

Arlan and Ruth Moss, Sioux Center Public Library, 7-28-22

Speaker 1:

How did your family come to live on a farm in Iowa?

AJ:

Our farm is fifth generation farm. We're a century farm. And my great grandparents immigrated to Iowa from Holland, both sides of the family. And my wife's family immigrated also. So, yeah. We were actually living on a century farm, the fifth generation, but we've been here quite a bit longer than that.

Ruth:

Okay. So, we were the fourth generation on the farm. Our son is the fifth generation.

AJ:

Fifth generation.

Ruth:

Yeah. And he's on the farm now.

AJ:

Yeah. Ruth and I, both are actively farming with him, our son and his family. So, we're all part of the farm operation.

Speaker 1:

Okay. What is your favorite story about growing up on the farm?

AJ:

I just love interacting with the animals and just the daily activities and being a steward. I just love nature.

Ruth:

One of my memories is when we butchered chickens, and my aunt, my mom's mom... My mom's sister and my mom's mom, so my aunt and my grandma, came and we made a big day of it and we cut the chicken heads off. I mean, we'd hang them up from the clothes line and then cut their heads off. And then, some would fall down and they'd flop all over and we'd go... Put them in the hot water to take the feathers off and butcher them all. It was a process, but it was a memory that our kids never had any clue of what went into it.

AJ:

We did ourselves, our married life, we did a lot of-

Ruth:

But not like that.

AJ:

Well, we did a lot of broilers.

Ruth:

Yeah.

AJ:

Yeah. We used to do a lot of that.

Ruth:

Right. But we didn't hang them on the clothes line and cut the heads. We had someone come in, usually.

AJ:

No, we did ourselves too.

Speaker 1:

How old do you think you were when you were involved with that?

Ruth:

Grade school.

AJ:

Oh, shoot. We were six years old, five years old, but we did it all the time.

Ruth:

Yeah. It was just a normal part of life because everybody raised chicken, so you had eggs. And then, you butchered them because you wanted them in your freezer to eat.

AJ:

And Sunday dinners, we always had-

Ruth:

Always fried chicken. Yeah.

AJ:

We always had the big... I mean, we always grew the 12 pound broilers.

Ruth:

Yeah. Your family did.

AJ:

We had big ones. They were legendary.

Ruth:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

So, you shared why you enjoyed growing up on the farm, but is there a story? Is there a specific story?

AJ:

We have good Border Collies now, but when I was in junior high, I had a Border Collie dog that was really good also then. And I remember one time we had a yard of Holstein heifers; two different yards get mixed up and it was muddy and a mess out there. And my dad and my neighbor stood on the outside fence as that dog and I sorted all those cattle out. I just pointed to the dog and he could sort this one to that yard and that one to that yard, the dog and I... I was in junior high when we did that. And that dog and I, we worked together and we did that well.

Back then we had pasture for the cows. And so, you'd get up early in the morning and bringing them with the dog, you train the dog. We have excellent Border Collies now too, that are legendary, really. And we just pull up load of cattle, had a trucker from Nebraska just commented, "Never seen a dog work like that. Never seen a dog like that. I've been all over the United States, I've never seen a dog like that dog." And that dog, he's legendary. He saved her son's life, he went a mile on his own to find cattle there lost in-

Speaker 1:

You can't just throw in, "He saved my son's life." Without expanding on that.

AJ:

My son was in a cow yard and one of the steers... Well, it really wasn't a steer, it was being ornery and my son just started to turn around and the bull attacked him and took him down and the dog came back and stepped on Craig's face and tackled that bull. It was a 1300 pound bull and drove him back and...

Ruth:

Took him by the-

AJ:

Nose.

Ruth:

Grabbed his nose, the bull's nose. Yeah. Bit it.

AJ:

And then, just dragged him... Backed him off and Craig got up.

Ruth:

And he was able to roll underneath the fence and get up.

AJ:

So, that dog is just really legendary in itself right now.

Ruth:

Right now. Yeah.

