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# ***Bedford Farming***

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ABOVE: Lorri and Marty Gordon  
LEFT: Coco is a 6-year-old mule.

# Breeding the American Mule

Gordonview Farm is busy

By **ZOË WATKINS**  
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**G**ordonview Farm isn't necessarily a getaway. It's one of Bedford County's working, hobby farms—one complete with mules, cattle, and dogs.

It's 100 acres of pastureland that backs up to the hills of southern Bedford County. They have stables and a boarding kennel. There's always something to do.

Marty Gordon started Gordonview farm in 1991 to give his two sons a childhood of growing up on a farm. He built a simple life raising horses, cattle, and hay while working a full-time job at Arnold Air

Force Base.

"You'll learn skills you won't find in the city," Marty said.

The horsemanship and colt breaking that Marty's grandfather, Tennessee Walking Horse trainer Ray Tenpenny, passed down to him is a skill he still uses today—except now, it's with mules.

Lorri was born in Michigan and also found a love for animals through her grandfather. Having lived in South Carolina for 20 years, Lorri came to Shelbyville to buy and sell horses.

Both Marty and Lorri were involved in the Tennessee Walking Horse industry, training and showing walking horses, flat shod. Meeting as they say "in the woods," during a trail ride, they married in 2008. At the time, Marty wasn't raising mules, so it was Lorri who brought up the idea.

"We got into breeding for mules with a jack and a mare. We sold mules all over the United States and Canada," said Marty.

Lorri rode quarter horses as a kid. But while in Charleston, she met a friend who

▶ See **Gordonview**, Page 3

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The farm also has beautiful views of Bedford's hills.

## Gordonview

(Continued from Page 2)

had a gaited mule. "And I rode it and had to have one."

It's a "soulful relationship," she explains. As well, she's come to understand that a mule is "kind and smart."

And, whereas a horse can be ridden off a cliff, a mule can't. "They get that from a donkey. A donkey is a very cautious animal."

**Fact:** mules can live to be as old as 40. They're king when it comes to trail riding, due to their footing.

Marty added, "People say they're stubborn but it's because they're really smart. You're not going to manipulate a mule or a donkey into doing something like you can a horse."

**Fact:** The character of the mule is thinking about itself. Owners must deal with it.

"It makes us adapt to change," he further explained. "Simply put, the mule will humble you," said Marty.

Watching the Gordons, it's clear it takes a lot of work to manage a mule. There's also a lot of patience involved.



**The cattle didn't seem to mind being photographed.**

Today, mules are not labored as much. So, Marty said it's an enjoyment—even a luxury—to do a wagon ride, like he just organized for the American Mule Festival in Shelbyville.

The world mule comes from Latin for "half-breed." Back in the day, they used to breed the worst mares—or the "undesirable" mares—to a donkey, he notes. Nowadays, the best mares are bred, which has increased the value of the mules today.

▶ See **Gordonview**, Page 4

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Gordonview Farm is located on U.S. 231 South.

# Gordonview

(Continued from Page 3)

**Fact:** Teams of mules now sell for around \$30,000.

For years, the Gordons have worked with gaited mules but lately they've been targeting quarter mules, which is a different western-ranch style mule than a gaited.

"It was more demanding, I think, than we really wanted to do. In the spring, people wanted to bring mares to us and I'm trying to work the farm. We didn't do a lot of outside mares. You have to house the mare and take care of the mare."

They did this for about 5 years until

they found it is easier to breed someone else's jack than keep their own. "It's kind of a rewarding journey. Plus, they work with some great people, they say.

"The mule people, we help each other. They will go out of their way to help somebody," said Lorri.

"They're real," added Marty. "They're not materialistic."

About to turn 62, he still works that full-time job at AEDC on top of running the farm. Sometimes they think about selling some of the extra "hobby farm" to give themselves a little bit more independence.

But in the meantime, they plan to continue to share their farm. Marty notes, "It's about sharing what God has given us."



Marty and Lorri said their mule Diamond has a very friendly temperament.

