

Kenyon College

Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange

Interviews

Family Farm Project

2-1-1995

Interview with Darel, Lela and Dan Hathaway

Jamie Wilson

Lela Hathaway

Darel Hathaway

Dan Hathaway

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital.kenyon.edu/ffp_interviews

Recommended Citation

Wilson, Jamie; Hathaway, Lela; Hathaway, Darel; and Hathaway, Dan, "Interview with Darel, Lela and Dan Hathaway" (1995). *Interviews*. 26.

https://digital.kenyon.edu/ffp_interviews/26

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Family Farm Project at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Interviews by an authorized administrator of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact noltj@kenyon.edu.

**Family Farm Project
Interview with Lela, Darel, and Dan
Hathaway**

**Interviewer: Jamie Wilson
February 1, 1995; 10:00-11:30 am**

In the farmhouse kitchen.

**JW: OK, really easy question to start with.
How long have you and your family been here
in Knox County?**

**Darel: My family's been here since the original
deed on some of this land. I don't know for
sure what date that is, but it goes back a long
time.**

**JW: And that starts with the farm you were
talking about up the street...**

**Darel: A lot of those folks were actively
involved in agriculture here in the county.**

JW: And you're all from Knox County then?

Lela: Yes.

Darel: Been here all our lives.

Lela: And our families also.

JW: And when did the farm here start?

**Darel: Lela and I started this operation after I
got out of high school in 1958...and its
continued from then on.**

**JW: Any of you, can you describe the operation
here? You were calling it a partnership earlier.
How's it work?**

**Dan: We are a partnership of parents and a
brother—brother Kim and myself that own and
operate approximately 4000 acres of ground
within mainly Knox County. Basic crop
farming—corn, soybeans, and wheat. Our**

livestock interests include feeder pig business, to finish, which runs approximately 1500 to 1600 head a year and we'll turn about 250 head of cattle a year.

JW: So you two grew up on farms, right? (indicating Lela and Darel)

Lela and Darel: Yes.

JW: Did any of you go to ag school in college or either of you sons?

Darel: None of us have taken a four year course, but we have been actively involved in many short courses and courses through the period of time.

JW: Through the Extension office and things like that?

Darel: Well, Extension and the University and even out of state.

JW: How did your farm get as big as it is now?

Darel: Well, I guess we've just kind of been in a growth mode ever since we started. Basically, when the boys came back here in the late seventies, early eighties we expanded and expanded very fast and have grown from that.

JW: How did you all feel about the success of the farm?

Dan: I think we've probably had to grow into each jump we've made size-wise. I think if you make a jump in acreage or livestock and I think it takes a period of time each time you do something like that to grow into it. Probably, it affects you more from a management standpoint than it does in an actual work standpoint. I think when you grow that quickly you're probably a little slow to catch up management-wise. Success-wise, I think as we have each determined our roles out here as to

who's going to handle what particular section of the operation, its become easier for us and at this point we feel, hopefully, we'll be successful each year.

JW: How do you see your farm in relation to others in the county?

Lela: Well, we have always enjoyed agriculture and when our two sons decided that they would like to farm, this is when we decided we had to make some jumps simply because when you take more families in you've got to have more profit and so this is the one reason that we have, we have grown, is because we thought we could handle more acres.

Dan: There's probably, there's many very good farms in the county. Each of them runs at a different level, for different reasons. You know, each has their own ideas and where they want to be, we like to hope and think that we're on the edge of what's going on out here and we're constantly striving to stay at the leading edge as to what goes on and we do that through continuing education and the work ethic that everyone has to strive to achieve.

JW: And that's what you plan to keep on doing?

Dan: Yes.

JW: Sounds good. What do you think the future of family farming is in the county? Do you think this trend toward agribusiness is going to continue?

