

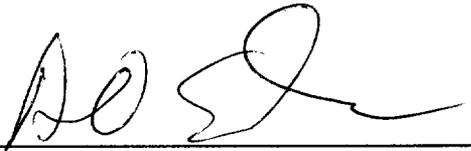
My Family and Our Farm

An Honors Thesis (Honrs 499)

by

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the history of my family our farm and how they relate. Our farm has been with the family for five generations and been successful all along. This paper will discuss the reasons for this success and hopefully help those without farm knowledge understand what it takes to keep an operation running.

## List of Characters

Great-Great Grandpa-----King Luther Chamberlain

Great-Great Grandma-----Emma Chamberlain

Great Grandpa-----John Chamberlain

Great Grandma-----Altie Brunton-Chamberlain

Grandpa-----Orville Chamberlain

Grandma-----Martha Pond-Chamberlain

Great Uncle-----Max Chamberlain

Second Cousin-----Brian Chamberlain

Uncle-----John Scott Chamberlain

Aunt-----Marcia Frierhood-Chamberlain

Cousins-----Angie Chamberlain-Vincent

Monte Chamberlain

Chrissy Winters-Chamberlain

Dad-----Dallas Baer

Mom-----Kitty Lou Chamberlain-Baer

Brothers-----Troy and Tyler Baer

Sisters-in-law-----Stacy Hoppes-Baer and Kim Winters-Baer

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## **Introduction**

This paper will discuss the history of my family and our farm and how we have continued to be successful. First, there is a discussion on the history of the farm and how we originated. Next, the statistics of our farm, as we operate now, are given. Thirdly, the trend toward corporate farming is discussed and the advantages and disadvantages of it. Finally, I discuss the reasons why my family has continued to be successful, which include our division of labor, family closeness, smart financing and decision making, and technological improvements. These sections all work together to tell the story of my family's success.

Only two per cent of the American population gets to experience the joys of being a farmer. Even before I was born, Chamberlain family life has revolved around farming. Major events are postponed for harvest, and the Christmas meal is delayed so all the chores can be finished before we start our celebration. Although farmers can often be heard complaining and fretting about the inconsistency and unreliability of their profession, I suspect most would agree there is no better way to make a living. There are many risks to being a farmer, both physically and financially. Success depends on factors that cannot be controlled, like the weather and the market. “You must have a little bit of gambling blood to be a farmer” (Dallas Baer interview).

“Farming just becomes a way of life. I can’t imagine living any other way.” Farming becomes such a way of life that even Christmas cards are related to the farm. The hot topics at the lunch table are the lowered hog prices, the raised average litter numbers, or the new discoveries just made for improved artificial insemination for hogs. Children of the farm see the new life being born, understand the necessary ending of the life, and have a better general perspective on the life cycle (Kitty Lou Baer interview). Our family life on the farm has led to many stories that have been told and retold many times.

## **History**

The most important and often told story is that of how the farm originally became a part of our family. The story began when my great-great grandfather, King Luther Chamberlain, who owned 185 acres of land in Urbana, Indiana, chose to give this land to his son, my great grandpa John, and his wife Altie Brunton in 1920 (Orville Chamberlain interview).

King Chamberlain and his wife Emma lived in Mount Ayer, Indiana, and had seven kids, John being the third after two girls. King worked his own land in Mount Ayer and thought his son should live the same type of life. His son John began courting Altie Brunton. King and Emma did not approve of John's relationship with Altie. Altie always claimed that the Chamberlains had made quite a name for themselves as the "well to do" members of the small town. On the other hand, the Bruntons were rather rough around the edges. They weren't as well off as the Chamberlains, and the Chamberlains felt as though their son did not need to associate with a girl of that sort. Great Grandpa John was determined to marry my great grandma Altie. So, Great Grandpa's parents finally gave in, and the couple received their blessing. John and Altie were set to marry in August of 1922. During the summer before their marriage, John went to live on his farm in Urbana. At the time there was another couple renting the land with whom John stayed. They lived in a home that is still standing and is known as the home place. Together, the family and John raised a barn and made some necessary improvements on the home. One week before their wedding date, John moved his tools down to Urbana from Mount Ayer using a team of horses and a manure spreader. Directly after their wedding, John and Altie loaded all of their possessions remaining in Mount Ayer into a buggy, and they made the trip to Urban where they would settle and live happily the rest of their lives.

Their first home was with the renting family at the home place. The renting family stayed in the house until their lease was up in March. The family and the newlyweds simply split the house in half sharing the kitchen. They always cooked the

meals together, but never ate together. Shortly after their marriage, John and Altie had their first child. My grandfather, Orville, was the second of the final four kids.

