

Keeping Farmland in the Family While Changing Commodities

John Rohrbach and his family from Longswamp Township have been in production agriculture on their preserved farm of 160 acres since 1948. That is when Wilson and Carrie Rohrbach (John's grandparents) bought the dairy farm. They milked 35 cows until 1975. Growing tomatoes, sugar beets and pumpkins were part of field production. The pumpkins were sold to Mrs. Smith's pies. Starting with five acres, production increased to 100 acres after they built their own harvester.

Roy and Teresa (John's parents) took over the farm in 1981 by first renting and then purchasing it in 1991. They began the swine operation in 1990 by raising feeder pigs until they reached market weight. John and wife, Amy, who is a teacher at Brandywine Heights Middle School, took over in 2009. Swine is still a major part of the farm business. In 2017, management of the swine operation was taken over by Taylor and Keegan (John's daughter and son-in-law). To improve genetics, they began using Artificial Insemination. In addition to swine, the farm operation grows beef steers, most sold directly to consumers. The rest are marketed through Leesport Farmers Market. Crops grown include: corn for feed for the animals, wheat and soybean which is sold to Kurtz Grain Hauling and hay for the steers. John stated that the most challenging aspect of farming, other than weather, is "The ups and downs of the grain and livestock markets and the cost of products to keep the daily production of the farm running."

The farm has developed a unique marketing tool for their swine segment which is their "Longswamp Traveling Hog" do-it-yourself hog roasting operation. John and his father, Roy, started the operations by building 8 roasters on wheels that could be transported to any location. The farm now has 3 roasters available for rent. This operation is now managed by the youngest generation, Taylor and Keegan, through which any size hog can be purchased and a roaster rented for picnics and gatherings. They even have charcoal you can purchase to use in the roaster. The Rohrbachs have ventured into this added activity gaining more income by marketing directly to the consumer. This trend is a welcome opportunity as end consumers know where and how their food is produced, helping that individual farmer and keeping the money in the local community.

John is proud to be in production agriculture saying, "I am able to help feed the world and share my love of agriculture with my daughter, Taylor, and grandson, 2 year old Laken. I am happy to have a generation (my daughter and her family) to whom I can pass the family farm."

When asked about the future of the agriculture industry in Berks, John mentions, "More land needs to be preserved for agricultural usage and local programs need to be implemented to get the younger generations introduced and interested in the world of agriculture."

