

Fall 2020

# Backbone

STORIES OF **Kids** IN AGRICULTURE

## Horsing around

Platte County sisters  
love growing up  
on family farm

## Looking ahead

Cass County teen  
focused on his future

And more stories from Colfax,  
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TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN, FREMONT TRIBUNE

Ty Petersen, far right, competes during the goat show in July at the Dodge County Fair in Scribner.

## Backbone

STORIES OF PEOPLE IN AGRICULTURE

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Backbone is a Lee Enterprises publication produced by The Columbus Telegram, The Fremont Tribune, Schuyler Sun, David City Banner-Press and Wahoo Newspaper.

# Youth will help push agriculture forward

Society often glamorizes celebrities, pro-athletes, superheroes and wealthy businessmen and women. It's



MATT LINDBERG

not often you hear the same of farming and others in agriculture, yet they're very important to our well-being.

Our mission with launching "Backbone" was to highlight and share the stories of people in agriculture throughout Eastern Nebraska. Sure, there are many dedicated men and women who have committed their lives to what is a very-hard lifestyle. But, who will carry the torch?

In Eastern Nebraska, the future looks bright. A young man with ties to Saunders and Cass counties has learned from many role models and is already showing promise on the family farm and beyond.

A group of sisters in Platte County are constantly working hard on their farm and appear to have aspirations to make a difference in the industry by working with animals.

In Dodge County, there's a sixth-generation farm kid who has no fear of hard work and putting in what's necessary to keep agriculture thriving.

They may not be fighting bad guys like Marvel's "The Avengers," but youth committed to agriculture in Nebraska are undoubtedly saving the world in their own right. The

younger generation has a chance to make a difference by growing enough food to feed the world, help be part of the solution to world hunger and stop malnutrition. It can also push the economy forward, among other things. Sounds heroic to me.

In this issue, you'll read about some of the youth from throughout Eastern Nebraska that should provide hope for a bright future when it comes to Nebraska ag.

"Agriculture is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals & happiness."—Thomas Jefferson

Matt Lindberg is the managing editor of The Columbus Telegram, Schuyler Sun and David City Banner-Press. He oversees the news production of 'Backbone.'



# BROTHERS IN FARMS

Brainard boys living their best lives in agriculture

STORY & PHOTOS BY MOLLY HUNTER, The Banner-Press



Brothers Justin Bongers, left, and Jason Bongers, right, pick through their pumpkin patch. Justin started the pumpkins in pots and eventually planted them at the edge of a cornfield near his house.



**W**hen COVID-19 sent kids across the nation home in March, Justin and Jason Bongers seized the opportunity to undertake farm improvement projects.

But that's just like them, according to their mother, Sandy Bongers.

The Bongers live on a farm just west of Brainard, a town of 330 located in Butler County. The boys' father, Jerry Bongers, cares for cattle and raises corn, soybeans, wheat and hay to feed them. Sandy teaches family and consumer science at East Butler High School. Meanwhile, Justin, 14, and Jason, 12, are both in middle school at East Butler. They don't have a PlayStation, an X-Box or a family computer, and the TV in the Bongers' residence only gets about 15 channels.

"Weather and the news," Sandy laughed, leaning against her kitchen counter one evening in late July.

When the boys aren't in school or at basketball or cross country practice, there's not much else to do but stay outside and be productive. And on a farm, there's always work to be done.

Since the pandemic moved school online in the spring, Justin and Jason have fixed up a Jon boat and a hay bale trailer,

grown a pumpkin patch and vegetable garden, tended to their chicken coup, started a goldfish-selling business and still found time to help their dad on the farm and bring a pen of three broilers to compete in 4-H and FFA (Future Farmers of America) events at the Butler County Fair.

Justin also spent six weeks of the summer roguing to make some money. He already has some ideas about how to spend it, too – he's thinking he might buy a few cows for him and his brother to start raising.

"I'll be 14 in August and it's something to play around with, maybe. If you don't like it, you end up selling them. If you like it, maybe you grow a little bigger or keep it small," Justin said.

Sandy said she admires her sons' initiative.

"When you're 13-years-old and you're thinking of investing in some cows, I think that's kind of impressive," Sandy said. "It's like, 'Well, I'm going to be 14. What am I doing? I should have cows.'"

Justin only shrugged.

"You've got to start somewhere," he said.

The boys are keenly aware of the issues facing farmers today and into the future.

Please see **BROTHERS**, Page 6



MOLLY HUNTER, THE COLUMBUS TELEGRAM

Justin Bongers, left, and Jason Bongers, right, stand several yards in front of a cornfield near their house in Brainard. The two are committed to working hard on their family farm.



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# Brothers

From 5

“It’s becoming harder and harder if someone wants to farm that (has) never had farming in their family. It’s hard for them to get started,” Jason said.

“First of all you need land, and then you have to have the expensive machinery to farm it,” Justin added.

“It’s not like you just decide to farm,” Jason finished.

Like most farmers, the Bongers boys are developing an eye for the long view.

For example, Sandy said, many people are putting up chicken houses in the area. Although Justin and Jason won’t graduate high school for several more years, they are already thinking about what that means for them.

Demand is high right now, Justin said, but that may change.

“In five years you’ll know how that went – who stuck with it, the condition of those houses, was it worth that investment,” Sandy said.

The boys have a lot of admiration for farming – and especially for their dad.

“I love helping my dad and making him happy. That’s one of my favorite things,” Justin said.

Otherwise, Justin said his favorite farm jobs are working cattle and making an electric fence to keep them contained.

“I like when you work cattle and you get to the pasture and you just open it and they just all walk out into the green grass,” Jason said, smiling.

They don’t know, yet, if they will go into farming like their dad. But, they said, the skills they’re acquiring now will carry over into whatever profession they pursue. A strong work ethic will certainly serve them well no matter what they decide to do.

“I will be anxious to see if they want to farm – if they want to do something different. I don’t know, it’s hard to say. There’s no pressure here from Jerry and me. It’s whatever they want to do,” Sandy said.

