Faces of AGRICULTURE 2020

brought to you by the Fulton County Farm Bureau
The Fulton County Farm Bureau was pleased to sponsor our third installment of the “Faces of Ag”. Our promotion on the Fulton County Farm Bureau Facebook page during March of 2020 was to continue to spotlight our farmers, farm families and those individuals involved in the agriculture industry!

As in past years, the entire set of stories was too good to “let go”; so we had a book published for each of the 31 “faces” to keep. These profiles spotlight the diversity, dedication, and passion local individuals have for our agricultural industry. Importantly, some of the stories also discuss changes, and sometimes the difficulties, that have been made to farm operations over the course of their farming careers.

“Thank You” to all of the individuals and families that we featured during the campaign. It was an honor and a joy to interview these folks, and to hear and share their stories. Again, we met some new people and learned some things about people we already knew! It was evident over the course of the month that our featured folks share a true passion for what they do. They love what they do. They feel a duty to do the best job possible for others (their family members, their customers, and even society). Not a single one of them said they wished they were doing something else with their lives.

Most of them mentioned the importance of their Faith and of their families; their desire to improve and advance, their determination to make their enterprise successful (and the wisdom to make a change when it wasn't working), their encouragement of young people to enter their field, and the high value they place on the work ethic they learned growing up on and/or working on a farm. They ALL exhibited their humble nature (we know it's hard for farmers to talk about themselves!), their love of the land and animals, and their quiet dignity.

“Thank You” to all of the Facebook followers and readers that made the program so rewarding! If you think farming is just corn, beans, and cows, think again. Farms come in all types and sizes. These stories are a reminder of the hard-working and dedicated people who have had to adapt to a changing landscape and will face future challenges as changes continue.

The goals of our campaign were to spotlight the diversity of farm operations, the changes seen in farming over the course of the years, and the many occupations that are supported by our farmers and the ag industry. It also provided the perfect opportunity to truly put a “face” on all of those working in our agriculture industry.

March of 2020 will be remembered as an uncertain, concerning time in our history. These profiles were written well before the school closings, the cancellation of church services, public gatherings and social events, and before the temporary closure of non-essential businesses. It became abundantly clear to all how important our agriculture industry and food production systems are. Businesses that were agriculture-related or those that provided a service to farmers were allowed to stay open. They were declared “essential” to our society. We knew that all along.
I'm Levi Porter and I was recently elected to the Fulton County Farm Bureau Board of Directors. I am married to Abby, who is from Washington. She is the Marketing Coordinator for Advanced Rehab and Sports Medicines. We live near Ipava.

We have a daughter, Leah, who was born on August 2nd last year. She loves watching the dog and cat and being in her bouncer!

I attended VIT High School, graduating in 2008. I went to Spoon River College for 2 years, then continued my education at Western Illinois University, graduating with a degree in Ag. Business in May 2012. While I always planned on coming back to the farm, I took a job at Security Savings Bank in Monmouth. I was there for 5 years before I came back to farm full time.

I work on our family farm with my Dad (Brian Porter), my Uncle Craig Porter, and my cousin Derek Porter. We have a cow/calf operation, along with a feeder-to-fat operation. We raise crops of corn and soybeans on about 1800 acres.

I'm a member of the Ipava Presbyterian Church. In my free time, I like to go on UTV rides and do other things with family members.

My advice to a young person looking to get into farming is to learn the numbers first; maybe that’s from my ag business education and banking experience. If the numbers don’t “work” in your cash flow you won’t be farming for long! Also, farming is always changing. You have to keep up with the changes, too.

I’m passionate about farming and it’s not just a job to me. It’s all I’ve ever been around, and I grew up watching both my Grandpa Sam and Grandpa Lester (Ridle) do it. I want to continue our family tradition. Looking at what they have worked so hard to build, someone needs to keep that going. And what better industry to be in than Agriculture??!! It’s the backbone of our Country.
I am Curt Oldfield. In 2012, I was selected as the 8th President for Spoon River College; the role I currently serve. I am married to Pattie Oldfield, and we have two children. Daughter Lauren is a Senior at Canton High School and will attend Spoon River College in the fall and transfer to a major in Elementary Education. Son Nick is a Sophomore at Canton High School.


I was an Agriculture teacher for two years at Roseville High School in Roseville (IL) and then began teaching agriculture at Spoon River College in 1999. I still help my father (Verne) and cousin (B.J.) farm in the Farmington area. This is a small corn/soybean and cattle farm.

I enjoy watching and helping with our kids’ activities and try to squeeze in some fishing. I enjoy helping in the communities and I have the fortunate ability to volunteer with a variety of organizations around the area. I am a member of the Economic Development Board in Macomb, ex officio member of the Chamber of Commerce in Canton, board member of the Canton Family YMCA, and a member of the Canton Rotary club.

I was active in FFA during my years at Farmington High School. I learned so many life skills from being a Chapter and Section 12 President, participating in Career Development Events like Public Speaking, Parliamentary Procedure, Supervised Ag Experience (Record books), and livestock, soils and grain judging events. Two things I learned, from all of these experiences include, it is important to never stop learning, and that it is a small world and we should be respectful to each other. Finally, someone in my position has to know a little about a lot of subjects, but have a deep passion for student success.

As President of SRC, I get to see so many positive contributions being made by faculty and staff for our students and our SRC students/alumni working in our communities. I see a wide variety of activities from people around the area who are working to improve our communities.

The agriculture industry has given me so many opportunities. My work ethic, appreciation for being a steward of resources, and gratitude for all that has been given to us is part of my passion for agriculture. My time on the Fulton County Farm Bureau Board was career changing for me. Because of being a Farm Bureau member, I was able to participate in and win the Illinois Farm Bureau Discussion Meet and win the ILFB Ag Excellence award. I want non-farm members to know agriculture and farming is a way of life that is guided by strong business principles; that over the years U.S. agriculture has been and continues to be the safest source of food, fiber and fuel in the world; that technology has changed agriculture, but cannot replace the dedication and commitment of a farmer; and that agriculturists have been and will continue to be stewards of the land, crops and livestock. Some media might try to paint a different picture of US agriculture, but I love seeing connections made with farmers and non-farmers and removing barriers so we can learn from each other. This is a small world and a simple and polite conversation can go a long way to building bridges to the future.
I am James E. Rock II, more commonly known as “Jimmer” Rock!

I am married to Brooks, who is a Registered Nurse and clinical supervisor at UnityPoint Health Pekin. We are the parents of two sons; 12 year old Braxton Riley who is a 6th Grader at Ingersoll Middle School in Canton and Truman James who is 5 years old and in Kindergarten at Westview (Canton).

I graduated from Canton High School in 1999. I then went to Spoon River College for 2 years, transferring to University of Illinois C-U to graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Crop Sciences. I worked at Monicals Pizza in Canton from the age of 16 until I went to the U of I.

While attending the U of I, I worked as an intern under the direction of Dan Zink and Lance Tarochione at Monsanto Research farm in Monmouth. When I graduated, that became a fulltime job with Monsanto.

I stayed with Monsanto until my Grandfather James E. Rock, who was farming with my dad (Jimmy Rock), decided it was time to retire. I took his place on the farm.

In our farm operation, I am responsible for most of the tillage, running the sprayer on all of the fields, and I do the cleaning and machinery/mechanical maintenance. I also make the seed and chemical purchase decisions. I own a semi and do the trucking of our own grain to market.

Brooks and I are members of Shields Chapel Church. In our spare time we enjoy watching our sons in athletic and school events. I also enjoy driving my Jeep Wrangler!

For a young person wanting to farm, I would say that being raised on a farm is the greatest help. Growing up participating in the work and being involved in the decision-making is a great way to prepare for someday playing a valuable role in the farm.
I’m Chris Helle. I’m the Director of Fulton County Emergency Services and Disaster Agency since 2005 and the 911 Coordinator for Fulton County since 2017. I am married to Stacey, who is a graduate of Bradley University with a degree in Nursing. She is a RN at Unity Point. We’ve been married since 2001 and met on a blind date. We are the parents to Maddie (15) and Ryan (10).

I graduated from Farmington High School, and then with a Degree in Criminal Justice from Spoon River College. I hold a FEMA Professional Development Series Certificate, and an IEMA Professional Development Series Certificate.

I started in Emergency Management in 1997 after finishing up high school by joining the local ESDA in Farmington. I wanted to get involved in public service and build a resume for a potential career in Law Enforcement. In 2001 I became the Director of Emergency Services and Disaster Agency for Farmington. With support of the City a successful CERT (Community Emergency Response Team), a storm spotting program and various other ESDA related programs were built. In 2004 I was awarded the “Volunteer of The Year” in Emergency Management for a Search and Rescue call in the Farmington area.

In 2005 the Fulton County Board placed me in charge of the Fulton County ESDA program. With the support of the County Board the program has placed new outdoor warning sirens in Avon, Bryant, Cuba, Ellisville, St David and Marietta all under grant funds. Additionally, another approximately $350,000 in grant funds were obtained for various other programs throughout the County. In the past 15 years we have had two federal declared disasters; both of which were from flooding. We also maintain one of the largest social media pages for emergency management in the state.

In 2017 I became the 911 Coordinator for Fulton County. The role of Emergency Management and 911 Coordinator often intersect and has led to the successful reduction in duplication of resources. Under the Direction of the Fulton County Emergency Telephone System Board I have been able to continue the successful implementation of the 911 system. The Fulton County 911 system is one of the most advanced within the State of Illinois. In 2020 we will see the implementation of the Starcom21 Communication System for Fulton County Emergency Medical Association, Fulton County Sheriff’s Department and all area law enforcement. The Fire Departments will also see a county wide simulcast system allowing for County wide paging and communication for departments County wide.

I’ve been a member of Farmington United Methodist Church since High School. I was married and baptized in that church. In my spare time, I enjoy helping my wife with her work at the Fulton County Humane Society and being involved in my children’s events. Both kids are heavily involved in school activities. Maddie is involved in Band, Scholastic Bowl, Key Club and Winterguard. Ryan is involved in Baseball, Cross Country and Student Council. Both kids carry 4.0’s.

I tell my own kids, and other young folks to get involved in their community! Join a volunteer fire department or emergency management agency. Learn about how the various agencies serve their community and plug in to help. Roll up your sleeves and jump in. It will be the best thing they ever did.

