

Kreiders' Family Farm Expands To 25 Farms

The Lord's, The Bank's And Ours

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

MANHEIM (Lancaster Co.) —

Two hundred years is a long time to keep a farm in the family. For the Kreiders of Manheim, that accomplishment is a time to look back in appreciation of their roots and a time to plan for the future.

The Manheim farm and its 102 acres were deeded to Christian Hershey in 1792. The farm almost did not remain in the family when it was sold over public auction in 1934.

Noah Kreider Jr. recalled the scenario surrounding those years. The country was in the Depression. His parents had been married about eight years and were farming a 57-acre farm in Bird in Hand. When his mother prompted his dad to buy the Manheim farm, his father's response was: what with? His mother said, "We have nothing to lose."

Noah Kreider Sr., agreed and purchased the property for \$12,000.

"That was not considered cheap at that time, and Grandfather didn't think my dad could make it," Noah Jr. said.

But right timing and his father's aggressiveness in turning a hog house into a place for 1,000 layer hens and converting an area above the garage into raising 1,000 chicks enabled the couple to pay off the mortgage within two years.

In those beginning years, the Kreiders also milked 10 to 20 cows by hand, but were one of the first families in the area to buy a milking machine.

They also were the first in the area to purchase a tractor with rubber tires.

Noah Jr. recalls that people predicted, "That will never work. The radiator is too small and the rubber tires pack the soil too much."

Steers and eight acres of tobacco were added to the family's enterprises and, by 1939, Noah Sr. decided to rent a neighboring 120-acre farm.

During World War II, farmers could not buy new equipment and it was difficult to farm 220 acres with only two tractors. In 1946, the Kreiders purchased a neighboring 137-acre farm that sold for \$32,000 at a public auction.

The buildings were worn out and the neighbors thought his dad was foolish to spend so much for acreage, but by then Kreider was making money in potatoes. Hucksters purchased the potatoes to resell. The next year, Kreider planted 80 acres in potatoes, which needed to be harvested by hand and marketed through potato brokers.

Noah Jr. and his older brother Richard worked hard on the farm. The boys remember that their father got them out of grade school whenever the truck came and needed to be loaded with potatoes.

To young boys, this was not seen as hard work but as excitement.

It was not that the elder Kreider did not think his sons' education was unimportant. In fact, he paid to send Noah Jr. to town school because he thought he would receive a better education. When Noah Jr. said that he would like to play sports in high school, his father said, "Fine. If you want to go out for sports, we will cut down on the work at home."

But the boys liked the new tractors, trucks, and cars that accompanied the success of their father's farming enterprises. They decided



From left, Richard, Noah Jr. and sons, Ron and Jim Kreider, gather in front of the Manheim farm that has been in the

family for 200 years. From this one farm, the Kreiders farming operation, restaurants, and dairy stores have grown to include 25 farms.

they would rather forgo sports and work on the farm.

The following year, the Kreiders purchased the farm that they had rented.

Noah Jr. said that his parents had been reluctant to purchase that farm because they thought: we have only two sons and we already have two farms. We don't need anymore.

But the sons encouraged their parents to buy the third farm with the promise that they would stick by them.

The brothers converted a chicken house for 2,000 broilers, which was an FFA project. That was before the time of live television footage but radio station WGAL came out and cut a live record in the Kreider chicken house.

The brothers soon graduated from high school and worked full time in the business. The brothers and their father formed a partnership in 1956.

The sons built a broiler house for 16,000 chickens — considered a big amount then but nothing compared with the 1½ million layers the Kreiders now have.

Although it sounds as if the business was a constant booming success, Noah Jr. said they had their setbacks.

One happened when Noah Jr. and his brother decided to build a potato warehouse beneath the broiler house so that potatoes could be held and sold for higher market prices out of season. When the building was three-fourths finished, it collapsed. There was no insurance. It was time to harvest potatoes and no place to store them and no equipment with which to harvest them.

The family managed to rebuild the warehouse, but the potatoes rotted and the broilers got sick.

Noah Jr. remembers the anguished questions his family asked each other: "Why did we do this? Why didn't we just buy another farm?"

For a few years, the family did not expand their operations because, Noah Jr. explained, "Once you lose, you don't take as big of gamble."

They started irrigating the potato crop during the late '50s.