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# No market exists for hemp in area

By **DAVID MELSON**  
dmelson@t-g.com

There's a lot of talk in America's agricultural community about the supposed benefits of hemp as a profitable crop, but John Teague, Bedford County's UT Extension Agent, hasn't fallen for it.

"Our experience in Bedford County has not been very good," Teague said Wednesday. "I don't know anyone who raised it this year."

He added, "I know some who fell for the hype but they found there's no market for it."

A statewide auction of hemp production was attempted in Franklin but it was abandoned, Teague said. "No one was bidding."

A hemp producer license is required in Tennessee. Anyone growing the product for consumption must additionally be licensed as a food manufacturing facility.

Unlike most farming products, no federal assistance programs are available.

"From an agronomy standpoint, there's no weed control products and that increases the labor required," Teague said.

The lack of insecticides is compounded by the plants' susceptibility to funguses, which destroy their pods and flowers, according to Teague,

Southern summer heat and hemp plants

don't mix well, adding to growers' problems listed by Teague.

Tennessee Department of Agriculture does list some approved pesticides on its website.

Then, there's that not-so-little matter of THC content.

"There are male and female plants," Teague said. The male plants can sometimes develop high THC levels.

"If the THC level is too high, then it's not legal to sell."

And, the grower is risking being cited for raising an illegal substance.

"It's a high risk deal all the way through," Teague said. "High risk, labor intensive, can be contaminated very easily."

Plus, in some cases, a totally unexpected situation can develop.

"We had a man with a patch at an intersection of two roads," Teague said. "He couldn't keep people out of it."

Southern Middle Tennessee does have a past history of hemp production. Hemp was widely grown in Bedford, Marshall, Maury and Coffee counties in the 1800s, with the area noted as having soils suitable for hemp production by Tennessee's first commissioner of agriculture, Joseph Killebrew, in his "Resources of Tennessee" book released in 1874.



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# Farm living is the life for Richard Smith

By **DAWN HANKINS**  
dhankins@t-g.com

Some farms are for pure profit, producing great crop yields, year after year. But other farms do not, for whatever reason. Still, they suffice just the same for people who just enjoy the obvious peace and tranquility associated with farm living.

Take Richard Smith for example. While he and wife, Kathy, and family, have been on his current Flat Creek property for decades, it has been 30 since it was turned as farm income, that is from cow/calf.

His dad first started raising cattle there when he was a boy. In later years, he offered the farm to Richard, who jokes that he now has three “worthless old horses” which wander around about the 65 fenced in acres.

But while the family may not be cultivating corn or soybeans, the Smiths are exploring some other sustainable uses of their farm. “We are actively working on growing habitat to encourage deer, turkey, quail, pollinators, rabbits, and similar



T-G Photo by Dawn Hankins

**RICHARD SMITH**

wildlife,” said Richard, who professionally owns Select Trailer Co., located off Highway 231 North.

He’s also investigating and researching best land management practices as well as specific plantings for the farm. “It seems as if what is best for cow operations, for example, is not well suited for wildlife.”

A community-minded man, he’s actively involved in helping those in need during the holidays with a canned food drive through Thomas Magnet. He’s even done overseas missionary work.

But while he’s empathetic to people’s needs, he’s observed over the years how Bedford County farmland has slowly dwindled into pockets of development. “I know people need a place to live. But I am also saddened when I realize the places I rode horses and hunted 40 to 50 years ago are now neighborhoods.”

Smith knows first-hand that local farmers, like his dad years ago, get very passionate. But he also knows weather and other hurdles can make farming a tough life.

“Our area here makes it tough. This dry summer will make for a stressful winter as hay is in short supply. But it is always one thing or another for them.”

One thing certain, this local businessman understands how the pandemic was brutal. Now there are the current equipment price increases, with little relief in sight.

## The good old days

Richard reminisces that as a youth, he raised about 30 calves every year. Though maybe he doesn’t farm “for a living” these days, he saw the beauty in it as a young man.

“Once our hay was up, my father allowed me to use the equipment to make hay for some neighbors. [This] made for great help with college funds in the 80s. I didn’t appreciate then what he was allowing me to do. Having bought equipment, I do now.”