AJ:

We've been blessed.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. Do you still have a dog?

AJ:

We still have two dogs. Zip is still with us yet, and we got a younger dog, Hank, that it was very good too. He's really good.

Speaker 1:

Okay.

AJ:

So, they're good hired men.

Speaker 1:

For sure. All right. What kind of crops do you grow?

AJ:

We grow corn and soybeans and we also grow some small grains. We dabble in some oats and-

Ruth:

Wheat.

AJ:

Winter wheat grass and rye, cover crops. We're doing a lot of cover crops. So, a variety of things. It keeps life interesting.

Speaker 1:

Anything you want to add to that, Ruth, or are you good?

Ruth:

It keeps life interesting.

Speaker 1:

Okay. What kind of animals do you raise?

AJ:

We raise beef cattle and hogs. We used to dairy until the year 2000. And then, when Craig came back, we went to the beef more. Years ago, we used to farrow to finish, that is no longer the case because the disease pressure of hogs. And so now, Ruth and I and Craig, we all have shares in a south farm with other farmers from Hull in a sow unit in Wagner, South Dakota. And so, those pigs supply our barns. And so, we raise them, finish them out. And several barns. I was just able to go to the sow unit earlier this week and I looked at the progress there and it's just the technology there. And that's amazing, the production, you get all pigs and sows and the healthcare. And it's just really...

Ruth:

We used to have chickens, no longer chickens. No more chickens. We have a goose.

AJ:

We have one goose running around that showed up a year and a half ago in December-

Ruth:

During a blizzard.

AJ:

During a blizzard. And has adopted us. And that thing will... The head veterinarian from Iowa state university say, "That's a bullfighter." Because that goose actually go in the yard and peck the cattle back. We've had interesting comments with that goose.

Ruth:

Brings lots of laughs.

AJ:

Lots of laughs. He just brings a lot of joy.

Speaker 1:

So, you're just going to keep the goose.

Ruth:

Yeah.

AJ:

Oh, yeah. He's there.

Ruth:

He don't do anything special. He eats the silage from the-

AJ:

He feeds himself, when it gets cold out, he'll lay inside right next to the cattle and-

Ruth:

Yeah. Stay warm.

AJ:

I call him Aflac.

Ruth:

In the summer when it gets hot, he puts a pail of water out for-

AJ:

A pail of water so he can stand in there, cool off. So, we just laugh a lot.

Ruth:

And he's really noisy when he starts honking.

AJ:

And he's... Yeah. A lot of laughs off of him.

Ruth:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Have you named him?

AJ:

Yeah. Aflac. I call him Aflac. That's me.

Ruth:

I bet the boys on the farm call him Goose. It's Goose, very original, right?

AJ:

Yeah.

Ruth:

That's Goose.

Speaker 1:

That's good.

Ruth:

Yeah. He's been good. Funny.

Speaker 1:

So, do you raise any of your own food?

AJ:

We have a garden, but not much anymore for ourselves.

Ruth:

Tomatoes.

AJ:

Tomatoes and sweet corn. We raise a lot of sweet corn for everybody else.

Ruth:

Which I just bought some today.

AJ:

Oh, you did?

Ruth:

Yeah. Because ours isn't ready yet, but I bet it stayed in Joan's car.

AJ:

Okay. Well, we had to get the electric fence around it to keep their raccoons out.

Ruth:

The girls... Our granddaughters don't think anybody else can raise sweet corn, although their dads planted some in their garden this year. And it's not coming up. It's not-

AJ:

Grandma makes the best sweet corn.

Ruth:

Yeah. Grandma makes the best sweet corn.

Speaker 1:

That's a good thing to be known for.

Ruth:

Yeah.

AJ:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. For sure.

Ruth:

It's all good.

Speaker 1:

All right. So, who does what kind of work on the farm? That's probably changed a lot through the years, hasn't it?

AJ:

Yeah.

Ruth:

It used to be, when we were milking, that was his deal.

AJ:

And Craig...

