

A woman with long dark hair, smiling, wearing a brown jacket over a grey hoodie, holding a small black goat. The background is a barn with wooden walls and a green metal railing.

Our Home

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On the Cover: Katie Mooneyham pauses for a moment during barn chores to cuddle one of her miniature goats. The Mooneyhams are passionate about their homesteading mission.



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Livestock farming continues

Daniel Briseño
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Driving a rural Edgar County road, it is still possible to see an occasional farm with a pasture full of livestock. Raising animals was once part of almost every farm, but it is not as common as it once was.

"The sale barns used to be jammed, packed full," said Roger Stanley. "And who could forget the smell of the hog barns."

Paris at one time had two sale barns, one at the end of Wabash Street and one at Jefferson and Jasper streets. Hog barns were once located adjacent to the site of the current John P. Allen Field.

Contemporary livestock operations raise animals to slaughter for food consumption. In another era, animals played a more diverse role on the farm by providing eggs, milk, wool for textiles, meat for the table and in much earlier days, muscle power.

"People used to raise livestock not just for money," said Stanley. "Growing up we could take a few dozen eggs to the store and leave with two bags of groceries."

Livestock was an important food supply for families.

"I can remember my grandma going into the yard with the chickens," said local

resident Peter Briseño. "She'd grab one of those chickens and step on its neck and pop its head off to get it ready to cook."

Edgar County has been home to farms that raised chickens, goats, pigs, beef cattle, dairy cattle and even ostriches. Many family farms have sold, and more farms have moved away from the daily labor associated with livestock to concentrate on monoculture row crops.

It is rare to meet a farmer whose family has farmed the same land for more than 100 years, but Ned Heltsley is a fourth-generation livestock farmer in Edgar County. He got his start thanks to a family member.

"I rented 300 acres of land from my uncle in 1977 when he got out of farming," said Heltsley. "I got my start then, and I was only 17 years old and in high school."

He farms the same ground that has sustained four generations of his family, lives on the same land where his great-grandmother was raised and in the house built by his grandparents.

"In 1952, my grandparents' house burnt," said Heltsley. "They built the new house and in 1991 me and my wife were able to move in."

Although Heltsley does not remember

the original house or the fire, he still tells the story he has been told several times.

"Bruce Tabor was on his way back from Kansas, coming down Coach Road in his ton and half Chevy truck with a straight six when he saw smoke and stuff come from my grandparents' house," Heltsley said. "The concrete bridge up the road used to be wood, and Tabor came flying across it and knocked two plug wires off, but that didn't stop him. He came chugging up into the driveway because he was worried about helping Arthur carry stuff out of the burning house."

Family connectivity to the land and each other is an emotional bond Heltsley values. He partnered with his father in farming both crops and livestock.

"I got to work beside my father every day for 35 years," said Heltsley. "I was truly blessed."

His special love is raising cattle. He has a herd of about 20 Angus cattle, which calves every spring.

"I used to have two calving herds," Heltsley said. "I had a spring calving herd and a fall calving herd."

The spring calving herd includes 19 females and two bulls and most of the calves

“I GOT TO WORK BESIDE MY FATHER EVERY DAY FOR 35 YEARS. I WAS TRULY BLESSED.”

NED HELTSLEY

KANSAS AREA FARMER AND CATTLEMAN

are conceived naturally. Only four of Heltsley's cows were artificially inseminated this year, and that gives him pride.

“When it is the mating season, I'll split the herd into two pastures,” said Heltsley. “I'll turn one bull out in one pasture and take the other down to that pasture.”

This year Heltsley's herd surprised him.

“I pulled into the pasture and noticed one of the cows had birthed twins, I never have twins,” Heltsley said. “I said, ‘Oh God, please let her have accepted both.’ I got over there, and they were both licked clean, and she was looking back and forth for them.”

With farming a family affair, Heltsley was excited when his daughter, Olivia, started showing cattle in 4-H and elsewhere.

“Shorty the bull up there is my daughter's,” said Heltsley. “She raised him, broke him and showed him. He is one of the gentlest animals we have. I can do just about anything to him.”

Heltsley, 63, personally tends his farm daily. He visits his pastures two or three

times a day looking for every cow to assure their safety.

“I used to have a blue healer that this Ranger belonged to, it could not move if she wasn't in it,” said Heltsley. “She has passed,

but I have two cows that absolutely hate canines, so I have never had trouble with coyotes, but I still find each one every time.”

A quick ride around the pasture shows just how much Heltsley cares for his cattle. He identifies and talks to each one as he passes by.

“That is Shorty the cow, the mama of Shorty the Bull,” said Heltsley. “There is Little One and that is Big One and the other

bull has a pedigree name of Wake Up Call but we shortened it to Wake.”

Livestock farming is a labor of love to Heltsley who is not sure when he will be done.

“I always say that when the herd is gone, I am done,” Heltsley said. “But then I go to Mexico, Missouri, to another auction and bring home more.”

Heltsley makes informed decisions about the cattle he buys by researching the numbers associated with each animal. The numbers for the expected Progeny

Raising cattle in Edgar County

Differences (EPD) are an important part of his research.

He explained a high EPD predicts how docile a beef is likely to be, and he has found the EPDs are accurate. The fastest exit from his herd to the slaughterhouse is aggressiveness.

“I don't play around with them when they get aggressive,” Heltsley said. “If they

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start to get that way, I send them away. It is the fastest way for them to leave the farm."

There is one dirty job associated with cattle Heltsley does not do — feeling inside the cow for the calf.

"The vet comes in and puts on his sleeve and goes into his shoulder and feels for the calf," said Heltsley. "I have tried, and my daughter can, but I can't feel the calf."

Heltsley's cattle are raised for slaughter and his beef is highly sought after.

"People want my beef," said Heltsley. "I am not bragging, but it is good beef, and they know it."

Heltsley attributes the quality of his beef to the feed mix. At one time, he mixed his own feed

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HAVE.”**

NED HELTSLEY
KANSAS AREA
CATTLEMAN

with silage but now leaves that work to a nutritionist.

While the COVID-19 Pandemic created difficulty for many sectors of the economy, it had little impact on the beef industry.

"When COVID hit, the beef market blew up," said Heltsley. "I could have sold through my herd and more, but the problem was getting appointments at the locker."

At one time during the pandemic, he was making appointments six months out

to get animals processed. He noted things are getting back to normal with the lockers.

Times change and livestock raising is not the same as when he started at 17.

The number of smaller livestock operations has fallen in recent years due to the industry shifting to specialized, larger scale operations using practices and production technologies geared toward cost savings for economic efficiency and final product prices. Some have voiced concern about these



Daniel Briseño/The Prairie Press

Ned Heltsley believes in the importance of checking his herd multiple times a day. With years of experience, he easily gauges the herds' mood upon entering the pasture.