## Variations of farming

The Smiths have been planting trees destined for future Christmas trees for a few years. Nothing big, Richard says, just maybe some retirement fun and pocket cash for the future.

“But they’ve proven to require more attention than I’d originally anticipated,” he said recently of the crop.

While those holiday trees might prove to be the only potential source of future revenue from their farm, that’s OK with Richard. He’s still owner of a legacy farm—one filled with lots of memories and perhaps some potential use for future generations.

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Submitted Photos

Local hay production has suffered, because of the extended bouts of dry weather this summer, according to local farmers.



# 20th year for the Halls Mill Sorghum Squeeze

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Photos by Daphne Motes and Dawn Hankins

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**ABOVE:** The Halls Mill Sorghum Squeeze is held every year in October, when it is just the right time for harvesting.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Catching up on events is a big part of the annual sorghum squeeze.

**LEFT:** Vendors enjoy displaying their canned goods, knives and other wares during the October event over in Halls Mill. These pickles were by Cynthia Leverette.

**RIGHT:** A lot of work goes into preparing the famous Halls Mill Sorghum

Photos by Daphne Motes and Dawn Hankins



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# An interesting farm year

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A white pickup truck with a flatbed trailer is shown in a field. The trailer is loaded with several large, round hay bales. The truck is parked on a dirt road, and the background shows a field with more hay bales under a blue sky.





