
Interviews

Family Farm Project

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Interview with John Norris on his Farm

Courtney Coughlin

John Norris

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John Norris on his farm in Gambier.
February 26, 1995
By Courtney Coughlin

I am at John Norris' farm he is taking me and his three children in the truck to show me around the different fields. The children controlled the microphone most of the time, so it might be kind of annoying in place to listen to this tape. For the most part, I transcribed usable pieces of information. If you want children's voices, this is a good tape to listen to, but not the most coherent. Side B has some brief biographical information that was recorded in his home on the same day.

CC: Courtney Coughlin
JN: John Norris
CN: Carrie Norris
LN: Lisa Norris
RN: Rita Norris

000 kids playing with the tape recorder and singing in it.

CC: How many acres do you farm, off hand, do you have any idea?

JN: I got a hundred or so acres here on Kenyon, and there's 60 acres at Herb White's, that would be 160 and I farm the ground that Dad and I own.

CC: Right, that is enough to keep you busy for sure.

JN: So, I mostly have corn and soy beans here on Kenyon, because they want pretty good money for their rent and I can't afford to raise oats or anything like that. You just can't afford to do it.

CC: IF a field does well on corn, will it do well on soy beans? Is it good land is just good land or is some land better for other things?

JN: Most of it does pretty good. With no till you can have fields like these with no problem. They have had good luck with no till beans, I haven't done any, but...I farm that little field. I don't know if I can get up here or not.

CC: What is your process (034)

JN: You would have to spray it before you plant it and then just come in and plant the beans. This section right here, we don't do

anything with, I got a pasture on back in here. We have cattle on every summer.

CC: It is really pretty up here.

JN: Oh, it is really pretty up here in the fall when the leaves are changing over there on that hill and over here, and back here. Have you ever been up here?

CC: NO.

JN: Some of the students come up in here. There is a pond back in here. See they bought this farm from [Alva]Hall and Hall kept 40 acres here. They come to me and wanted me to turn this ground back here into pasture and I said no thanks, it was all grown up and the fence wasn't no good. I said, my cattle get out and get on that hillside. And then they said they would get new fence if I built it. We went to building fence, then we had a dozer come in and punch a hole in this wood and so I got 50 acres of pasture right here. We build fence all the way around that. That is kind of a deal, they are talking about not being allowed to have cattle in a pasture like that with, where you have a run. There is a pond up there that has a run going down through that way. And there is a run that comes past Alvie Hall's. That is where they get their water and, but you are not allowed to, in the future you might not be allowed to have cattle in an open spring. Pollution you know. I don't know if they will do that or not, but if they do that, I would just have to give that pasture there up. Because fencing all that off would be...it would be real hard to do. Kind of hard to get the grain off this hill. We keep the truck at the bottom and use a grain cart. It is a big wagon with an auger on it. (070)

CC: When do you start planting?

JN: We plant oats as soon as we can get the fields. It will probably be about a month. Corn is the 15th of April.

[kids chatter]

(094)

JN: You have never been back in here?

CC: NO.

LN: that is the haunted house Daddy.

JN: Courtney could buy that house and remodel it, couldn't she.

cC: I don't know about that.

JN: You would be back in the middle of nowhere, wouldn't you.

[104-108]

JN: Now you know where you are at.

CC: Now, I do know where I am at.

JN: UP in Gambier. what do they do with that building there?

CC: It is called the Beta Temple. It is where a fraternity has their meetings and their parties. It is basically wasted space.

JN: this is the way you go to your school.[to Steven]

JN: this some of kenyon's ground that I farm. And Alvie Hall lives up this road, and I farm some for him. Do you know him? He is part of this project...(138) All my ground is kind of spread out which makes it kind of bad. A lot of little fields, it all belongs to Kenyon, so.

CC: Is it hard to move around your machinery?

JN: It is kind of hard to move it around. Yea. It takes time and it is costly and dangerous on the road. [noises from kids] Some people say I am not going to spend any money or do anything, and they [Kenyon] spend some money.

[can't hear the conversation over the kids singing and chattering 155-177]

CC: I thought you were too young to be liking boys.