Ruth:

The kids would help, and I would help too.

AJ:

All our children, our nephews, nieces milk for us. Even we have nephews from Minnesota that would come down and spend the summer helping us farm and run the machinery and chop hay and everything else. We got to know a lot of our family because they all worked for us over the years. So, yeah. I really... When I was farming with my brother and my father then, I did most of the livestock. I've always done all the livestock effort growing up. I mean, even in junior high, I was in charge of the livestock. I always was. And then... Yeah. Now Craig, he handles the beef end and I watch over the swine end of the operation.

Ruth:

And Craig does the marketing, mostly.

AJ:

On the beef cattle and all that.

Ruth:

And the hogs, too.

AJ:

Hogs. Yeah. We work in the marketing firm. That's changed. I used to go and call in for bids or deliver them here and there. And now, we use marketing firms for the hogs and also on the beef. We're doing a little bit more of our own now. But yeah. And Craig does a lot of the planting and tillage work. I do most of the repair work. That's sort of my thing.

Ruth:

You run the combine.

AJ:

I run the combine. We each have our own area. Craig runs the chopper, I run the combine. I push the side up and I do a lot of the repair work, welding or electrical work. Craig does it also, but that's... And Craig does the carpentry work now more, repair work. We've been fixing up after that derecho. And we had to fix a few things, a few barns. So, yeah. But we work together.

Ruth:

I pay the bills and they tell me what to do.

AJ:

Ruth does the bookkeeping.

Ruth:

Haley and I feed them.

AJ:

Yeah. Keeps us fed.

Ruth:

During harvest, especially.

AJ:

Try to keep us straight and narrow, which... But no, it's good. So yeah. Craig will be gone and I'll do his chores, or when I'm gone, he'll do my chores. We cover and we make it work. We do have some seasonal help and we have a good neighbor that's retired that helps us. Yeah. We try to do a lot of cooperative things with our various neighbors. We'll share equipment, bell shredders and fly sprayers. We work together. And with the Donson's farm, we work with them on harvest and buying their crops or other dairy farms, we work with them on their issues. So, we try to do a lot with our neighbors. We try to work with them and do things jointly and work cattle together. Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Okay. You have anything you want to add to that, Ruth?

Ruth:

I think that sums it up.

Speaker 1:

Okay.

Ruth:

That part of it.

Speaker 1:

So, what kind of farm machinery or technology do you use?

AJ:

Well, that's changed a lot.

Ruth:

A whole lot.

AJ:

A whole lot over the years.

Ruth:

When his dad started, they were picking corn by hand.

AJ:

My mom and my dad both picked corn by hand. And before my dad passed away, he was running the eight row combine then.

Ruth:

But you went from picking it by hand to a pull-time picker, then to a combine.

AJ:

To a pull-time sheller and then to combine and four row.

Ruth:

A self-propelled one. Yeah.

AJ:

Now, we run an eight row. But yeah, everything's bigger and faster.

Ruth:

We used to have a pull-time chopper. And now, we have a self-propelled chopper.

AJ:

A bigger one.

Ruth:

And heads that are way different than anything that ever used to be.

AJ:

Air conditioned cabs.

Ruth:

But even with the computer part of it, Craig has a program on his phone that tells him what he's feeding and how much. I mean, all that kind of stuff.

AJ:

We use a notepad.

Ruth:

And you use a notepad in the tractor.

AJ:

To record all the feed and everything else, feeding. But also, with harvest, we have automated steering.

Ruth:

And GPS.

AJ:

GPS steering for some of the tractors. We have not incorporated into the combine. Yeah. I do use the light bar in that for combine. We'll probably switch to that this year for beans. So, yeah. We're taking-

Ruth:

You try to keep up with the times, but everything changes so fast and the prices of things are just phenomenal, that someone who's not a big farmer like us, you don't go out and buy a million dollar combine or whatever.

AJ:

We're more livestock intensive than crop.

Ruth:

Right. We feed all our own crop.