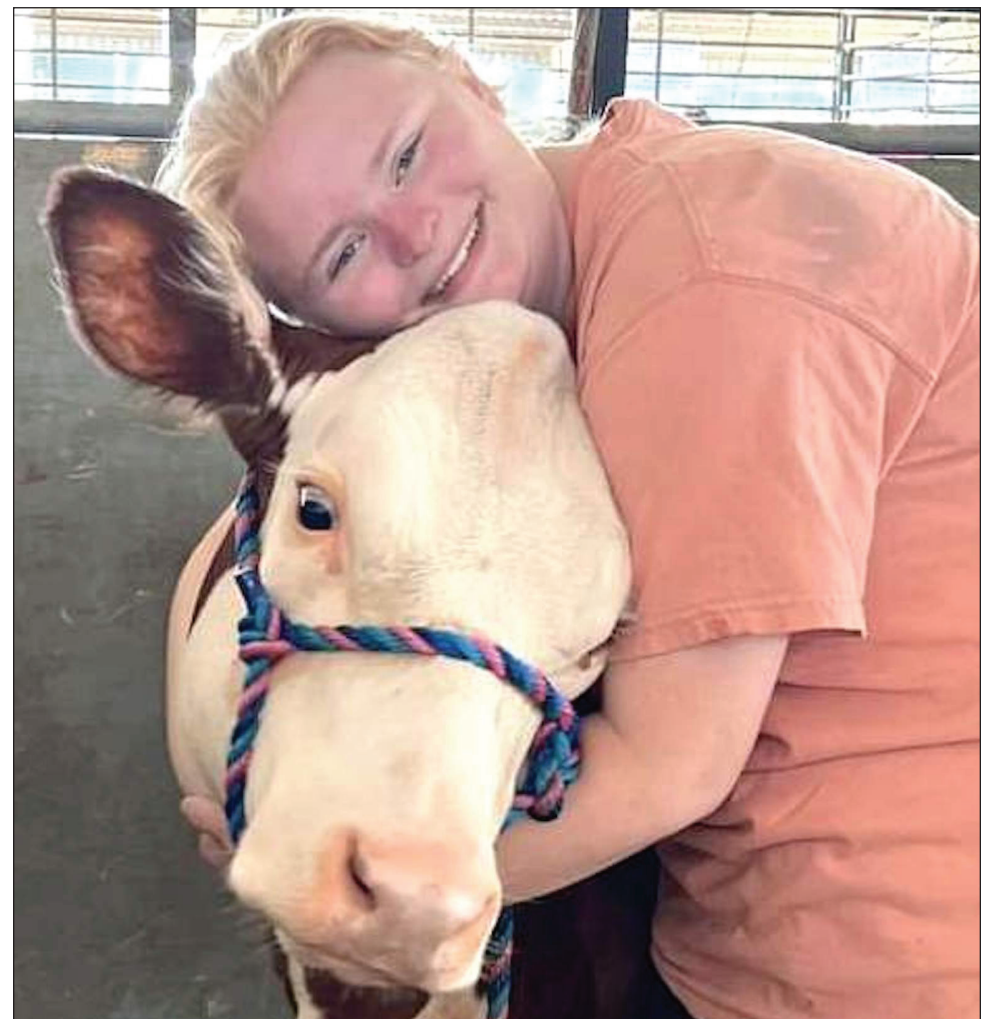
## BC scrapbook 2022

 An advertisement for Select Trailer Co. The background shows a large American flag flying on a tall pole in front of a lot filled with white horse trailers. The sky is blue with some clouds.
 

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# Farm Fresh for the Holidays

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**Seasonal Eating**  
**Whitney Danhof**  
BC Extension Agent

The first Thanksgiving was a celebration of the autumn harvest. Today, we still enhance our holiday meals with foods from the fall farm, orchard or garden.

Some of these are preserved foods from the summer harvest such as canned or frozen corn and beans and some of these are straight from the fall garden. Cool season vegetables such as cabbages, Brussels sprouts, broccoli and cauliflower along with hardy greens such as kale and collards and root vegetables such as beets, carrots, parsnips and turnips are all good choices for enduring light frosts, extending the fresh produce season.

In fact, some vegetables actually get a little sweeter after frost hits. This is due to the plants storing energy in the form of starches. When the plant is threatened with colder temperatures, it converts the starches to sugars, which act as an anti-freeze.

This winter sweetening occurs in greens like collards and kale as well as many root vegetables like carrots, turnips and rutabagas. Other fruits and vegetables can be harvested and stored before the first frost/freezing. Curing winter squash, pumpkins and sweet potatoes (which are warm season crops) will have them ready for storage and



**Whitney Danhof**

use throughout the fall and early winter. Apples and pears are common fall fruits and work well for holiday meals also.

Fall produce lends itself to rich, hearty dishes often combined with the warm spices

we associate with the holidays such as cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, allspice and ginger. To accompany that prize roasted turkey at Thanksgiving or a perfectly glazed ham for Christmas, turn to produce. Roasted or candied sweet potatoes, mashed butternut squash, baked acorn squash rings, ginger glazed carrots or simmered apples with cinnamon all complement the main attraction with a sweet touch.

Pan seared Brussels sprouts, roasted cauliflower, braised collards, mashed turnips or a kale salad with pears bring out the more savory side of holiday accompaniments. And don't forget those preserved summer treats like corn pudding or green bean casserole made with canned or frozen produce.

The larger the group you are feeding, the more side dishes you will need to help fill plates and give a bountiful selection to please everyone from the young to the young at heart.

As you plan your holiday meals, consider the fall farm harvest and incorporate some old familiar staples along with some new,

► See **Fresh**, Page 14



**Garlic Parmesan Baked Cauliflower**

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**Red Cabbage & Apples with Currant Jelly**

## Fresh

(Continued from Page 1)

fresh fall sides. Below are two good sides to give a try this holiday season.

For more information and recipes, check out the Seasonal Eating page at [bedford.tennessee.edu](http://bedford.tennessee.edu).

### Garlic Parmesan Baked Cauliflower

- 1/4 C. olive oil
  - 2 Tbsp. butter, melted
  - 1 Tbsp. minced garlic
  - 1 1/2 Tbsp. lemon juice
  - 1/2 tsp. salt
  - 1/4 tsp. black pepper
  - 1 head cauliflower, cut into florets (about 5 cups)
  - 1/2 C. crushed Ritz or Town House crackers
  - 2 Tbsp. butter, melted
  - 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- In a large bowl whisk together the olive oil, butter, garlic, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Add the cauliflower and toss to coat the florets. Pour into a casserole dish, cover and

bake at 400 degrees for 20 minutes, stirring after 10 minutes. Meanwhile, combine crackers and melted butter. Remove from oven and uncover. Sprinkle with cheese and crumbs and bake 10 more minutes or until cauliflower is tender and crumbs are browned.