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Daniel Briseño/The Prairie Press
Shorty the Bull, a retired show bull, is now used for breeding and has his own section of pasture on Ned Heltsley's farm. A fourth-generation farmer, Heltsley checks his herd daily and gives Shorty a good scratch.



Daniel Briseño/The Prairie Press
Little Miss stands for the camera showing the kind of gentle disposition Ned Heltsley wants in his cattle.



A well-loved herd

practices —especially a regular use of antibiotics. Farmers use antibiotics to treat many different things including increasing the productivity of animals, but an Economic Research Service (ERS) report indicates overuse of antibiotics will contribute to antimicrobial-resistant pathogens, with repercussions for both human and animal health.

Heltsley has seen the changes over the years but strongly believes smaller livestock farming is necessary, and he will continue as long as he can.

"People want to know what they are buying is good quality," said Heltsley. "I love cattle and I love my cattle. I always have."

He is facing the same quandary that many aging farmers confront. He does not have anyone ready to take the farm into the next generation.

"My kids don't want to take over," Heltsley said. "But I do have two grandsons, maybe they'll grow up and take it over."

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Growth in all directions

By Robby Tucker

rtucker@prairiepress.net

Horace is a small, sleepy village. A sampling of houses, a railroad crossing, a gleaming white church steeple and a grain elevator are the only things that differentiate the hamlet from any other stretch of country road.

Still, despite Horace's small size, it attracts plenty of traffic from local farmers. Paul Porter, the manager of grain operations at the Horace elevator, owned by Effingham-based grain cooperative The Equity, experiences firsthand the uniqueness of the operation's location.

"A lot of people know we're here, but they don't know how big we are," he said.

As The Equity's corporate presence has grown

over time, so has the Horace branch. The current facility dwarfs the elevator's previous footprint.

Going forward, Porter and his team look to expand their operation even more — not just in terms of scale, but technology.

Born and raised in Paris, Porter attended Horace Baptist Church as a child long before his job brought him back to the area years later. His grandparents farmed in

Edgar County, so Porter is familiar with the area.

Porter is also familiar with the grain industry, touting more than four decades of experience. After studying agronomy, Porter embarked on his career in 1980, managing elevators in Metcalf and Chrisman before he was recruited by The Equity.

In his current position, Porter manages the elevator and facilitates the distribution

of grain — a tall task considering the volume of grain The Equity processes. Porter and his team receive truckloads of product from roughly 300 clients.

At the height of harvest, as many as 260 truckloads are dumped at The Equity's facility per day. The grain The Equity receives is exported across the U.S. to

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A LOT OF MY FRIENDS HATE THEIR JOBS,
BUT WHEN YOU GET TO COME TO WORK WITH
GREAT PEOPLE, AND YOU LOVE WHAT YOU DO,
IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE WORK.”**

PAUL PORTER
THE EQUITY'S HORACE LOCATION MANAGER



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

A truck fills up on corn before exiting The Equity's Horace elevator. Roughly two million bushels of grain are shipped out via truck. Thirteen million are distributed by train.



various feed and chicken mills.

The numbers are surprising at times, even for Porter.

“You would not think there are that many (customers),” he said. “But it adds up pretty quick. Some come in to sell grain, others to buy chemicals or both.”

The Equity’s foray into chemicals and fertilizers comes as part of the Horace branch’s expanding agronomy wing. Specialists now have the facilities to mix different fertilizers and repellants on-site, whereas chemicals had to be shipped to the elevator before being sold in previous years.

Growth seems to be a common theme across all The Equity’s departments. In addition to the compound’s hog feed plant, completed in 2018, and the new chemical building, The Equity owns an additional 20 acres of land it can use to expand its operations.

The Equity’s growth will likely continue, with an emphasis on building additional grain storage bins. Local farmers are often forced to deliver their grain at roughly the same time following weather delays.

Such a high volume of grain can create a bottleneck for The Equity. Elevators cannot afford to be caught with too little space for grain, and if an outgoing shipment is delayed, it only further complicates storage issues.

“It can be tough for farmers. Weather is a big factor,” Porter explained, later adding, “places like this will get bigger. You don’t want to have too much corn or beans.”

Still, bigger additions are in the works. Porter hopes to install a drying system in order to get grain in storage faster but will have to exercise patience before the new dryer becomes a reality.

"It just takes time and money," Porter explained.

While there is room for improvement in Porter's eyes, the evolution of the Horace elevator is still impressive.

Long owned by Englum Grain, the property was purchased by Coshocton Grain in 2012. While some improvements were made, the general layout of the compound remained similar, with a row of grain bins lining the railroad tracks.

When The Equity first purchased the elevator from Coshocton in 2016, it came with just over a million bushels of storage. Once the newest batch of construction projects is completed, Porter will have seven million bushels of storage to draw upon.

Building projects on the west and north sides of the property have more than doubled the elevator's size.

The Equity itself has experienced massive growth over

the course of the last few decades. The Horace location is one of 19 year-round locations owned by the company.

Originally established in 1919, Equity is the brainchild of 53 farmers who decided to create an independent agriculture cooperative to consolidate their buying power. By 1949, funds were gathered to build a 16,000-bushel elevator just north of Effingham.

The facility was constructed in order to accommodate increasing amounts of corn as well as soybeans, which had just been named a cash crop.

Since then, The Equity has continued to expand, offering goods and services to a wide swath of central Illinois and more

recently Indiana. Additionally, The Equity has provided jobs and philanthropy in each of its communities.

In Horace, 40 full-time positions exist. This makes up a fraction of The Equity's roughly total 500 employees.

"It's a busy place," said Porter. "We've brought a lot of jobs to this community."

While its remote location might seem odd, The Equity is centrally located within Edgar County and can pull manpower and clients from Paris, Chrisman, Georgetown, Oakland or as far south as Marshall. The relative seclusion of Horace has also provided The Equity with plenty of room to expand.

connections continue to grow, so does their technology. Technology is reshaping the face of agriculture, allowing farmers to maximize yields and cut down on delays.

"With the tech we've got, it's hard to see it stopping," said Porter.

This increase in output and decrease in waiting means more business for elevators, but it can also mean logistical problems when it comes to storage. While The Equity is adding additional storage, technological changes are also allowing them to grow more efficient — working smarter, not harder.

The Equity has rolled out new windshield stickers to their customers. Trucks with

a sticker are automatically identified by a scanner when they bring their load to the elevator, telling staff who and what is in the truck while informing customers which dump site to enter.

"Communication is everything," Porter explained. "Everything is instantaneous."

Staff at The Equity can contact customers via text in order to relay information, including how much their haul of grain is worth. Often, the

funds have already been wired to a farmer's account before they have pulled out of the parking lot.

For Porter, the leap in technology from the dawn of his career until now has been astounding to watch.

"It's amazing. I wish I'd bought stock in phones 20 or 30 years ago," he chuckled.

Perhaps more than any other aspect of his job, Porter appreciates his coworkers. As The Equity continues to expand and facilitate growth for local farmers, so also Porter grows in appreciation for his role.