Growing up in the town of Farmington, I was immersed in the Farmington Community. Our School District had a fantastic FAA program and my mom works for the USDA. Farming is the backbone of our County. Geographically we are the 8th largest County in the state of Illinois, most of that is Farming. The farmers of our County feed a large portion of this Country and world. Even though I don’t farm, I see the value of the agriculture community. Farming is a dangerous job and we’ve partnered with farm groups on programs and activities that keep farmers (and all of us) safe. I’m proud of the role I play in protecting our farm families.
I am Randy Hartstirn, a farmer from the rural Fairview Area. My wife and bookkeeper Vicki and I have 4 grown children who we raised on our “family farm”. We also have 8 grandchildren who attend Illinois College, University of Illinois, Spoon River Valley and Farmington schools. After graduating from Valley High School I attended the University of Illinois and earned a BS degree in Ag. Education. I taught high school Agriculture at La Harpe, Illinois for 3 years, until my Uncle Carl (who farmed with my Dad Bob), passed away suddenly due to a heart attack. This created an immediate need for another partner, and I decided to go back to help in 1977 and have been living on my family’s homestead ever since.

Our family farm had its roots in Germany. My Grandfather, Albert, was born in Germany in 1878. He was one of several siblings who decided to immigrate to the U.S. in 1895. The Fairview area had several German families at that time; the Zumsteins, Schaefers, Vollmars, and Utsingers to name a few. In 1900 Albert went back to Germany to visit family and returned later that year. Travel at that time from Europe to America was by ship. His return trip to America was on the Graf Waldersee from the port of Hamburg, Germany. Also on that ship was a 17 year old German girl Emma, who caught the eye of Albert. We have a copy of the ship manifest from the archives of Ellis Island that states Emma had $1.00 cash and a relative from Buffalo, New York to live with. Albert, from Fulton County, and Emma from Buffalo wrote letters until they were married. She joined him on the 160 acre Joshua Township farm that he had purchased and where I have lived for 43 years.

My Grandparents raised 4 children and were able to survive the Great Depression without losing their farm. They also built the house and barn that are still located on our homestead. They raised most of their own food that included a large garden and butchered their own meat. Of course they had a large variety of livestock and were pretty much self-sufficient. Horses were used to farm, and the corn was picked by hand. It was a much simpler but a very hard life.

I presently farm over 2,000 acres of corn/soybeans with Tim Negley. By combining our farming operations we can buy bigger, more efficient machinery. I also run about 40 head of beef cows in partnership with my sons, Randy J and Ryan. Our farm is truly a “family farm” with many family members pitching in to help. Even several of my Grandkids help me. They do everything from mowing and operating the grain cart to helping construct a new 14,000 bushel grain bin last summer. I really enjoy having a family that is involved on the farm because it teaches a good work ethic and so many life lessons. Being responsible for the care of animals and other chores is good preparation for later in life.

One of my biggest joys is working with family on the farm. My Grandfather, Albert, passed a year before I was born. But it was great working with my father, and now my sons and grandkids. The “Buddy seat” is a super invention to let family, especially grandkids, landlords, and others ride in the farm equipment safely. I can remember riding on the fender of a “cab less” tractor when I was a kid. Later I put a pillow behind the seat of my cab tractor with my 5 year old daughter hitting her head on the window every time I hit a bump. I guess she didn’t mind because she still wanted to ride every chance she got.

I truly believe that people should volunteer their time and talents to their community. I have tried to do that over the years serving on church board, park board, elevator board, school board, and presently the Fairview State Bank Board, Fairview Jr. Livestock Committee, and Spoon River Valley Foundation Board. I also have coached baseball teams and was a 4-H leader with my wife for over 20 years. It takes a lot of people to keep these worthwhile programs going and I respect anyone who will give willingly of their time.

It is very hard to become a farmer today unless you have access to land or livestock. The financial demands for a beginning farmer are overwhelming. But there are lots of other jobs in the Agriculture Industry that anyone can do with the proper training and education. I would advise a young person trying to break into Agriculture to make sure that you are tech savvy. So many jobs in Ag. use technology in one way or the other. In today’s Agriculture you must be flexible and adapt to what is needed to survive. People who get in a rut and don’t change with the times will be left behind. Also communication with the general public is a must. We need to make sure that people know more about where their food comes from and how conscientious farmers are about delivering a safe, high quality product. I believe that Agriculture has a bright future because people will always need to eat and I would encourage any young person to give it a chance!
My name is Janis (LaRue) Blout. I am employed by University of Illinois Extension as the Fulton County 4-H Program Coordinator. I began here full time in April 1981 as a secretary, then 12 years later was promoted into 4-H Program Management, which I have done now for about 27 years. My job is different every day. I plan 4-H shows and events, support 4-H volunteers and members, do a lot of writing and publicity, coordinate educational programs, attend meetings and trainings, keep up on all the rules and policies, answer lots of questions, and more. I sometimes tattoo sheep and pigs, and am there to do paperwork when we tattoo steers. I could be speaking to a group of 200 people one day, the next day be setting up for an event, and the next day outside tattooing pigs. Variety!

I am responsible for our 4-H Foodstand during the Fair, and do lots of shopping, planning, and organizing for that. The Foodstand is one of my favorite times of the year, getting to see so many of our 4-H members and families working together and having fun.

To be clear, 4-H is not just about agriculture. We have dozens of projects that members can take, such as Photography, Visual Arts, Robotics, and also Beef, Sheep, Swine, Goats, etc. The roots of 4-H are in agriculture, most definitely, but it has broadened now so there’s a project for almost every interest. In Fulton County the Beef project has more enrollment than any other.

I was raised in town, so much of what I know about agriculture has been learned on the job. In the early years, if I heard a term I did not recognize, I either asked someone or I looked it up. No internet then, so I REALLY looked it up. I learned new words like barrow, wether, and others. I also worked here part-time during my senior year of high school, 1976-77, then worked for Spoon River FS for almost four years, before coming back to Extension full-time.

Some of my best memories on the job are the people I have worked with, both as co-workers and as 4-H volunteers and members. I love to see the excitement on the faces of young 4-H members when they accomplish something they didn’t think they could do, or when they receive an award at our 4-H Achievement Program. I love hearing reports of the community service projects our clubs do, and what a difference they make in their communities.

I will retire in a few years. I’m just not ready yet; I still enjoy what I do. The person hired to take my place someday will need a Bachelor’s Degree and some experience in program management.

One of the greatest honors I receive is when I am invited to a former 4-H member’s wedding, graduation, or other special event. It means a lot to me that maybe I have left a small imprint on their lives in a positive way. I hope so.

I have three adult children – Brianne, Terry, and Jon. Brianne is married to Brian Satorius, and they are parents to my two beloved grandchildren, Ethan (8) and Ava (5). My parents were Bob and Betty LaRue. Dad grew up on a farm in rural Ipava, and his Dad, James, was a charter member of Fulton County Farm Bureau.

I have lived in Lewistown all my life. I belong to the First Presbyterian Church in Lewistown. I am choir director, and formerly taught Sunday School and served on our church board. I serve on the board of Graham Health System and on the Farm Bureau Ag Literacy Board. Spending time with my grandkids is my favorite thing to do. I also enjoy music, movies, and my cats and dog.

Agriculture is important to all of us. I landed in a job where I have met countless people working in agriculture, either directly or indirectly, and I have the utmost respect for them. My job is to support our 4-H members and volunteers, many of them with livestock and agricultural interests, and I am proud to do so.
I’m Doug Falk from Cuba. I am a retired High School Agriculture teacher and FFA Advisor. My wife Terri is a Speech/Language Therapist at Westview Elementary in Canton. We are the parents of two children; Kyle Falk is employed by ADM as the plant manager of a Soybean Crush facility in Mexico, MO. Kyle and his wife Emma live in Columbia, MO. Our daughter Jenna is employed by OSF St. Francis as a Speech/Language therapist in St. Louis, MO. She and her husband Brett live in Glen Carbon, Illinois. We have a 12-year old granddaughter; Rilea.

I grew up on a 400 acre Beef/Corn/Soybean farm in Rock Island County farming with my Grandparents, parents and uncles. I attended Riverdale High School, graduating in 1980, where I was active in FFA serving as Chapter Treasurer and President. I was in the band and played basketball. I also served as a Section 2 FFA officer. My brother and I were excellent hay baling help, along with shelling corn and walking beans. I graduated from the University of Illinois in 1984 with a degree in Agricultural Education and with a MS Ag Ed in 1989. I received my MS-Ed Administration in 1992 from WIU.

While on the U of I campus I worked on the University Beef farm, conducting beef research. I was involved in the Field and Furrow Agronomy club and Ag Education organization. I was also involved on the soil evaluation team and conducted soil research. Everyone in my family are loyal ILLINI fans. My favorite color is orange!!

I started teaching at Cuba high school in 1984, retiring in 2018 after 34 years in the agriculture classroom. During my time there, the Alumni and Ag Department sponsored the Cuba Livestock show, barnyard zoos, Scenic Drive, Career development events, SAE record books and leadership activities.

Since moving to Cuba, I’ve been involved not only in the schools but in the community. I have been involved in the Fulton County Fair Board. I served twenty-two years on the Cuba city council. Terri and I served as ballpark commissioners for 7 years organizing park baseball and softball programs. Our family has supported parades, community events and love our North Fulton Community!

I started my second career after retiring from teaching. My new adventure is working in Real Estate with Gorsuch Realty and Auction in Canton, IL. I also teach part-time in the Spoon River College Agriculture Department. We belong to the Cuba United Methodist Church in Cuba, where I love a good sermon and enjoy the fellowship of other Christians. Now that I have MUCH more flexible time on my hands, I enjoy being with family and friends, and traveling.

Advice for young people? Boy do I have it! I am biased, but Agriculture Education and FFA provide great opportunities to learn, to get involved with your school and community and to develop your essential skills for future career.
Welcome to the farm. We are Karla and Jack Schleich of Fairview, Illinois. We have been married over 25 years and have two children; Austin is 21 years old and Anthony is almost 16 years old. Austin is a senior at Iowa State University and is a double major in Agronomy and Seed Science. Anthony is a sophomore at Spoon River Valley High School.

Jack was raised on the family farm that we still farm today with Jack's parents, Jack and Connie Schleich of Fairview, and his two brothers and their families. Our farm is crop production based where we grow corn and soybeans. I am the proud daughter of Gary and Diane Hollis and was raised on the family farm outside of London Mills, where we grew corn and soybeans along with raising cattle, hogs, horses, sheep, and rabbits. Besides farming, we also have a field tile drainage business with Jack's brother Jesse called Schleich Tiling, Inc., serving our fellow farmers and landowners. We started tiling 21 years ago and have tiled within a 60 mile radius of Fairview.