For now, at least, Justin and Jason do take a lot of pride in farming.

“Making no money and yet feeding the world. Why we do it, no idea. But we do it. Somebody has to,” Justin said.

Molly Hunter is a reporter for The Banner-Press. Reach her via email at [molly.hunter@lee.net](mailto:molly.hunter@lee.net).



Laying hens scratch in the dirt inside their pen at the Bongers’ home near Brainard. Brothers Justin and Jason Bongers mix ground-up oyster shells into the hens’ food to make their eggshells thicker.



Justin Bongers, left, watches as his brother, Jason Bongers, right, uses a net to catch a goldfish from the pool in their backyard. Their neighbor’s fishing pond flooded and ran over into the Bongers’ farm pond in 2019, introducing goldfish to the Bongers’ pond.



Justin Bongers holds a big goldfish in his hands before returning it to the pool in his backyard. A flood introduced goldfish to the Bongers’ farm pond last year. Jason and his brother, Justin Bongers, netted some of the goldfish out of the pond and have kept some in their backyard pool, where they set up a sump pump to aerate the water.

**“ Making no money and yet feeding the world. Why we do it, no idea. But we do it. Somebody has to.”**

**Justin Bongers**



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**Landon Sokol**  
Transfer Student, Ag Engineering

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COLFAX COUNTY

# HOME FARM TWINS

Schuyler sisters relish life in agriculture together

STORY & PHOTOS BY CAROLYN KOMATSOULIS, SCHUYLER SUN



Allison and Addison Vavricek pose in a soybean field.



Addison and Allison Vavricek walked into a building with sheep, including one wearing a Hawaiian-shirt-patterned blanket. Later, they trudged through a soybean field on their family farm in Schuyler as the sun was setting on an early August evening.

The twins became the fourth generation on the land when they were born 13 years ago, not counting the family dog, Mack, who arrived around the same time.

Now, as they've started the eighth grade and are finally the oldest at their school, they're gearing up for sports seasons and their father said they might help out with harvest this year.

Plus, Allison was getting sheep ready for this year's state fair and two other major shows, American Royal in Kansas City and Aksarben Stock Show in Grand Island.

"We basically just (have) grown up on the farm with our dad, helping him do all of his jobs. We actually started working for our dad during quarantine. He actually started paying us," Allison said.

The twins sat next to each other on a Zoom call inside their house for an interview in August.

"Dad just taught us to work the lawnmower over quarantine," Addison added. "It was kind of hard at first and it was kind of swerving, but after we did it a couple of times, our lines got straighter."

Allison said it was a little scary at first. There are some drop-offs in their yard and it is pretty easy to spin out, but they eventually got the hang of it.

They mostly do irrigating and bean-walking, the latter of which their dad said is one of his favorite jobs to have them do. They also take farmers to fields.

"One of our bigger jobs in the spring is we were cleaning out the windbreak in three different places," Allison said.

But the two are involved in agriculture beyond the family farm.

"You can start showing in 4-H when you're 8-years-old, so that's when I started," Allison said. "We didn't actually start doing well until last year because we found some sheep breeders and now they help us out all the time."

A good sheep, said Allison, must have a lot of butt muscle, leg wool, its shoulder and hips need to line up, and it has to have a good chest, among other criteria. But in the end, all judges have different opinions.

"I want to go to the University of

Please see **TWINS**, Page 10



CAROLYN KOMATSOUKIS  
PHOTOS, SCHUYLER SUN

**ABOVE:** Three generations pose together, with the family dog Mack.

**BOTTOM:** Allison Vavricek walks one of her show sheep.

“It’s pretty magical to have a front-row seat to their bond. It’s pretty magical.”

Cori Vavricek,  
Mother





Allison and Addison Vavricek pose next to a John Deere tractor on the family Farm on Aug. 19.

## Twins

From 9

Wyoming and be on the livestock judging team and eventually be a judge,” Allison said. “That would be my goal, but obviously plans change.”

Addison used to show sheep but decided to focus more on sports. Now, it’s just Allison and her older sister who show sheep.

Allison also started welding (melting metals together) when she began 4-H after her dad and grandfather helped teach her. Although at first she was afraid of the sparks, since then she’s made an owl, a truck, a hot air balloon, and a big metal wheel with a V on it to put on the farm.

“I’ve gotten grand champion every year,” Allison said.

For 4-H, Addison does a lot of wood-working, which her dad and grandfather also helped teach her.

“I redid this nightstand and painted it and sanded it and I make signs sometimes,” Addison said.

Farming isn’t the only place the two excel. They both play basketball, soccer, volleyball, track and do competitive dance. Their father taught them the way of the farm and is their basketball coach.



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“He wants us to practice (basketball) more,” Allison said.

How do they manage to fit all this in? They go to school, they practice after school and they work with sheep after that.

“In the summer, it’s mostly just working for dad and we find the time to practice our sports when we’re not working,” Allison said. “We usually have to wake up early and go to bed pretty early.”

Addison sleeps in a little later than Allison. She wakes up at 7 or 8 as compared to 6 a.m.

Addison also likes to read, and over quarantine has been reading a lot. One of her favorite books is “The Hunger Games.”

In the book, children from various districts compete to the death for the Capitol and its tyrannical leader President Snow. Katniss, the heroine from District 12, is torn between two boys, her best friend Gale and the baker’s son, Peeta. Allison thinks Katniss should have chosen Gale. Addison said Peeta.

Two of the sheep are actually named Gale and Peeta.

“The best one’s name is Gale because Gale is better,” said Allison, as her sister shook her head.

Family is important to them, and they said it’s special to be a twin.

“It’s easier because you just have someone who can always be with you and you’re not as nervous for things,” Addison said.

On the farm that late August evening, the twins rode on a four-wheeler together, operated and helped explain how machinery works together.