Great Grandma Altie was known for her big heart and kindness. When her niece developed the fatal disease of tuberculosis, she had her stay in her home where she tended to her needs. Her son, Max, being just a baby at the time, also came with her for Altie to provide care. Finally Altie nursed her niece back to health. The niece returned to her hometown of Mount Ayer but left Max for Altie and John until she had more strength. Once they began to get very attached to Max, his mother came back for him. Max didn't want to go home with her, but Great Grandma and Grandpa knew he should go. When John and Altie would visit Max, he didn't want them to leave again without him. Eventually his mother gave in and let Max go home with John and Altie. While Max was staying with them, his mother's tuberculosis again developed, and this time it took her life. At this point Max was adopted and lived the rest of his life from age six on as John and Altie's youngest son (Orville Chamberlain interview).

I have been given many examples of how generous my great grandma Altie was to those who were in need. For instance, she always visited church members who were in the nursing home or shut-ins. There was a specific incident when a less fortunate lady came to Great Grandma for help. She had trouble walking, was very unhealthy, and was not in the habit of good hygiene. Great Grandma always took her to the grocery store and allowed her to sit on a bench in the front of the store while she did all the shopping. Though she always put blankets down in the car before she would drive her to the market, she always received much pestering from John because of the odor that remained in the car after Great Grandma's guest had left (Kitty Lou Baer interview).

Just as Altie was known for her big heart, John was known for being such a smart farmer. He knew how to invest his money to get the largest return and when to invest it. It seems that John and King Arthur had a type of falling out concerning the manner in which John chose to run his farm. King was a rather conservative farmer who made changes only if they were needed and the outcomes of the change were certain. John, on the other hand, was always willing to go out on a limb if there was a slight chance of success. Great Grandpa's first major investment was in dairy cattle. After John had accumulated a fair number of cattle, the Great Depression came in the 1930s. Though my Grandpa Orville was very young, he can remember his father coming home one night when Great Grandma was on the porch doing the laundry, taking her hands, and telling her they had just lost everything they had ever owned. The word had gotten around that the bank in town had just closed, taking all the money with it. Grandpa Orville will never forget this day: "It had so much impact on me even though I was a little kid, almost too young to understand." The Depression, however, caused John Chamberlain to all but lose hope. He scrounged up every penny he could possibly find and used it to buy more livestock. He bought all he could afford while keeping his family fed.

Once the Depression finally ended, the livestock market shot up very quickly. Now Great Grandpa's hard work paid off. He sold some of his livestock and accumulated a substantial sum of money. He could buy almost anything he felt his family needed or wanted. Neighbors began to turn to him for his financial help. He would buy cattle from them so they would have the money to get back on their feet. Great Grandpa John was known for giving more money than what the cattle were actually worth just for the extra financial aid (Orville Chamberlain interview). Great Grandpa John often exchanged his

possessions for skilled work or other offers from neighbor farmers. For example, one farmer helped shuck corn for a day in return for a horse tank and goose (Great Grandpa John's record books). Great Grandpa John bought his family the first automobile in the small surrounding country area (Orville Chamberlain interview).

Meanwhile, Great Grandma Altie continued to aid others in need as well. The door at the house was always open for anyone who needed to talk or just stop by and say hello, especially at noon. "You never knew who was going to be sitting at the dinner table when you came in from work at noon." Great Grandma Altie participated in the affairs of the farm as well. On a farm, each member of the family is responsible for certain chores. Great Grandma Altie woke early every morning to get her work started before the kids got up and began looking for their breakfast. The typical breakfast at Great Grandma Altie's was eggs sunny side up, bacon, toast with homemade jam, orange juice, and milk. Not a day went by when one of her children left the house without a big, healthy breakfast.

Great Grandpa John, knowing that his son would one day take over responsibility for the farm, bought my grandpa Orville a small herd of sheep to tend. Grandpa Orville took very good care of his sheep to prove to his father he was capable of the upcoming responsibilities. However, Orville was not very keen on sheep. "They're just so darn stupid; where one went they all went, regardless of anything I did." Needless to say, as soon as Grandpa Orville proved his point, he sold all of his sheep. Great Grandpa John and Grandpa Orville went to work side by side at the farm. Grandpa Orville recalls the sternness in which Great Grandpa John ran the farm. "If everything wasn't done just right, he'd let you know what you had done wrong. He wanted everything done his

way.” In 1944 Grandpa Orville slowly worked his way to part-ownership of the farm. “I started out just owning one sixth of it until I worked my way to half.”

