

Children Absorb Parents' Values At Groff Valley Farm

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— Lime Valley Road is rich with family farms bordering both sides of the winding road. The acreage touches neighboring fields and stretches for miles around. It's an area proud in its heritage of passing along a love for the land that embodies the faith of generations past, and, James Groff hopes, of generations to come.

The Groff's two-story brick farmhouse, built before 1851, has felt the laughter, the tears, the prayers, and the hopes of five generations of Groffs.

If James's and his wife Peggy's hopes come true, the farm will continue to hear the sounds of many more generations of Groffs.

"I know you hear that you need to be big to stay in the farming today, but I believe the family farm will always survive," Jim said. "I think we need to strike a happy medium. Bigness is not always the answer. There's the labor factor as well as other problems when you're big that you don't have to deal with on a family farm."

The Groff's oldest son Dennis is in partnership with Jim. Dennis and his wife Jody have three daughters. By the time this article is printed, another baby will probably have arrived. A daughter Karen is married to Loren Esben-shade and they have a daughter, and the Groffs' 16-year-old son Kurt helps out on the farm when not in school.

Recently, the Groffs received a Century Farm award for having had the farm in the family for 127 years.

Several previous generations of Groffs had only one child. Jim's father, Arthur, was an only child whose father died when he was 16. Arthur and his wife Miriam farmed and lived in the farmhouse until Jim married. Then the older couple built a home on the land, and they continue to help with egg gathering when needed.

Although the farm was originally a dairy farm when the first generation of Groffs owned it, poultry was slowly eased in. Jim only remembers it as a poultry farm where his parents raised broiler, layers, and pullets.

When Jim married and Peggy moved on the home farm 30 years ago, they raised 2,000 chicken in three tiers in the barn. In 1966, the Groffs built their first caged chick-

en house for 7,000 layers. In 1977, they increased to 45,000 and last year, an additional house provided room for 106,000 layers.

Three family members work together for two hours for the morning gathering of eggs. It takes about 1½ hours for the evening gathering.

The farm's 85 acres and additional rented ground is cash cropped. They prefer to chisel plow instead of disc because it holds the soil together better.

Jim and Denny started a custom combining business about 10 years ago and work long hours during the harvesting season while their wives take responsibility for the chickens.

After harvesting is over, Jim does some long-distance trucking for a local firm.

"I'm a farmer at heart, but I like to do a little trucking as a sideline during the off season," Jim said. Last year, he took Peggy along to the west coast on a trucking trip and they spent several extra days in the area.

Although Jim doesn't believe in forcing children to continue to farm if they prefer another career, he does have strong convictions that the love for farming is instilled at a young age.

"The things dad talks about and gets enthused about rubs off on the kids," Jim said.

He believes children need to experience the pleasure of working on the farm at a young age.

"You can't wait until they are teen-agers and then expect them to want to help on the farm," he said.

From the beginning, the Groffs took their children with them to do the farm chores.

The couple said that they had a 4-year-old son who was killed in a farming accident 22 years ago.

"More than anyone, we believe in farm safety for children, but we don't think the answer is to shelter them by keeping them in the house. Children should be able to watch their parents work on the farm," Jim said.

Jim said that farm safety is easier today than in previous years because of tractor cabs and safety features on much of the equipment.

They believe that children should not be forced to do chores that they are not confident in handling. This applies to tractor driving especially.

Although son Kurt is interested in farming, he is taking business



During the past generations, a few changes have been made to the century farm property. Jim and Peggy had the summer kitchen transformed into a garage. Shortly after the first Groff family purchased the property, an additional house was built, which is where their son Dennis and his family now live.



Family togetherness is important to the Groffs, who are grateful for the opportunity to work together in caring for the 106,000 layers.

courses instead of ag courses at school.

His dad said, "Home is a place to learn farming and school is a place to learn from books."

Jim is both optimistic and pessimistic about farming trends. "We have a great opportunity to farm, but I fear rules and regulations of environmental laws in years to come," he said.

"We should use the best conservation practices and be concerned about the environment, but additional costs of conforming to government regulations are not easy to pass on to consumer. We need lawmakers who understand where farming is coming from and problems we are up against. Farmers are not in control."

The Groffs are disturbed that in the last few years, special interest groups get more attention than groups with a balanced view toward agriculture.

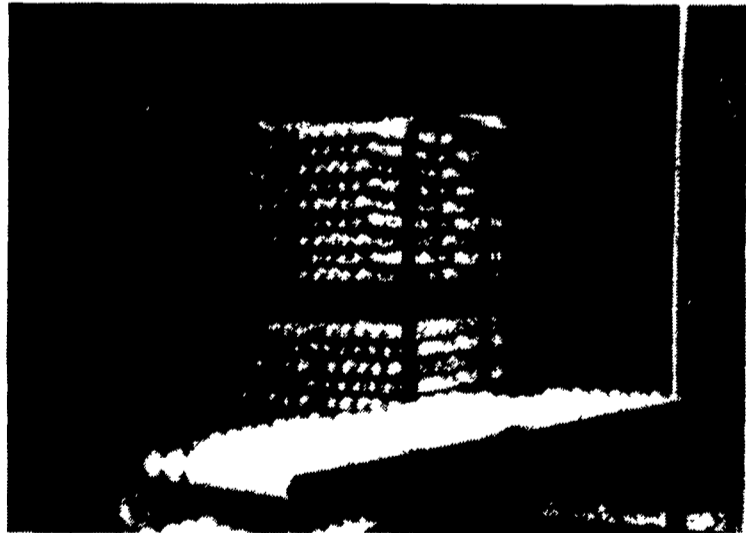
"We need to strike a happy medium in environmental issues," Jim said.

The Groffs are grateful that they live in a rural area that is ag friendly.

Other than attending Strasburg Mennonite Church, the Groffs prefer to spend their free time at home.

"We consider ourselves homebodies. We are not meeting persons," Peggy said.

"I want to see the farm stay in the family and pass through the generations," Jim said, "but it's far more important that the children have that desire."



Dennis, who is in partnership with his dad, is involved with the poultry operation, the field work, and the family's custom combining business.



Groff Valley Farm has many neat white buildings trimmed in green that stand behind the family's two homes.

"You chose farming not for the money, but as a way of life, a place to bring up the family, and where everyone can work together."

Homestead Notes