“I can’t imagine not having that because I would be so nervous to do stuff by myself,” Allison added. “We just can tell each other everything and we say the same things and sometimes think the same things.”

It’s also easier to practice with another person, the two said, but sometimes it can be easier to fight if they’re together a lot. It’s fun having a best friend all the time, Allison said.

“It’s pretty amazing to have a front-row seat to their bond,” said Cori, their mother. “It’s pretty magical.”

They switch their desks or sweatshirts at school sometimes and their teachers don’t notice, but it didn’t work on their parents the one time they tried.

“They’re pretty different to us,” Cori said.

Next year, the two will be able to do Future Farmers of America.

“I’m excited to take all the classes and kind of find out what I’m good at and what we want to do in college,” Allison said.

Although the pandemic has changed a lot, the two were able to take a break from sports and just focus on helping their dad.

“It was a nice break to have and to spend



The twins drive on the side of Road 13 in Schuyler.



The Vavriceks’ show sheep in their pens, all wearing blankets. Some have animal-print patterns.

**“ He (Dad) teaches us to be hardworking. You have to work for everything you have and (know) not everything’s going to get handed to you.”**

**Allison Vavricek**

time with our family,” Addison said.

Their dad always turns stuff into a life lesson, the twins said, and taught them agriculture is important.

“He teaches us to be hardworking,” Allison said. “You have to work for everything you have and (know) not everything’s going to get handed to you.”

Carolyn Komatsoulis is a reporter for the Schuyler Sun. Reach her via email at carolyn.komatsoulis@lee.net.



# Nebraskans already love their hometowns – we need to show them the potential

**T**he siren song of the big city is quiet in Greater Nebraska. Youth today overwhelmingly prefer the connections and comforts of smaller communities to the grind of major metropolises, according to Nebraska Community Foundation's (NCF) recent survey of over 1,300 high school students.

In January 2020, NCF began working with the University of Nebraska-Omaha's Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR)



JEFF YOST

to co-create the Nebraska Youth Survey with the purpose of examining young people's perceptions and perspectives of their Greater Nebraska hometowns. Students in the Axtell, McCook, Columbus, Diller, Shickley, Ainsworth, Stuart and Norfolk communities responded to the online survey between January and May 2020.

Their responses resoundingly indicated a preference for the types of communities rural Nebraska offers in abundance. Many

students (44%) said their ideal community would have a small population like their hometowns, and 31% preferred medium-sized communities like Grand Island. Fewer than 5% answered that their ideal community would be as large as Chicago.

Fortunately for these youth, there's no shortage of smaller, connected communities in Nebraska. From the lush banks of the Missouri River to the ponderosa pine forests of the Panhandle, Nebraska's hometowns are poised for success. The NCF network alone boasts more than 250 communities with a common goal of unleashing local assets, inspiring charitable giving and connecting ambitious people to work together toward an even greater Nebraska. Especially encouraging is that these youth don't appear averse to returning to their hometowns. In fact, most of them – 83% – said they didn't think there was a negative stigma associated with returning to or staying in their current community. That's a fantastic development for local leaders who have

been hard at work on people attraction efforts, but we cannot afford to rest on our laurels.

While the negative stigma of returning home appears to be fading, the survey suggests other reasons young Nebraskans may choose to relocate once they begin to consider settling down. Primarily, a perceived lack of desirable employment opportunities may be students' deciding factor on whether they return home. More than 500 students said a career opportunity elsewhere would be the main reason they would not live in their hometown, and many indicated a belief that opportunities are lacking in their home places. Respondents said the most plentiful employment opportunities in their communities were in agriculture, education and manufacturing. That doesn't align with the desired careers of many students, which include jobs in the medical field; firefighter or police roles; health science or biotech; or arts, broadcasting and journalism.

To CPAR Director Josie Gatti Schafer,

the survey's findings "suggest a need to better connect students and schools to the variety of job opportunities that exist in small towns across Nebraska as well as continue to grow and diversify Nebraska's economy."

The pandemic has made it clear that the notions of what we've traditionally considered a workplace are beginning to change, if they haven't already. In the past six months, many companies have made it possible for – and even encouraged – employees to work remotely in perpetuity, whether they're located down the street or across the country. In this new work environment, a perceived lack of local employment opportunities becomes less disadvantageous. Youth may no longer need to choose between a promising career and the community they love.

Further, the work of NCF volunteers across the state continues to build communities with potential to attract and

Please see **YOST**, Page 13

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# U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Perdue hears UNL plug for USDA research presence

DON WALTON  
Lincoln Journal Star

Nebraska public officials celebrated the vital importance of Nebraska agriculture with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue in early September, and University of Nebraska-Lincoln Chancellor Ronnie Green slipped in a plug for a long-sought U.S. Department of Agriculture research presence at Innovation Campus.

The university is “a world leader in agriculture,” Green told Perdue toward the end of a panel discussion, and could provide “a key partnership” on ag research issues.

Gov. Pete Ricketts and Rep. Jeff Fortenberry participated in the event held on the growing campus where a swarm of construction workers were building a new six-story hotel and three-story office building across the street.

A USDA research center has been a goal since inception of the new campus.

In 2010, former Sen. Ben Nelson had championed location of a \$60 million USDA research center as a vital catalyst and anchor for the new campus, but his effort collapsed when Congress eliminated the use of earmarks to fund projects and that subsequently slowed development of the research campus.

University of Nebraska President Ted Carter welcomed Per-



GWYNETH ROBERTS, JOURNAL STAR

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue (in pink shirt) and Rep. Jeff Fortenberry look at products available in The Mercato retail store at Great Plains Beef on North 84th Street on a September day.

due to the campus “at a critical time for the nation” when it is battling the coronavirus pandemic.

Perdue said universities help provide “a path forward to sustainable agriculture” as agriculture tackles what he described as “an obligation to feed a growing

world.”

Agriculture also can team up with universities to help “make food more safe, more healthy, more nutritious,” he said.