### Red Cabbage & Apples with Currant Jelly

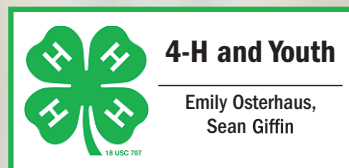
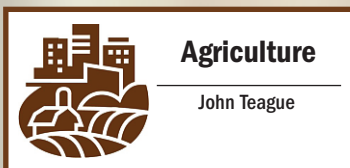
- 1 Tbsp. butter
- 8 C. thinly sliced red cabbage
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 tsp. lemon juice
- 1/4 C. sugar
- 1 tsp. salt
- 3-4 gala apples, chopped
- 5 Tbsp. red currant jelly

In a large Dutch oven or deep skillet, heat oil and add the cabbage, onion, lemon juice, sugar and salt, stirring to mix well. Cover and cook over medium heat for 10-15 minutes or until cabbage is crisp-tender, stirring occasionally. Add apples and cook 10-15 minutes longer or until cabbage and apples are tender, adding a few tablespoons of water, if necessary. Stir in jelly until melted. Transfer to serving bowl and serve immediately.

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Left to Right: Yesenia Lira-Garcia, Whitney Danhof, Emily Osterhaus, John Teague, Kim Harvey & Sean Giffin.

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# Vannatta Farm: A Century Farm legacy

By **DAWN HANKINS**  
dhankins@t-g.com

Vannatta Farms Inc., was recently a part of Bedford County Board of Education's "Workforce Development Summit: Innovation Nation Teacher Tours" as part of a fall staff development day. Such events stand to prove that the farming profession here is still very much alive.

Family still currently operating Vannatta Farms will tell you, however, it takes a lot of work and a tremendous amount of faith to continue farming as a profession. They note their father, the late Bobby Vannatta, was ahead of his own time, foreseeing farm updates they would have to make in order to keep up with the necessary modernizations.

## Farm history

Vannatta Farms Inc., actually has quite the history of success—over 172 years to be exact. So small wonder they're chosen to represent area farming throughout the year.

The history is quite interested surrounding the Bedford County farm. Established by James and Jerusha Vannatta in 1850, with the original 100 acres, the founders grew wheat, cotton, and corn, and managed a herd of cattle.

## Second & third generations

James' son, George W. Vannatta, became the farm's second generation owner, who built and operated the first cotton gin in the 5th District. The founders' grandson, William Cleveland Vannatta, was the third owner of the family farm.

W. C. increased the acreage to 320 acres and operated one of the first wheat threshers in Bedford County, family history reveals. Vannatta is credited with assisting in the construction of the first road between Murfreesboro and Shelbyville.

## Fourth generation

W. C. wed Ophelia Hardison and their son, Marvin (Pete) Vannatta, was the farm's fourth operator. Pete, his wife, Elizabeth Walls, and their four children, introduced new crops such as crimson clover. They began a dairy business and history notes they also purchased the county's first cotton picker.

## Fifth generation

Later, in 1964, Pete's son, Bobby W.



Vannatta Farms, Inc., in partnership with Tracy H. Vannatta Farms, cultivates row crops of wheat, corn and soy as a primary focus, with Angus cattle and broiler chicken houses rounding out the operations.

*"A successful farmer is always looking to find new techniques in farming practices."*

— W. C. Vannatta, third generation Vannatta Farm owner

Vannatta, became the fifth owner when he acquired the farm's original 100 acres. He would later add over 750 acres of land. Bobby wed Linda Joyce and had 3 children who still work the farm.

As great-great-grandson of the founders, Bobby incorporated the farm's operations in 1980. Throughout his lifetime, the Deason farmer recognized that a "successful modern farmer" must balance the embracing of new technology and have respect for the land and its continued sustainability.

Family proudly note today how he was a pioneer in no till farming and crop rotations—that which ultimately built the

farm's soil fertility. Taking time always to serve his community, he was a former deputy commissioner of agriculture for Tennessee.

## The Vannatta Family of 2022

Since Bobby's death in 2012, farming operations have been under the control of his wife, Linda, and their three children, Sharon V. Edwards, Tracy H. Vannatta and Troy W. Vannatta—all which make up the VFI Board.