Dan: I think—I'll answer. With two young children, I'll answer this one. I think that the future of family farming is, it has to come down to a situation where you have to, with profit margins narrowed, which they have been for a long time, I think it takes more work, more acres, more cows, whatever your situation is. I don't think in most cases that you can rule out outside income anymore to

help support what goes on out here. In my particular case, and all of us, with health insurance running what it is today, that's a major expense that years ago most farmers didn't have to realize. Crop insurance and those types of things that are an added expense that a generations before us didn't have to worry about complying with some of those types of expenses to help meet what they have to do every day. So I think outside income is going to become, it already is, its a basic need on some operations and if you choose not to do that then I think size and structure becomes an issue.

Darel: Well, I might add that we have many meetings here that we discuss this very subject. And we are of the opinion as a family that there is an opportunity in agriculture. We have made up our minds that we want to be a part of that opportunity, so we'll adapt and adjust to whatever it takes to continue in this business.

JW: How important do you think farming is to the Knox County community?

Dan: We right now, in the last year, have done business with over 300 different companies or businesses, maybe not all county-wide, but I know a major portion of those are within the county, so the ag, the community itself, I think, relies more heavily on agriculture, in general, than they will probably give it credit for, that goes from the local repair dealers to filling stations and everything else, so I think its very important to the local economy, I don't think there's any question to that.

JW: Do you want to talk about the Farm Bureau a little a bit?

Lela: Well, I can if you'd like to hear this.

JW: OK.

Lela: Do you have an hour?

JW: Not quite.

Lela: What would you like to know about the farm bureau?

JW: Just a little about what you do there and the general gist of the whole program.

Lela: OK, the Knox County Farm Bureau is made up of full-time farmers, part-time, and associates. Our membership are the grassroots of agriculture here in the county, we have twelve trustees, which meet once a month and they talk over...such as what projects we might become involved with and also, right now, we're working very strong on the Delco water problem here in Knox County. We support the ideas of being able to make a good living for our families and the profitability on our farms with good management and we hope through the nineties that agriculture will remain strong, we have...we are associated with Nationwide Insurance and as the population has become less and less in agriculture, less than one percent, we feel very strong about what we're doing and feel that there is a future in it. And we're continually looking for ways to help those in agriculture survive and we feel that in the nineties and on beyond, with good management, people will still be in agriculture.

JW: So the actual structure is through the local councils?

Lela: Yes, it starts with the councils. The councils send in, they have a meeting once a month and these are the farm bureau members, we have several councils in the county. We would like to have more, but everyone is very busy. A lot of the young wives are working and they do not have time for this type of thing and the information from those meetings then is sent to Columbus and is evaluated there. So, anything that is determined in the state is, does

come from the grass roots, the local people.

(Rachel Balkcom interrupts to leave.)

JW: Does the farm bureau...I really don't know that much about it...does it promote one type of farming over another or does it have anything to do with that?

Lela: No, farm bureau will promote any type of agriculture. They work very close with the state representatives and they work with people in Washington and it is probably the strongest farm organization now. With the different commodities, they have commodity meetings and actually right now we have gone with a lot of public affairs meetings on things like fencing, CAUV, and a lot of the problems that are going to effect a lot of farmers. Sometimes there are problems out there effecting agriculture which no one addresses, and this is one thing that we've tried to do is address something that is going to effect everybody. And, agriculture is very strong right now in Knox County.

JW: So a lot of the farms in the county are members?

Lela: We've have 850 plus, we're in our membership drive right now and we look to be picking up several more new members this year. You see, a lot of people think that in agriculture the larger farmers are taking over for the small. Well, this is not the case, as farms become larger there's also farms being sold which someone will come out and want to be a part time farmer, someone else will farm their place, but there will always be family farms, and they may not be doing their own farming, but they will be there on the land and so I don't really see this as a concern in agriculture.

JW: You two were talking a little earlier about the way the farms here on this road have

changed. Could you go ahead and talk about that again?

