

The GOODELL Family

Frank and Virginia Goodell
Portage County

For 173 years -- ever since Jonas Goodell moved his family from Massachusetts to Ohio and bought 50 acres of land in Portage County -- a Goodell family member has been farming in Shalersville Township. Their farming operation has always included making maple syrup, because the family has found maple tree taps dating back more than 150 years.

Today, the family operation includes Frank and Virginia Goodell, their sons Bruce and Jay, and Jay's family. The Goodells produce maple syrup, potatoes, and cash grain and maintain an intensive grazing dairy operation. The farm has expanded to encompass more than 300 acres of owned land plus additional rented ground.

A carriage barn built in 1850 is the oldest building on the farm and is still used today for storage. The large main barn and a cement silo building were built in 1893 and are also still used today. The main house, in which Frank and Virginia live, was built in 1904 from wood cut on the farm and the original woodwork has been carefully preserved.

One common thread interwoven in this family is maple syrup. The current generations of Goodells have turned this into a major community event. In 1982, the family started hosting a community maple syrup and pancake breakfast at the local township hall. At first, only family members supplied the labor, but the breakfast has gained so much publicity, they now have to hire additional workers. They serve their own homemade maple syrup in pitchers, promoting its consumption. On the four Sundays in March, the family serves more than 500 people.

No-till and intensive grazing represent the innovations which the family has adopted to remain profitable. The no-till crop plan is a five-year rotation of grain, hay, and potatoes. Jay said they switched to no-till to keep the soils in place on their rolling farmland and have been pleasantly surprised at the improvement of the soil. In 1994, they started intensive grazing, and today, half the cropland is in pasture. Jay handles the dairy while Bruce manages the fences. Their 63 head of dairy cows are a mix of Holsteins and crossbreeds.

Frank has lived on the farm since he was born there in 1920. "Electric arrived in 1928," he said. "We had a set flat rate. No matter how much we used, the rate was \$18 per month, which was a great deal of money back then. They probably did it this way to encourage electric use."

The SMITH Family

Cy and Dennis Smith
Stark County

Plain Township in Stark County was once a thriving township of dairy and grain farms. Today, the township has two farms left in it, nestled among stores, houses and churches which have swallowed the farmland in giant gulps. One of those farms is the dairy operation of Cyrillas "Cy" Smith and his son, Dennis and his wife, Jennifer. The farm has been in the Smith family since 1880 when Jacob Essig and his wife Magdalene, who was Cy's great-grandmother, bought 120 acres to serve as a family farm.

Jacob had lived and farmed on a neighboring farm nearly all his life. He bought this 120 acres in 1889, nine years before he died at age 69. However, the family connection with the farm dates back to 1815 when Conrad Speelman acquired the land via a land grant from then-president James Madison. The family lived and worked on this farm until 1834, when it was sold outside the family. It wasn't until 1880 that the family was able to buy back the farm.

Conrad was Cy's great, great, great grandfather on his father's side of the family. Conrad had come to the U.S. from Germany as a baby in the arms of his father, John Peter Speelman, around 1753. Conrad farmed and owned land in Maryland and Pennsylvania, and in the early 1800's, when people were being encouraged to move into newly opened Ohio territory, Conrad decided to speculate and take advantage of the land opportunity. He acquired two square miles of previously unfarmed land in what would become Stark County. His two sons came to Ohio to work the land.

Conrad's daughter, Elisabeth Speelman Phillapy, eventually inherited the land and established the lineage for the Smith family although the Wershler family, which bought the land from Elisabeth, built the 1846 federal style house which serves as the home for Cy today. The property remained in the Wershler family for 46 years until Cy's great grandfather on his mother's side, Jacob Essig, bought the farm.

All told, the family has nearly 140 years of ownership of the farm, but it is not all successive. From Jacob Essig, the farm passed to his son Simon and wife Ida in 1888, then to Ira Smith and wife Grace Essig in 1921, and to Cy and his wife Martha in 1950. Martha passed away in 1994. Their son, Dennis and his wife Jennifer, have taken over management of the dairy operation while Cy is semi-retired from the operation.