Jack has an Associate's degree from Spoon River College and a Bachelor's degree in Ag Science from Western Illinois University where he specialized in Agronomy. I also attended Western Illinois University and have a Bachelor's degree in Ag Science with a specialization in Animal Science and a minor in Zoology. We are members of the Fairview Reformed Church where Jack is a Deacon. I have coached four years of summer ball with the Valley Park District; T-ball, coach pitch, and a 9-10 year old boy's baseball team. I have also served as PTO president at Spoon River Valley for five years. Our children are the center of our lives. Over the years we have enjoyed watching them play baseball and basketball.

Jack and I both actively farm, run equipment, and love the aspect of being outdoors with both our businesses. We enjoy working with our tiling customers and meeting new people. I work with Jack to install the field tile, and I'm the secretary and treasurer of the tiling business and I manage the paperwork and business for our side of the farm.

The tiling business provides an important service allowing for drainage of subsurface water that impedes crop production. Removal of this excess water (2019 was the second wettest year on record for the United States according to NOAA) allows for earlier opportunities of planting, optimal planting and harvesting conditions, less soil compaction, improved yields due to better plant stands and plant health, increased soil health allowing for oxygen to be used by important microorganisms, less run off, and other benefits.

We are passionate about agriculture and all it stands for. Since we both were raised on farms, it is natural that this is the path we have followed. It is great to be a part of the ag industry where we can work together, raise our kids by our side, and spend valuable time making memories doing what we love (making it not seem like a job). Our sons have had an active part in both businesses where they love working with the equipment, and have learned skills, trades, and life lessons that will be integral to their futures.

Those young agriculturalists looking for a future in this industry need to obtain their bachelor's degree. They should take courses that relate to agronomy, ag marketing, precision ag/technology, mechanics, and ag economic classes. Internships are a great way to learn and confirm your interests. We recommend reaching out to farmers and others in the ag industry to gain hands on experience. Leadership qualities are also important to be leaders of tomorrow's ag industry.

We would tell non farmers that the ag industry is always changing and improving. We have to keep up on new technology, seed, chemicals, soil health, accounting, management, ever changing markets, and the list goes on. We keep educating ourselves and always want to find ways to improve our production, reduce our inputs, and keep being managers of the land. Adding cover crops, water ways, reducing soil erosion by changing tillage practices or even switching to no-till are a few ways farmers try to take care of the land. We want to preserve this valuable resource for future generations! This is our livelihood. Without these applications we would not be able to provide quality, affordable, abundant, and safe foods for people to consume. Look to credible resources that have facts like the Farm Bureau and reach out to the ag industry to help answer your questions. We are proud to be farmers and proud to provide a service to improve farmland for now and the future.
Hello, I am Seth Vohland. I work full-time alongside my family with Vohland Farms, Inc., near Farmington. My wife Natalie and I are parents of Henry (3 soon to be 4 years old) and Anna (2 years old). Natalie is the Payroll Administrator/Bookkeeper at South Pekin Grade School- District 137. She is from Virginia, Illinois, and attended Spoon River College. While working full-time, she is currently enrolled online as a full-time student finishing her BSM with plans to receive her MBA by 2023.

I graduated from Farmington High School in 2010 and the Spoon River College Diesel Program in 2012. For the past 7 years, I have been the Assistant at Spoon River College Diesel Program, working with the Spring classes.

My story with Natalie goes back to high school. We met at Spoon River College in 2010. She was participating in the FFA Public Speaking contest, while I was there for my FFA State Degree Interview. Natalie’s teacher, Robin Fisher, made me go talk to her since she was alone. From there, we stayed friends and she asked me to go to Prom with her in the spring of 2010. We continued to stay friends until she went to college. It wasn’t until her spring semester in 2012 we started to officially date. Three months later I bought a ring and three months after that I asked her to marry me.

We were married on September 6th, 2014 on her grandmother, Bertha’s, 90th birthday in memory of her. A year later, we found out we were pregnant with Henry and a year after Henry’s birth, we found out Anna was on the way! From there, we have been super busy with two beautiful, very energetic children all while keeping up with our jobs and “Other Duties Assigned”. We are very blessed to have such a beautiful family and are so grateful to have such an awesome support system within our families. We wouldn’t trade all the craziness for the world!

Our family farm, Vohland Farm’s, Inc., has been around for over a hundred years. We are a medium sized family farm that is mainly farmed with soybeans and corn. We have about 30 head of cattle that we hope to expand over the next several years. Natalie and I also farm with my brother Nathan. This consists of about 37 acres with a rotation of soybeans and corn every-other year. I know that doesn’t sound like much, but everyone has to start somewhere!

Our family attends the Fairview Reformed Church in Fairview, IL. This is the church where my grandparents, and pretty much, my whole family, including myself and my wife were married. Natalie will occasionally teach Sunday School and she helps with the church’s VBS program. I also serve as a Deacon on the church’s Consistory Board. We both now take part in the church’s choir and we go wherever we are needed.

In my spare time, I enjoy working on old John Deere Tractors, especially the 4020 models. Finding a solution to problems has always been important to me. When we find time, I like to go on vacation to have quality time with my family.

I would tell a young person wanting to be in agriculture to always be willing to get your hands dirty. Have a good work ethic and always be willing to learn something new. The world is always coming up with new ways to do or handle things. With these, and other attributes, a young person would be able to find employment in the world of agriculture.

I am passionate about farming because it is my livelihood. I grew up on our farm, watching my grandparents doing what they love to do and I knew it was what I wanted to do too. I can say I am blessed because my dream of working with my grandparents and other family members on the farm came true.

I think a lot of non-farmers do not quite understand the amount of work we do. Sure we have our one “down season” but the other three are pretty busy! There are years where some of us are happy to break even and some years when we do a little better. To say the last planting year was “challenging” would be an understatement.

Farming is so much more than planting a seed and watching it grow. It is making sure the seed is able to grow before you plant it, caring for the seed when it is planted, and harvesting the plant when it is ready. There is a lot that happens to ensure a seed will have a good yield. I have noticed quite a bit of non-farmers not only think all we do is plant seeds and wait for growth but also how we are all extremely wealthy, but the reality is most farmers are just making barely enough to get by. The amount of work that this job requires, not only to work on the family farm, but to get established on your own is overwhelming and is sometimes extremely stressful, and for what? We farm to help support our family and country and also to do what we love….farming!

Farming is also about family. No matter how busy or hard things get, we always find a way to help each other in some way. Some non-farmers don’t realize the amount of time we spend away from our families and our little ones. During the week in the busy season, our children are usually sleeping when I get home and my wife is waiting on me so she and I can eat together. On the weekends, my wife and mother will bring the kids out to the field, bringing goodies and lunch. As Grandma Lois always said over the radio, “The Lunch Wagon is Here!”. It is the little things like having family out in the field for lunch on a hot or frustrating day that makes it all worth doing. It’s always the little things that make us feel appreciated and I am truly blessed to say I am not only a Husband and Father but I am a Farmer too. God Bless!
I’m Emma Eathington from Ellisville. I’m the daughter of Kevin and Patricia (a farmer and a nursing instructor at WIU) and I am a Senior at Spoon River Valley High School. Next Fall I will be majoring in Animal Science at the University of Illinois Champaign Urbana campus.

My family has been in agriculture for generations. We have crops, as well as Angus cattle. Since I was very young, I have been active in our family farm business. I have been blessed with very supportive parents that have allowed me to be raised in the agriculture industry.

I am a member of St. Augustine Catholic Church. My family and I go to Mass every Sunday. This hour of peace and worship resets everyone to be humble and thankful for the week.

I have been active in the Spoon River Valley FFA Chapter, serving as Chapter Reporter and Vice President and as Section Treasurer and Vice President. I was Section Star Farmer in 2018 and won the Beef Enterprise Award in both 2018 and 2019. I’m active in the Fairview Huskies 4-H Club. I was Club Secretary and Activity Planner. I have won the County Beef Award and am an Achievement member. I received the Legacy of Leadership Scholarship and was a recipient of one of the FCFB Scholarships this year.

I’m also a volunteer with the Farm Bureau Ag. In the Classroom Program, and I’m a member of the National Junior Angus Association, the Illinois Junior Angus Association, and the Illinois JR Beef Association. My family and I have showed cattle all over the United States, including Indiana, Wisconsin, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Colorado, and Iowa!

My “job” right now is being a good student and excelling in the extracurricular activities I’m involved in. I have to be really organized to do all the things I do! I have to set priorities to do the things I do. If I was planning on going out with friends, but I have a meeting come up, I cancel plans with my friends. The advice I would give to other young people is just that; set priorities and be organized!

I’m pretty passionate about the agriculture industry. I was brought up in this industry and it has molded me for the better. Agriculture is my future and without my past experiences I wouldn’t be who I am today. My journey started by showing cattle. As I got older, I began working more with our production herd. This has shaped me to love the cattle industry, which is why I’ll major in Animal Science in college.

I wish people not involved in agriculture realized our passion for our industry. Farmers work 365 days of the year. At times it can be trying, however, we wouldn’t trade it for the world!
Ruth Knott

I'm Ruth Knott from Ellisville. I was born in my uncle’s house in London Mills, Illinois. My parents were Elmer and Mary Anderson. I’m a middle child; having an older brother and younger sister.

I grew up in Rapatee, Illinois. We had a cow and a pig most times, but my Dad didn’t farm. He was the shovel operator at the gravel pit on the Spoon River. Mom was a homemaker and did professional wallpapering and house cleaning.

I graduated from Spoon River Valley High School in 1955. In the summers, while I was in high school, I worked the scale at the gravel pit. I sat there in the hot sun most days and often wondered how I haven’t died of skin cancer!

I was a junior when my senior brother told me his classmate, Larry Knott, wanted to go out with me. I said “Who’s Larry Knott? And if he wants me to go out with him, he should ask me himself!” He did, and we married on July 7, 1957. We have 3 children: Sharron Edmonson (married to Lonnie) who is the bookkeeper at Postin’s Pit stop in Avon; Robert, who lives near me in Grandpa’s house, still farms with me, and is an EMT and volunteer fireman; and Glenn (married to Teresa) is the computer IT expert for a waste management company in Peoria. I have 3 grandchildren: Lawrence, Katie and Sam.

We raised our children on the “home place” on the 600 acres of land that Larry’s great great grandfather and grandmother settled in 1832 through a land grant from the war of 1812. His great great grandmother came from the New England area with her parents to claim the ground. She met a farmer from Ipava, Illinois (John Knott, Jr.) and they settled on this farm that has only had Knott’s on it, now 7 generations.

Larry’s dad, Harold, and mother, Zada, bought the first Polled Herefords during the Great Depression in the early 1930’s with egg money Zada had saved. They chose Polled Herefords because Zada liked them. Larry sold his first bull when he was around 10 years old. He knew the pedigrees of all the animals and knew what animal would work best for the buyer’s need.