In 1947 Great Grandpa John and Great Grandma Altie moved from the home place to a home near the farm that they had completely remodeled. Because Great Grandma Altie didn't like the location, or the house overall, they built a new home one mile from the farm. They moved into their new home in 1949. At this point John claimed he had gone into retirement at age 49. However, he still participated in the work and decision making down at the farm, just not as intensely as before (Orville Chamberlain interview).

Meanwhile, their oldest son had fallen for Martha Pond. Although Grandpa was very busy with the farm and his schooling, he always found time to have fun. The basis in which Grandma and Grandpa's relationship began is actually quite humorous. Grandpa, being the typical narcissistic teenage boy, bet his high school buddies that he could date every cheerleader in Wabash County. At the time there were seven high schools. “Well, I made it through four and a half,” Grandpa added. I guess you could say he got stuck on my grandma. It was not an easy task convincing her to go out on a date with Grandpa Orville. She knew he was a farmer and frankly was trying to avoid him. “My parents had warned me not to get caught up with any farmers, they work too hard.” Grandma's father was a dentist and kept set hours contrary to a farmer. “Your grandpa was very persistent. I finally said yes just because I was sick of him pestering me!” (Martha Chamberlain interview)

Grandpa Orville was always known as a practical joker at his small high school in Urbana. He helped answer the prayers of many students one day when he took his work

on the farm to school with him. He and his father had been back in the hog houses worming the hogs. "Back then we fed the hogs capsules of medicine that just smelled awful if the capsule was broke." At the time Grandpa's desk was placed near the radiator at the back of the room. Before leaving for lunch, he placed one capsule on the radiator. By the time the class returned from lunch, the capsule had melted and released a gruesome smell. The stench was so unbearable that the students were released for the remainder of the day so the windows could be left open to air out the school on the cold winter day. "I didn't tell anyone what I had done until years after that happened."

Martha and Orville married in 1947 and moved into the home place. In 1948, their son, John Scott (called by his middle name), was born, and in 1951 my mother, Kitty Lou was born. They were raised on the farm with the typical responsibilities of chores and odd jobs. In 1959, the family moved from the home place to their newly built house that is right across the road from the farm. The family was featured many times in the newspapers displaying their new home and family farm. In 1969, Scott was admitted into the partnership with his father and grandfather after he graduated from Purdue University with a degree in agricultural economics. He also married Marcia Friermood the same year. They eventually built a home a quarter of a mile west of the farm. In 1971, Mom and my dad, Dallas Baer, got married. After working two years in construction, Dad decided to join the action on the farm. He joined the partnership in 1971. In 1973, with the farm now having four part owners, they decided it would be the best thing to form a corporation with stocks. They then distributed the stock among the four owners (Orville Chamberlain interview).

In 1971, Scott and Marcia had their first of two children, Angie. Then in 1973, my mom and Marcia both had a baby boy, Marcia having Monte, and Mom having Troy. In 1975, my second brother, Tyler, was born. Finally in 1978, I was born. We moved into our new house in 1979, which is a quarter of a mile east of the farm. Through the years the farm has bought new property with houses, which provide good homes for hired hands or family.

In 1981, my great grandpa John passed away from a sudden illness. His death came just four years before the addition of a farm office where a computer was housed to deal with the many different aspects of the farm. This was a major change in the style of farming. “The farm I started farming with and the one we have now don’t even resemble each other. I have my dad’s books from when he started farming and you could carry them in your pocket, now it takes so many books that they can’t fit in an office. Back then there was more romance to [farming]. Now, it’s just a fast-paced business” (Orville Chamberlain interview).

Now graduating from high school in 1991, Troy and Monte planned their futures. Monte went to a two-year program at Lincoln Tech studying mechanics, while Troy graduated from Purdue University with a degree in agricultural economics. Ty also went to Purdue for one year studying Ag. Econ. “In college I told myself I was leaving my options open. But the more you get away from it, the more you want it back. People think it doesn’t take much gray matter to run a farm—they think we’re out ‘slopping the hogs.’ A lot more goes into it than what people think” (Troy Baer interview).

In 1993, Monte married Chrissy Winters and moved into Grandma Altie’s home. In 1995 they had their first son, Cody, and in 1998, they had their second son, Clayton.

Chrissy is due for her third baby in October. Both Cody and Clayton have taken a huge liking to the family farm, and have hundreds of play tractors and equipment. In 1994, Troy married Stacy Hoppes, and they lived in a house owned by the farm across the road from our house. This year, Troy and Stacy built a new house that is a half-mile south of our home (about one and a half miles from the farm). After Troy and Stacy moved out of the home across the road from our house, a new full-time employee, Mike Yentes, moved in. In 1997, Tyler married Kimberly Winters (Chrissy's sister). They live in another farmhouse that is on one of our farms near the Eel River. Before moving in they completely remodeled the inside and out.

