

Flooded-out farmer hits road

BLACK RIVER FALLS, Wis. (AP) — His business and his dreams washed away by the rushing Black River, Duane Gerdes has decided to hit the road, trading the family farm for a family truck.

He and his wife, Julie, plan to make their living as owner-operators of two 18-wheelers. They will share the work of running rigs they plan to buy and take their daughters, ages 3 and 1, on the road with them.

The surging river swamped the Gerdeses' farm of 155 tillable acres and 56 milk cows.

"I worked my tail off for 13 years, and in a week's time it was gone," said Gerdes, 31. "There are sand bars in the pastures. It is all mud and silt. The crops are ruined and the topsoil is gone. It is just not farmable."

The couple recently auctioned off their cattle and farm equipment.

Gerdes drove a truck for several years before renting, then buying the farm. But he wasn't married then.

Part of the reason for getting into farming, Gerdes said, was that it offered a better lifestyle for parents with young children. But that dream is gone, although the family will retain ownership of the land and the house on it.

Their home sustained a flooded basement, but the living area was spared damage by the rampaging river.

Water was 4 feet deep in the dairy barn, Gerdes said. The cattle were moved to a neighboring farm where they were milked until the sale. ■