It’s “the heartbeat of Nebraska,” Ricketts told Perdue, and agriculture’s health is vital “if we are to grow our state.”

Fortenberry, the Lincoln congressman who is ranking Republican member of the House Appropriations Committee’s subcommittee on agriculture and rural development, said Nebraska farmers understand and perform their role in providing “stewardship of the land.”

## Poll: Rural Nebraskans remain optimistic

LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR

Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, low commodity prices and the ongoing impact of last year’s flooding, most rural Nebraskans have a positive outlook on their current situations and futures.

The 2020 Nebraska Rural Poll, which is administered by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Department of Agricultural Economics, found that 53% of rural residents think they are better off now than they were five years ago. Additionally, 50% of respondents said they believe they will be better off in 10 years.

Optimism has only decreased slightly since 2019, when 56% of respondents said they were better off now than they were five years ago and 52% of respondents said they believe they will be better off in 10 years.

Additionally, most rural Nebraskans have faith in the power of their communities. In the poll, 63% of respondents said they strongly disagree or disagree that their community is powerless to control its own future.

The survey was mailed to 7,000 rural Nebraska households just after many schools and offices shut down because of the pandemic, according to a news release.

The annual poll is the largest survey of rural Nebraskans’ opinions on quality of life and policy issues.

Reach the writer at [lstephens@journalstar.com](mailto:lstephens@journalstar.com) or 402-473-7241.

## Yost

From 12

nourish new economic opportunities. Volunteers are turning their hometowns into places where residents thrive, cultivating an environment open to

change and growth. With such a foundation in place, opportunities have the potential to increase significantly in coming years as employers begin to realize the benefits of doing business in Greater Nebraska.

Youth today might not see this potential without the

guidance of adults in their community. Whenever we can, we should remind our younger neighbors that their hometowns have the capacity to nourish the opportunities they desire, and the traits they love – like safety, family and connectedness – are already

in place. There’s more than enough room for our youth to continue to call their hometowns home.

Jeff Yost is president and CEO of Nebraska Community Foundation. Feel free to contact him at [jef-fyost@nebcommfound.org](mailto:jef-fyost@nebcommfound.org).



# Sokol loves ag life

MATT LINDBERG  
The Columbus Telegram

Columbus native Landon Sokol's fascination with agriculture is no surprise to anyone who knows him – it's literally in his blood.

Sokol, a 2018 graduate of Scotus Central Catholic, is the grandson of the late Don Sokol and great-grandson of the late Leo Sokol, the men who founded Columbus' own Irrigation Pump Company many decades ago. He didn't know them personally; however, one of his most prized possessions is a framed 1946 blueprint of one of their Duncan single-cylinder manure loaders.

The framed item also features some photos of his late relatives. Irrigation Pump was well known for manufacturing its original Duncan Lifetime Spinner, considered to be a top-notch spinner, among many other things.

"I'm still fascinated by what they did," Sokol said of his grandfather and great-

grandfather. "It's just neat to see where great-grandpa Leo and grandpa Don came from. I look at (the blueprint and photos) and think, 'yeah, I could be doing this at one point in my life.'"

Sokol was born and raised in the city limits of Columbus, attending St. Anthony's and later Scotus throughout his youth. Despite where he lived, the great outdoors and agriculture were a big part of his life. He was a football player and did wrestling and track while in high school, but when he wasn't competing or in the classroom, he spent significant time hunting and fishing.

He also had plenty of opportunities to help some of his dad's farming friends in nearby spots like Duncan, particularly when he was in high school.

"Growing up, my dad had friends who had farms. I was always happy to do something ag-related," he said. "I always would welcome the chance to come and help them during the summer. I liked helping



MATT LINDBERG, THE COLUMBUS TELEGRAM

Landon Sokol shows off a gift he received from family: A framed copy of a 1946 blueprint of his grandfather and great-grandfather's Duncan single cylinder manure loader and several photos of his late relatives.

out during the fall harvest. I would help my dad's friend in Duncan get the equipment ready and make sure he was squared away for harvest. I would be there in a moment's notice."

When it came time to make a decision regarding his future after graduating high school in May 2018, Sokol admittedly thought seriously about automotive engineering. But his heart told him agricul-

ture-engineering was his path.

"Being in the ag-field, I just felt at home," he said.

Sokol is pursuing an associate degree at Central Community College-Columbus, a place he said has provided him a lot of opportunities to grow and learn. There, he's also a member of Project GPS, also known as Growing Pathways to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). Project GPS is a scholarship-awarding program sponsored by the National Science Foundation that targets high-achieving students with financial needs and who represent underserved populations in the STEM fields.

"He's a really dependable, reliable, really outstanding young man," said one of his professors, Lauren Gillespie, a CCC-Columbus instructor of biology and program director for Project GPS.

Gillespie said Sokol has vastly matured throughout the program since he became a part of it, calling him a high-achiever and quiet learner.

His advice for young people is simple: Don't give up.

"When you're going through hard times, different trials and tribulations stay strong through those and everything will turn out all right," he assured.



