

# Tall, Presidential Tasks Await These Farmers

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— "This was a chance, I thought, to prove that careful husbandry could restore land to its original fertility . . . Although we haven't achieved the greatest success . . . there are enough lush fields to assure me that I shall leave the place better than I found it."

That quote by the late President Dwight D. Eisenhower in "At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends" indicates how much he cared for the land.

It was to his farm in Gettysburg — the only place he and his wife, Mamie, ever called home — that the couple went after the 1961 inauguration of John F. Kennedy. The Eisenhowers had bought

the small dairy farm just outside Gettysburg in 1950 from Allen Redding with the hopes of retiring to it, but they were to travel many more trails before that became a reality.

Today there are three farm outside of Gettysburg — all part of the Eisenhower legacy left to the people of the United States — where the land is still tilled and cattle raised.

The job falls to Wilbur and Dolores Martin of Martin Acres of Gettysburg and their sons Sam and Eric Martin.

The Martins recently won the 1997 Adams County Chesapeake Bay Clean Water Farm Award.

Wilbur and Dolores moved to their farm of 104 acres in 1969 after he had worked as a steel

fabricator which involved a lot of overtime, in addition to farming a smaller property at Two Taverns.

He said, "I figured if I'm going to kill myself, I'm going to do it as my own boss."

Wilbur explained that the family rented the Eisenhower Farms when the federal government "Advertised it and we had to go in and apply for it just like you do a job. I understand when I first applied for it there were 30 some farmers that applied to get the farm and I was selected. They gave me only one farm to start with and I had that for a year."

He's not sure exactly what year he added the Eisenhower Farm to his operation, but knows it was in the early 1980s.

He was later asked to take over the other two farms. There are 489 acres he now rents on the three farms, including 150 acres of pasture.

But then a glitch in the way the farms were rented cropped up and they were put out for bid.

"You know how farmers talk. 'This guy's bidding on it and This guy's bidding on it' so by that time we got into the deer problem. I was hesitant to even bid on it because they were eating up all the profits . . . so I got to fighting it with the help of a lot of neighbors and we had a meeting with all of the big people out of Philadelphia. There must have been 30 people there from the Department of Interior and, of course, we (farmers) sat back along the wall like a bunch of bumps on a log."

But, he finally spoke up and told them if they didn't do something about the deer problem there would be no farming on the Eisenhower Farms. "We couldn't keep putting our money into it . . . then the next year they gave it to me rent-free just so we'd farm it until



From left, Eric Martin and brother Sam Martin work Martin Acres in Adams County along with their father Wilbur Martin. They also farm several other properties, including the three Eisenhower Farms. Anyone who has stood on the tower on the Gettysburg Battlefield has looked over the Eisenhower Farms.

they decided on what to do with the deer. It was nothing to go down there and see 200 in a bunch."

The government eventually shot many of the deer — a story that made national headlines — and Wilbur said, "Last year I planted corn down there and I got

a decent crop and it looks pretty good this year too."

While Ike and Mamie lived on the main farm, he had a herd of prize-winning Black Angus.

Today, in keeping with that tradition, Wilbur must keep a herd of the same breed of cattle at the

(Turn to Page A31)

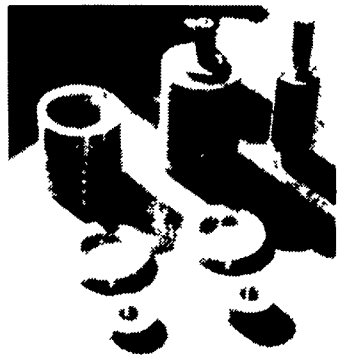


David Martin, 9, enjoys a moment with newborn kittens on his grandfather, Wilbur Martin's farm in Adams County. When school's out, David gets to spend time on the farm where his dad, Sam Martin, works.

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