Darel: We have many times talked here on our particular road...at one point in time there probably was fourteen different, separate operations that a family depended on for their living. Today, there basically is three operations left on this road that are viable. And I guess this is part of the change that has taken place in the last thirty years and makes you wonder what change will come in the next ten or whatever number of years it is.

JW: Can you see something common about the three farms that are still here that have made them survive, or...

Darel: Well, basically its been sons that stayed on the farms. It has been well managed operations, diversified into different areas of business, I guess maybe two out of the three do the same thing, but just an overall restructuring change of what it takes to make a living out here today.

JW: The generational issue has come up on a lot of farms, whether its sons or daughters not wanting to stay on the farm, or the parents feeling guilty about leaving the farm to them, because they're not sure that they want the farm. Have you guys...you've apparently overcome that and things are going great, so what do you think...

Darel: Well, I'll answer that or try to answer it to some degree. We went through an operations review, business review here five years ago with the two boys and at that point set up the partnership and an estate plan that will so pass this down to them as well as being partners in it at the present time. And, one of our family goals is to keep our sons, grandsons actively involved in agriculture for the long haul and we see it as an opportunity, we feel very strongly that these young people have to

be able to make the money to stay out here and that seems to be one of the big issues today, is enough income to survive and to feed a family and do the things you want to do. And, we have pretty much our mind in our plan that we will adapt, change, do whatever it takes to stay in agriculture.

JW: Have you boys always wanted to stay here?

Lela: Be truthful. (laughs)

Dan: Yeah, I think in general, I think Kim always did, I think Kim was destined to come back here and farm. I went to Ohio State for a quarter down on main campus, probably due more...I was probably more athletically inclined in high school and probably didn't have a true direction set coming out of high school. When that did not work out I think it became a point where I realized that this was a good opportunity to come back here and work with these guys and its been a good working relationship. We have our bad days, but yet, we both as brothers, or as brothers and sons, have been fortunate that they've been willing to pass the buck a little bit here and give us some leeway to grow and expand and raise families and have ideas, and be free thinkers, I guess, to what goes on here. We haven't just been puppets underneath the shelter here. I think that's one of the biggest issues, I think if that would have happened, I probably wouldn't have come back here, but we've been able to expand, use our ideas, and go forward with this thing and I guess when that was able to happen the fact of working and having a job with some freedom and be able to work hard and see the results for your work was I think enticing to both of us. So...

JW: Do you all have anything else you want to say? Or think about today?

Lela: Well, the way I look at agriculture today,

I think there's great opportunities for it. It takes a determination. These farm boys that want to stay home and stay in agriculture they've got to realize, if they're gonna get married, then they've got to make enough money that everyone will have a good living, not only the parents, but the kids will and you cannot raise kids the way it used to be, on nothing. And, so, I think the parents no matter what operation it is, if they really want their kids to come back and farm and keep things going, they've got to look at it as a business and they've got to make enough money in order for everyone to have a good living. And, the son might sacrifice for a while, but once he has a family, they need to be able to live like everyone else and I think this has been a big factor in sons going to town to work, because the money was not there at home, but it is a good living, and a good place to be.

Dan: I think you've gotta make a commitment, I think, to it, from the standpoint...I think we've tried to make a commitment here from an education standpoint where none of us are gonna graduate from a four year college, but there are ways out here to find the education in the field that we're in that allows each of us to hopefully help make decisions around here that are correct and will lead us down the right road. I think its gone so far beyond how many cows there are in the barn and how many acres of grain, that its no longer...working hard's just not enough. And I think that we've made that decision here that we're gonna work and we're gonna work smart and if we can't come out here and make the same money that, you know, that by working this hard that we can make somewhere else, we're not going to kid ourselves, and I think that's our driving influence behind what we're gonna do, that we're gonna work and we're gonna market this stuff and we're gonna make the decisions that have to be made, and if we're not correcting them, then obviously we're not so tied to this that we won't see through it.