be the primary selection criterion. As a general rule, only alumni who have graduated ten or more years ago, with an undergraduate and/or a graduate degree will be considered. The deadline for submitting nominations is August 15, 2003. The awardee will be recognized during a special event held in October.

The nominator should submit a nomination letter outlining why the nominee would be a worthy recipient of the award and include the nominee’s contact information. The credentials for nominees not chosen will be kept on file for consideration for two additional years, the nominator is welcome to update the file. Current MSU faculty members are not eligible. Send nomination letters to:

Ajit Srivastava, PhD, PE
Professor and Chairperson
Michigan State University
Department of Agricultural Engineering
215 Farrall Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824-1323

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Notes about you (recent promotions, professional honors, career activities, civic achievements, family news). We will publish this in our next issue:

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Major

Message


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Dr. Ajit K. Srivastava, Chairperson
Department of Agricultural Engineering
Michigan State University
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