In 1994, the three grandsons formed ChamBaerLand Corporation and bought 320 acres of land and raise hogs separate from Chamberlain Farms, Inc. The corporation was created to establish ownership for them. Scott and Dad each own 35 per cent of the farm, and Troy, Ty, and Monte all own 10 per cent (Troy Baer interview).

The roles of a family living on a farm are significantly different from those of families living elsewhere. Each member is given a task to take care of every day. These tasks may range from bottle-feeding a baby calf to going with Dad to help with the chores. In general, according to the tradition of my family, the men do the "dirty" work on the farm, and the wife takes care of the kids and house during the day. Mom and Grandma are often called on to run some errands. Every day at noon, the men come home to a hot meal prepared and set on the table ready to eat. The kids took care of cleaning the office once a week until Monte, Troy, and Tyler all accumulated their shares of the farm. Now, I take care of cleaning whenever I get the chance with Grandpa and Chrissy doing touch ups now and then. The cooperation and respect of the Chamberlain

family is what has made the farm what it is today. We all work together to build and make the farm stronger.

## **Statistics**

Chamberlain Farms totals just over 1,300 acres total. Of this, we crop 850 acres of corn, 160 acres of beans, and 150 acres of wheat. We feed all of the corn we raise to the hogs and also need to buy more. The wheat we bale for straw for bedding in the winter months, and all of the beans we raise we sell on the open market.

The farm consists of six different farms that we finish hogs on. A finishing house is where a pig is taken once it is weaned from its mother and where it stays until it is ready to be sold. We have two farms where we farrow hogs. A farrowing house is where a female pig is taken when it is close to the time for her to deliver, where she delivers, and where she stays until the baby pigs are weaned from her and she is completely recovered. We also have one house where we actually wean the hogs (or have a hot nursery). We run 204 farrowing crates, which are individual stalls where sows farrow their pigs. We also run three breeding houses. Troy and Ty take care of all the breeding and spend a fair amount of their time in these houses. We typically handle around 1,300 sows at one time. A sow is a female pig that has already had a litter of pigs. We also sell about 22,000 hogs a year. At any given time, we may have around 15,600 hogs on hand (Dallas Baer interview).

## **Corporate Reign**

Recently family farmers such as the Chamberlains have been forced to go out of business because of the recent trend toward "corporate farming," in which large groups have joined together to dominate the farming industry. They pull together all of their

resources and all of their best products and start working together. Though this may seem like a good idea at first, looking at it through the eyes of small farmers and those that have no desire to turn over their entrepreneurial rights to others see it differently. "Turning over our farm to another group to run as they see fit would be like selling out, not just ourselves, but also all of the generations before us. We just have got to keep on building ourselves up and make sure things get done. That's how we compete" (Tyler Baer interview).

Those farmers that have joined forces usually have anywhere from 5,000 to hundreds of thousands of sows. When we compare that to our 1,300, even though that's a large for a family farm, one can see where the difficulties come. "The large farmers have an advantage in the sense that they can use economies of scale. They have more buying power than us, they have more selling power than us, and they make the barrier to entry huge; if you're going to join or compete, you better come in big" (Troy Baer interview). The corporate farmers have more buying power because they can buy in larger bulk. The larger amount one buys, the cheaper it is per unit. They also have more selling power because they can sell a huge amount at one time. Therefore, it is advantageous for a packer to go to them because they can buy all the hogs they need at one place, with one check, and dealing with one person. If they buy from smaller farmers, they have to buy a couple loads from one farmer and a couple loads from another farmer, adding to the hassle and cost.

There are two sides to the large group farmers, however. Part of the group is going to feel like they had no choice but to join the large corporation because they would lose everything if they didn't have help from others. Therefore, they're going to be

unhappy with the situation they're in and feel like victims. They won't be afraid to step on anyone's toes and say exactly how they think the farm should be run. This creates another problem. There will be several farmers involved who think their way of handling all the areas of farming are the best and only way to do it. There will rarely be a time when the whole group agrees on something and it gets done right away without any debate.

Group farming will also create a problem with hired hands. "The expense for hired hands is much greater on a large farm. This is primarily because it takes more people and therefore they have more wages and insurance to pay. However, there will also be a higher turnover rate because these people don't have an interest in what they're doing. If the place goes belly up they can always just find another job. With family farming, part of the payment for working is seeing the business be a success, that's all the payment you need when it's a part of you" (Scott Chamberlain interview).