Cy and Martha did much to modernize the farm when they took over in 1950. It has received the Stark County Goodyear Conservation award, and the dairy herd has produced several production awards over the years -- the 65 cow herd currently has a DHI test average of more than 23,000 pounds of milk. The farm operation includes 250 acres of crops.

The NICOL Family

Fred and Kathryn Nicol
Union County

On November 25, 1893, George Michael Nicol signed a purchase agreement for 205 acres of farmland in Union Township in Union County. He paid \$900 for the farm and buildings. He wanted to buy a farm on which he could make a living for his family and on which future generations could raise crops and livestock. He never could have imagined what this farm would someday produce in the way of another "crop" -- of FFA leaders.

Pearl Nicol, George Michael's grandson, and his wife Lucia created a family which is outstanding in its productivity. Every one of their five sons (Gene, Roger, Larry, Fred, and Tom) achieved his Ohio FFA Farmer degrees, plus Pearl counts four American FFA Farmer degrees among his grandsons and granddaughters. Two granddaughters have served as Ohio FFA state officers. A grandson, Brad, is currently working on his American FFA Farmer degree this year.

For Pearl and Lucia, this has meant repeated trips to the Fairbanks FFA convention. Lucia estimates she and Pearl have been attending every local convention for at least the past four decades. "I can't imagine George Michael had this (FFA) involvement in mind when he bought this farm those 105 years ago," Pearl said.

While George Michael was born in nearby Darby Township in 1857, his father, Johann, was a German immigrant who came to the U.S. in 1821 from Dottenheim, Germany. He lived and worked the farm until he died in 1930, when his son, Christopher, took over. Pearl was born in the family home in 1921, married Lucia in 1943, and assumed ownership of the farm in 1948.

"We started farming with a team of horses still on the farm. Our first tractor was a used Oliver 70 which my father bought in 1938. But even though we had the tractor, we still used horses as well," he said.

Today, the farm is a modern dairy operation run by son Fred and daughter-in-law Kathryn, the fourth generation of Nicols to operate the farm. They were married in 1977 while Fred was working his way into the family dairy operation. Their children, 19-year-old John, 17-year-old Brad and eight-year-old Anne, are actively involved with the operation. Pearl and Lucia are semi-retired and live nearby. They milk around 70 head of Holsteins and feed about 40 head of steers per year. They raise all their own feed and sell some cash grain and hay.

"We're a pretty self-contained operation. Because of creeping urbanization, we don't have access to additional land so we have to make best use of what land we have," Fred said. However, they see a future in agriculture in their area, because those neighbors still farming are long established farm families who show little inclination to sell land for development.

The CRAMER Family

David and Ann Cramer
Seneca County

The Rinebold Homestead Farm in Loudon Township, Seneca County, is a prime example of how a tragedy can make a family stronger. In 1979, L. David and June Cramer were a husband and wife team on the farm, started by L. David's great-great-grandfather, John Rinebold in 1832. That year, the entire world was turned upside down for the family when L. David was killed in an accident.

Son David, who was attending Ohio State University, and June, his mother, struggled through the loss and attempted to keep the farm going as best they could. They rented part of the farm to a neighboring farmer, and after graduation David returned to the farm and worked out a management agreement with his mother.

"That was the only time we know of in the history of this farm that it hasn't been actively farmed by a member of our family. Since 1832, it's been a Rinebold or a Rinebold descendent farming this land," David said. To help keep that Rinebold heritage, David and wife Ann have added a seventh generation to the farming operation: seven-year-old son Alexander and five-year-old daughter Emily.

David started no-till cropping in 1989. At first, he adopted this practice to save labor costs for the farm. However, he found additional benefits with less soil erosion and improved efficiency. Today, they farm nearly 500 acres of popcorn, field corn, wheat, and soybeans, supplying most of the work themselves. David has continued another family tradition started by his late father, that being active involvement with the Seneca County Farm Bureau and the local community.

Today, David and Ann live in the family homestead built from bricks fired on the farm in 1868. The original log cabin homestead still sits about 100 yards from the brick house and has been remodeled to serve as a rental home. The log home is believed to have been built shortly after the farm was bought by Rinebold in 1832. The brick house has been modernized but the historical integrity has been maintained as much as possible, including preservation of the original woodwork.