AJ:

Plus, we buy a lot of other corn to feed our livestock and hogs. We buy more corn than what we raise for our livestock and our own... So, yeah. It's been good and the technology has changed.

Ruth:

You talk about buying more than you raise, which is way different than what used to be when your dad was farming. Or even when we were farming, we were milking cows. We raised it all.

AJ:

We had additional corn to sell out then.

Ruth:

Right. So, now...

AJ:

We're a much bigger consumer.

Ruth:

Consumer, rather than... What's the other word?

AJ:

Yeah. Producer.

Ruth:

Producer. Thank you. Yeah. But that's just the way it changes.

AJ:

And we utilize other growers for our beef operation and also for our hog operation, especially. We got additional barns that are cared for by other people, which we supervise. And we work with... Just like with the south farm, there's 10 other farmers from Hull that joined us in their operation. We cooperated together and built the south farm out in South Dakota. And I developed with... Craig and I and another producer, we have a partnership agreement with a couple different hog raising enterprises where we share the risk together, and we're constantly marketing. Every day, every week of the year, we got loads of hogs going out. And so, it evens out our marketing. Yeah.

Ruth:

Which was different... When we were milking, we had a milk check every two weeks. And then, we switched to cattle listing, and that is you don't get a check every two weeks, you get it when you sell the cattle, maybe how many months later.

AJ:

But we are constantly rolling. We're constantly taking cattle in and cattle going out.

Ruth:

Right. Now, we're to that point where we have more steady...

AJ:

We're different than other beef raising operation, we're a constant flow type operation. And so, that's some of the reflection of our dairy year. It's how we did things there. We took some of the things that we used in the dairy farm into the feeding of the beef cattle that a lot of people don't.

Ruth:

Yeah. Well, a lot of people probably don't have the experience of doing both.

AJ:

Yeah. So, we do things a little different than the other beef producers do, but it's been very successful for us. Yeah. We use drones and satellite technology. We use a little bit of that and mapping, GPS and all that.

Speaker 1:

Sounds like it's changed a lot.

Ruth:

A lot.

AJ:

My brother, Jake, who's six years older than I am, still remembers our last draft team of horses. He can remember that.

Ruth:

Yeah.

AJ:

But I don't remember.

Ruth:

Harvesting with horses or whatever.

AJ:

I don't remember that. They used to use them just for now and then to pick up bales. Jake still remembers that last team. I do not remember them. So, we've seen a lot of changes. Our parents, especially, but we also have seen a lot of changes over the years. Yeah.

Ruth:

But anybody who's been farming for that long and have tried to keep up, I think, would say that.

AJ:

Oh, yeah. They've all seen a lot of changes. We aren't walking beans like we used to. Hours and hours of walking beans.

Speaker 1:

So, what do you do instead now?

AJ:

Basically, it's controlled by herbicides.

Ruth:

Spraying. Yeah.

AJ:

And the new technology and the biotech into the corn crops and soybean crops. We would not have near the production... When we first started farming, or maybe when I was growing up, we thought maybe 80 bushels. And then, 100 bushel corn and acorn. And then, it's 120. And then, our populations and all that's changed. Yeah. Used to walk beans and you did a little more rotation to help control weeds. I remember sitting on a sprayer with a four row boom on it, a little tractor spraying weeks when I was in junior high already, I was doing that. And so, cultivating three times.

Ruth:

That brings in the whole health issue thing. We've done a study at U of I that talks about health of farmers. You sit in an open tractor and breathe in all the stuff that you're spraying and all that kind of stuff. You don't do that anymore. I mean, you just-

AJ:

Not much. No.

Ruth:

Figured out that that's not good for you.

AJ:

Yeah. Shoot. We didn't realize it.

Ruth:

Well, no. At the time.