"A lot of my friends hate their jobs, but when you get to come to work with great people, and you love what you do, it doesn't feel like work," said Porter.



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

One of Horace's distinctive features is the railroad running through the village — pictured above. The track has been used to send grain from the elevator for decades and is seeing more traffic thanks to The Equity.

The village of Horace has benefitted from The Equity's continued growth according to Porter, who noted the elevator brought with it fiber optic internet and a dedicated water line.

The Equity also provides philanthropy and stewardship to nearby communities, offering donations to 4-H, FFA and other non-profit organizations near each location.

This philosophy of stewardship extends to The Equity's customers, who Porter cherishes.

"They are easy to get along with," he said. "You live with each other, so you have to try to be a good neighbor."

As The Equity's facilities, personnel and



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

A massive pile of extra grain is ready for transportation at The Equity's Horace branch. Grain bins currently under construction will likely fill up fast once they are completed.



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By GARY HENRY

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Row crop monoculture of corn and soybeans dominates Edgar County farming, but it is not the only way to practice agriculture.

Josh and Katie Mooneyham take a different approach on their 40-acre homestead near Paris. The wooded ground backing up on Sugar Creek is not suitable for tillage, but it works well for raising chickens.

Getting to where they are now involved a circuitous path emphasizing a desire for healthy and natural food, respect for their property and appreciation for what raising animals brings to their lives. The young couple are 2006 graduates of Paris High School, who grew up in town, not on farms.

Josh Mooneyham did farmwork in high school laboring on baling crews and cutting firewood. Katie Mooneyham had a more direct animal connection.

"I got to grow up with horses, and I really enjoy animals," she said. "I was always out at Grandma Theresa's when she had horses."

but end up with a huge flock."

The Moneyham flock of six birds quickly grew to a dozen when they agreed to take a flock from friends who were relocating, and the flock has continued growing to more than 100 birds. Other animals have also joined the homestead — bringing their own benefits.

A previous owner logged the property and invasive plants are rampant. Josh Mooneyham works full-time in construction and just keeping the property maintained is a challenge, let alone trying to restore it to a healthy, natural balance. That's why goats and sheep entered the picture after chickens were already on the property.

The goats browse high on shrubbery while the sheep graze lower ground plants, and that combination is a natural way to get the invasives under control. A rotational grazing plan gives the herbivores a constant supply of fresh food without the danger of overgrazing, and it greatly reduces the labor needed to eradicate, or at least minimize, the

Having chickens constantly moving about on new green grass is a benefit because the birds reduce both the number of parasites that get on the goats and insects that are bothersome to people.

An unexpected business

The first chickens were considered an important step in healthy eating as a clean source of hormone and antibiotic-free eggs for use by the little family.

"One of Josh's biggest things is hormones," said Katie Mooneyham. "He researched how hormones in the meat bought at the store affects the body."

The egg layers the Mooneyhams keep are free-range birds. Their main feed is what they scratch out on the property, but the diet is augmented by surplus vegetables obtained from a local grower and pumpkins provided by another person. Some commercial chicken feed is also used.

Word she had fresh eggs created inquiries from family and friends about purchasing

Homesteading suits the Mooneyhams

Raising chickens for eggs and meat assures healthy, clean food source

That love for animals inspired her to take ag classes at PHS with a desire to be a veterinarian. She interned at the Edgar County Veterinary Service while in high school and attended vet tech classes at Lakeland College after graduation.

The career path did not develop as she anticipated but she is taking care of animals and following her own precepts of what good care means.

Getting animals on the homestead was almost an afterthought.

"You go through Rural King and see the chicks, and they are super cute. Josh agreed to six," she said, adding six is the minimum number of birds the store sells. "It was just enough chickens to give us eggs and give me an animal because I enjoy it."

It was a set plan with a minimum number of birds, then she encountered what everyone who raises fowl calls chicken math.

"Chicken math is a true thing," she insisted. "You swear you are only to get a set number

undesirable plants.

"They are constantly eating, and it's free for them," said Katie Mooneyham.

She has noted another benefit from the rotational grazing. The manure not only fertilizes the ground but seeds from the supplementary hay feed is re-introducing native plants. The seeds get dispersed in the manure.

Putting chickens with the goats and sheep created a dynamic team for land restoration.

"Last year, we had two flocks going," said Katie Mooneyham. "One at the coop for eggs, and one we called the goat flock which helped sanitize the pasture by living off the land."

To minimize predation, they created fenced, covered and mobile chicken tractors within the bigger enclosure occupied by the goats and sheep. The larger animals are kept in place with portable electric fencing. The whole operation gets moved every two to three weeks.

any extra and with the growth of the flock, Katie Mooneyham had a small egg business on her hands. She has been careful to keep it a directly off the farm sale operation to avoid the licensing requirements for selling at a farmers market or to a grocery store. Her egg customers come to the homestead and transport the eggs from the property for personal use.

"They understand they are purchasing off the farm," she said.

After gaining experience with raising chickens for eggs, they decided to venture into meat birds — again just for personal use. Katie Mooneyham said they initially started with just six meat birds and timed the operation to coincide with Josh Mooneyham's off season so he could do the processing.

Two outside factors prompted them to expand the number of meat birds. When they shared chicken dishes at family dinners or provided meat for cookouts people asked to buy meat from them. Josh Mooneyham en-



Gary Henry/The Prairie Press

Katie Mooneyham's love for animals led to purchasing six chickens which has expanded to a flock of more than 100 birds, goats and sheep for the family homestead.

countered the same reaction from co-workers when he took chicken to cook while on the road for his job.

COVID was the other incentive. Katie Mooneyham said observing people panic buying at the grocery stores raised a concern about their limited supply of hormone free chickens. They called every nearby Rural King store and bought all the meat birds still in stock.

Selling dressed meat birds is a different nest compared to eggs. The Mooneyhams had to obtain a license from the Illinois Department of Agriculture and the Edgar County Public Health Department. By choice, they only sell whole birds, which simplifies the licensing process.

A common accusation that gets bandied around by some in agriculture is there is too much government regulation and overreach. Katie Mooneyham has a different perspective.

She said the Illinois Department of Agriculture inspector they worked with was a great asset in advising them how to do things right — he even had recommendations about the type of equipment to use for their size of operation. She added the inspector became their go-to-guy for questions.

While inspectors can drop by at any time without advance warning, she does not consider that intrusive given the overriding important goal.

"They are like everyone else," said Katie Mooneyham. "They

want to make sure everybody is getting good, healthy food."

Regulations they must follow include keeping the scalding water at a constant temperature. Scalding after killing makes it easier for the plucking machine to efficiently remove feathers. The water they use must also be tested to make sure it is free of contaminants.

Another safeguard is waiting until the carcass cools before it is packaged and put in the refrigerator awaiting sale. Birds may be kept in a refrigerator for three days for sale as fresh meat. After three days, any unsold

birds are frozen.