"We got electric when I was six years old," said June, who was born and raised on the farm. "It was a real big deal for us. I still remember seeing those live wires running all over the house. My mother kept warning us not to touch them or go near them."

The NEELEY Family

Larry and Janet Neeley
Fairfield County

Not even having a portion of the Ohio Canal split the farm has been enough to keep the Terra Farm of Millersport in Fairfield County out of the hands of the descendants of John Cooperider, a German immigrant. In 1813, he purchased 160 acres, or a quarter section, of land in Fairfield County to eventually pass to one of his 11 children, George. In 1888, George's widow Irene assumed ownership of the farm, and it has been passed down through the women in this family ever since.

The original land deed, personally signed by then-President James Madison, hangs in a frame in Larry and Janet Neeley's house. They represent the fifth generation of their family to work this farm. Over the years, additional land has been added to the original homestead, and today, the farm encompasses more than 400 acres which produces field corn, popcorn, wheat, and soybeans.

Larry and Janet Neeley manage the farm along with their son, Lindsay, who works in Toledo. Lindsay spends much of his free time at the farm. Larry and Janet came back to the farm after they retired from their off-farm jobs. For Larry, it was a return to the farm after being gone for nearly 40 years, working as a newspaper editor. "Over the years, I'd always thought someday I would come back to the farm but never realized it would take so long," Larry said.

"Having worked off the farm nearly all my life, but still having grown up on a farm and having connections to a family farm, has given me a unique perspective on farming," he said. "As we're seeing more farms near metropolitan areas being converted to housing developments and strip malls, Ohio's agriculture history is being lost forever. Couple this with the fact that most people don't understand where their food actually comes from, and we can see how people are losing their connection to the land. That's a shame."

The SHAW Family

Otto (deceased) and Elizabeth Shaw
Hocking County

In the early part of the 19th century, Germany was racked by one war after another. To escape a dismal future, many young German men fled to other countries, especially the new United States, which welcomed them with war-free arms.

One of those thousands of immigrants was a man named Sampson Carpenter, who bought 30 acres of rolling farmland in Hocking County for \$110 near the little town of Rockbridge, Ohio. The gently rolling land reminded him of his native Germany. While Sampson worked to buy more land and build up the farm, it was his son, Abel, who made the most visible contribution to the farm when he built the massive house and barn.

"Abel's house was the talk of the town, literally," said Elizabeth Shaw, who with her late husband, Otto, operated the farm for many years. Elizabeth still lives in this meticulously preserved homestead. The barn was also a marvel of efficiency and design at the time it was built. In 1910, it was doubled in size and cited by many as the type of barn to build.

For Abel Carpenter, leading was natural. He served as county commissioner from 1879-1882 and instilled in his family the desire to be the best farmers they could possibly be. His daughter, Emma, married Otto Shaw and took over the farm operation in 1906. Otto fit well with Abel's progressive thinking and continued to build the operation until his untimely death in a train accident at age 39. His son, Paul, was only sixteen years old at the time of Otto's death. He and his mother, Emma, tried to keep the farm operating as best they could.

Paul became nationally recognized for his knowledge of livestock, especially sheep. He and son Otto were featured in an article in the October 1956 issue of Farm Journal and Country Gentlemen, which described their outstanding market lamb production. They were crossbreeding to obtain the best market lambs they could, a cutting-edge technique at that time.

In 1962, Otto and his wife Elizabeth took over management of the farm and became active in community affairs. "We were married in 1946 and moved into a house down the road from the main farm," Elizabeth said. Otto continued to work with his father, Paul, until he passed away and Otto and Elizabeth moved into the house in 1962. When Otto passed away in 1992, Elizabeth and son Bill formed a working partnership to keep the farm going.

Today, a new generation of farmers is working into the operation as the grandchildren of Elizabeth and Otto learn to farm. Bill's daughters, Morgan and Mallory, have both become experienced hay makers. "This farm has been a part of Ohio's agriculture for the past 163 years. We'd like to see it continue to do so in the future," Bill said.