## **Why my family has been successful**

In spite of fluctuations in the economy, my family has stayed in farming and continued to be successful. I attribute the success to four areas: the division of labor and organization, the family's closeness, smart financing and decision making, and technological improvements. It is important to realize in any business that there is a huge amount of give and take and that compromise is the only way to succeed in every area in the business.

## ***Division of labor and organization***

The farm is run by seven full time employees, two semi-retirees, and five part-timers. They work side by side every day. We sell hogs every Thursday and wean every Friday unconditionally. Having a weekly schedule helps the hired hands know what to do, and the repetition makes the operation run smoothly. All employees also have their own job descriptions, which may include tending to hog nurseries, chores, breeding, managing a finishing floor, planting and harvesting, grinding feed, putting anhydrous ammonia on, running a starter lot for cattle, irrigating manure, or taking care of gestation houses. Each person has a “backup” who knows their job to lessen the chances of a breakdown in the chain of events due to illness or vacation. The weekend chores rotate every week and holiday chores are usually taken care of by my dad and my brothers (Dallas Baer interview).

Brian Chamberlain, Max's son, deals with the feed. We have our own mill right on the farm, so Brian has to do all the grinding as well as hauling the feed to each of the seven farms. Troy and Ty handle all of the breeding, farrowing, processing pigs, and vaccinating gestating sows. (Farrowing means that they take care of sows that have been bred, impregnated, and are delivering.) When Troy and Ty process pigs, they have to take each baby pig that has just been born and cut their needle teeth, so as they get older they can't bite the other pigs and hurt them; castrate them because only those that are going to be used for breeding are left uncastrated; and vaccinate them to protect them from disease. They also vaccinate gestating sows, which means they doctor pregnant sows during the gestation period.

Scott takes care of all the books and cash flows, hog enterprising, beans, and feed programs. In keeping the books, he monitors the cash flows going out as well as coming in and tries to budget these appropriately. Hog enterprising entails managing the feed conversions and product costs. He keeps close track of the feed that is used and its cost. He keeps all of the receipts dealing with the production of hogs, including overhead, short-term and long-term debt, and feed purchases. At the end of the year, he balances the books to see how profitable our production was over-all and finds the break-even point for all the areas of the farm. For instance, "Right now the break-even point on beans for us is about \$2.72. This is not very good because the market price is \$1.91. That means for every bushel we produce we're losing \$.81. This probably has a lot to do with our high long-term debt that we have right now. We knew the only way to survive was to add on and produce more, so we built some more buildings. Our overhead is probably a little bit higher than the average farmer because of this, but we'll turn it around in no time at all" (Scott Chamberlain interview). Scott is also in charge of all the planting, maintenance, and harvesting of the beans. He also schedules the feeding program and makes sure the orders of all the different kinds of feed are set up and delivered at the right times. Of course, it is extremely important that the right feed is on hand at all times so as not to break the pattern the hogs are fed in and consequently harm their production.

Dallas is in charge of hog production, which includes keeping monthly inventories of all the hogs in each building, monitoring the sow production and making adjustments when necessary, monitoring the conception rate, and solely taking care of the hot nursery at the Eel River farm. He also takes care of all the planting, maintenance, and

harvesting of the corn. Monitoring the sow production rate means he is constantly checking the litters that have been born and keeping a close eye on the average size litter and the health of the newborn pigs. He watches the conception rate by finding the ratio of sows bred to those that became pregnant.

Monte deals with the gilts, manure management, overseeing the finisher and grower houses, and maintenance. (Gilts are female pigs that have not yet farrowed.) "All of our gilts are lot bred, which means we just put a boar on the lot with them and let them mate themselves" (Monte Chamberlain interview) He also selects the gilts that the farm buys and breeds and keeps them fed watching their diets closely. Manure management includes keeping a record of where the manure has been injected, how much has been injected, and making sure it goes on the fields uniformly. "A huge part of manure management is the actual setting up and taking down of the machinery that pumps the manure from the pits. Ty helps me out with that a lot. Now we inject all of our manure instead of spreading it with a honey wagon or slurry tanks. This helps keep neighbors off our back because it reduces the smell, and it keeps environmentalists off our back as well because it helps us manage the NPK levels. It also saves time and is more efficient. We better utilize the manure and have less compaction on the fields" (Monte Chamberlain interview). (NPK levels refer to harmful emission of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium into the environment by manure. The state requires that farmers keep a very close eye on these levels and never go over the legal level. "If you do, you're going to have one heck of a fine to pay.") Monte spends a large part of his days in the grower/finisher houses where he monitors the production and growth of the hogs that have been weaned and are given time to grow before they are sold. Having a degree in

mechanics, Monte is very good at the maintenance and everyday "fix its" that a farmer must engage in.