2021 was the first year they processed and sold meat birds under their own license. They initially started doing 30 birds in a batch, and by the end of the year were processing groups of 75.

"We won't be doing that many this year," she said, reflecting on the amount of work required.

Trying to satisfy public demand for quality meat eventually put the Mooneyhams on alert for what was happening to their operation.

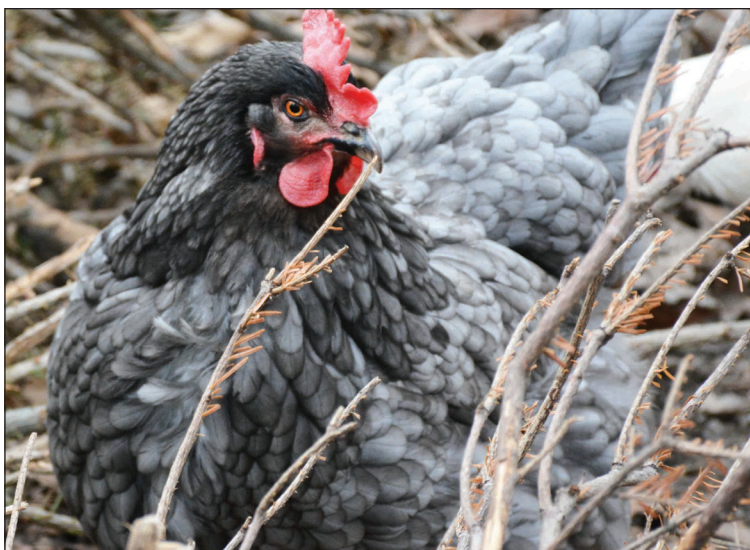
"We thought we were losing focus," said Josh Mooneyham. "We were not raising the quality of meat birds we wanted."

There was also a toll on other important parts of their life. He explained the effort to quickly raise as many birds as possible to keep up with the processing demand interrupted family time. When they reviewed the year, they found they were not spending as much time with their children as they wanted.

They are scaling back for 2023 by raising meat birds in flocks of 20-25 which is more manageable, especially at processing time.

As an animal lover, harvesting the meat birds has been a challenge and a learning curve for Katie Mooneyham.

"I've definitely had to be weaned into it," she said, acknowledging she is now



Gary Henry/The Prairie Press

Keeping animals in a natural environment is important to local homesteaders Katie and Josh Mooneyham, Paris. One way of doing that is augmenting the winter barn lot with leftover Christmas trees because the bird's browse the needles as a new food source that also provides a natural worming element to the diet.



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Gary Henry/The Prairie Press

Katie and Josh Mooneyham are passionate about their home-steading mission of knowing where their food comes from and how it is raised.

proficient at almost every step. "Josh still has to make sure I'm doing the gutting properly. That's not for everybody."

Raising birds with the knowledge they will later kill them for food has implemented personal standards for what defines good care. The meat birds are raised inside chicken tractors in limited numbers to avoid overcrowding and kept on green grass.

"We want them to live their best life up to the day," said Katie Mooneyham. "The goal is to make it as quick and as painless as possible. We always thank them for their sacrifice."

She emphasized stressed birds from overcrowding or other poor-quality living conditions do not produce good meat and are poor egg layers. Healthy and well-cared for birds yield a superior product.

They have recently added a small number of turkeys annually to the flock, but it is far from certain they will raise turkeys as a commercial venture. So far, the small number of turkeys has been for personal use or for other family members and friends.

A major impediment to turkeys is the expense. She said each turkey can cost between \$8-\$15 as a chick and every chick will consume a 50-pound bag of feed before harvest. Their chicken harvesting equipment may not be suitably sized for turkeys, so they take the larger birds to a commercial facility, which is another expense.

From the animal lover side, there is this perspective.

"With small numbers, the turkeys are fun," said Katie Mooneyham. "We've not had an aggressive bird, and they do well with the others. If we have too many and it gets overcrowded, they will get aggressive. Then it's no fun."

Scaling up to mass production is not in the future for the Mooneyhams.

"For us, it is about providing good quality, hormone and antibiotic free meat. It's not about getting rich," Katie Mooneyham said. "We have select people who are regulars that show a great amount of appreciation. If we can still supply to them and to our family and still have time to travel and vacation, that's perfect."

Keeping chickens is not for everybody

Inflation has driven the prices for grocery store eggs to a point it is common to hear people claiming they are tempted to raise chickens for cheaper eggs. It is not certain there is any cost savings in that plan, both in terms of money spent and time expended.

There is a definite up-front expense for the first birds in the flock. Chicks are purchased, and they require a shelter against the elements and predators. The new chicks must be fed, without any return, while they mature to laying age. Hens start laying at around 18 weeks and

remain a productive layer for two to three years.

The coop must include nesting boxes so the eggs are not scattered around the property. Birds must be checked almost daily, especially when they start laying, and coops must be regularly cleaned to keep birds healthy.

Katie Mooneyham encourages anyone with the right motivation to raise chickens, and that involves understanding the principles behind the homestead movement. Keeping chickens is part of a homesteader's overall plan of knowing the food being consumed is locally sourced, healthy, not artificially enhanced and raised in a way that is both sustainable and environmentally friendly.

For Josh Mooneyham, chickens offer an easy way to introduce children to animal care since the birds are not so large to pose a threat. That care involves important life lessons about where food comes from and the need to be humane in how animals are raised and dispatched for food. Care involves making sure the animals have their food and water needs met.

"I want the kids to learn responsibility," he said.

Raising chickens and caring for the goats and sheep is work especially on cold days, hot days or having to muck around in the mud. Then it may not seem like such a good idea, so it is important to keep the big picture in mind.

"When I look at how much Katie and the kids enjoy it, that makes it worthwhile," he said.

Katie Mooneyham said a novice without any prior knowledge can successfully raise both laying and meat birds, provided there is adequate space, and a person is committed to learning and prepared for mistakes and setbacks. It is important to know priorities, so the right breeds are selected.

"Each breed has pros and cons," she said, quickly adding what works for one person may not be a sure thing for somebody else.

Early in their chicken venture, the Mooneyhams selected a breed that did not thrive on their homestead. Another person took the birds and was successful with them. Katie Mooneyham is not sure why that breed did not work for them and now takes a broader approach with her laying hens.

"We enjoy the color of a flock, so we have multiple breeds," she said, adding it is fun and exciting when a person new to keeping chickens finds that first egg.

Her favorite birds are ones she calls Easter eggers because they lay eggs with shells colored tan, pink, blue or green. She said the color is boldest in the spring and fades as the season progresses. Shell color brightens again after the molt.

A major factor in deciding what breeds to try is comb size, since the Mooneyhams overwinter their laying hens.

"We don't heat the barn, except in extreme cold. They can get frostbite," Katie Mooneyham said.

