



The Hoover family stands in front of two of the four farms and additional rented ground that they farm in the Denver area. Eugene Hoover calls himself a city farmer because much of his land borders housing developments and

edges the town of Denver. Despite a hectic work load, Hoover said that he is learning to slow down and enjoy his family, Bonnie and children Cody, 8; Jody, 5; and Cole, 21 months.

Work Is No Longer #1 Priority For This Farmer Workaholic Learns New Perspective On Living

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DENVER (Lancaster Co.) —

"When you're six feet under, what you did on earth doesn't matter—except family," said Eugene Hoover.

Coming from a self-professed workaholic with a never-ending workload of farming 500 acres and finishing 1,000 head of cattle, that statement clarifies Hoover's attempt to spend more time enjoying his family.

Hoover balanced 5-year-old Jody on one knee as he scooped up 21-month-old Cole.

"I just love this," Hoover said as he hugged his children. "I used to be so busy with my own life, I didn't take time to pay attention to the family. I put my wife through many hard years."

His wife Bonnie returned his smile and said, "I'm very proud of my husband. He's changed completely. He's open and caring. He talks about his feelings. He spends time with the children and shows

affection. We're closer because of what we've been through."

The catalyst for bringing about a change wasn't less work for Hoover, but a change of perspective brought about by a nervous breakdown.

Hoover is very candid in discussing his breakdown and recovery. "It was the best thing that ever happen to me. I learned how to handle stress, to stop and take breaks. Instead of looking to the future and being overwhelmed, I take one day at a time," he said.

Looking back, Hoover believes the symptoms were evident of a massive breakdown long before it happened, but he was too busy to recognize it.

Of that time, five years ago, Hoover said, "I had a complete nervous breakdown. My fuel tank was empty. I couldn't even get out of bed."

He also lost about 30 pounds, a substantial amount for a man his size.

Hoover said that like many with

agricultural roots, he grew up in a farm family with a strong work ethic. "I felt good when I worked and guilty when I rested," he said.

The problem was that Hoover's body couldn't maintain the seven day round-the-clock work that he thought necessary.

He was too busy to talk with his wife, too busy to play with the children, and too busy to enjoy life.

After admittance to a psychiatric hospital, Hoover was forced to take a hard look at his life.

"For 30 years I was taught one way, then total strangers told me to do things differently," Hoover said of the psychological help he received through his hospitalization at Philhaven Hospital.

That's when Hoover realized that he loved his wife and children but his actions were driving them apart. He began to express his thoughts to his wife. He became generous in giving hugs and attention to his children.

"It amazes me. The more I changed, the more my family seemed to change."

Since Hoover's breakdown, the couple had a son Cole, who is 21 months old.

"I'm able to see the youngest grow up like I've never saw the others," Hoover said of his two oldest children, Cody, 8, and Jody, 5. When Hoover marvels at the precociousness of his toddler, he is amazed when his wife tells him that the two older children accomplished the same feats at that stage of life.

He was too busy to notice. "My attitude was 'take care of me first and you next.'"

But there was never time to care for anyone else because the crops needed to be planted or harvested, equipment repaired, or cattle tended.

"Now it's my family first," Hoover said.

That doesn't mean Hoover has



Bonnie and the children often accompany Hoover to one of the four farms. Hoover built this chuck wagon to haul the paper egg cartons and newsprint that he picks up locally and uses for bedding.

become lax in his farm work. He still farms as much acreage as before and cares for as much stock.

He'd prefer to cut back a bit, but said, "Renting the place — it's an estate — comes as a package. To make ends meet, the barns must be full."

Hoover rents what local people know as Triple G Farms in Denver. Hoover had been farm manager for Triple G before he was given the option to lease it four years ago.

Although Hoover rents addi-

tional land, he said, "We can't grow enough to feed all the animals, but try to have enough forages, which include silage, hay, shelled corn, and fodder."

All the manure from fattening 900 steers and 100 heifers can be used on the land, which is another incentive for boarding animals.

Hoover has one full-time hired man and several seasonal workers. In addition, his brother and dad

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Eight-year-old Cody holds a chicken that he is raising on the back porch. He loves all kinds of animals. His sister Jody and brother Cole share his appreciation for animals.

HOMESTEAD NOTES