

# Five Generations Carry Grain Dust In The Blood

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BRODBECKS (York Co.) —

In some ways, not much has changed at the G.S. Snyder and Son Feed Mill.

Every day, the sound of grain being ground into feed echoes off the mill's solid, sturdy walls. Supplies like rodent bait and tomato dust line the shelves in the office. Trains pass by just a few yards from the mill's front steps, the engines' whistles periodically piercing the quiet of this placid rural village.

And, as they have for five decades, farmers stop by to order feed, to deliver grain, and to trade good-natured jibes with owner Gordon Snyder.

Snyder joined his father, Paul, in operating the Brodbecks landmark in January, 1946, after returning home from a three-year stint with the Air Corps during World War II. He is the fourth generation of family millers at the site, and grew up as he says, "with grain dust in my blood."

"I used to ride with the salesmen when I was a kid," he relates of his appreciation of getting out and meeting with the mill's customers.

Emanuel Heindel opened a sawmill business on the site in 1864, later diversifying into grinding flour and grain with the water-powered mill. In 1890, following a heavy storm, Heindel walked up to the train tracks to check a dam for the mill's water impoundment and was killed by an oncoming train. His son-in-law, Titus Snyder stepped in to keep the mill running, continuing the flour grinding business and expanding into sales of feeds and byproducts. Succeeding Titus in operating the mill was his son Paul.

Less than two years after Gordon joined his father in running the family mill, Paul died, leaving Gordon, his wife Romaine, and their four children to carry on the Snyder feed firm tradition.

"A lot of things have changed since then," chuckles Snyder, reminiscing about the rapid progress in agriculture. One giant step toward technology came when electricity replaced water for powering the mill.

Though it was difficult to obtain trucks following the war, the mill did manage to acquire a vehicle for deliveries. Before long, three customer routes were being run weekly, delivering to farmers bags of the custom mixes they had ordered for their livestock and poultry uses. While Snyder's feed and commodity purchases were once delivered to them strictly by rail, that, too, changed as trucks became a more cost effective hauling system.

"The feed business was starting to get a little more sophisticated," says Snyder. "Forage was a real focus then; and now we're again seeing an increased emphasis on forages and grazing."

Rather than develop his own brand of feed mix, Snyder has handled a line that has sold as various brands over the years, as firms have bought, sold and merged. When he began his career at the mill, the brand name was Larro, later changing to Ful-O-Pep. Then came Eshelman, Wayne, Beacon; now G.S. Snyder and Son handles Nutrena feeds.

"We were young and ambitious back in those days," relates Snyder of a move in the 1950s toward diversification. They began offering broiler raising on contracts,

with the mill supplying the feed and guaranteeing a price for the growers. Later, houses for raising pullets for laying operations were added, working closely with the Lancaster County poultry firm of Hubbard Farms. At peak production, Snyder's contract pullet operation includes about 140,000 birds.

"Then the kids started to leave for college and I lost my help," Snyder quips. The couple's four children were a vital part of the poultry team, helping to vaccinate and debeak the young birds, then returning to the houses to help catch and load when flocks were marketed.

A grain dryer and bins were added to the facility in the 1960s, with grain bank services for the mill's customers and an increasing trend toward more bulk handling of commodities. Today, about 70 percent of the mill's business is in bulk, with dairy feeds the primarily volume product, and lesser amounts of beef and horse feed.

"We work more today on 'focus' rations, coordinating, and customizing feeds to the farmers' forages. We have nutritionists that help us in balancing our customers' specific needs," he explains.

Just as feed ration balancing has become more scientific and specialized, the handling of farm supplies by smaller mills is, in Snyder's description "a gone business." Instead, many of his customers now purchase their livestock medications and supplies from route operators or mail order, where bulk buying offers more competitive pricing. Seeds and fertilizers are also mainly purchased by farmers in bulk volumes.

And if the feed business is changing, Snyder is quick to point out that agriculture itself is in constant flux.

"The small farmers are going out," Snyder says, recalling the days when a herd of 10 dairy cows was considered big and every farm raised a little of everything. "Those remaining are becoming more market-oriented, more technical, more detailed, more specialized. Farming is a big business, not just a way of life anymore.