It is also important those just starting out with chickens find good sources of information. For Mooneyham, that is Rural King and Allen

and Donna Vietor at Paris Feed and Animal Health. Except for turkeys, which must be purchased directly from a hatchery, the Mooneyhams buy all their birds from Rural King.

"They (Rural King staff) have been really good for working with me," she said. "They have gone over and above typical service — especially the person who orders the meat birds for me."

The Vietors have proved an invaluable resource for understanding nutrition. It is not just a matter of putting food out. Beyond food, egg layers also need grit and oyster shells in the diet.

Maintaining a network of other small growers, whether it is livestock or vegetable truck farming, is another valuable resource.

"The farming community is amazing," said Katie Mooneyham. "It's one small business trying to help another one grow."

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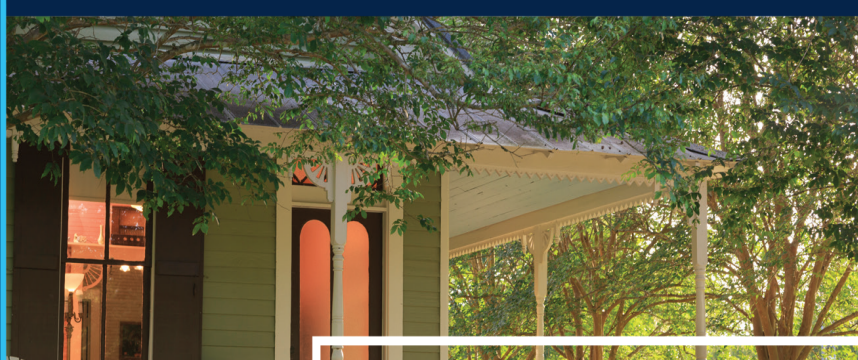
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The ComplianceTeam



Weir's Florist has been a flowering business for 52 years

Daniel Briseño

daniel@prairiepress.net

It does not have a 48-row planter or a giant combine, but the 52-year-old Weir's Florist is recognized as an agricultural farm by Illinois.

Russ and Maxine Weir opened the doors of Weir's florist in 1971 with a greenhouse they purchased from relatives Harry and Lila Ghere. Randy Weir was a sophomore in high school when the family business opened, and he knew then it was something he wanted to do.

"It interested me for sure," he said. "That's why I went into it."

Following high school graduation, he went to Danville Junior College, graduated in 1978 with a degree in horti-

culture and returned to the family business. He loves all aspects of the business, but the spring garden season is his favorite

ing," said Randy Weir. "Then the customers come in that you haven't seen since last season. That is the best time."

“

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RANDY WEIR
WEIR'S FLORISTS

With spring here and better weather approaching, he and the rest of the staff are preparing for the operation's busiest time of the year. He said for about a two-month period starting soon, the business will be open seven-days-a-week.

Weir's started as a family business and remains as such. Randy Weir's son, Brad, has been part of the business almost from birth.

"The kids have always been a part of this," Randy Weir said.

"We had them here in playpens when they were babies."

time of the year.

"Watching the plants grow is breathtak-



Daniel Briseño/The Prairie Press

Weir's Florist is home to five greenhouses that are full and waiting for customers to take advantage of the spring planting season.



Randy Weir called the cut flower shop their bread and butter, adding it is hard to find someone better at the job than Georgia Mathias.

Daniel Briseño/The Prairie Press

Brad Weir is now 41 years old and entering his 21st year as a full-time employee.

"As soon as I was able to walk, I was helping," said Brad Weir. "I have always wanted to take it over."

Spring planting season is also Brad Weir's favorite time of the year.

"I love watching the plants grow over the weekend," Brad Weir said. "And I always enjoy the customers. They are so personable."

Weir's survived the COVID-19 pandemic thanks to their state agriculture permit.

"We have to buy a permit from the state every year to sell bulk seed," said Brad Weir. "That is what allowed us to stay open."

Randy Weir explained just how scary the COVID-19 pandemic was.

"It took them forever to decide if we were an essential business," said Randy Weir. "We had already purchased



Alicia McQueen, left, and Melody Weir, right, are checking plants as part of the daily routine at Weir's Florist.

Daniel Briseño/The Prairie Press

all of our plants for that season and if they would not of said we were, we would have had to close our doors."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Weir's continued to sell plants when the rest of the world shut down.

"We were much busier than expected," said Brad Weir. "People couldn't get out, so they took to planting gardens and flowers around their homes."

Weir's has survived for more than a half-century selling to the community and family members know the reason for that longevity. They consider their prices competitive and claim the quality of their plants is better than what is available from other vendors.

"Our plants are taken care of," said Brad Weir. "Every time the hose clicks on, our plants are being fertilized."

Weir's uses around 10,000 gallons of water a month to keep the plants hydrated. Another big number connected to the business is heating the greenhouses with than 1 million BTUs of gas. With the amount of water, gas

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and electricity the shop uses, Weir's leaped into clean energy by installing solar panels, hoping to cut utility costs.

"We had Solar Shift install them," said Brad Weir. "They are wonderful."

The installation of solar panels at Weir's prompted another person to move to solar.

"Mark Dunlap called me and asked if everything Solar Shift says is true," said Randy Weir. "After talking to him several times, he had them installed as well."

Weir's grows the majority of its plants from seeds with the use of a germination chamber. Brad Weir said the special device is adjustable for humidity making it possible to germinate cabbage seeds overnight. When the seeds are mature enough, they are transplanted to individual containers.

Weir's has grown substantially over the years and has come a long way from the first greenhouse in 1971. Today the five greenhouses have self-watering systems, ventilation and air circulating fans, furnaces and vents on the walls and roof that open when a set temperature is reached.

"Each house has its own thermostat as well as being connected to a computer program," said Brad Weir. "When it hits a certain temperature the vents open but if something fails and it gets too cold or too hot, we get a call on our phone from the program."

For Weir's, modern technology is a necessary tool that not only aids in production but also protects their investment.

"We sell one of these four-inchers for \$3 and each hang-



Daniel Briseño/
the Prairie
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ing fern for \$15,” said Randy Weir. “Look at how many are in here and think just how many thousands of dollars we’d lose. It would kill us.”

Weir’s is expanding again in the future with the addition of a new greenhouse bringing the business to 18,000 square feet. Brad Weir credits the City of Paris for providing a grant from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and helping make the expansion possible. He noted the grant provided funds the business did not have to secure elsewhere.

The new greenhouse will be a state-of-the-art 30-foot by 100-foot building equipped with all the regular amenities, and some important upgrades. Thermostat controlled roof vents that open and close are a common greenhouse feature and will be part of the new greenhouse. The innovation comes with the walls of the building.

“The walls will be controlled by a thermostat as well to roll up when the temperature gets too hot,” Brad Weir said.

Open walls to the exterior present a challenge and Randy Weir explained chicken wire will cover the openings to keep wildlife out of the space.

Randy and Brad Weir are second and third-generation florists. They both love the business and are elated that Brad Weir’s son, Sam, shows interest as well.

cart and just go to stocking the plants without being told. You don’t see many kids his age like that.”