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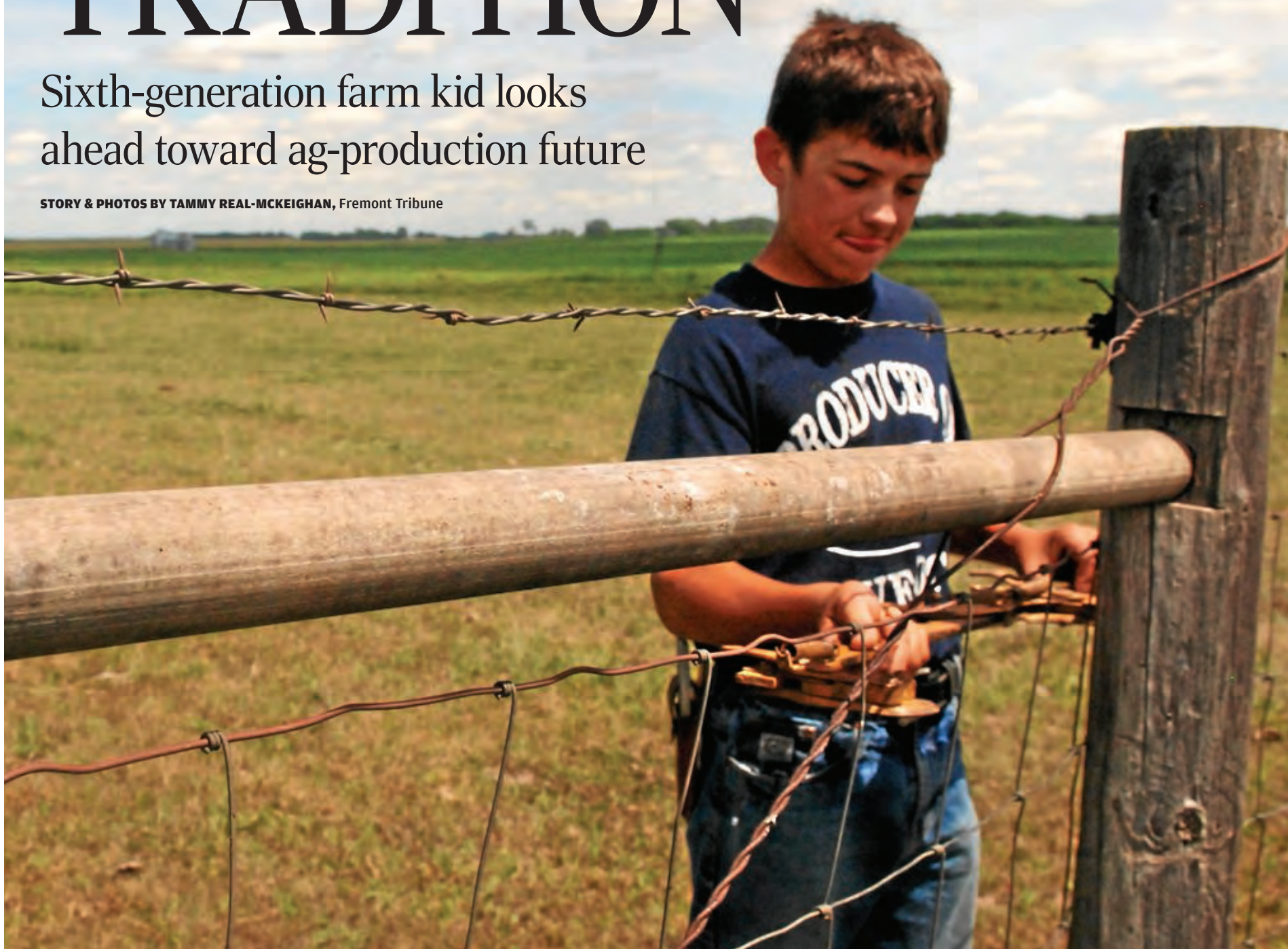
**DODGE COUNTY**

# Carrying on TRADITION

Sixth-generation farm kid looks  
ahead toward ag-production future

**STORY & PHOTOS BY TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN, Fremont Tribune**

Ty Petersen of rural Fremont stays busy on his family's farm. His dad, Nick, says if the teen notices something—like a fence—that needs to be fixed, he does it.







Ty Petersen feeds cattle on his family's farm in rural Fremont in August.

It is a Tuesday afternoon and Ty Petersen is outside using a cordless drill to disassemble a wooden chair.

While other teens might be texting friends or playing video games, Ty contentedly works on a project for his mom, Nicki.

He thinks video games are boring.

He'd rather be doing something on the rural Fremont farm, where he and his family live.

As school starts, Ty looks ahead to football, wrestling and basketball at Logan View Public Schools, where he's an eighth-grader. This will be his first year in FFA, known to old-timers as the Future Farmers of America.

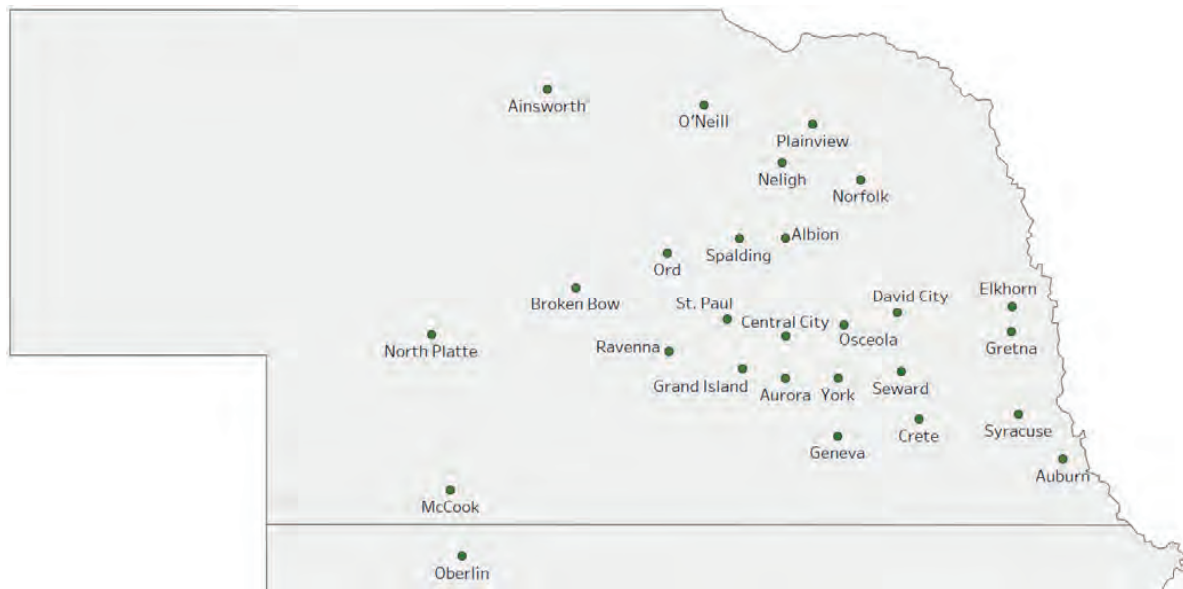
Ty is the sixth generation in a family of farmers and plans to continue farming after college.