We lost Larry in September of 2011, but we farmed every day of our life together. Our herd of Registered Polled Hereford cattle always averaged around 100 cows, and still does today. I helped with the cattle until Larry passed away. I filled and prepared syringes for vaccinations, rounded up the calves, and warmed more calves than I can count in the bathtub when cold weather would have taken them. Now Robert and Sam do the cattle work, but I worked them for most of my life. I loved to do tillage work. Larry’s dad would do the disking, I would do the finishing work, and Larry would plant. Sometimes all three of us were in one field at the same time. We have about 30 acres of hay and are always haying. I would mow the hay, rake it, and run the baler. I also hauled grain to the elevator and hauled rock from the rock pit as well. I was still doing that until a couple years ago. I always had a big garden and spent the summer canning and preserving whatever we grew. I also mowed 3 yards and still enjoy mowing my lawn. I also started doing the books for the farm after Larry passed; a job I still do.

I’ve been a member of the Union Church of Rapatee since I was 3 months old. I’ve been the piano player there since I was 13 ½ years old! Larry and I were 4-H leaders for the Fairview Huskies 4-H Club for 40 years. Our kids and grandkids showed cattle at the fair and our club had a lot of kids that showed livestock. I enjoy crochet projects and embroidery and used to do a lot of plastic canvas work. I was Chairman of the FCFB Women’s Committee from 1984 to 1990 and served on the Board of Directors. I learned so much through my involvement. I realized how much Farm Bureau does for our industry, and how the organization educates others about where their food comes from. During that time I was also able to go on a Illinois Farm Bureau-sponsored trip to Washington, D.C. with other farm women from across Illinois. It was a real eye-opener to see what IFB was doing concerning laws and regulations that affected our farms.

The best thing about raising our family on the farm was that I always knew where my kids were. They all worked so hard with the hay and cattle that sometimes at the end of the day they were so tired they’d walk in, wash their face and hands, grab a bite to eat, and go to bed.

Farming is a hard life, but it’s a very rewarding one. We always had food on the table and I always knew exactly where it came from. I told my folks at a very young age that I was going to marry a farmer, and I’ve never regretted it for a moment.”
I am Eve Zimmerman and I am the Dual Credit Coordinator at Spoon River College in Canton. I am married to Zach Zimmerman who is an electrician with Oberlander Electric and an amazing farm hand at the drop of a hat!

I graduated from Lewistown High School and from Spoon River College with an Associates in Arts and Sciences. I have a Bachelors Degree in Animal Sciences: Technology and Management Concentration from U of I Urbana-Champaign.

In addition to my full time job, I help my father (Tom Shafer) and grandfather (Bob Havens) with each of their operations. My father runs a small Cow/calf operation as well as corn, soybean, and alfalfa crop operation part time. My Grandfather is currently working full time in his post retirement occupation running two of his family farms that have been within his and my grandmother’s families for generations. Both operations produce corn, soybean, wheat, and alfalfa crops as well as cattle production.

I am a member of the Lewistown United Methodist Church and help support the church in any way I can. Whether it is donating to the collection plate on Sunday mornings or attending the Annual Groundhogs Day Pancake and Sausage Breakfast, I try to do what I can to show support.

My hobbies mostly pertain to summer and fall activities. I enjoy spending time outdoors doing a variety of miscellaneous activities, such as camping, hunting, fishing, kayaking, float trips, cookouts, farming with my Dad and Grandfather, and just spending quality time with my friends and family. Growing up I was greatly involved with 4-H, and it has helped lead me to career paths and interests that I currently have today. Due to my love for 4-H, this past year I assisted Sandy Bonney with the Annual 4-H Livestock Auction held at the Fulton County Fair. I enjoy seeing the youth in our community with their projects of all shapes and sizes. I enjoy donating my time to great causes such as this!

Before I became involved with Spoon River College as the Dual Credit Coordinator, I was an Evisceration Supervisor at Cargill Turkey in California, Mo, and a Production Tech Trainer with Professional Swine Management in Carthage, IL. For any position and these positions that are specifically within the world of agriculture, I would encourage students to enter into an internship. Internships depict a more realistic picture of “A day in the life of a ….” Internships allow individuals to interact with persons within that company and start forming connections and relationships. And who knows, maybe it will also lead to a job upon graduation!

Agriculture is very near and dear to my heart. I grew up around agriculture, and it has taught me many life lessons at such an early age and in a way that made sense! I started 4-H when I was 8 years old. And my main project was showing cattle. That project taught me responsibility and about being dependable. If you didn’t go out every night and feed that steer he would never grow. If you weren’t the one out there spending time building a bond, that steer would never trust you and would not cooperate for you in the ring.

Showing cattle taught me about finances; and how to make a Budget, and the value of a dollar. My 4-H project also taught me confidence and bravery. Showing a 1200 pound steer in a showring full of people can be extremely intimidating! Especially when you participate in showmanship classes and have to speak in front of an audience, too! This also helped me deliver my speech in front of all of Fulton County the year I was crowned Miss Fulton County Fair 2013!

Being involved in 4-H and showing cattle also taught me the importance of family and friendship. Without these amazing and supporting people, our lives would be greatly less meaningful. We would have no one to share our victories with, and no one to help us get through hard failures. To me, agriculture is one big family. We all help and support each other. Where one fails, another tries to help bring them back up. We are constantly backing each other in our specific areas.

Yes, the world is changing and so is agriculture. We are developing ways to be faster, more efficient, less wasteful, less harmful, and the list goes on and on. But Agriculture is so much more than just an industry to me. It is the main factor that has helped shape me into what I am today. I am proud to be an “Ag Girl” and I hope to raise my kids the same way.
My name is Curt Strode. My wife Mary and I live on a grain and livestock farm in the northwestern part of Fulton County. Mary is a retired teacher and guidance counselor having spent most of her career with CUSD #3 in Cuba. We have two children. Rachel (Hamilton) who is deceased was a graduate of the University of Illinois with a degree in agriculture. She worked with the American Meat Science Association. Our son Wesley is also a graduate of the University of Illinois in agriculture. He spent several years working in banking at Citizens National Bank in Carlinville and Macomb and with Tompkins State Bank in Avon. He “retired” from banking in 2010 to farm with us. We have four grandchildren, Kaitlyn Hamilton, Dalton (15), Miles (9) and Reid (6) Strode live on our farm, just a quarter mile from us. Wes’s wife Jamie operates a hair salon in their home.

I grew up in a home about ¼ mile from the home where Mary and I have lived for the past 47 years. I attended Checkrow grade school, Bushnell-Prairie City High School and graduated from the University of Illinois in 1969. After spending 2 years in the US Army, I returned to the home farm. My great-grandfather purchased the first portion of Strode Farms in 1881. Wes is the fifth generation to farm this land.

Our farm is comprised of about 2000 acres with approximately 1500 tillable. It varies from black prairie soils to Spoon River bottom ground, to white timber soil. Raising corn and soybeans on such a variation of soil types and productivity potential provides its own set of challenges. We also have a beef cow-calf herd and two confinement barns which were added to the operation when Wes returned to the farm. In these barns we finish our own calves and feeders purchased predominately out of Louisville Kentucky. In addition we operate a deer and turkey hunting enterprise that caters mainly to out of state hunters mostly from the East coast.

We are members of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Macomb. I am currently serving as an elder and have held several other positions. Mary is also actively involved there. Time for hobbies is limited, but I do enjoy woodworking and being involved in our grandchildren’s activities.

My grandfather Charles Strode was a meticulous record keeper. We have ledger books dating back to his college days until entries made the day he died. These provide an interesting history of almost 50 years of farming. They are detailed to the point of finding a penny in the street, itemized grocery bills, and the price and quantity of all grain and livestock sold which included cattle, hogs, sheep, chickens, eggs, cream, raspberries, apples, and seed. My father’s birth was also noted with the charges of the attending physician, his trip from New Philly (which was more expensive than his professional services!) and cigars! My father attended WIU with the intent of teaching chemistry and physics. However, since he graduated in the heart of the Depression, no jobs were available, so he came home to help his dad, and spent the rest of his life farming. The most interesting thing about farming for my dad was the mechanical aspects. He was almost excited when something broke so he could figure out how to fix it. My grandfather’s ledger documented the purchase of the first tractor in 1937 at the urging of my father who really didn’t like horses! My father always maintained an active interest in science, history, photography, religion, astronomy… throughout his life.

Many things have changed in the 140 years on this farm. It has grown from 80 acres to 2000 acres. Planting capacity has increased from a single digit per day to over 120 acres per day. Harvesting from 100 bushel per day to nearly 12,000 bushel today. The relative values of crops and livestock have changed drastically and even the weed species have changed. Electronics made a huge impact on everyday operations on the farm. All these changes have been made over a period of years in an attempt to maintain a profitable operation. However, certain things never change. We still fight the mud in February and March. In April-May we still put seed in the same earth in hopes of producing a bountiful harvest. In June-July we still look for needed rain to keep the crops growing and, in the fall, it is always a race to get the crop harvested before the weather breaks. In the future, I suppose economic conditions will continue to change. In another 50 years, things could change even more drastically than in the past 50 years. Yet certain things haven’t changed one bit in 150 years, and I doubt they ever will.

I suppose I am passionate about agriculture and my farm because it has been my life’s work as well as the life’s work of my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. I hope it will be the life’s work of generations to come.

I would like non-farmers to understand that we love what we do and work hard to provide food and fiber to the rest of the population. We seek to provide a good environment for our family, protect the land we use, and care humanely for our animals we raise there. Our goal is to make a decent living for our family and pass our land on in better condition than we received it.
We are Scott and Tracy Snowman, owners of Snowman’s Reindeer Farm, in Canton, IL. A lot of people laugh when they hear that. But, if you think about it, having a last name like SNOWMAN kind of puts you in the Christmas mood year round. Our farm is based in agritourism. This type of agriculture centers around farm visits and hands-on learning about animals. When we started in 2015, it was just the two of us and our children. Today, Snowman’s Reindeer Farm employs 24 people with part-time seasonal positions and welcomes over 10,000 visitors annually.

We are proud parents of two children who remain involved in our operation. Our daughter, Taylor, and her husband Joel VanTine are advisors for the business as well as assist in operations throughout the year. Taylor is a full-time teacher in Canton Dist. #66 and a Professional Photographer. She has exclusive photo rights to the farm and animals through her business (Taylor Snowman Photography). Her husband, Joel, is an accountant for Spoon River Mechanical in Canton. Their two children, Luke (age 3) and Bella (age 1) are at the farm four days per week for full-time grandma and grandpa daycare. They adore the reindeer and are already learning to feed and care for them. Luke is the official “toy tester” and “cookie taster” for the farm gift shop and snack bar.

