

Going on Sixth Generations

Mark Balthaser is following in his family's one hundredth thirty year tradition. At Northkill Creek Farms, the twenty-one year old has committed his career and financial future to farming. The construction of two meat bird buildings was a lifetime decision and he realizes the importance of the financial requirements placed on his shoulders. But being a farmer is in his genes as he starts the sixth generation in the Balthaser clan. When asked why he has taken this step, Mark said, "I feel this is an opportunity to continue the family farm, do something I enjoy and have a future".

Samuel Balthaser, Mark's great-great-grandfather, purchased the present farm in 1888. The farm was passed on and is now owned by his father Randy and mother Tracey for 14 years. The present farm operation is made up of 3 parcels of 280 preserved acres. Crops of corn, soybeans, alfalfa, grass hay, rye and grazing pasture are grown for the 100 herd of Holstein and Brown Swiss dairy animals. The milk is sold to Guers Dairy in Pottsville, a family fluid milk processor, with their products found in many venues in the northern Berks.

In 2002, Wilson decided to honor his family tradition by dedicating the first farm to permanent agriculture production and sold the agriculture conservation easements. The easements on the other two farms were sold in 2002. Wilson stated that "farming the land was his whole life and preserving it for future generations was the right thing to do."

Meat birds are a new commodity to the Balthasers allowing Mark to have his own business while helping with the cows and crops when needed. Mark contracts with Bell & Evans, in Fredicksburg. Mark owns the buildings, provides the labor, electricity. Bell & Evans provides the day old chicks, the feed, and management advice. The farm supports local businesses by purchasing most farm inputs from farm supply business within 50 miles of the farm. Farmer Boy Ag in Myerstown completed construction of the new facilities.

Today's challenges are labor and high input costs, but the Balthasers believe in the future of agriculture. One reason is that fifteen year old daughter Hannah has dairy interests. Her homebred brown Swiss cow has won 2 national junior shows. They hope that consumers realize where their food comes from and how hard farmers work to provide it.