

Lincoln's Neighbors By Ray Bowman, Kentucky Farm Bureau News



In early 1809, Thomas Lincoln bought a 300-acre farm near Hodgenville, KY at Nolin Creek in Larue County. The property was named Sinking Spring Farm for the “magnificent spring that bubbled from the bottom of a deep cave.” On February 12, 1809 Abraham Lincoln was born.

About the same time, Gideon Ragland acquired his original property in Larue County.

In 1811 Thomas Lincoln and his family moved to Knob Creek Farm, about 10 miles northeast of the Sinking Spring Farm. Abraham Lincoln was later to reflect “my earliest memories are of the Knob Creek place.”

In December 1816, the Lincolns moved north, settling in the Little Pigeon Creek Community in what was then Perry County and is now Spencer County, Indiana.

The Raglands remained in Larue County. Today, nine generations later, three generations of Raglands still farm in the area.

Family farms and sustainability are two of the most highly valued attributes of contemporary agriculture and the Raglands exemplify both, although perhaps not in the romanticized fashion that some might expect.

Caleb Ragland and his wife LeAnne are the most recent generation to participate in the operation, which consists of some 4,500 acres of row crops.

“We produce corn and winter wheat, then double-crop soybeans after our wheat,” Caleb explains. “We’re using the winter wheat to, hopefully, improve soil health and reduce erosion on some of the more rolling acreage.”

Ragland continues, “As farmers, we care more about the land than anybody else really can, in my opinion. We’re dependent on it for our livelihood and we’re doing all we can, not only to maintain fertility and conserve topsoil, so that the land is more productive for us and for future generations.”

Currently, those future generations are represented by the couple’s three sons; Charlie, Corey and Carter.

“We grow two to three hundred acres of corn each year with no commercial fertilizer,” Caleb beams. “We feed corn to our pigs, the pigs make manure, the manure fertilizes the corn and we feed the corn to the pigs as the process starts all over again.”

The pigs currently number about three thousand sows managed in a housing system that protects the animals from extreme weather and limits exposure to disease-causing pathogens through a stringent biosecurity protocol. The result is some 75,000 piglets produced each year.

Those numbers probably catch the attention of detractors that quickly label it a “factory farm” operation. Ragland quickly points out that the enterprise is run completely by family, whether immediate or extended. Caleb’s father David and one of his brothers work with him day to day and occasionally grandfather Howard still climbs aboard a tractor to lend a hand. The family extension includes more than a dozen neighbors hired from the community to keep things running smoothly.

For the last four years, the Raglands have joined LaRue County’s Farm Bureau and the rest of the county’s agriculture community to hold the AGstravaganza showcase. Both Caleb and LeAnne quickly recognize the necessity for transparency and outreach to a consumer base that has limited exposure to the process of food production.

“It was an adjustment moving out to the country because I grew up in a neighborhood

in Florida with houses all around,” LeAnne acknowledges. “I’ve grown to like it here and feel a little claustrophobic now when I go back to the city.”

Given her experiences, LeAnne has taken on an advocacy role to help bridge the gap.

“I feel like I have that connection with people who are still in the city,” she says. “I’m trying to reach that group in the ‘moveable middle’ that may not understand what we’re doing and trying to open conversations.”

Caleb and LeAnne serve on Kentucky Farm Bureau’s Young Farmer committee and Caleb is a producer director for the Kentucky Soybean Board’s Central Bluegrass Area.