AJ:

And even the dust factor, we were conscious of dust in the bins and everything else. We used to breathe in the dust growing up, it was just part of life. It's healthier and not as physically labor demanding, thankfully. I'm getting older. But I still can.... I'm in good health. I'm very thankful for that. And we do a lot of things and we're grateful for that. I enjoy working with livestock. I just always have enjoyed animals and enjoy caring for them and taking care of them. That was a good thing about milking cows and raising hogs and being part of that, you really understand the life cycle.

Speaker 1:

All right. How many members of your family are into farming?

Ruth:

Only our son.

AJ:

Only our one son, Craig, and his wife and his family.

Ruth:

None of his siblings are...

AJ:

They'll help out. Our daughter, Joellen, is a great grain car driver. She loves doing that.

Ruth:

And Adam comes to...

Speaker 1:

She still do that?

AJ:

Sure.

Ruth:

Oh, yeah. She didn't last year because she was pregnant.

AJ:

We get her on the tractor and the two-way radio and say, "Blondie, get going."

Ruth:

Yeah.

AJ:

No, really. Blondie, get going. Come on, get up here.

Ruth:

We have to speed her up a little bit.

AJ:

Or whatever. She's really good at it. She enjoys it.

Ruth:

Adam will come too. His job now allows him to take a little more time for that.

AJ:

And his son, Asher, has helped us. So, yeah. We look forward to that. Like I said, we have a lot of nephews and nieces help us over the years. We used to have big fall festivals where we had a lot of our nephews and nieces come in to help us, even if they're married, to help us combine a big piece of corn a day a lot of people on the road and trucks and tractors and wagons. We knock out a lot of corn in those days and have big-

Ruth:

And lots of food.

AJ:

Lots of food. Everybody stopped at noon hour and everybody sat and talked.

Ruth:

Yeah. It was good.

AJ:

It was good. Good memories.

Ruth:

Yeah. But I can honestly say, I think, that my... I have five siblings and every one of them is involved in agriculture somehow. Either it's a banker, veterinarian, beef nutritionist, one's a farmer.

AJ:

Farmer.

Ruth:

Yeah. So, farming is kind of in our blood, I guess.

AJ:

Yeah. And my brother farmed with us and he became a banker, especially in ag banking.

Ruth:

Yeah.

AJ:

Sister Helen and her husband up in Worthington. But yeah, they're very active in the rural community up there. And Iris and Paul, they're involved in the agricultural field and feed and healthcare. So, yeah. It's been good. It's been a legacy on both sides of our family, and a lot of our relatives farm and are still farming around here. My mom's family, a lot of farm families still in the Hull area, your family around here and there. So, it's been good.

Speaker 1:

All right. Well, the reason I'm asking you all these questions, it's going to be an oral history. It's called the Earth's Bounty in Iowa Then and Now. So, for people in the future to go back and listen to this recording and see what it was like in 2022 and your memories in the past. Is there anything that you would like to add for somebody listening to this that would want to know about farming in your experiences?

Ruth:

It's a great way to raise kids, we feel.

AJ:

It's good for the family. Farming is not a solo occupation, it takes teamwork from the family and everybody else together. And also, teamwork from the community. My family and your family, the same way, have been very active in their communities. You grew up right outside the city just like we are, we both farmed right next to the cities, our communities in town. Yeah. So, we farmed right next door to them, we were right on the edge. And so, all our families always been very active in the community and the communities helped us. I would say... Okay. You're talking about one of the favorite memories of farming.

One of the most humbling memories of farming... February. And Craig was in Rapid City helping the Vult's family who had... We lost his son here in Hull, was a hog specialist. Right before Christmas, he got hit by a train. They were classmates up at SDSU, and he was gone helping Dusty's father up in Rapid City at the...

Ruth:

Cattle show.

AJ:

Cattle show there. And I walked into our hog barn on that Saturday morning to do chores. That's when we still had cows too. No. I remember I walked in there at six o'clock in the morning and found out most of the hogs were dead because of a computer glitch. And that was six in the morning, I walked in there. I went about the rest of my chores. I made two phone calls, one to Marge, the church secretary and one to the neighbor, and said, "Hey..." And these were all 230 pound hogs. Not quite ready to mark, but real close, real big. And they all died because it got too hot, the ventilation system quit. And so, I made two phone calls. And then, I made another phone call. And by 8:30...