Weir’s is noted for its quality product, service and offers custom planting.

“Customers like Nancy Marrs come in and ask us to plant something for her

for more than 50 years and both men are confident the business can continue for another half-century.

“We have made it so long because of the customers we serve,” said Randy Weir.

“As long as we go above and beyond for them as we do, we will still be here.”



Daniel Briseño/the Prairie Press

Brad Weir stands inside one of the five greenhouses at Weir’s Florist explaining how in a good year the greenhouse is empty by the end of May.



Daniel Briseño/The Prairie Press

Randy Weir pulls a flat of plants out of the germination chamber to show just how fast plants sprout from seed in the right conditions.

“My boy is here a little bit after school,” said Brad Weir. “But he is 10 years old so there is that.”

The boy’s work ethic stands out to his grandfather.

“When school gets out Sam will be here,” said Randy Weir. “He will grab a

every year, and we do,” said Brad Weir.

Randy and Brad Weir have dedicated their lives to the plant industry and the people of the Paris community by providing the highest quality product they can. They see it as a successful formula that has kept the business operational

“
THE KIDS
HAVE
ALWAYS
BEEN A PART
OF THIS. WE
HAD THEM
HERE IN
PLAYPENS
WHEN THEY
WERE
BABIES.”

RANDY WEIR
WEIR’S FLORISTS

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NOW, THEREFORE, the Edgar County Board acknowledges and supports agriculture within our County. The jobs created, taxes generated, technologies embraced and environmental practices implemented by farmers makes agriculture a valuable industry within our County; and

LET IT BE RESOLVED, the County of Edgar Elected Board and County Staff will work to support and promote the development of agriculture for the benefit of our County and all its residents.

Passed by the Edgar County Board April 13, 2023

Farm Bureau's local efforts



Gary Henry/The Prairie Press

Edgar County Board Chairman Jeff Voigt, left, on behalf of the entire board, accepts an Illinois Farm Bureau Allies in Agriculture Award from Edgar County Farm Bureau representative Phil Wright. Prior to the presentation, the county board passed a resolution



Gary Henry/The Prairie Press

Katie Mooneyham is immediately surrounded by her goats and chickens whenever she enters the barnyard.



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

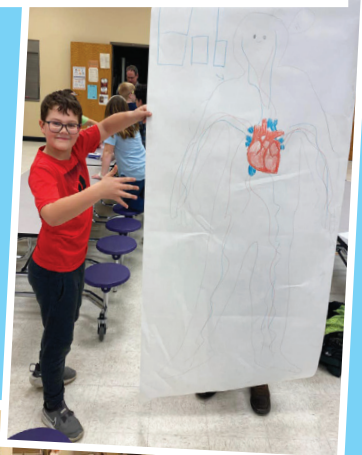
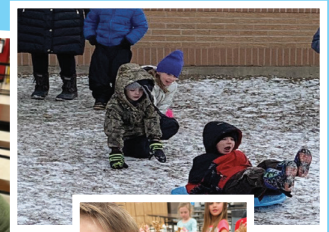
A trio of workers constructs a new grain bin. The Equity owns 20 acres of property behind what it occupies today and hopes to house more storage for its increasing reserve of grain.

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Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

The Cargill compound on Jefferson Street in Paris is easily recognizable to locals. The large white silos are a fixture of Paris' skyline.

Plant with a mission

By Robby Tucker

rtucker@prairiepress.net

Residents of Paris are familiar with the towering silos of Jefferson Street, which loom large over Paris' modest skyline. While the structures are easily visible to both locals and passersby, the operation and mission behind them are not as visible to some.

The facility is owned and operated by Cargill — a worldwide, family-owned corporation specializing in food solutions.

At the Paris location, Cargill processes and breaks down corn for use in foods

and products ranging from tacos to kitty litter. Cargill's Paris location creates the foundation for products used by millions.

Cargill's mission extends beyond the plant's product output. The management team hopes to foster an inclusive and empowering work environment, providing a benefit for its employees and the community of Paris.

Plant lead Keith Smith is quite familiar with the facility's objectives. Smith graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in chemistry before joining the Army Corps of Engineers to perform

contracted civil work — what he affectionately dubbed grunt work.

Smith developed soapy solutions for tactical vehicles with coats of non-reflective or infrared-resistant paint. Often, regular suds negatively impact the stealth capabilities of military vehicles, so developing a compound capable of cleaning each vehicle without compromising the paint's low profile was a challenge befitting a competent chemist.

After landing in Newman and working in a tech recycling plant, Smith eventually found his way to Cargill.

For 30 years, Smith has worked for

Cargill in various capacities — quality control, research and development and operations are all familiar areas for him. Smith found satisfaction in each stage of his Cargill career, especially in operations.

“The fun thing about ops is each day is absolutely new,” he explained, referencing the iconic 1993 film in which Bill Murray finds himself trapped in an endless loop. “There are no Groundhog Days.”

While Smith absorbed some of the responsibilities of the plant lead role late in 2022, he officially adopted the title in January. Even in his new position, Smith still finds plenty of unique challenges to overcome each day, which excites him.

“I like the diversity of my work, of the challenges we have,” he continued.



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

A sign bids farewell to Cargill customers as they exit the facility. Cargill's farmer-first mindset has earned the loyalty of much of the local agriculture community.

As the manager of a plant the size of Cargill's Paris facility, there is always work to do. Still, despite the magnitude of some of the challenges he faces, Smith focuses on the importance of his facility's mission.

“We are feeding the world,” said Smith.

Many grain elevators simply store and distribute crops purchased from local farmers. A large portion of those crops, roughly 90% according to Smith, are sold as animal feed.

While Cargill operates an elevator and distributes feed, the facility also houses a dry mill where teams break down the corn into a plethora of components. One single kernel of corn houses the possibility to create dozens of unique products.

Components like whole kernel, flaking grits, coarse grits, snack grits, granulated grits, flour, bran, germ and more can all be pulled from a single kernel and each component can be utilized in vastly different ways. The versatility of a single, golden nugget of corn is surprising, even to professionals within the field.

“It blows my mind every time,” said Toni Connell, plant coordinator for Cargill's Indianapolis and Paris mills.

Connell often observes similar reactions from students and



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tourists who visit the plant.

Before the kernel reaches its true potential, it must undergo a lengthy, multi-step process.

First, corn is brought to the mill by local farmers, and is dropped into an in-ground hopper. Next, the raw product is sent to a dryer to achieve a low, uniform level of moisture across the entire load.

Next, the tempering process begins.

Tempering introduces small amounts of moisture to the kernels to prepare them for processing. After a short stop in the sauna, the corn is de-germinated and ground up into its various components.

An aspiration process draws the

remaining moisture out of the corn components once more before they are sifted and sorted by tall, gyrating containers.

Once the kernels have been processed, sorted and prepared for transport, they

in an extensive list of food items.

