

It's In Their Genes

The Kopicz family of Centre Township has been dedicated to agriculture production since Nicholas Kopicz, present day Brad's grandfather started dairy farming in 1948. He was a decorated WW II veteran and received the Purple Heart. He and wife Verna, loved to work with animals and toil the soil. Wanting to keep the farm in permanent agriculture production, they preserved the first farm of 118 acres in 2004 entering it into the Farmland Preservation Program. The same year son, Richard, and wife Sandy, who grew up on a dairy farm, preserved one of their farms of 105 acres. The third and fourth farms were entered into the program in 2005. They operated the business with Richard's father until 1999 when they took ownership of the farms and milking herd. The Kopiczs said that, "We preserved the farms so they would always stay in farmland and could be handed down to future generations." That has started, as in 2009 Brad & wife Missy bought two of the preserved family farms. Today, Brad and Missy own 177 acres of preserved farmland, and Richard and Sandy have 223 for a of 400 total acres owned and preserved. Nine hundred total acres are farmed when adding the rented land. Missy is a stay-at-home mother for daughter Leah along with a unique hobby of woodworking.

Brad said, "I did not enjoy the twice a day routine of milking cows so we became crop farmers. To lower our cost per acre for machinery, we rent an additional 500 acres." Crops include corn, soybeans, wheat, alfalfa and orchard grass, and multiple cover crops. They have practiced no-till planting for many years. The grain is stored on the farm in grain bins and transported by the local buyer. The grain is marketed through local buyers and mills in southeast Pennsylvania. Brad hauls the alfalfa and grass hay, which is sold through auctions in Lancaster and Lebanon counties. Horse farmers and Amish purchase most of the hay. The ag supplies, like fertilizer and seed, are purchased within 5 to 25 miles, from local farm supply businesses.

When asked what is the most challenge aspect of farming, Brad said, "Weather is always the biggest challenge, like the recent drought, but a close second these days are input costs like equipment and repairs and the cost of land."

Asked about their proudest accomplishment, Richard stated, "Being able to be successful at farming and to be able to hand the farm down to the next generation."

The Kopiczs said, "The future of agriculture in Berks looks positive, but we need to keep preserving as much farmland as we can and stop letting our farmland get eaten up by development and warehouses."