Mike Yentes is our only full time employee who is not a member of the family. However, he has lived on the same road as the farm and the family and been a small part of it since he was in high school. Mike mostly does general tasks like helping out the guys when they need some extra hands. He is also very good at repairs and maintenance of the equipment. He spends the majority of his time in the finishing houses helping out (Dallas Baer interview).

Because Max is semi-retired, he spends about three quarters of the day at the farm. His duties include mowing in the summer months and ground maintenance. He participates in planting and harvesting, runs many of the errands, and does a majority of the hauling of hogs when they sell on Thursday and wean on Friday. Mowing and maintaining the farm grounds is a much bigger job than it sounds when you consider that we farm 1,300 acres and over 200 of those acres have to be mowed and maintained.

Grandpa Orville is also semi-retired but still shows up at the farm every day. He runs the dryer during the harvest season, takes care of a lot of the equipment maintenance, and advises all the others. When the corn is harvested, before it is put into a grain bin or silo, it must be dried to avoid mold and mildew. There is a large dryer on the farm that the corn is fed into; it remains in the dryer until there is no hint of moisture at all. It can take hours to dry the corn depending on how dry it is when it is actually taken out of the field. So, when the harvesting is stopped due to the lack of daylight, the dryer keeps running into the wee hours of the night. The dryer buzzes very loudly when it is done, and during the harvest season, Grandpa sleeps with his windows open so he

can hear when it is finished and go unload the dryer. Grandpa is a great adviser to the others on the farm because he has seen and experienced so much on the farm. He suffered through the great depression and watched the field work move from working with teams of horses to working with fuel guzzling equipment.

Grandma and Grandpa Chamberlain are also very avid travelers in between planting and harvesting seasons. They go to Florida every year during the winter months and travel the world during the warm months looking for more efficient ways of farming. They have traveled well over 30 countries worldwide, several of them two or three times, studying agriculture and farming methods (Orville Chamberlain interview).

Ironically, most of the part-time help comes from the Baer side of my family. Grandpa Baer works Thursday mornings every week to help out with the selling and moving of all the hogs. My uncle Dewayne works on the weekends. He goes to each of the buildings and cleans them out, using a pressure sprayer to clear away the cobwebs or any other debris that may have gathered throughout the week. My uncle Rex actually lives on one of the farms where we have a farrowing house and helps out as needed there. "It's really nice to have him over there to help out because sometimes you just don't have the time or enough help to get to each house and make sure everything is running smoothly. Rex is a great worker and we know we can always count on him" (Tyler Baer interview). Two other hired hands work in the mornings and help out with weaning, cleaning, and selling on Thursdays. Chrissy, Monte's wife, also works part-time and does a lot of the work in the office including paying bills, keeping books up to date, and payroll.

## ***The Family's Closeness***

A second reason for my family's success is our closeness. It is said that a family that plays together stays together. My family is living proof of that statement. Since I was one year old, I have lived less than a half mile from my grandparents, aunt, and uncle, and the farm. My cousins, Angie and Monte, and my brothers and I spent every waking minute of the summer together. We invented clubs and sometimes dangerous games that entertained us for hours. Each family had one four-wheeler, I had a moped, and Grandma and Grandpa had a golf-cart for us to play with, providing the opportunity to get ourselves into trouble.

The boys, however, were the most mischievous ones. Perhaps the time they found themselves in the most trouble was when Ty was eight years old and Troy and Monte were ten. They had heard some people at the high school basketball game talking about going out and soaping windows. This was an intriguing prospect to the guys because they heard the people saying how much fun it was. So, that night they took all the soap they could from their houses and met back at the largest hog shed we own. They then proceeded to soap every window on the building, writing their names, their girlfriend's names, or simply "hi" on them. Needless to say, Dad and Scott were fuming when they got back there Saturday morning and found what the boys had done. The three once again found themselves gathered back at the hog shed, this time not with soap in hand, but Windex and paper towel. "There are at least forty windows back there. Let me tell you, it took a hell of a lot longer to clean up the windows than it did to soap them. And, if I remember right, it just wasn't quite as fun" (Monte Chamberlain interview). "I guess we kind of had a hard time with windows around the farm because I can remember

once getting in trouble for shooting out four of the windows in the barn at the Hall Farm with my b.b. gun," Tyler added (Tyler Baer interview).