"And there aren't as many young farmers," adds Romaine.

Total number of mill customers, however, is holding. A steady flow of suburbanites moving onto small acreages in southwestern York County, tending a few horses or sheep or goats, continues to bring new faces into the Brodbecks landmark.

One of the most dramatic and rapid changes Gordon Snyder has seen is the rapid escalation of commodity prices over the last several months.

"I've never seen anything this drastic," he states. "These prices are created by cheap American dollars. Corn is up 74 percent over what it was last year. Barley has more than doubled. I think these prices are going to hold. If we have a dry year, I don't know what farmers will do for feed."

In a telling price comparison, Gordon and Romaine Snyder pulled out some of their 1947 feed and grain invoices. Dairy feed, 24 percent protein, sold for \$91.30 per ton. Cottonseed meal was \$52.90/T. Chick builder was \$5.45 per hundred pounds. For a ton of 3-12-6 corn fertilizer, farmers paid \$41, minus a possible discount. Oats were \$1.35 per hundred, or about 45-cents per bushel. Wheat was \$2.17 per



The cozy, old office of the G.S. Snyder and Son feed mill is a favorite spot for trading stories between long-time friends and feed customers. From left are Donald "Bud" Sprengle, five-year-old Katie Sprengle and owner Gordon Snyder.



A local landmark, the historic feed company at Brodbecks is now operated by the fourth and fifth generations of the founding family of saw and grain millers.

bushel. And if you heated with coal, your bill was \$10.85 for every ton shoveled into your furnace.

And, though ag prices and trends have greatly changed, one agriculture basic has not, according to Gordon Snyder.

"Farm people haven't changed — they're still the best people on earth to do business with," he says with a wide smile. "With what farmers have had to deal with over

the years, you'd think they'd be the grouchiest people around. But they're not; they're optimists."

In 1979, a fifth-generation Snyder "came home" to the Brodbecks feed mill. Karles Snyder, who had "helped as a kid and liked it," left his accounting job to fill a vacancy at the mill. Karles quips that he continued to help during busy periods even while working elsewhere following college, so he really never left.

Earlier this year, despite extremely bad weather, nearly 150 of his long-time customers and friends turned out for a 50th anniversary celebration at the York County 4-H Center. They shared memories, pored over old bills and photographs and presented the Snyders with some hand-made commemorative gifts.

"I like this business, and I like the people. Otherwise, I wouldn't be in it," affirms Snyder.

## Save With Credit Cards

RUTGERS, N.J. — There are certain areas regarding credit card usage that many consumers are in the dark about. Understanding them will help keep more money in your pocket than in the credit card company's coffers.

- Interest rates and annual fees are often negotiable. The credit card companies know you are bombarded with lots of other offers. This information can be used to your advantage. If you are paying 16-18% interest, ask them to lower your rate. If you don't ask, you don't get. Many will lower your rate 2% or more. If they say no, there are plenty of low-rate or no-annual-fee to take your business.

- If your credit card is lost or stolen you are liable for the first \$50 of unauthorized use — as long as you report the disputed charges within 60 days in writing. Read

over your monthly statements to monitor for charges that may not be yours.

- You may think you have a 25 day grace period — maybe not. If you do not pay the entire bill in full, your grace period is gone. You'll pay interest on new purchases from the day of purchase.

- Less is more when it comes to credit cards. Too many cards can actually hurt your credit record. A gasoline and two major credit cards should be plenty.

- When calculating interest credit cards are not all alike. Most credit cards use the average daily balance method (Discover Card is one) which calculates interest by adding the average daily balances for the current and previous months. (This is very expensive). If you use a card using this method, pay off the bill in full each month. The most consumer

friendly method for calculating interest is the adjusted daily balance method which deducts your payments before calculating fees.

- If you only pay the minimum required, you go deeper into debt. Pay as much as you can and as early in the billing cycle if you are not paying in full to help lower finance costs.

- The use of a "convenience" check is not equal to using your credit card. Credit card companies often will send you convenience checks to encourage you to write against your credit line, particularly at holiday time. Usually, interest accrues immediately (no grace period) and the interest charge is based on the cash-advance rate which is most often at a rate higher than what is charged on purchases.