Our son, Jake, is in his final weeks of law school at Indiana University. Jake was an integral part of early set up at the reindeer farm and was one of the main handlers in the first few seasons before moving to Indiana. Jake and his fiancé, Mara, are animal lovers who recently rescued an abandoned kitten he found outside the Fulton County Court house. Jake also rescued an abandoned pit bull, Penny, who is now the main guard dog at Snowman’s Reindeer Farm. Inside the farmhouse is our quirky cat, Chester, who Jake literally rescued from drowning in Big Creek park when he was in high school. Jake continues as an advisor for the farm. He and Mara help out with social events such as the Friendship Festival Parade when they are home.

Farmers can come from many different backgrounds. We are both retired art teachers, but that skill set serves us well in agritourism as we are constantly teaching people about our animals. Scott has been involved in agriculture his entire life. He was an active FFA member and spent decades raising all types of animals including, dogs, chickens, guineas, pheasants, cattle, pigs, ducks, horses, mini donkeys and now reindeer. Small plots of crops are harvested at the family farm to feed animals, but most of the acreage is timber. Our family has been active in forestry for over 30 years planting hundreds of trees per year.

Like any farming venture, raising reindeer takes a lot of research, financial commitment, planning and work. One particularly challenging aspect of reindeer farming is that there are extremely limited resources for learning. They have very unique characteristics and challenges, including a high susceptibility to parasites. Much of the management revolves around preventative measures and includes a lot of diagnostic monitoring. Biosecurity is taken very seriously at Snowman’s Reindeer Farm as part of this preventative practice. We work closely with the Illinois Department of Agriculture and the USDA to follow best practices of farm management. As a result, we have developed a whole new knowledge base of strategies and medical practices that are specific to reindeer.

For our family, the greatest reward is in seeing others respond to the magical quality reindeer possess. Our staff experiences that joy every time we have visitors and it never gets old. As corny as it sounds, we feel deep in our hearts that everything in life has been leading to this: Snowman’s Reindeer Farm. Anyone interested in learning more can visit our website or follow our Facebook page. [www.snowmansreindeer.com](http://www.snowmansreindeer.com) or [https://www.facebook.com/snowmansreindeer/](https://www.facebook.com/snowmansreindeer/)
Hello all, I’m Presley Stambaugh! I am from Cuba, IL, where I live with my husband Matt. We just got married last September, so my herd and I moved away from the family farm, which is where my story starts.

Our farm is just a few miles south of Lewistown, IL. I farm with my grandparents Ray and Glenda Postin and my uncle Wes Postin. I am the daughter of Stacey Postin. My sister Cassidy Barr often helps out around the farm as well when she is not busy in school or with work.

I have not always lived on the farm which has been hard, but with lots of trips to town between mom and grandpa they made this little girl’s dream come true. I have been on the farm basically since I was old enough to start sorting cattle and carrying feed buckets. Being a part of the farm has been the best thing I have ever gotten myself into. I cannot thank my grandfather enough for this opportunity. He has always been there and pushed me along, even on the hard days.

I really got involved with cattle when I started 4-H with the Jolly Workers Club. The Postin family has always showed cattle, so I knew that’s what I wanted to do. Grandpa bought me two baldy steers and it was the best time of my life. I showed for 10 years. Showing was not just walking into the ring with an animal. You get the experience, the work ethic, and the responsibility of taking care of animals. I was also very involved in 4-H, with community service and held many offices in my club. While in high school I was also very involved with FFA. I attended livestock judging and soils contests. I learned how to keep records of my cattle, and I learned many other real life experiences.

I graduated from Lewistown High School in 2013, and then attended two years at Spoon River College in Canton, IL where I was actually going to start a nursing career, I didn’t always plan to farm every day of my life! After a few classes of nursing, I quickly realized my future belonged with animals. I then went to Western Illinois University for two more years and graduated with an agriculture science degree focused on animal science.

After graduating from WIU I went right back to the farm. My grandfather backgrounds feeder steers, we also have a cow/calf herd and crop farm soybeans and corn. I have been helping with just about everything that goes into farming from daily cattle chores to tilling the soil in the fields. I also work at Fairview Sale Barn, where I am learning another big part of my family’s operation by watching the cattle market.

Cattle farming is more than just being a part of an industry that feeds you. It is my family’s livelihood. I belong to a big family of farmers, growing up with second cousins and great uncles. They all helped in some way to get me involved. Seeing all that they have done, I want to continue on and grow the family farm. I want to see how far I can go. My advice to anyone? Don't be afraid; take the risks. You won't get anywhere without trying.
I'm Rob Janssen from Avon. I graduated from Abingdon-Avon High School in 2016 then went to Spoon River College in Canton for 2 years. I'm currently a student at Western Illinois University. I served as the Illinois Association FFA Vice President 2017-2018.

My Dad and I have a 13-head cow/calf herd together. I'm a member of the Checkrow Community Church and I enjoy playing the guitar. I continue to volunteer with the Illinois Association FFA and I'm a member of Alpha Gamma Sigma Professional Agricultural Fraternity.

I also went to Missouri Auction School in 2017 and own and operate Janssen Auctioneers. I travel across the state for benefit, estate, livestock, machinery and all other types of auctions. To get into auctioneering, you need to start learning number sets and tongue twisters. Then you

PRACTICE PRACTICE PRACTICE! I started listening to the caller when I attended auctions. I learned from the auction staff how an auction is run. I'd tell a young person to find the things that you like and things that you don't like so you are ready when it's your time. Talk to other auctioneers. Most will invite you to come chant a little at one of their sales. Don't get discouraged if you feel you had a bad sale or if you aren't doing as many sales as you'd like. Just be patient and keep your nose to the grindstone.

I'm passionate about this industry because ag is all around us. Every day whether you realize it or not, you use agriculture. From the clothes on your back, to the food on your plate, to the gas in your vehicle. Life as we know it would not be possible without agriculture, which is what I would also tell non-farmers about modern day ag. Auctioneers play a vital role in ag commerce, whether that's selling or buying animals, hay, feed, land, or farms.

For those who would ask me ‘Why use an Auction/ hire an Auctioneer?’ I say two things. One, Auctions Work!!! Auctions are the best way to find the real value of your item as it reaches out to the most in a completely winner-take-all open market. Two, there are three people that you do not want to hire because they are the cheapest. Your doctor, your lawyer, and your auctioneer! So call Janssen Auctioneers for talent and quality that is the best in the west!
I'm Phil Dare and I farm near Canton. My wife, Kris, has taught math at Canton High School for 27 years. We are the parents of Isaac, who is 10 years old and in the 4th grade at Lincoln School in Canton.

I graduated from Canton High School in 2001. I had the phenomenal opportunity to serve as Illinois Association FFA State Vice President 2001-2002. I then obtained my associate degree at Spoon River College in Canton, continuing to run a lawn mowing business I started while in High School. When I was finally able to farm full time in 2003, I retired from the mowing business and never looked back!

I literally FARM ALL THE TIME! I raise corn and cattle with my Dad, Henry. I am the 7th generation on our family farm, which was settled in 1863 by my Grandma's family. This year we will grow 1600 acres of corn and finish between 5000 and 7000 head of cattle, spread out all over the country.

We’re members of the Evangelical Free Church in Canton. Kris has gone there over 23 years. I’ve always gone to church but have now attended with her at E Free for 12 years. My hobbies are activities done to make money; I farm for a hobby. There is truly nothing else I like to do. I love it!

I’m passionate about the agriculture industry because of the vast opportunities that exist. Not necessarily farming, but the thousands of good jobs that in some way provide food, fuel, and fiber to the billions of people on this planet. I’d like non-farmers to know that contrary to some opinions, we really strive to do the best for our land and our animals.

In our case, there are a lot of people who think we as farmers may mistreat our animals or not take the best possible care of them. Really, caring for the cattle is about 90% of how I spend my time on a daily basis. I want the animals to be healthy, happy, clean, and well fed. We do whatever it takes to achieve that goal. When the cattle are sick, they get medicine. When they are hungry, we feed them. When they make manure, we clean it up. We do whatever we can to make them grow and make the most delicious beef on earth.
Paul Nelson Stoops is 84 years old and grew up on the outside of Ipava near Camp Ellis. He married Barbara Anne and they had five children and 9 grandchildren. Lynn is their oldest daughter and she is a hospital RN taking care of babies. Debra Chasteen is a computer programmer and has four children John, Robert, Tonda, and Justina. Bruce is an emergency room doctor in Quincy and has one son Ryan. Connie Roberts is a teacher’s aide and has two daughters Kelsey and Ellen. Finally, Byran is their youngest and he is a licensed social worker in Carlinville and has two daughters Isabell and Gabrielle. Paul likes to take trips to visit each of his children and grandchildren.

Paul graduated from VIT high school in 1953. He never went on to college but farmed and worked for Caterpillar. While at Caterpillar he ran the machine lays and ran equipment. He retired from Cat in 1992. When not working there he farmed his 74 acre farm with a 190 XT Allis Chalmers and a 4 Row John Deere 38in planter. Growing up he said his father used a horse and that is how Paul started farming. He also raised Hereford cattle. When he decided to retire from physically doing the farming, Roy Slater Sr. took over for him. When Roy retired, Kevin Wilcoxen took over for him. When Kevin passed away, his wife Anastasia took over. Now their son Delson Wilcoxen will be farming for Paul. The farm has grown from 74 acres to 90 acres thanks to some clearing of trees. Paul is still involved in making the decisions about the farm and will take the old farm car or one of the tractors out to inspect progress from time to time.

Paul’s farm has quite the story. Paul has lived on Airport Rd in Ipava since he was two; - in the same house. He believes that Jerry Atwater’s dad lived in the house as a boy before the Stoops family moved in. The house was built in three stages, but the oldest part is estimated to be over 100 years old.

When the U.S. Army was surveying property to combine into the Camp Ellis, Paul’s farm was surveyed for this. He began looking elsewhere for new ground to farm. The Camp, however, never took Paul’s farm. But since the airport was so close, he remembers the planes would bank over the house to get up into the air fast enough. Paul never served in the military, but he has always been an avid supporter of those in uniform and in service to our Country.

