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2009 AAMP ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

If there is one recognition that symbolizes the highest appreciation members of the American Association of Meat Processors feel for an individual who has done truly special things, it is the AAMP Annual Achievement Award. It gives me extreme pleasure to present this award tonight.

While I have only known this gentleman for nearly 10 years, many of you have known this colorful character for much longer. He has been a strong proponent of the small volume meat industry for many years and is being recognized tonight for his continuing service to the meat industry. The recipient of the 2009 AAMP Achievement Award is Gary Crane of Perkins, Oklahoma.

Gary is the owner and president of Ralph's Packing Company of Perkins, Oklahoma. Gary grew up in his father's meat business that was founded in 1959. Gary worked at the plant part-time until he went to Murray State College, where he met his wife, Tess. They then left there to attend Panhandle State University, where he worked in the meat laboratory and majored in meat science with a minor in business. He graduated in 1971, earning a Bachelor's degree in animal science, and returned to work in the family business.

He took over the family business when his father was diagnosed with cancer in 1980. After Gary and Tess took over operations in Perkins, a long-time family friend joined the team with the idea of opening a retail store in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Gary and Wes Beane formed a new corporation called Ralph's Quality Meats in 1983, and opened and operated the store.

Gary's portion of the business, Ralph's Packing Company, performs custom processing and sells to the wholesale trade. The business has significantly grown over the years and includes not only Gary's wife, Tess, but also the Crane's daughter, Erica, and her husband, Jason Hering.

Gary is a lifetime member of the Future Farmers of America and belongs to several cattle organizations. He has donated time to the FFA and 4-H and has served as a judge at local meat competitions. The business has won more than 250 cured meat awards from the Oklahoma-Texas Meat Processors Association and over 30 awards from AAMP's American Cured Meat Championships. In 2000, Gary was inducted into AAMP's Cured Meats Hall of Fame. Gary continues to volunteer his time for OTMPA and AAMP to this day, and is a friend to many meat processors across the country.

The company and its representatives are very active with the national and state meat trade associations. To this day, Gary attends educational sessions for the meat industry; typically sitting in the front row with his colorful shirts and eager to learn.

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Over the years, he has seen the meat industry change, and Gary has struggled with the concept of transforming from a meat processor to a HACCP paper processor. With the help of his good friend and business partner, Wes, he has continued to not only maintain his business, but expand the family business. Of course he is still often seen sporting the ball cap "Pork Fat Rules....HACCP Sucks," to demonstrate his silent protest, but his perseverance keeps him going in the industry he grew up in.

The leadership, knowledge, success, and active participation in the meat industry all his life demonstrates that Gary is quite an eligible recipient of the AAMP Achievement Award. I am personally honored to be able to present this, the highest recognition of the American Association of Meat Processors....the AAMP Annual Achievement Award...to Mr. Gary Crane.