Grandpa Orville always gave the kids an opportunity to earn some money on the farm. Sometimes, the jobs farm kids are offered are a little different than those of other children. For instance, everyone's favorite money maker as we grew up was "rattin'," as we called it. Grandpa told us that for every rat we shot and killed he would give us a quarter. So, every Saturday night we would get the spotlight and our pellet guns and head to the barns. I always had to hold the spotlight while the guys shot at the rats as they came into the light. "We had the greatest times taking the 'rat-bo' pellet gun out and getting those rats, and we made a lot of money too!" (Troy Baer interview). We also were each given a quarter when we could produce the head of a sparrow for my grandpa to see. "I guess he wanted the head because he hated those things so much, he just wanted to make sure they were dead. They are such a nuisance" (Monte Chamberlain interview).

After bailing season, the kids could always be found in the barn celebrating our new playground in the straw. We would break some bales to make a soft place to land for a getaway when we played tag, or for safe landing when we would swing on the big rope clear across the top of the barn. Our biggest projects however were always building tunnels and clubhouses in the stacked straw.

Even though we're older now and these games are just stories to talk about at Christmas, we still have many common interests. Dad, Troy, Ty, and Monte all go to a bowling league Monday nights. They're not all on the same team, so this can cause some heated competition. Dad, Monte, Scott, Troy, and Ty all enjoy golfing in the summer

after all the chores are done. Of course, we can't forget fishing either. Troy, Ty, and Monte just bought a fishing boat together three years ago and have enjoyed it every summer since. Scott and Monte both have speedboats, and we occasionally all head out to the lake with them to enjoy a day of tubing and skiing. "We're all really close and know each other well. We pick our battles and have respect for each other; that's what keeps us running. Everyone does his share and trust that you will do yours" (Dallas Baer interview).

### ***Smart Financing and Decision Making***

Recently Chamberlain Farms has been deeper in debt than ever before. This debt, however, has proved to be one of the reasons our farm has stayed alive. "As we watched group farming become more popular, we knew that to compete we were going to have to add on and produce more hogs" (Troy Baer interview). With the recent falling prices in hogs, the government bought all of the farmers' diseased hogs. Because we were losing money every week, we decided to participate in the buyout. We sold a majority of our population and therefore had a lot of additional costs when we started to repopulate. "At the bank, we have a line of credit that is always available to us. Of course, every year we have to go back and renew it, and the available amount can always change. Things have sure changed in the last ten years though. Used to be that you were nearly best friends with your bankers. Now they don't have time because they're too busy getting loans and making a profit off of the huge farmers" (Orville Chamberlain interview).

At the beginning of every year, Dad, Scott, and Grandpa Orville put together a budget. The budget always includes the following: utilities; feed costs; corn production; bean meal costs; artificial insemination costs; cost of new boars; yields of beans, wheat,

and hogs; health insurance for all employees; reimbursements for dental costs among employees; building repairs; new equipment and equipment repairs; and medicines and vaccinations. The overhead costs of farming are astronomical and always higher than what one would think. For instance, they budget \$1,800 every month for the electric bill alone. With the rise in gas prices, the cost of heating our buildings went up dramatically. "We were kind of surprised when we got the gas bill on one building and saw that it cost \$4,000 just to keep it heated for one month. We were afraid to get the gas bills from all the other farms" (Scott Chamberlain interview).

Chamberlain Farms is also starting to get more involved in hedging its risks in the market. "So far the only types of contracts we make are with the packers, and even then, we never contract for more than one-third of what we're selling for the month. We sell every single week, bar none. We just take the highs with the lows and everything seems to balance out, so far anyway" (Dallas Baer interview).

The contracts that my father is talking about here are futures contracts. They are a "binding obligation to either purchase or deliver a specific commodity at a set future date." (Fleisher, p. 88). Futures contracts are highly standardized with regard to quantity, grade, location, time, and method of delivery and purchase. The contracts make it possible for farmers to hedge, or protect themselves, from the risk that goes along with the market. "I guess we've found that the premium that goes along with creating the contracts just hasn't saved us enough money. It's not worth our time yet" (Orville Chamberlain interview). "Overall we do a pretty good job with our budgeting. We usually aren't too far off. The only thing that throws us off is if the cost of grain goes up or the price of hogs goes down. We base most of our numbers on the past expenses and

try to interpret the market and base those numbers on recent trends" (Scott Chamberlain interview).

### ***Technological Improvements***

Success in almost every business, including farming, depends on its ability to keep up with recent trends and technology. "It's amazing to me seeing all of the new equipment and gizmos we have around here that makes our job a little bit easier. I just wish my dad and grand dad could have seen and used all of it too" (Orville Chamberlain interview).

Perhaps one of the major technological improvements relevant to our farm is in the area of pork producing. The goal of a pork producer is to have a high percentage of leanness on the hogs, to produce larger litters, and to have a high conception rate in breeding. "Right now we're running at about 55.2% lean on carcass, and yielding 76%" (Dallas Baer interview). This means that when a hog is standing on the scales, 55.2% of its body weight is meat. Yielding 76% means that when a pig has been skinned and all of its entrails have been removed the remaining is 76% meat.