Mom, Linda, still pulls on her farm shoes too.

Now the sixth generation of Vannattas

carry on the farming tradition, with Tracy building his own operation along side the VFI entity and serving as farm manager. Currently, over 2,000 plus acres of land are farmed under the Vannatta name.

## Farming into the future

Tracy, Troy and Sharon proudly note that the seventh and eighth generations of Vannattas are ready to continue the legacy of sustainable farming practices.

With grandchildren now by their side, the three Vannatta siblings walk across the vast farmland in Deason-row after row

▶ See **Vannatta**, Page 16





T-G Photo by Dawn Hankins

Linda Vannatta, left, and daughter, Sharon V. Edwards, attended this year's Century Farm coffee, sponsored by Bedford County Fair Board. Sharon's grandson, Oliver Henderson, holds the official plaque presented to the long list of Bedford County Century Farms, which includes their Vannatta Farms Inc. in the Deason community.



Farm photos by Jenna Henderson and Vida Vannatta

Collectively, over 2,000 acres is still farmed under the Vannatta name in 2022.

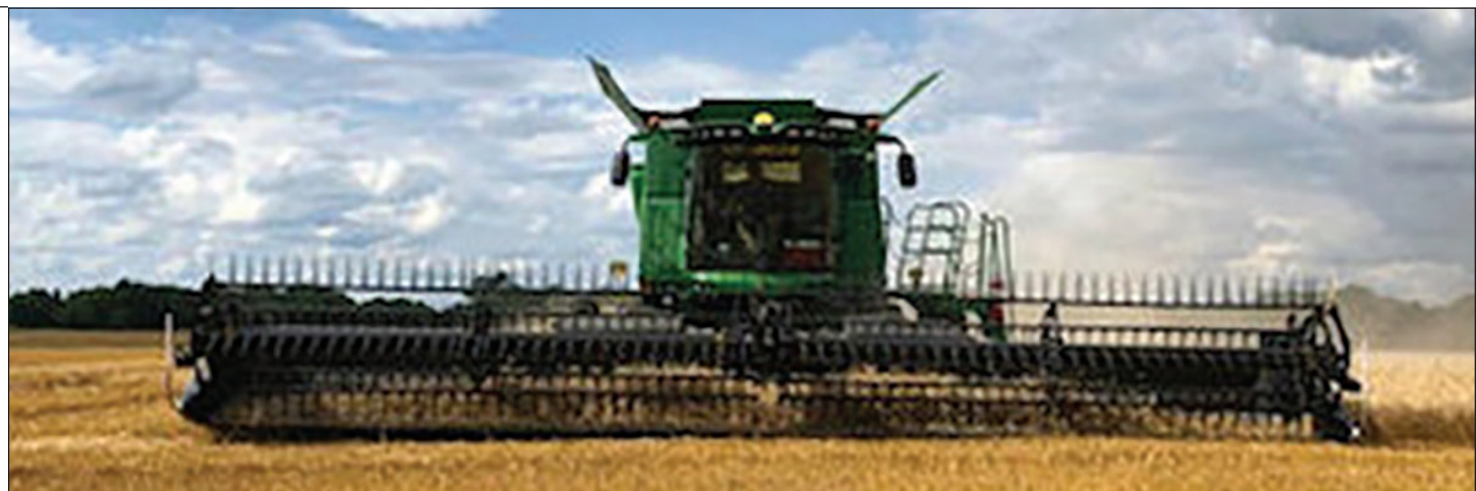


## Vannatta

(Continued from Page 1)

which their dad proudly farmed before them.

Sharon said recently, "A farm legacy has been such a blessing in my life. Farm life instills a love of, and appreciation for, the land, a strong work ethic and a strong faith in God's cycles of nature. The ability to look out our front door and view the colors of nature in all its glory provides an indescribable sense of peace of mind. I am glad that I am able to share the gift of farm life with our children and grandchildren as we help them develop an understanding of their farm heritage."



With knowledge from a seven-generation farming legacy, Vannatta Farms has committed to the excellence in crop cultivation.