If you do not find Paul at home, you can count on him being in a few spots but one of his favorites is the Roadhouse in Ipava. Everyone knows who he is when he walks in and they have his drink sitting on the table when he gets there. He also loves attending tractor shows and parades with his own tractors. In the summer he will drive one of the AC tractors up and meet with the South Fulton Antique Tractor club and go riding. He is an avid toy collector, having some of the most unique models and one of the most extensive collections around. He is still very active and likes to sit and talk with others. You can almost always bet he will be at the Fulton County Fair watching the tractor pulls or at any antique tractor show. The antique tractors are his absolute favorite thing to look at and spend time around. He is also a member of the Presbyterian Church of Ipava and has been a Fulton County Farm Bureau member for at least 50 years.

Paul knows every inch of his farm and keeps very good track of what is going on. When asked what advice he would give young people wanting to farm, Paul said, “have good landlords” and laughs.
My name is Shannon Chenoweth. I live with my family in rural Adair. I am a Certified Crop Specialist and Marketing Manager at Fulton FS in the Ipava and Lewistown locations.

My wife Tara works with University of Illinois Extension as a SNAP-Ed Community Worker in McDonough County. I am the father of Dawson - a Junior at Macomb High School, and Grace - a third grader at Lincoln Elementary in Macomb. While my children attend school in McDonough County, I have lived and worked in Fulton County much of my life. I was born in Table Grove to Dale and Connie Chenoweth and graduated from VIT High School in 1990. Upon graduation, I attended Western Illinois University where I earned a Bachelor of Ag Science/Agronomy degree in 1993.

In the Spring of 1993, I obtained an internship with Schuyler-Brown FS as a Crops Sales Associate. I transitioned to be a Crop Specialist with Fulton FS in 1994 at the Ipava location. I became a Certified Crop Advisor in 1996.

In our spare time, Tara and I enjoy following our children’s many activities. Dawson plays football, runs track, and is an officer with Macomb FFA. Grace plays soccer. Both children are involved with McDonough County 4-H, where Dawson has participated in several shooting sports opportunities.

For those young individuals looking for a career in Agriculture, I would encourage them to explore the many different avenues Agriculture provides. Whether it be technology, research, food and fiber production, manufacturing and sales, or one of the many others, find a niche that fits your personality. Also, do not be afraid to ask questions or talk to people in the industry. Those connections can lead to knowledge and even opportunities.
My name is Gene Rector. I was born a fifth generation farmer in 1933 to Ward and Adah Rector of Smithfield. As a young boy, I grew up helping my dad milk cows, take care of the livestock, drive the hay horses in the field, and carry water to the field for the men, usually while riding my pony Buddy.

I attended Freemont country school in rural Vermont, IL through 6th grade, transferred to Vermont Elementary School through 8th grade, and then graduated from VIT High School (then located in Table Grove) in 1952. I started at WIU the next year and married my high school sweetheart, Carolyn (Watson), on July 4, 1953.

On July 9 of that year I was drafted into the Army, and then served in Korea from March 1954-April 1955. When I returned in the spring of 1955 I started farming with my father in Vermont. When my father asked me what I wanted to do on my return from deployment, my reply was “I want to farm so that I don't have to take orders from anyone else”. Carolyn and I started living on the Vermont farm with my parents, and I returned to helping my father farm his land and take care of the cattle and hogs. By January of 1956 we had our first child, Sharon. Six years later, in 1962, our son Leland was born. We moved to our current farm in Ipava in 1972.

Over the years, we continued to expand our grain farming operation, despite getting rid of livestock in the early 2000s. When I wasn't busy farming, I was serving on the FHA board and Aqua Clown Ski Club. I am now “retired”, and my son Leland, his wife Valerie (Bucher), and his sons Tyler, wife Amanda (Essex), and Leighton, wife Amber (Briney) operate the farm. The farm has grown to about 4000 acres of corn and soybean mix. I still enjoy running tractors, hauling grain, pulling anhydrous tanks, and tendering to the sprayer to help out.

My daughter Sharon now farms with her husband, Randy Parks of Adair. They have three children, Branson, wife Brenda (Hollenberg);Brian, wife Christen (Bradford); and Brecken Reimold, husband Rodney. Carolyn and I now have 10 great grandchildren, from ages 1 up to 19, and we love spending time with them at our farm home and attending their ballgames and other extracurricular events.

Farming has changed a lot since I was a young boy; in some ways it is easier, and in other ways there are more challenges. If I were to tell a young farmer how to prepare for a career in farming, I would advise them to learn as much as they can from their parents and grandparents. To those in the non-farming community, it is important to understand where your food comes from. There is a lot of time invested in this work, and we constantly rely on appropriate weather conditions. Go spend a day with a farmer and you will see that we don't just work 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. This is our livelihood. And also, behind every good farmer is a good wife. There are months out of the year when we are gone long hours and our wives are responsible for a lot at home. I love farming because it is rewarding work, and we get to do it as a family.
Hello, I am Keely Egelhoff. I graduated from Southwestern High School in 2015 and I completed my Associate degree in the fall of 2015 from Lewis and Clark Community College. I then moved to Macomb to attend Western Illinois University (WIU) in the Spring of 2016. I graduated WIU in the Spring of 2018 with a degree in Agriculture Business, and a minor in both Precision Agriculture and Agriculture Technology Management. I also graduated with honors from the WIU Centennial Honors College.

During college I worked for several companies including Monsanto in Monmouth, John Deere in Urbandale, IA and Birkey’s Farm Store in Macomb. A year and a half ago I started working for the McDonough and Warren County Soil and Water Conservation Service. From there I transferred into a Federal role, joining the Natural Resource Conservation Service as a Conservation Technician.

I was raised on a grain and livestock farm in Southern Illinois. My family and I were blessed to raise corn, beans, wheat, hay, cattle, and hogs. I learned a great deal from our farm that I am able to carry on in my role now. Currently, I help Delson Wilcoxen on his farm. We raise registered Angus cattle, corn, beans, and hay. Most of our free time is spent either in the cab of a tractor or on a set of bleachers watching cattle enter a sale ring.

My passion for cattle runs strong. Growing up I loved to go to Bowling Green sale barn with my dad and grandpa to watch the sales. I was usually treated to lunch at the barn; they had something called a cowboy burger that was guaranteed to make your hands messy with BBQ sauce.

In my spare time, I enjoy gardening and working on quilts. I am one of the only ones left in my family who still quilts and recently my passion has grown into working on them every night.

I would tell a young person wanting to be in agriculture to always be willing to get your hands dirty. Have a good work ethic and always be willing to learn something new. Do not be afraid to be different and do what you think is best. Sometimes some of the best ideas are those that someone had and decided to act upon. I will be the first to admit I do not like change, but change can be good, and we should not be afraid to accept it when it comes.

I am passionate about farming because it is my life. I do not know anything else. I have always farmed and in the more recent years have found myself able to make more and more of the decisions. I want my children someday to grow up on a farm and know what hard work and dedication looks like. Farming is not easy, but it is rewarding.

I wish more people would talk with farmers. I have spent most of my young adulthood advocating for agriculture. I have communicated across the Nation, trying to spread the good work agriculture does and the story of what farmers are trying to do to better themselves. Even in my job I am working with farmers to make themselves and the land better so that non-farmers will see that we are normal people too, just trying to make a living and feed them.

Farming is not for everyone; everyone has something they are really good at and no two farmers are the same. Even between Delson and I there are things I am better at and things he is better at and having that diversity is what makes our farm go round. I think that is one of the most important things for farmers and non-farmers to think about. It takes all kinds of people to make up this planet. Without diversity we would not be able to produce or be successful in our daily operations. It never hurts to try something you have not done before. Just becoming familiar with something might become handy down the road.

Small family farms are what made America and what keeps making America so great. Sometimes just a simple phone call from the neighbor checking on you and your family after last night’s storm is all you need to get back on your feet and go again. Farming is not for the faint of heart. It takes real dedication and determination. There are a lot of sleepless nights and hours of worry just in one year. But I would not trade it for the world. Even when I am sitting at work, I am thinking of all the farm activities that await me when I get back home. Next time you pass a farmer in the store stop and just say hello and ask them how it is going, you never know you might just make their day.
I’m David Hahn, a Doctor of Veterinarian medicine with an office in Canton. My wife Angie and I have 3 children: Josh, Erin, and Alisha. Our grandchildren are Trevor, Carleigh, and Kaeden.

I was born in Sigourney, Iowa in 1956 where I grew up on a grain and livestock farm. After graduating from High School there, I completed my undergraduate education at Iowa State University, where I also graduated from Veterinary school in 1980. I began my practice in Canton in 1981 and had a special interest in equine (horse) reproduction and dentistry, bovine reproduction and production medicine, and small animal medicine and surgery. The first 30 years of my career I worked predominately with food animals and horse medicine. The past 10 years have focused less on farm work, and more with horses and pets.

I have a small farm, raising Angus cattle, 2 horses, a donkey, and a long-haired sheep. In my spare time, I like fishing, sport-shooting, and camping.

My job requires a science background and good communication skills. College is a total of 8 years; 4- pre professional and 4 years of veterinary school. I would tell a young person wanting to go into this profession to spend LOTS of time around veterinarians. Do job shadowing. An interest in biological science and chemistry is also required.

I have spent most of my professional career assisting and instructing livestock producers in proper animal husbandry practices and in helping them produce a safe, wholesome food product for their family, as well as for mine, and for others to consume. Since the agriculture sector is so small but so important, it is necessary for all of us to tell our story to anybody who will listen. Most people are now far removed from the farms and food production. They need to be told the true story of how their food is produced. I feel fortunate to have been in a career that allows me to help tell that story.
I'm Joe Ferretti from Farmington. I own a trucking company. My wife Nancy (Gray) and I have 4 children. Jill (Mauro) Aguilar lives in Fairview and is a radiography tech. J.F. (Rachel) is a dairy farmer in Wisconsin. Kevin (Brandi) lives in Princeville where he is a truck driver also. Janey (Travis Bond) lives in Metamora and works for Caterpillar. We have 13 grandchildren, one of whom (Dylan) is deceased.

I was born in 1956 and raised on the farm. We had lots of livestock and crop ground from 350 acres to nearly 1800 acres. I graduated from Farmington High School and then went to Spoon River College in Canton, where I received my Associates in Ag. Business. After college, I worked for Neff Company in Avon part time for 4 winters. I repaired combines and put new equipment together. I also had a repair shop and machinery sales business of my own. I sold Shortline Field Cultivators and Big Bud tractors from 1976 until I quit farming in 1986. During that time, I sold a lot of equipment to Norris Farms, where I also did custom subsoiling (deep tillage) for the farm. I worked about 1800 acres of ground for them until 1985.