Buns, taco shells, granola bars, beer, puff snacks and chips all make use of Illinois'

most recognizable export. Many of these products are not normally associated with corn or corn byproducts.

"I'm always looking for opportunities to educate (people) on dry mill corn ingredients," said Smith, whose experience in research and development familiarized him with corn products of all shapes and



Keith Smith, plant lead for the Cargill facility in Paris, points toward a batch of corn as it funnels into a processor. Smith has worked in various capacities for Cargill over the last 30 years, but his role as plant lead has provided him with new and exciting challenges.



Cargill platform supervisor Brent Cox operates a panel inside the corn mill.

are packaged and delivered to their respective destinations.

Processed corn matter is included

sizes.

He cites protein, intrinsic fiber and a lack of trans fat as benefits of using dry corn ingredients in food.

Cargill's corn products find their way into other veins of consumer products



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as well, appearing in items like cat litter and even ant bait. The versatility of corn is one of its greatest strengths but is often overlooked.

"When you think about corn, it's just corn and whatever includes corn in the name," said Smith.

While corn byproducts are utilized in a variety of ways, Smith still thinks there is more to do. He hopes to channel his chemistry expertise into exploring techniques to redirect different strains of corn products into food products.

"What is the norm? Are there opportunities to make the status quo different?" asked Smith. "If we could convert all corn to consumer products, that would be amazing. The tech just isn't there yet."

As Smith and Connell continue to seek breakthroughs in their products, they are doing the same for their employees. New initiatives within Cargill aim to make plants like the one in Paris more inclusive and welcoming for all.

Recently, Connell partnered with Hi-Viz, a work clothing provider, to offer her female coworkers refitted, comfortable parkas and uniforms. Before Connell's efforts, all Cargill personnel were limited to uniforms fitted for men.

Additionally, Emily Hollingsworth, Sanitation Supervisor at Cargill in Paris, spearheaded an effort to bring International Women's Day festivities to the office and highlight the importance of women in agriculture.

"We had a vision, we worked together and got it done," said Hollingsworth.

Next, Connell hopes to open a conversation about women's footwear.

"Men now have more choices than women," Connell explained. "We're trying to make it more inclusive. We want people to feel welcomed and engaged."

Connell's efforts fall under Cargill's new D.E.I. (Diversity Equity and Inclusivity) initiative. Connell has pushed the initiative in Cargill's Indianapolis branch as well as at the Paris location — she's starting to see progress.

"People in Paris are more tight-knit. It can be hard bringing in new people but by implementing more engagement activities, it has helped to integrate new individuals and make them quickly feel part of the team," she explained. According to Connell, Smith's role has also been instrumental in creating a more cohesive environment.

"Keith is very embracing of everyone. He includes everyone," Connell explained.

"The value of a diverse workforce is everyone brings something different," Smith added.

Smith's approach is inspired by a couple of motivators, including his desire to push Cargill forward.

"(I ask myself) what if we all have the same vision and we

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just drive this thing forward,” Smith explained. “How far can we go?”

Success and innovation are pillars of Smith’s management style, but a desire to preserve the workplace culture that he has called home for the past 30 years is a conviction that rests closer to Smith’s heart.

“I get to work with some great people. I like the fact that I know the people,” said Smith, later adding: “During COVID, I worked from home. People think that’s the dream job, but that’s not me.”

As time passes, both Connell and Smith will continue to advance their mission of creating a more inclusive



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

Michael Moreschi, Cargill platform supervisor, works at his computer. Technology plays a crucial part in monitoring mill systems and ensuring a satisfactory product for buyers.

culture within their ranks. Inclusivity is a virtue extending to Cargill’s clients as well.

“We value the relationships we have with folks. People have delivered to us for generations and we want to continue to cherish that going forward,” said Smith.

“Our animal food growers, we value those relationships too,” Smith added.

Perhaps the only thing more impressive than the environment Cargill offers to its employees is the value Cargill offers its community. The facility, formerly known as the Evans Milling Company, then Illinois Cereal Mills before being purchased by Cargill in 1994, has offered employment



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

The Cargill office building houses the administrative wing of the mill’s operation, sitting across from the plant’s towering silos and elevators.

to locals for decades and now boasts a workforce of more than 80 people.

Connell hopes to offer even more to the people of Edgar County.

"We give back to the community a lot," she said.

Whether in the form of donations, grants offered to local non-profits or service projects such as assembling wheel-chair ramps, Cargill stays busy both in and around their facility.



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

The towering structure pictured above is an industrial dryer used to remove moisture from corn dropped off at the mill. Ensuring all the kernels in a truckload of corn share the same moisture content makes for consistency during the tempering process.



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

Employees pose for a picture inside the mill. Pictured from left to right, platform supervisor Michael Moreschi, lead operator Richard Tinsman, platform supervisor Brent Cox and bag line operator Michael Evitt.

The business' mind for the community has trickled down to its employees at the individual level, according to Smith.

"We certainly have a community voice we try to instill. A lot of our employees volunteer because they are good people. We try to support them," he explained.

Smith revealed his team includes everything from food pantry volunteers to volunteer coaches for several local youth sports teams.

Smith himself has participated in various benefit auctions as an auctioneer.

For many, a career at Cargill can be enriching and beneficial on multiple levels. This has rung true for Smith, whose time with the company has allowed him unique opportunities and experiences.

"Cargill provides opportunity, whether you want to stay local or work internationally," said Smith. "It provides an opportunity to understand diverse cultures."

Throughout his time at Cargill, Smith

has ventured around the globe, making stops to work in locations like Korea, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and England.

The story of Cargill's Paris branch is one of service and innovation, and the story continues to evolve with time. From the company's primary mission to the ambi-

“

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KEITH SMITH
PLANT LEAD, PARIS CARGILL

tions of individual team members, a heart for the community of Paris and a desire to build an inviting workplace culture seems to permeate Cargill from top to bottom.

More so than the products created, or the profits turned, Cargill's success rests squarely on the shoulders of the men and women who come to work every day. For Connell, a Greencastle, Ind. resident, the hour and twenty-minute drive to Paris never seems like a chore because of the people she works with.

"We have a wonderful team. They are all very knowledgeable and they have all been there for many years," she remarked.



Robby Tucker/The Prairie Press

Cargill plant lead Keith Smith shows off a pile of partially processed kernels. Corn brought to the Cargill mill is processed in a variety of ways in order to harvest different sections of the kernel.

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Family farming is all in the genes



By NANCY ZEMAN

nzeman@prairiepress.net

Farm families own and operate 96% of all farms in Illinois today, and the Illinois Farm Families organization claims farm families are 100% committed to bringing consumers the most sustainably grown, healthiest food anywhere.

Given agriculture, with its related businesses, is Edgar County's largest industry, nearly everyone knows an Edgar County farm family. The names are familiar — Phipps, Sunkel, McCulloch, Stanley, Barrett, Curl, Rowe, Trogdon, Lanker, Sullivan, Wyatt and Barkley to name a few. Many are farming the same land worked by their great- and great-great-grandparents.