At 14, he knows college is on the horizon, but he's been training for his future for years.

"He's been with me since he was 5 years old," his dad, Nick, said, noting that Ty began shadowing his father at a young age. "He's been with me whenever I've done anything. Now he just does it on his own."

Ty's days are different than his counterparts in the city.

On a typical summer day, he and his



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Ty Petersen takes apart a chair in August on his family's farm in rural Fremont. The area teen enjoys fixing and building items on the farm.

10-year-old sister, Emerson, are up by 6 a.m. Their mom is already at work. She works in a hatchery processing baby chicks that will go to area farms.

Ty and Emerson each have two calves. They walk each one a mile a day before feeding the animals, which they then wash and blow dry.

Next, the siblings exercise and wash their goats, which are fed three times a day.

Nick Petersen smiles as he watches Ty and Emerson lead the goats down a long grassy ditch next to a dusty farm lane. They let the animals loose and in what Petersen calls "The Running of the Goats" follow them back up the ditch toward the barn.

Exercising the goats enhances their muscle tone, Petersen explained.

There are other chores.

If their dad needs assistance, they help him reset irrigation. Ty shuts off irrigation gates, while his dad opens others down the row. Emerson is learning about irrigation, but for now, she likes to play in the water.

Ty helps his dad with corn and bean row crop rotation. He helps bale hay and alfalfa and is starting to rake hay.

"We started teaching him how to run the bean planter this year," his dad said.

That's a 32-row soybean planter.

Ty helps his dad hang cattle panels and is learning to weld.



Ty Petersen of rural Fremont waits to go into the show ring in July during the Dodge County Fair in Scribner.

He's been learning about the day-to-day care of livestock, too.

The year Ty was born, his dad started a registered herd of Simmental cattle. They raise and sell the animals.

"I've always grown up with Simmentals, but never went down the registered side of it before ... I wanted the kids to have the opportunity to show and be associated with it," Nick Petersen said.

They started showing cattle and then ventured into goats.

"Emerson's the one who started us in goats," Petersen said.

Petersen believes it's good for kids to show animals so they learn work ethic and

understand responsibility.

"What they've learned is: They've got to take care of them (the animals). They can't take care of themselves," Petersen said.

He's appreciated how his kids have assumed responsibility.

"They've done a great job this year," Petersen said. "With their mom going back to work and their dad being busy, they've taken care of their own animals."

Emerson took the year off as far as showing animals.

Ty has done well in the show ring.

He competed in the Simmental Junior

Please see **PETERSON**, Page 18



# Peterson

From 17

National Classic in Brookings, South Dakota. He placed fifth overall in the cattle-men's quiz.

He was 19th overall junior out of 220 kids in the bred-own division—these are youth who raise and show an animal as opposed to purchasing one.

Ty also placed 12th overall, over 170 other calves. In the junior nationals, there were 764 animals exhibited and 463 kids participated.

"He does well," his dad said.

Ty did well at the Dodge County Fair in Scribner, too. He won supreme breeding doe and supreme market goat.

Sitting near the family's pickup after the show, Ty and his family relaxed for a moment.

"He's been very lucky and successful ever since he started showing. He's had his days where it hasn't gone his way, but today was a good day," his dad said.

Someday, Ty says he'd like to win supreme champion breeding heifer and supreme market goat at the Nebraska State Fair.

Petersen has seen how involved his son is getting in showing animals.

"But he really likes to tear stuff apart," Peterson said.

Ty agreed.

"I've started doing it with toy tractors and then I started to build stuff with wood and tear wood apart," he said.

When he was 12, Ty built a 3-foot by 2-foot toy barn.

"He loves to build. That comes from his mom's side," Petersen said. "He likes to take stuff and improve it."

The Petersens take part in jackpot shows with the goats. It's a one-day show. Competitors show animals off the back of a vehicle. City dwellers might compare it to tailgating.

Ty cut an old cattle panel and put it on the front of a portable pen in the back of the pickup. The panel is easier to attach feeders to and provides good airflow for the animals.

On the farm, Ty helps his dad build fencing to keep in the cattle.

"If the cows get out, instead of calling dad, he'll figure out where in the fence they got out and he will try and fix the fence," his mom said.

His dad agreed.

"Whenever he sees an issue, he'll just go and fix it, create something," Petersen said.

Ty's mom tells how he gets out the skid loader and helps put bags of feed or wood chips on it.



Rural Fremont Ty Petersen calmly concentrates as he washes off a goat in August on his family's farm.



Ty Petersen blows dust off of one of the animals on his family's farm rural Fremont farm, which is about 5 miles north of Ames. At back, his sister, Emerson, cleans up.

"We use a skid loader for everything," she said.

Petersen pointed out that for being 14 and 10 years old, his kids—and most farm kids like them—do a lot more than most youth their age.

But the Petersen kids come from a long line of farmers.

Their ancestors came from Denmark.

It started with Neils Petersen who came in 1890 and settled in the Fremont area. He started the farmstead here in 1898 and the house was built in 1901.

Ty and his family live on the original homestead, purchased from his dad's great-uncle.

After he came from Denmark, Neils Petersen had three sons: Pete, George and Morris.

Other history sounds like something that could be recorded inside a family Bible.

Morris had three sons, Rolland, Gerald, Buster, and a daughter, Dolores.

Gerald is Nick Petersen's great-grandfather.

Ty's middle name is Gerald.

Gerald's son, Jerry, went to school until the eighth grade. The next year, he'd ride his Indian brand motorcycle about 40 miles to Irvington to milk cows. He'd stay there during the week and come home on weekends.