I always had a big interest in trucking and I started my company in 1982. That's all I've done since! I haul a large amount of grain, rock, lime, and feed commodities. My travels take me into the 4-states surrounding us. I also mow a cemetery that is adjacent to our property.

I would tell a young person wanting to get into the trucking business, to be around trucks when you're young and learn as much as you can. It's like the old saying “If you love what you do you will never work a day in your life”.

The farmers, the dairymen, the ranchers; agriculture is the most needed industry. Because you eat, you need agriculture. The trucking industry is very important because all the products that this industry needs, we truckers have to move.
I am Kody Wickert from Lewistown. I am 19 years old and graduated from high school in the spring of 2019 and am the son of Brian and Cara Wickert. I am currently enrolled in the Aviation Maintenance Program at Lincoln Land College in Springfield. I am also working towards obtaining my commercial pilots license.

I grew up on our farm outside of Lewistown, where we grow corn and soybeans. We also raise livestock. I was a member of the Jolly Workers 4-H Club, where I showed cattle. For as long as I can remember I worked alongside my Grandpa Steve Wickert, who is now mostly retired. I have also always been around aircraft and ag business since I could walk (actually before that!), “helping” my grandfather Harley Joe Curless.

I am employed at our family crop dusting service in Astoria, Curless Flying Service, which also includes an aircraft repair facility. My grandpa Harley Joe started his business in 1977, and it has grown to include “Farm Air Inc.” which he took over in 2010. He relocated that business to our airport that is east of Astoria. We are an authorized dealer of “Air Tractor” aerial application planes. (The bright yellow planes you see buzzing farm fields in the summertime!) I am part of the grounds crew. We service planes for owners across the Midwest. We do spraying and seeding for farmers across the Central Illinois Region.

I enjoy flying, and also outdoor activities like hunting. I’m also very active in the diesel truck community, building custom lighting. This comes in handy for our operating equipment, too! If a young person wants to get into aerial spraying and plane maintenance, my advice to them is to spend time with a farmer or someone in this field and learn by how they operate and develop their skills.

I grew up helping my Dad and both Grandpas. I enjoyed spending time in the fields and scouting land for crop development. I am blessed to have grown up farming and I know the importance of how it benefits the world. The ag industry is very diverse and benefits multiple people around the globe.
Hi and welcome to Spangler Farms. My husband, Bruce, and I have farmed near Marietta since we married in 1962. I was raised south of Fairview on what is now known as a Shelby farm. My dad farmed and my mother taught home economics at Valley High School. Bruce and I met through 4-H and the Fulton County Fair. In fact, you might say that I fell for him as I slipped in the mud carrying a bale of straw at the fair and fell right in front of him!

Bruce farms with our youngest son, John. After having a knee replacement, Bruce’s farming mainly consists of running errands for John. Bruce and John have a cow-calf operation and farm 2500 acres of corn and beans.

We have two other sons: Bob is an account executive for Hitchcock Scrap and Metal in Canton, and David owns a trucking business. We also have 9 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren. Our sons live within 12 miles of us which is rather unusual in this day and age.

I graduated from Valley Senior High School in 1958 and the University of Illinois in 1962. I lived at 4-H House on campus, where 3 generations of Spanglers have lived – myself, Holly, Kaity and now Hannah. I graduated with a BS in Home Economics Education and taught at the Lewistown High School until we had the boys. We also had a grain business and I was the grain merchandiser for it for 35 years.

Bruce graduated from Bushnell Prairie City High School in 1957 and joined the Army National Guard shortly after graduation. After he was discharged from the National Guard, he attended Calvary Bible College. He started farming with his grandfather, Robert Homer, in 1959.

Our faith in God is our top priority. We are members of the Checkrow Community Church in rural Avon, IL. Bruce has been a trustee, Chairman of the board, and Sunday School teacher. I have been a Jr. Superintendent, Sunday School and Bible School teacher and organist. Bruce has served on the Fulton County Farm Bureau Board and the Fulton County Farm Service Board. We have been leaders of the Checkrow Volunteers 4-H Club for 47 years.

Being a 4-H and FFA member and being involved in the activities of these groups is so important for the development of our young people. I also think a further education at either a junior college or a 4 year college is very important. A farmer is required to know all aspects about farming – animal science, agronomy, technology, record keeping, marketing, and many more things.

I feel so passionate about agriculture because there is no better place to raise a family. It is rewarding to watch baby calves bounce around the barnyard, to watch corn and beans emerge from the ground in the spring, grow, and then be harvested in the fall. Paul Harvey’s “And God Made a Farmer” sums it all up!
My name is Kaity Spangler, I am from Avon, Illinois, and am a 2018 Agricultural Education graduate of the University of Illinois (I-L-L!). I attended Bushnell – Prairie City High School and was actively involved in 4-H and the FFA. My involvement in these organizations played a huge role in my career and passion for the agriculture industry. I currently work with youth and collegiate programs at the Illinois Farm Bureau.

I am actively involved at Checkrow Community Church where I occasionally lead music on Sunday mornings, with my sister and two of our best friends. I assist when needed teaching Sunday School or Children’s Church. My faith in God is the most important thing in my life, and I am incredibly thankful to attend a church that is so dedicated to loving and serving others.

Two of my favorite things are baking and competition – my favorite nights are spent making homemade pizza and playing games with my family members. Listening to Dolly Parton, watching movies, going to Disney World, and cheering on the Fighting Illini are also things that I enjoy. I love America with my whole heart, so you can occasionally find me visiting Washington, DC. Additionally, I love when my passions for the industry and our country cross and I have the opportunity to spend time in DC or Springfield talking to legislators about agricultural policy.

My earliest memory involving ag is riding with my dad in the semi as he hauled grain. I spent lots of time riding in the bunk of his truck playing with Polly Pockets and watching Disney Princess movies (on VHS!). A trip to ADM was never complete without a McDonald’s picnic in the truck, with Orange Drink and Diet Pepsi, and the soundtrack from Tarzan playing in the background. “You’ll Be in My Heart” by Phil Collins will forever take me back to being my dad’s blue semi shotgun rider.

Of course, I’d be remiss if I didn’t mention sharing a Cherry Coke or two in the cab of the combine with my Grandpa Bruce or taking trips back and forth from the field in the grain truck with my Grandma Sharon. Or the grand adventures of myself and cousin, Ryan, as we spent time at the Fulton County Fair. Another family member that has played a huge role in my agriculture story is my Aunt Holly. I tagged along with her to many events throughout my time in high school and college – growing my professional network before I even realized how valuable networking is.

The agriculture industry is incredibly important to me, however, its importance stems from a family so deeply rooted in it. We’re kind of like the Robertson family from Duck Dynasty, but instead of ending the week around the dinner table, you can find us at Monicas Pizza in Canton. Agriculture (and good pizza) has a unique way of bringing us together and solidifying our relationships with one another.

I started attending livestock shows at a young age to watch my cousins. My hand-me-down t-shirt collection was full of shirts with 4-H clovers and FFA emblems on them. As I grew older, I started showing with my sister and cousins, and added my own t-shirts to the collection. I’m so thankful for memories of assisting each other in the show ring and playing endless rounds of card games. You don’t always remember who won the trophies or the banners, but you do remember the jokes and adventures.

The County Fair continues to be a family affair – reminding us that of course, hard work is important, but at the end of the day, it’s the relationships (and ribeye sandwiches from the 4-H Foodstand) that truly matter. While I’m incredibly thankful for the opportunity to grow closer with my family in the show ring, the relationships gained with the other showmen and their families are also just as important. The neat thing about showing livestock is that you gain another “family” – people that will continue to cheer you on and support you when your time in the ring has come to an end.

Agriculture has taken me many places and allowed me to meet so many fantastic people. As an 8-year-old, excitedly starting her 4-H career with projects in Dog Obedience, Sewing, and Textiles, and Performing Arts, I never dreamed that I’d one day meet the United States Secretary of Agriculture, or that I’d sit in the same room as a current U.S. President. Or even stand on the stage with my family as we received 4-H Family of the Year. But all of those things, and more, have happened and have changed my life. I’m so thankful to have grown up in a county, and with a family, that is so dedicated to sharing the story of American agriculture.
I am George Craft and live on our farm in Vermont Township with my wife Alcinda, who is a retired Hospice Nurse. We live in the house I have lived in my entire life. We are also in the process of filing for Century Farm status, as my Grandfather Craft purchased this land in 1920.

Alcinda and I both graduated from V.I.T. High School in 1960 (do the math!) and have three daughters: Deirdre, has a BS in Nursing from Iowa Wesleyan and lives in a farmhouse near Vermont. Adrea has a BA from the University of Illinois and lives in Austin, TX. Paige has an Occupational Therapist degree from St Ambrose University Iowa and lives in Kingman, AZ, where we have spent most of the winters for the last 10 years. We are proud grandparents of 4: Callie from Vermont, little George from Texas, Malachi and Micah from Arizona.

My Farm Bureau connection began with a membership in 1963 when I started farming. I was a student at Western Illinois University when in November 1962 at the IAA Annual Meeting in Chicago my Dad suffered a massive stroke and passed away. My Mom gave me the opportunity to assume the farming operations, so farming sort of chose me. My Farm Bureau involvement started when I was elected to the Fulton Service Company board, serving as Vice President and President. Fulton Service Company and Knox County Oil Company merged in 1971 to form Spoon River FS, where I again served as Vice President and President. Spoon River FS is now a part of West Central FS Inc. I later was honored to serve on both the Illinois Grain and FS Inc. Boards. These combined to form GROWMARK. I had the privilege to serve on that board until I retired from it in 1997.

One of the opportunities that came as a result of my coop board tenure was a chance to go to Czechoslovakia in February of 1992 with the organization VOCA (Volunteers in Cooperative Assistance), a division of the U.S. State Department. We were to advise and assist a 5000 acre coop state farm that was evolving from a government-run command system to a much more free demand system as a result of the “Velvet Revolution” led by elected President Vaclav Havel after the fall of the Iron Curtain. This farm had over 250 employees, grew several crops, had a dairy, and farrow to finish operations. The machinery, though fairly new, resembled what we in America used in the 1950’s and the livestock enterprises were also very ‘old school’. I was able to return in 1994 for VOCA and worked with my brother in law, Phil Richmond, to help two Czech brothers who were trying to make a success of combining several small privately owned acreages into a profitable enterprise. Part of this trip allowed us to visit the 1992 farm. The progress that had been made was incredible, as they had followed most of our recommendations and were well on their way to profitability.

In 1993 neighboring farmer Robert Fleming and I decided to pool our equipment and farm together. We each had about the same number of acres and we both were employing no-till, strip-till and variable rate lime and fertilizer on a grid system provided by our FS member company. This partnership was secured mostly by a handshake and lasted until I retired from farming in 2006.