In the case of Rick Taylor and his son, Jeff, they can trace their farming life to their grandfather and great-grandfather — Bee Taylor (1896-1972).

Bee Taylor was born in Kentucky and

moved to Indiana where he worked as a farm laborer. As the family story goes, he had the opportunity to rent farmland near Indianola in Vermilion County. There, he and his wife raised three sons and a daughter. Each of those sons, including Rick Taylor's father Joe, became farmers as did Thelma Taylor's husband.

In fact, Rick Taylor can count 13 independent family farmers whose line reaches back to Bee Taylor. Rick is following in his father's footsteps while his son Jeff has been farming 11 years. Jeff is the father of two sons, Leo and Lex, with son number three on the way.

Each of Bee Taylor's three sons, Wayne, Joe and Eugene as well as son-in-law Harold Baldwin who married daughter, Thelma, were family farmers. Wayne's sons Gerald and his sons, Ryan and Ron, are all farming. The two brothers are the fathers of five sons.

Eugene Taylor was followed by his son, Mike, and now his son Devin, who

has one son.

Harold Baldwin's son, Steve, followed the Taylor family tradition while son Alan is now also farming. Alan has one son.

"From my grandfather's decision to come across the state line to Illinois, there are 13 farmers and 10 mini-farmers," Rick Taylor said.

And while all are family farmers, none farm together.

"We're independent family farms although we support each other," Rick Taylor said. "That's really quite a legacy."

From those first rental acres in Vermilion County, Bee Taylor continued to add land to his operation. While he and his wife lived their lives near Indianola, Rick's father, Joe, moved south — a few miles north of where Rick and Jeff live now.

Rick and his cousin, Craig Hodge, spent a lot of time with their grandfather rid-

ing in the farm truck.

"We were always with him," he said.

By the time he was eight years old, Rick was driving a tractor on his own. "These are all good memories," he recalled including looking at crops, keeping tabs

“
**WE'RE NOT WORKING 9-5
OR 8-6. FAMILY FARMING IS A
WAY OF LIFE.”**

RICK TAYLOR
EDGAR COUNTY FARMER

on the farm workers, fishing and, "just doing things you do with your grandpa."

Rick and Jeff are graduates of the University of Illinois. They each emphasized while studying agricultural science and management is important there are also

skills learned in other ways that are hard to quantify.

"From the time I was young, I heard farmers talk," Rick Taylor said. "You remember those things. It's just in your being. Anyone who is involved in any family business has heard about it since they were young. Most of it is second nature."

A 1972 graduate of Chrisman High School, Rick Taylor said when he decided to attend the University of Illinois (1976 graduate), he did so with his eyes wide open. He now farms 1,700 acres.

"It keeps me busy," he said.

Jeff Taylor's story is almost identical to his father's.

"I spent time on the tractor and combine with Dad," he said.

By the time Jeff Taylor was in junior high he was planting in the spring and combining in the fall. Jeff also attended the University of Illinois and returned



Special to The Prairie Press

Bee Taylor and his wife, Bessie, first row center, raised three sons and a daughter on a farm near Indianola all of whom became farmers or married a farmer. First row, from left, are Thema Taylor Baldwin, Bessie Taylor, Bee Taylor, baby Gerald Taylor and his mother, Lucille. Back row, from left, are son-in-law Harold Baldwin, Joseph Taylor, Wayne Taylor and Eugene Taylor. Each succeeding generation has continued farming.

AT LEFT: Rick Taylor right, and his son, Jeff, are pictured on the farm earlier this month

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**JEFF TAYLOR
TAYLOR FARMS**

to Edgar County to make his own way.

“You’re in control of your own time,” he said, noting a personal attraction to being a farmer.

Rick Taylor said family farmers can move forward by adding new farmland through purchase or rental — depending

upon the motivation of the individual.

“There’s no ceiling in farming,” he said. “You are self-employed and in control.”

On a recent beautiful spring day, the father and son admitted they were each getting a little antsy about getting in the fields to begin planting. The land must dry out before tractors and equipment can work the ground, Rick Taylor acknowledged. Recent storms and heavy rains have left the fields muddy.

In early April, a line of storms spawned a small tornado tearing through Jeff Taylor’s property, destroying two sheds and a garage. All that’s left of the garage is the concrete pad and a lawnmower stored there. Pieces of the two sheds housing a planter and other equipment were scattered across the adjacent fields.

“It’s just part of farm life,” Jeff Taylor said. “None of the equipment was damaged.”

The father and son represent the another generation following monocrop agriculture. Monocropping is the agricultural practice of growing a single crop in rotation. When it comes to popular crops used for monocropping, corn, soybeans and wheat are grown in this area. Rick Taylor has always planted corn and beans while Jeff veered off that path this season and added some wheat.

For the Taylors, growing and raising crops means continuous improvement including discovering new ways to do things better as well as finding solutions to complex problems.

Both Rick and Jeff Taylor emphasized farms look different than they did when Bee Taylor retired.

Jeff Taylor shared how much farming has changed since he began just 11 years ago. Self-steering equipment, field-map-

ping drones, combines providing an accurate read out of the crop, the topography of the land, the size of the operation and the budget.

Taylor utilizes a drone to check crops. He said the person for which he farms prefers seeing the drone footage rather than just driving by the fields.

“The drone takes video footage as well as photographs,” he explained.

Earlier in April, Taylor Farms updated their grain handling system for the season. Jeff Taylor said the new system will streamline the operation and not require moving augers from one site to another.

Rick Taylor explained running a family farm requires a sharp pencil.

“I always make room for error,” he said, trying to account for too much rain, not enough rain, late harvest and other challenges. “You have to be conservative in your margins.”

Modern farming equipment extends

beyond powerful tractors and massive field equipment. The smartphone enables family farmers to be up to date with the markets, weather and other important information.

“We’re not working 9-5 or 8-6,” Rick Taylor said. “Family farming is a way of life.”

Jeff Taylor agreed. “I’ve gotten better at not being consumed by everything 24 hours a day and focus on trying to worry about what I can control.”

Three of the four children of Rick and Pam Wyatt Taylor are involved in farming. Shelby Phipps is married to a farmer and works for Farm Credit. Jeff’s twin, Sydney, works for Bungee, formerly Laughoff, in St. Louis in the same building as Edgar County native Darren Moody. Katlyn Taylor is a social worker in Danville. Pam is a retired Chrisman and Paris 95 schoolteacher and now proudly taxis grandchildren around.



Bee Taylor, seated, is pictured in the family home near Indianola with two of his grandsons, Steve Baldwin, right, and Rick Taylor, left. Many of Rick Taylor’s fondest memories of childhood are time spent with his grandfather and cousin riding in the pickup truck, fishing and hearing Bee’s stories about the farm life.

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