Jerry and his wife, Norma, became the parents of Roger, who is Nick's dad and Ty and Emerson's grandpa.

Generations of Petersens have seen changes in farming.

Most recently, Nick has watched how technology has changed.

"When I graduated from high school in 1999 is right when cell phones were coming out and now I can sit here and control my pivots with my cell," Petersen said.

Petersen has seen the growth in technology with tractors—as far as placing the seed in the perfect spot every time. It's become so precise since the time when he was a kid.

Kids like Ty are growing up with technology.

"He can run it better than his grandpa sometimes," Petersen said, smiling.

Ty looks forward to harvest.

"Harvest season is probably one of my favorite seasons—how the trees are changing colors and to see how the crops did," Ty said.

Sitting near the family's pickup after the fair, Ty says he likes living on a farm and getting to do things not everybody gets to do.

He plans to go to college for an ag-based job and wants to stay on the farm.

"That's what I've grown up around and what I like to do," Ty said.

Should a kid growing up in the city ask Ty what he likes about the farm, he has a straightforward answer:

"If you don't like to work, you wouldn't want to live on a farm," he said.

But days later, Ty smiled as he takes apart the old chair at his house. Birds chirp under blue, cloud-streaked clouds. A row of pine trees that form a long-ago-planted windbreak stand as sentries near the house. A field of soybeans grows near the family home on a farm that has seen generations of Petersens.

And it is here that Ty plans to continue the tradition.



PLATTE COUNTY

# FARM GIRLS FOR LIFE

Platte County sisters enjoy horses, hard work and learning life lessons

STORY & PHOTOS BY HANNAH SCHRODT, The Columbus Telegram



Pictured are four of the Klug sisters of rural Columbus, Emma, Whitney, Madilyn and Olivia.





Olivia Klug, left, and her sister Madilyn ride horses at their family's farm. The farm has been in the Klug family since the 1950s.

Driving past the home of Andrew and Lynette Klug in rural Columbus, passersby are likely to see any of the couple's teenage daughters doing what they love: Riding horses. Having grown up on a farm/cattle feedlot in Platte County, the four Klug sisters would, naturally, be accustomed to the outdoors and agriculture. What's most notable about them, though, is their passion for horses and animals in general.

Olivia, 18; Whitney, 15; Emma, 13 (almost 14); and Madilyn, 11, each learned to ride a horse starting around age 8. They're all, of course, involved in 4-H for beef and horses. There is a fifth Klug sister who is 25-years-old and resides in Texas.

The younger sisters have four horses – Honey, Riley, Trigger and Leroy.

"I love horses. They teach you a lot, a lot about responsibility," Olivia said. "And then through the industries that you get involved in and (the) associations, (you) learn all about leadership and communication skills."

Olivia noted that she and her younger sisters are responsible for taking care of the horses, as well as the other animals.

"We have to feed horses, dogs, cats," Emma added. "We clean out their pens every once in a while. We ride our horses almost every day. We wash them sometimes."

As the Klugs have their own feedlot, the teens also help wash and work with the calves, Whitney said. Washing also includes blowdrying the animals and brushing them out.

"I like to show cattle when we have them," Whitney said. "We don't have them right now, but we'll get some here in the next couple months."

Living and working on a farm also means pitching in often.

Please see **SISTERS**, Page 22



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Emma Klug feeds Trigger during a recent day at her family's farm and cattle feedlot in rural Columbus.





Madilyn Klug brushes Riley after desaddling and preparing the horse for the end of the day.

## Sisters

From 20

"I help Dad and Grandpa when they need help," Whitney said, noting that their grandfather lives nearby.

As the oldest sibling still living at home, Olivia is involved with organizations besides 4-H.

"I'm currently vice president of the NRHyA, which is National Reining Horse Youth Association," Olivia said. "In NRHyA, there are five officers from all over the United States and we kind of help lead the youth center in the face of the U.S. I've been an officer for two years. I was a treasurer last year (and) then I was a delegate for two years."

According to the NRHyA's website, the organization strives to foster leadership qualities and provide opportunities for success in future career plans.

Outside of the Klug family farm, Olivia, Whitney and Emma attend Scotus Central Catholic in Columbus, where they're involved in cross country, track and the musical. Emma also plays the flute.

"I like it for the background stuff. Not (being) front and center," Whitney said about participating in musicals. "But, yeah, I love it; it's fun."

Olivia, who is in her senior year at Scotus, noted that she's scaled back on extracurricular activities to allow for more time and energy on the family's horses. She tentatively plans on attending a college outside of Nebraska and joining an equestrian team.

Madilyn attends St. Bonaventure School, also in Columbus.

"I like playing with the animals," Madilyn said, shyly. "I like riding the horses around. I like spending time outside and playing with the cats and our dog — I like to play with him, too."

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Olivia also holds a job as a COVID-19 symptom screener at Columbus Community Hospital; she works at the emergency room entrance on the weekends and at the Columbus Family YMCA during weekdays.

Olivia turned 18 a day before the interview for this story, though she didn't have a big celebration for it.

"Not a whole lot," she said. "I rode some horses and I worked then hung out with some friends."

Emma enjoys hanging out and spending time with the animals as typical teenagers do.

"I like to hang out (and) I like my all my animals," Emma said. "I love cats. I've got like about 20. And I've got our dog Cooper and my horse, Leroy."

The cats stay outdoors and shelter in a barn on the property.

"(Karen) has very, very blue eyes. They all used to have blue eyes," Emma said, informatively. "But then, when they got older, they just (changed). They love hunting, the older ones."

A few days before an August evening interview, one of Emma's cats had a litter in a bush in front of the Klugs' home.

"Usually the other cats will have them like in barns and stuff where they're being

protected," Emma explained.

The farm has been in the Klug family since the 1950s, with Andrew being the third-generation owner.