The McNARY Family

Garth and Sherry McNary
Madison County

If one word could describe the McNary family farm in Madison County, that word would be perseverance. Through 109 years of McNary family residence, this farm has survived droughts, crop disasters, low farm prices, and the Great Depression. But the toughest test of survival was an unexpected death.

In 1983, Jim and Mary McNary had been farming together for close to 25 years. That year, Jim was the victim of an accidental drowning. Son Garth had only recently returned home from college and was helping with the farm operation. He and his mother, Mary, had to quickly pick up the pieces from Jim's accident and keep the farm going. Garth took over the farming operation and started working an off-farm job to supplement income.

Within ten years, Garth was able to buy the farm from Mary and become the fourth generation of McNary's to own this farm. "Those first few years after Dad's death were tough," Garth said. "Just overcoming the tragedy was bad enough, but also having to deal with the bad farm economy and being a young farmer getting started made it even tougher."

However, a willingness to work has been a standard commodity for the McNary clan. Garth's great-grandfather, John, bought the farm in 1889. His mother Mary still has the original deed which bears John's "X" mark because John couldn't write and could barely read. The original house still serves as home for a McNary family -- Garth and his wife Sherry share it with their sons, 3-year-old Jamie and 17-month-old Ben.

Today, the farm is strictly a grain operation raising no-till soybeans and corn on nearly 300 acres of owned and rented ground. While Garth and Sherry would like to expand, additional land for farming is difficult if not impossible to find in Somerford Township. "Land just doesn't change hands much in this area and there's not much rental ground available, either," Garth said. "What rental ground there is has typically been in the same hands for a long time." "There are so few true family farms, and the ones left have to be preserved," said Mary. "There is a sense of pride in knowing you've preserved something for future generations to see and understand."

The WADDLE Family

James (deceased) and Jirdena Waddle
Fayette County

Fayette County has some of the richest farmland in Ohio. This fact, plus a desire to have the freedom to worship as one believed, drove Irish immigrants William and Dorcas Waddle to buy 850 acres of bare land in Concord Township in 1858. As Old School Baptists, they were no strangers to religious persecution and rejection, and as farmers, they knew the value of good farmland.

William was born in Ireland in 1827 and immigrated to the U.S. in 1840, locating in Chillicothe. He married Dorcas Murray in 1852 and the two farmed in Ross County for six years before buying a portion of the Trustin Adams farm on Snowhill Pike. This land was part of a grant to a Revolutionary War veteran in lieu of payment for fighting in that war. They raised 11 children on this farm and established a legacy of Waddle family farmers in Fayette County.

Upon Williams's death in 1905, his son Oliver took over the farm. At Oliver's death in 1938, the farm was divided and sold in several tracts. William Orville Waddle, son of John Waddle who was grandson of the original William, bought the home tract. At his death in 1977, this 75 acre tract went to his twin sons Marion and Marvin and son James. James and Jirdena Snider married in 1946 and moved onto the farm, working the land until James passed away in 1997. Jirdena and her two sons, James Jr. and John, manage the farm today.

James and his twin brothers farmed together for several decades, working to buy back much of the original tract purchased by their ancestor William. At one time, together they farmed more than 2,000 acres, much of this being original Waddle land. Today, a new generation is beginning to work the land as Marvin and Marion are semi-retired and James has passed away.

The house in which James and Jirdena raised their family includes part of the original home built by William and Dorcas to raise their 11 children. The original house was only four rooms but has been expanded over the years to include three bedrooms, a kitchen and other rooms. The original, interior portion has been carefully preserved as it has been modernized. James and Jirdena moved to the farm shortly after being married in 1946 and began modernizing it at that time, adding electric, indoor plumbing, a basement and indoor heating. At that time, the house was still heated by fireplaces.

Although Jirdena was raised on a farm, she said she really didn't know what it was like to farm until she came into the Waddle family. "James and his brothers were dedicated to the farm. They really knew what it took to be good farmer and they worked very, very hard at doing the best job they possibly could," she said. "Farming has always been an important part of life for the Waddle family. That's what we'd like to pass onto the next generations."