Ruth:

Yeah. Nine o'clock.

AJ:

It looked like we were having an auction on our farm. We had more cars lined up and down our driveway, everything else. And we had more people showed up to help empty out that hog barn. It was that dirty, hot... A February day. Melting a little bit, but we had people-

Ruth:

It's a horrible job.

AJ:

Horrible job.

Ruth:

Each one of those hogs out by hand and they were dead, and they were heavy.

AJ:

And we had more people show up and we had a work crew... There was high school kids I didn't even know.

Ruth:

There was a lot of kids we didn't... People we didn't know.

AJ:

People we didn't know. I had helped them in the past.

Ruth:

And they showed up.

AJ:

That barn was empty by 12 o'clock.

Ruth:

Yeah. By noon.

AJ:

We were cleaned up and we had called the rented truck, they responded. It was organized chaos.

Ruth:

And people came with food to feed the... I mean, it was something. You don't ever want to have to experience that, but it was very humbling.

AJ:

Yeah.

Ruth:

Yeah.

AJ:

The community...

Ruth:

Came.

AJ:

Not just our church, the whole community.

Ruth:

No. Right. They just came alongside and said... They just showed up, "Okay. What can we do?" Yeah. It got done.

AJ:

It was a dirty job and a miserable job. We had it all cleaned up and it was that really humbling experience.

Ruth:

I thought of another me memory too. And I'd had this growing up and then with our kids, bringing lunches out to the field was always such a fun time because you would have cake. Fun stuff. And then, you pack an extra lunch for the kids to eat with dad or with grandpa or whatever, and that was always fun. They always liked doing that too. That was good.

AJ:

Back when we still did a lot of plowing and all that, I remember sitting on the ground and it was cold and they brought lunch out to the field at 10 o'clock...

Ruth:

In the morning.

AJ:

In the morning. And I'm sitting there, I guess I was breaking hay. I'm sitting there breaking hay and the dog had been running alongside me all day and I'm just going to put a piece of cake in my mouth, I was like 11 years old, and all of a sudden, that cake just disappeared.

Ruth:

The dog.

AJ:

The dog bitted out right... About to bit my nose off as I was ready to eat that piece of cake and the dog... The dog had it.

Ruth:

He saw his opportunity and he took it.

AJ:

He took it. He was about to take my nose with it and my fingers too.

Speaker 1:

So, you really like that dog.

AJ:

Yeah. I did like that dog. It was like... It was gone.

Ruth:

Remember you like that dog. Yeah.

AJ:

Yeah.

Ruth:

You're willing to share, right?

AJ:

Yeah. I was willing to share. So, those are just memories that you have and good times and you just can't replicate that. And just having other kids come from town to help you bale hay. And you're swinging bales of hay with a refreshment, and swinging hay with seniors and being their boss, trying to tell them what to do. Town kids. Yeah. It was just good memories. We still have a businessman who was a senior in high school walking there, still calls me AJ, "How are you doing, AJ?"

Ruth:

Yeah.

AJ:

Yeah. So, yeah. Life has been good to us here and been blessed.

Ruth:

County fairs is another farm related memory. Our kids all went through the fair. We went through the fairs.

AJ:

Yeah.

Ruth:

Now, our grandkids are going through the fair. Those are fun memories too.

AJ:

I was in charge of all the volunteer labor to build the fairgrounds in Sioux Center that is currently not being used. Supposed to move.

Ruth:

Yeah.

AJ:

That's a memory. 50 years ago, I built that fairgrounds.

Ruth:

Yeah. I know.

AJ:

So, yeah. Lots of good memories and good people. We've been blessed.

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Speaker 1:

Well, we're at the end of our questions. So, thank you for your time today and appreciate hearing your stories.

AJ:

Yeah.

Ruth:

Yeah.

AJ:

It was good.