LN: I am not, I am 12.

pretty annoying to listen to stopped at about 180 on side A

SIDE B

000

JN: I have 60-70 cows, and they are brood cows. I feed those calves

out and then I buy about that many more. Sell about 120 fat cattle every year. Last year I had a little over 300 acres of field corn and some soy beans, and I usually have 50-60 acres of wheat and we sell the wheat and use the straw for bedding for the cattle. And then about 30-40 acres of oats and we feed the oats, the oats is all fed here and last year, the field corn, there was about 200 acres of field corn and I feed about approximately, maybe half of that, not quite half of that, then I had about a hundred acres of popcorn and that is all sold, that is a cash crop and wheat is a cash crop. Of course, we bale the straw, most of it, and either sell it or use most of it for bedding and about 35 acres of oats, we feed all the oats and usually put the straw back on the field or bale that if we need it. And then have a hundred or so acres of hay. And that is all fed to the cattle here. So, really my only cash crops are soy beans, popcorn, some field corn, and wheat. And then the cattle.

CC: And then the cattle, after you sell them off, you buy about the same number. Is that yearly?

JN: yea, I try to do it yearly. Whenever the market is going, they are kind of a little higher now and they are supposed to come down this summer. I might wait a little bit before I buy some more, and maybe they will cheapen up a little bit. So, that is about, we hire a little bit of seasonal help like the shelling corn, so really about 5-600 acres of crops and with hay and oats and wheat and all that. And then we have other land we have to mow like that up there for Kenyon, and we have a lot of pasture, I am trying to think how many acres pasture. 50 up in Gambier. And 20 or 30 across the road that I showed you. There is about 30 acres down at Bladensburg. And then I don't know how much is here. There must be 60 or 80 acres here. Something like that here. Close to a hundred acres of pasture here that needs mowed. Ought to be mowed twice, you know, so.

CC: Is it hard to find help?

JN: It is kind of hard to find help. I have got pretty good help now. I got a pretty good bunch of fellas, one is the custodian that was here that night. He gets off at 3:00 and he can be here at 4:00. And it is kind of late to make hay, but like to haul corn, we can do that after dark with the lights on. But for hay, that is one reason I went to those round bales, I just can't get help. Everybody works, most of my fellas work in jobs in town, and come down in their time off. (045)

CC: And then is there anything that you or your family is involved, other groups.

JN: We are in Farm Bureau.

CC: Farm Bureau

JN: What else is there Rita, I am a trustee for Harrison Township, and we belong to the Church. I was on this bike path committee for a couple years, and I guess that is it... I was on the board for Producers. where I sell the livestock. I am on the board on that. The kids are in 4-H and things at Church and that is about it I guess.

CC: And what is the name of your Church again?

JN: First Church of the Nazarene in Mount Vernon.

CC: Good, as part of the booklet, I am going to have to write a little bio sketch.

JN: I see. [he recaps0 [060]

CC: Is there anything else that you would like me to include in your bio sketch? It is only going to be about 150 words, I am mostly just going to introduce you and what kind of farm you have.

JN: It is basically a grain and livestock farm.

CC: How long have you been on this land.

JN: Well, I grew up in this house so I took over here in about 1976.

CC: then is this where your father grew up?

JN: No, my Dad grew where she was telling you in that log cabin. My grandad he would buy a lot of land and he would come up here in the winter, and then him and my grandad moved up here one year and he didn't like it. And my Dad has been here since he was 19. he took over when he was 19. I took over in '76, I was 22 or something like that. 24 or something like that when I started in here. you know I am looking into expand my cattle operation, I put up that, I might add on to that barn a little bit and I bought a bigger corn planter, a 6 row corn planter. It is over at Tim's, so instead of having 4 row, I will have 6 row this year. I am kind of looking for, especially since they are going to put that biology thing, I am looking for a little extra to work on this year. That is about all I can tell you, you know. You asked me what my fears was, [089] was one things, when you hire somebody to help you and that one girl came along,

you know, if they get hurt, I don't want to see anyone get hurt in the first place, but the liability certainly is a question. Even this bicycle path, if somebody says, there is a cute little calf or something and they go across the fence to see it, even though they are trespassing, and the mother comes down to protect the calf and bumps him, they could technically I guess sue me for that. I guess, what some people say. I don't know, you know. But that would be kind of iffy, but that is a concern, you know. I have cattle up here in Gambier, and across the road, and up here, and in Bladesburg and if some of them would get out and someone would hit one and kill somebody that would certainly be, I certainly can't be everywhere all at once to watch them. So, that is kind of a concern too. So, I guess that is about all I can think of.

END OF INTERVIEW, SIDE B [109]