In 1958, they suffered another setback when they lost money invested in potato futures.

Despite the setback, the business continued to grow as dairy, beef, and poultry operations were expanded. New facilities were built. And more farms were added. "Sometimes we really could not afford to buy farms, but it worked out because the seller would contact us and offer to work something out," Noah Jr. said.

"We never intended to become as big as we are. We always tried to seek the Lord's direction and pray about major decisions," he said.

He quoted the verse from the Bible, "You have not because you ask not." Sometimes God's answers seem clear and other times not clear. We learned not to act until it was clear."

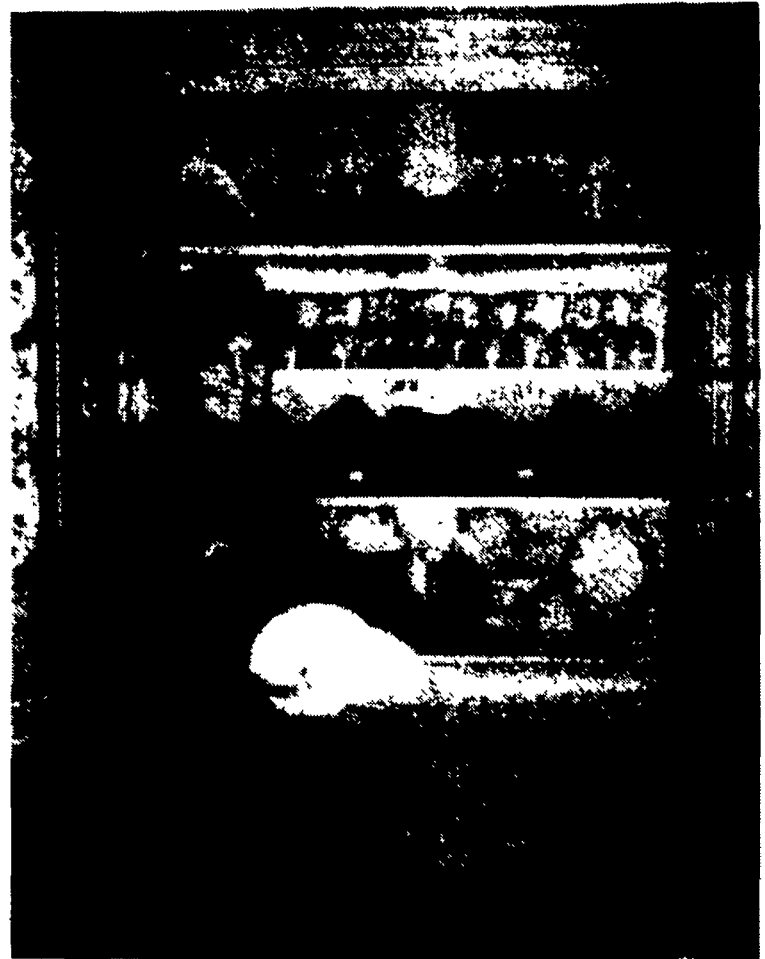
During these years, the sons made more of the business-related decisions while Noah Sr. became heavily involved in community affairs. He was a board member of the local bank, was one of the original directors to plan the building of Philhaven Hospital to treat those with psychiatric problems, and was active in many farm organizations. Noah Sr. passed away in 1982, and his wife Mary in July 1993.

When the Kreiders expanded the dairy to 102 cows in 1964, they thought that they would never want to expand larger. But in 1972, they began to market their own milk when they built their own milk processing plant and opened up a dairy store. The demand for milk and their own brand ice cream increased. After gradual expansion, they now milk 1,000 cows.

Another store combined with a restaurant was built in 1979 and later expanded to seat 240 in addition to a banquet room. Three more restaurants, one in Hershey, one in Lebanon, and one in Centerville were added.

As independent poultry producers, the Kreiders increased their poultry operation to 500,000 layers in Manheim, a half million layers

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Of the 1792 farmhouse, Pauline Kreider said the story is told that a group of troublemakers from Harrisburg massacred a number of Indians in the Manheim area. An elderly Indian couple sought refuge at the farmstead and were hid in the arch cellar. After danger passed, the couple continued living on the property and eventually a small house was built for them.

Homestead Notes