Today our farm is farmed by the Rector Family; Leland, Tyler and Leighton. Leland’s Dad, Gene, and I marvel at the modern equipment and technology. They let us drive their John Deere tractors and Freightliner trucks. Life is Good.
I’m Brett Whitsitt from Lewistown. My wife (Jessica) and I own Whitsitt Family Farms, featuring pasture-raised hogs. We sell feeder pigs and breeder pigs. We both graduated from Lewistown High School. Jessica graduated from Culver-Stockton College and attended Louisiana State University - Health Sciences Center. She works as a Research & Development Chemist at Evonik for her main job.

We are the parents of twins who are soon to be 13 years old; Laynee Whitsitt (she’s pictured with me here!) and Dempsee Whitsitt are both students at Spoon River Valley School.

Our family came together in 2018. The kids have always caught pigs at the Fulton County Fair in the scrambles, so that is where raising pigs started for us! They each caught a pig, so we expanded and added more. From there we decided to start breeding. We decided to start up Whitsitt Family Farms.

We soon discovered this was something we were passionate about and decided to invest in more land and expand on our current farm. So we went out and bought a new home with acreage and are working hard to get our name established and build a happy home for our farm animals. We currently have 20 sows. We have a Facebook page (Whitsitt Family Farms) where we post pictures of our litters and advertise when we have pigs available for sale. We also use Craigslist to advertise.

In addition to raising livestock, I’ve also been a commercial fisherman for 8 years. I catch Asian carp in the rivers and lakes around us. I can average a catch of 10,000 pounds a day and have even done up to 30,000 pounds a day. I take the carp to processing plants in various locations where they are either filleted or ground up to make protein meal. We fish all year round, as long as we aren’t froze out!

We have a lot of love for animals and this is shown in how our hogs and chickens are cared for. Both are raised and humanely treated. We sell antibiotic free, non GMO, pasture-raised market and feeder hogs. We have purebred registered Berkshires and mixed breed pigs available. Our animals have a wonderful life and run on two different farms with 10+ acres of pasture. We also sell eggs from our free range chickens. You can find out more about our farm and products at our Facebook page Whitsitt Family Farms.
I'm Travis Mahr. I live in Farmington. I graduated from Farmington Central Highschool in 1995. After high school I went to Spoon River College for two years and finished at Southern Illinois University with a Bachelor of Applied Science in 1999.

My wife Laura is a nurse at OSF in Peoria. We have five kids, Taylor (20), Kylee (18), Emylee (14), Kenna (13) and Rylan (11).

I farm with my dad Kenneth. We raise corn and soybeans along with contract feeding around 5000 head of hogs a year for TriOak foods.

Our kids keep us very busy. Kylee is active in band and theater, Emylee plays softball at Farmington Central High School and travel softball for The Lady Xtreme. Kenna is a 2020 IESA state champion in competitive cheerleading, and Rylan likes to ride his 4-wheeler and play games.

My hobbies include my kids, but also, I like to tractor pull. I pull a Case 970 in Farmstock classes and I am a member of The Back Roads Pulling Team.

I love farming and am very fortunate to get to do it for a living. I wouldn't change it for anything.
Hello, we are Jim and Cindy Cassidy from Table Grove, IL. Our joint partnership began on February 27, 1980. This year was our 40th wedding anniversary and this is our love story.

Our family consists of three daughters – Kari, mother of three children, who lives in Canton, Illinois and works in sales. Julie and her husband Mike are parents of four children and live in Valley Park, Missouri. Lindsey and husband Andrew are parents of two children and live in Marion, Iowa. She is a 1st grade teacher for Lin Mar School District. Andrew is Director of Supply Chain for Collins Aerospace Cedar Rapids, Iowa. One daughter, Leslie Ann, is deceased: February 1981. Our son T.J. (that’s him pictured with Jim branding cattle) and wife Deanna are parents of two children and live in Peoria, Illinois. He is a Design Engineer for Caterpillar and Deanna is an Employment Brand Marketing Manager for Caterpillar. Our 11 grandchildren range from the oldest Lexie who is 23 and a RN at McDonough District Hospital, to the youngest Aniston who is 2 years old.

Jim graduated from VIT in 1970 and attended Spoon River College. I graduated from Industry High School in 1972, and then from Spoon River College with a real estate license and Associates in Business. Our farm consists of two locations: one in Table Grove and the second on the outskirts of Ipava. On both farms we raise corn, beans, hay and cattle. This wet spring seems to be bringing us lots of calves! The Table Grove farm has been in Jim’s side of the family since 1863. We are 5th generation Cassidy’s to operate the farm. Over the years our passion in cattle has grown and expanded. In that time frame we have backgrounded cattle, finished cattle, and sold freezer beef, depending on feed supply, labor, demand and markets. We develop our own heifers for the cow herd. Our genetics range over different breeds including Herford, Brangus, and Gelbvieh but predominately we raise Angus. Our cattle wear the “wineglass” brand.

In 1983 we began Table Grove Feed Company and sell Kent Feeds to local producers. This is in addition to running the grain and livestock operations full time.

We are members of Vermont Christian Church. Jim has served on the Hispsley Board, as a Vermont Township trustee and presently serves as a director on the board at the Table Grove State Bank. I have served on V.I.T. School Board and on the Mid-Century Telecom board as director and President. I am currently a CASA volunteer. Regarding hobbies, we have difficulty determining where our work stops, and where our hobby begins. We truly love farming and the cattle.

For a young person, on-job training is the best way to prepare. In order to make this their life, he or she must like the outdoors (all-year round), be able to handle diversity (every day is doing something different), a willingness to learn (old ways and new technology), be motivated (lots of long hours in the saddle—metaphorically speaking) and most important passion – they need to love this life.

We in agriculture knew we “feed the world” but during this historic pandemic/period in our country this fact has really sunk in. We in American Agriculture play a vital role to our country’s survival.

It may not be any easy job because we face many challenges beyond our control like weather, markets, and viruses. Balancing modern day agriculture and the wisdom of our ancestors passed down to us is essential. We believe it is our duty to take care of the land because we know it will be here long after we are gone, for we are only God’s tenants. We love this life and give thanks to Him!

Lord, bless the land You’ve given us,  
And may we always know  
As we tend each crop and creature  
You’re the One who helps them grow.  
Grant us strength and wisdom.  
Please protect us from all harm,  
And thank you for Your gracious gifts—  
The blessings of a farm.  
-Robin Fogle
As we go through the month of March, highlighting different individuals involved in agriculture, it's important to reflect on past generations of farm families in order to appreciate the modern conveniences we enjoy today. So today we highlight Marjorie Williams, one of Fulton County Farm Bureau's oldest members.

Marge Nelson was born in December 1921 to Swedish farmers that lived near Oneida, IL in northern Knox County. As the oldest of three children, Marge remembers having chores around the farm that included keeping the wood box filled, feeding the little calves and chickens and collecting eggs. She also helped her mother in the kitchen, even though she’d rather go outside and milk the cow.

Mondays were wash days, they would heat the water on the wood stoves before any washing could be done and clothes were dried on the line. Marge can remember when the Bank of Altona closed in 1929 and her family lost all their money that was in the bank. Marge attended a one room country school through 6th grade and then 7th, 8th and high school at the Oneida schools. In high school Marge took bookkeeping classes. When she graduated in the spring of 1939 she decided to attend Brown’s Business College in Peoria. Marge said “the bookkeeping classes were a snap but couldn’t get her shorthand up to speed” so she did not graduate with a diploma. Tuition was $1/day and her dad would give her $15 every two weeks for tuition, room and board, food and anything else she needed.

She would ride the bus from Peoria to Galesburg every other weekend to visit her family. One weekend she walked in the house and there was a refrigerator in the kitchen! The house her family lived in had been built in 1934 and was wired for electricity in hopes they would have it someday. The electrical service stopped about a mile west of their house. In 1936 they finally got power and it wasn’t until the fall of 1939 when they bought their first refrigerator. Prior to refrigeration the family stored their perishable food in the cistern, which is similar to a well; a hole dug in the ground to collect water. It was a cool place. The food would be put into a metal container and lowered into the cistern where it would be kept cool.

Marge remembers her dad farming with horses. She thinks he had a dozen or so but would use a team of 4 horses to pull the plow, 2 row corn planter or 2 row cultivator. All the corn was harvested by hand and left on the ear to be stored in corn cribs. It would later be shelled and fed to their livestock. Marge commented “farmers couldn’t feed the world today, if they still farmed like that now.”

After Marge finished her schooling she worked for Bemis Brothers Bag Company on Adams St in Peoria. She lived at the YWCA and would take the bus to work. The weekend of the Pearl Harbor attack, Marge was in Galesburg interviewing for a job at The National Farm Loan Association (which became Farm Credit). She became a secretary for land loans, improved her shorthand skills and took dictation from attorneys. On one particular lunch break, she went to the train station and saw Harry S. Truman give a speech from the platform on the back of his train, as he was campaigning for the presidency. Marge worked for the NFLA for 10.5 years, until June 1952 when she married Richard Williams of Smithfield, IL and moved to Fulton County.

Marge received a mix of 50 white rock hens and roosters from her mother as a wedding present. This way Marge could raise chickens and earn egg money, which she used for any groceries she needed to buy in town. Marge remembers having over 100 chickens and selling the eggs to a man in Bushnell, he then boxed them up and shipped them to Chicago. Marge had chickens until the early 1990s.

She did not regularly get involved in the farm work, other than keeping the books. On occasion she would help chase livestock or drive a tractor, but she commented that was men’s work and she didn’t do it. Like many women of Marge’s generation she raised a large garden and fruit trees, so she canned and preserved the fruits and vegetables. Marge and Dick have two children Dan and Jane. Dan has since taken over the family farm and Jane farms with her husband in the Canton area. Marge has four grandchildren Julie, Keith, Vanessa and Daniel; all are involved with their family farms and in off farm ag related jobs. Marge now has three great-grandchildren Ellie, Hayes and Grace; who love growing up on the farm, riding in tractors and combines and seeing the
livestock.

Marge remembers reading the Rural Electric magazine in the fall of 1958, where she saw an ad for a new electric dryer. They purchased one soon after. She says that of all the new inventions and technology she has seen in her 98 years, electricity was the most life changing of anything.

Over the years Marge has served on the Fulton County Farm Bureau Women's Committee, been active in the HEA program and in the Bushnell United Methodist Church. Even though Marge isn't involved in the day to day operations of the farm she is still a land owner and keeps tabs on who is coming in and out of her driveway on the farm.
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