Growing up on a farm has taught his daughters to deal with both success and failure, as well as being tough while also enjoying the good times, he said. Qualities learned on the farm have been especially beneficial during the trying times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's helped them cope with the disappointment ... they lost shows on horses and cattle," Andrew said. "Olivia missed out on a full month, month-and-a-half of leadership opportunities to network and meet new people that would have helped her personally, academically (and) professionally and that was all taken away. So, I think that's helped them cope with that."

The sisters cited being in touch with agriculture daily and learning more about life than what can be taught in a classroom as reasons they enjoy living on the farm.

"We have a lot of opportunities that most people wouldn't have living in town," Olivia said.

Hannah Schrodts is the news editor of The Columbus Telegram. Reach her via email at [hannah.schrodts@lee.net](mailto:hannah.schrodts@lee.net).



Emma Klug holds one of the many barn cats living on her family's farm in rural Columbus.

  
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CASS/SAUNDERS COUNTIES

# FOCUSED ON WHAT'S AHEAD

Role models lend to  
bright future for Lambert

STORY & PHOTOS BY ELSIE STORMBERG, Wahoo Newspaper

Luke Lambert poses for a photo on his family's farm. The teen likes to see things from start to finish and thinks about not only his future, but the future of his family, farm and animals he raises.





Luke Lambert is reliable. The 15-year-old boy is the type that will change your tire, even if he doesn't know you. He's the go-to guy on his family's farm. Luke ensures his animals are taken care of, night and day. He's always willing to step up.

He likes to see things from start to finish and thinks about not only his future, but the future of his family, farm and animals he raises. Many consider him a quiet leader.

Quitting isn't an option for him.

Luke learned from example when working with members of his family like his grandfather Roger Lambert and now departed great-grandfather Keith Weston.

"They always taught me to try to do it right," Luke said. "Don't do half of it."

They are his role models.

Roger was surprised to hear that his grandson thought of him so highly.

"It never really occurred to me," he said.

Like his role models and many members of his family, Luke is a third-generation member of Cass County's Fairland Giants 4-H club as well as the Ashland-Greenwood FFA Chapter. Not only that, but he is also the president of the 4-H club, a title his grandfather Roger also held. His great-grandfather Keith was a leader of the club.

According to Roger, Luke is a huge help on Roger's roughly 300 acres of land located in the Greenwood area. Although he might misplace a few tools along the way, Roger said he can do just about any chore without issue.

"We'll miss him now that school's started," Roger said.

As a sophomore at Ashland-Greenwood High School, Luke is very familiar with early mornings and late nights. While he is heavily involved in FFA and 4-H, he is also a member of the junior varsity football team and varsity wrestling teams in which he always has a prominent crew of supporters, including his grandparents, mother, Brandi, father, Lance, and two siblings, Molly and Jack.

"We won't even see him on Saturdays once wrestling starts," Roger said.

On top of these extracurriculars, Luke also takes care of all his responsibilities on the farm, including feeding and practicing with the show calves and pigs his family raises.

According to AnnaLisa Estrela, Luke's FFA chapter director and agriculture teacher at Ashland-Greenwood High School, Luke's inclination toward agriculture is evident.

"Not only does he just love agriculture, it's going to stick with him," Estrela said.

Please see **LAMBERT**, Page 26



Luke Lambert pets one of his show pigs on his family's farm in Greenwood, Nebraska, on Thursday, Aug. 13, 2020.



Greenwood's Luke Lambert practices posing his market steer Diesel on his family's farm in Greenwood, Nebraska, on Thursday, Aug. 13, 2020.



COURTESY PHOTO

Six 4-H members pose for the cameras after winning or finishing second in the showmanship category in last Saturday's swine show at the Cass County Fair. Top row, Rylee Stohlmann, senior champion; Luke Lambert, intermediate champion; Easton Roeber, junior champion; bottom row, Morgan Mills, senior reserve champion; Grace Turner, intermediate reserve champion; Mollie Lambert, junior reserve champion.





Luke Lambert walks one of his show pigs on his family’s farm in Greenwood, Nebraska, on Thursday, Aug. 13, 2020.



Luke Lambert’s shadow is photographed near a Lambert Farm sign on his family’s farm in Greenwood, Nebraska, on Thursday, Aug. 13, 2020. Lambert said he hopes one day he gets to carry on the tradition of keeping his family’s land under the Lambert name.

# Lambert

From 25

Luke loves seeing things from start to finish as well as discovering what he’s learned in the process. A huge part of seeing things through when it comes to animals is their nutrition, Luke said.

With this in mind, Luke plans to become an animal nutritionist one day so he can help not only his family’s farm but farms in the area to efficiently feed their livestock. This is so the animals can gain better and look better for whatever purpose the farms need.

“It’s like bodybuilding, but for pigs,” Luke said.

Estrela said Luke knows exactly what is going on with each animal and that each animal is named and very well taken care of.

“They are treated like royalty,” Estrela said after visiting the farm for Luke’s FFA Supervised Agricultural Experience projects.

According to Luke, his favorite part about working on the farm is having the opportunity to see life begin during calving season.

His grandmother, Carla Lambert, said he pays attention, especially during calving season. If he’s the first one home, he’ll make sure all the animals are taken care of and knows what to do if there is an issue. Carla described it almost as a natural tendency.

When asked about taking over the farm one day, Luke jumped at the idea.

“Hopefully,” Luke said excitedly.

For Carla and Roger, they are proud to see that the knowledge Luke’s grandparents and parents have passed down to him



Greenwood’s Luke Lambert walks on his family’s farm in Greenwood, Nebraska, on Thursday, Aug. 13, 2020.

has made such an impact.

“For him to be interested enough to listen to what they’ve taught him to think this is something I would like to do,” Carla said.

To Estrela, Luke is one of those rare students that walk into her classroom determined and willing to do whatever it takes to accomplish his goals. She believes that

he is someone that has a beaming future ahead of him.

“He is going to be a leader in agriculture and he’s going to lead us well,” she said.





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