

Nutrition's Select Few
 The NBJ Awards get more selective as public interest mounts, industry now experiencing the best & worst of times

The headlines have not been kind in recent months to the supplement industry. That long awaited guidance from FDA on new dietary ingredients has industry poised at DEFCON 1. An aggressive new wave of enforcement actions from FDA, FTC and regulatory worldwide exposes a steady stream of questionable actors in the category suggests those regulators may have the very teeth industry has asked them to bare for years. "Nutraceuticals" in popular press are now "nutraceuticals" in popular press. Deaths, product seizures and bolded chorus of voices all bode to effectively self-police before potential ephedra wrecks a hez

We could go on here, but we w a joy to begin 2012 with a l inset box above right and se strong, reputable and forw this industry can be. NBJ re nominations from the other number that betrays growin and potential for turning all and gloom into cause for tr

In our most selective yet we also chose to limit this winners to one of the sma date. NBJ strives to pro tive knowledge of this i elite circle of industry ti but we also believe in th nutrition and wellness t much larger scale, and



NBJ 2011 Awards & Executive Review

2011 Sustainability Award

Organic rice pioneers Lundberg Family Farms pass the sustainability torch to a new generation of farmers

Ask Jessica Lundberg what spawned her family's commitment to environmental stewardship, and she takes you back a century and a half, to a time before **Lundberg Family Farms**—or the name that inspired the California-based organic rice company—existed.

Longing to be a farmer but living in a country where land was dominated by aristocrats, her great grandfather, Andrew Johnson, immigrated in 1860 from Sweden to Nebraska, homesteading a windswept patch of soil home to one solitary cypress tree. "To him, that tree represented the strength of spirit you needed to live off the land," she says. When Johnson opted to change his name to something less common, he had the tree in mind, and chose "lone berg" ("single thing" in Swedish). When his paperwork arrived, it mistakenly said "Lundberg," and the name stuck.

Fast forward to 2012, and the resilient, independent family business boasts more than 5,000 mostly organic acres of its own, another 10,000 grown by other farmers, a line of 17 rice varieties and 150 rice products, and annual sales growth of 8% to 10%, despite a lingering recession. As the first American company to successfully farm organic rice (a tricky crop to grow profitably without chemicals), it has gained a reputation as both an agricultural innovator and a generous educator.

"They have invested not only in their own success but in educating the entire industry about organic farming," says Kantha Shelke, PhD, a food scientist with the Chicago-based research firm **Corvus Blue LLC**. "Lundberg has a long legacy of not only protecting the environment but improving it."

The Lundberg family's start in the rice

business came in 1937, when Andrew's son Albert opted to escape the ripping black storms of the Dust Bowl—a direct result of poor soil management and short-sighted farming practices across the plains—for the fertile farmlands of California's Sacramento Valley. With its heavy clay soil, hot dry summers, and steady water source from the nearby Sierra Nevadas, the land was ideal for growing rice—and the Lundbergs wanted to keep it that way.

"They really understood the importance of land, not only from our family history of not being able to own it back in Sweden, but also from having lived through the Dust Bowl," says Jessica Lundberg, who heads up the company's sustainabil-

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—Kantha Shelke
 Corvus Blue

ity initiatives. "They had learned what happens when you don't take care of the land you are supposed to steward." Right away, the family did things differently than other rice farmers, bucking the trend of burning straw stubble after the harvest and instead using a roller to mash it back into the soil.

In the late 1960s—a time when most farmers, including the Lundbergs, had turned to chemicals for pest control and fertilization—the owners of Chico, California-based **Chico-San** rice cakes approached them with a proposition. If they would grow some of their rice organically, Chico-San would buy it.

The Lundbergs obliged, converting 60 of their 1,500 acres to organic, and opening their own mill to process brown, whole-grain, organic rice in a way that

maintained its nutrients. Because rice is particularly prone to weeds and relies heavily on fertilization, chemical-free production was a risky proposition. But over time, as the market for it grew, the Lundbergs slowly converted more to organic.

The company has also demonstrated its commitment to the environment in other ways—by purchasing enough renewable energy credits (for wind power) and installing enough solar panels to offset 130% of its energy use; by converting its packaging to 100% recycled paperboard; and by building an ultra-green new 28,000-square-foot headquarters in Richvale. The company has also played a leading role in the movement to require labeling of GMOs, with president Grant Lundberg serving as a founding member and board treasurer for the **Non-GMO Project**.

"Lundberg is a visionary company that looks ahead at what is going to be important in the future on both an environmental level and a business level," says Megan Westgate, executive director of the Non-GMO Project. "Their leadership in the project has inspired a lot of other participation. When Lundberg is paying attention to something, people know it is important."

In August, the company launched a multi-year initiative, **Raising Organic Family Farms**, which aims to extend not just its own legacy, but the legacy of organic farming. In its first round of grants, it doled out \$25,000 to everyone from bee and mushroom farmers to ranchers. The seed money goes to help upstart organic and sustainable farmers buy equipment, take classes, or connect with mentors in planning, marketing, retail, livestock management and crop rotation.

"New farmers often need a boost to get their businesses to the next level," says Grant Lundberg. "Whether it's a piece of equipment, advice from an expert, an opportunity to expand their networks, or just a kernel of wisdom that brings a big idea to life, this program will provide the support these farmers need to establish their own legacies." 🌾