A huge improvement in our hog production is the reduced amount of time sows spend in the gestation house and the decreased amount of time it takes to wean pigs and get them to the finishing houses. "We used to wean hogs at six weeks old, then at four weeks, and now we're weaning in about 16 or 17 days. These pigs are moved to the finishing houses faster and are ready to be sold at an earlier age. That allows us to produce more in our buildings creating higher income with higher sales. This does have some disadvantages though. The temperament of our sows is a lot different. We get more production out of them, but their durability isn't quite as good because they're being

worked harder" (Dallas Baer interview). "Our sows are also producing larger litters now than they used to. The average litter used to be about eight pigs, now we've increased it to 9.6 and we've had monthly averages up to ten per litter" (Tyler Baer interview). Our conception rate is a lot higher now than it used to be too. It's running at about 90%. This means that 90% of sows that we hand breed get impregnated. We lot breed all of our gilts, which means we put them out on the lots over night or throughout the day with a boar and let them mate themselves. The sows that have been hand picked at sales by my brothers or dad are placed in a small pen with a boar that has been hand picked as well so as to produce optimal offspring; this is what has been referred to as hand breeding. This type of breeding is used for all of the hogs we sell for meat, which are also called terminal hogs. We use artificial insemination for our maternal hogs. Maternal hogs are the ones we keep on the farm to use in future breeding. We artificially inseminate 10% of those that conceive. We have three breeding houses and usually we produce around 51 litters every week. "We put our sows on a rotation so we know where we are all the time. We have twenty bunches of sows with about sixty in each bunch. Normally we breed all sixty in each group and of those 45 will conceive" (Tyler Baer interview).

There has also been a dramatic change in the way hogs are fed. Ten years ago, a farmer would just walk by the pen and throw in a scoop of feed. Now there are five different stages of feed before a hog is sold. Stage feeding is done according to the body size and age. Pigs in the grower and finishing houses get completely different feed than the pigs in the gestation house. The difference is in the protein and vitamins that the feed contains. "Another thing we do now is sex feed. Gilts need higher amounts of protein than barrows" (Troy Baer interview).

Another huge improvement involves the monitors on the buildings. All aspects are computerized. We have computers in every building that monitor the quality of the air and the air temperature. In order for the hogs to remain healthy and stay on track, the temperature in the hot nurseries, or weaning houses, has to be uniform all the time regardless of the season or the temperature outside. In our newest hot nursery we have computers that automatically call my dad or brothers if the temperature goes above or below the target zone by a quarter of a degree. "This is a really good precaution, but I can't say that I enjoy getting those calls in the middle of the night when it's twenty below and snowing like crazy" (Dallas Baer interview). The computers also call immediately if the power goes off in any of the buildings. There have been several times when the power has went off in the night during a summer storm and we've all had to go back and ventilate the buildings so the hogs don't suffocate and aren't uncomfortable. It can be a real shock to a pig's system when they're used to having the temperature just where they want it and always being comfortable to have the power shut off and have the temperature skyrocket to 120 degrees.

Of course, there are also computer improvements in the equipment used for harvest and planting. In the planters, the computer informs you of how much you have planted, how many acres you have covered, and if your fertilizer is on evenly or if you need more in one spot. In the combines you have several yield monitors that tell you how many bushel per acre you're producing, how dry the corn is, and how quickly the combine is shelling the corn. These monitors all help farmers produce higher yields and higher quality crops.

## Conclusion

There are many different functions of a family. Being a part of a farm family, I feel that the responsibilities of each member are much greater than those of other types of families. For five generations, the children and grandchildren have been coming back to the farm. However, they don't come back because they have been forced to, or because economically, the farm would not get along without them. On the contrary, they come back for the many wonderful experiences they are involved in while working with the family. The farm helps each member of the family to become well rounded. The children are educated on the farm by tinkering with broken down machinery, and watching their fathers doctor the hogs when they are sick. Just as any other family, our family leans on each other emotionally.

I can't imagine growing up anywhere but on a farm. I don't think I've ever been given the chance to get bored. Stories that I find common, many other people find fascinating or sometimes repulsive. I always have looked forward to harvest, when I can ride in the combine with my dad. However, I always dread the bad humor that goes along with poor weather during planting or harvesting seasons. I have been given so many opportunities in my life because of the farm. It's great to grow up seeing and working with my family every day in all we do. As my father always says, "We'll just keep this thing going. Everybody gives a little so the farm stays with the family."

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