

Influences of Their Own Children

had to herd the geese out of the berry patch into a fenced off area. So they were great fertilizers, but they weren't great weeders . . . you couldn't tell them 'that spot is really weedy over there.'" ❖

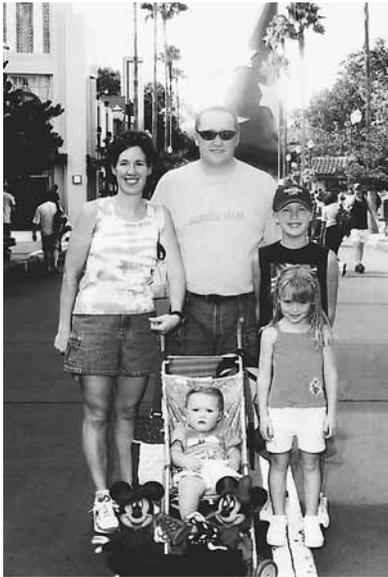
It was mid-August 2003, and Josh and Cindy Van Der Pol and I were standing in their chicken barn. They have three small corrugated huts inside the barn each holding over a hundred chicks (428 in total at this time). Maggie, their aging Border Collie, was watching the chicks closely, especially as Cindy put feed in their feeders and water in their watering canister. Cindy explained that soon the chicks will go out into the pasture with a large fenced off area (5' high mesh electrical fencing). Each evening, their dog, Maggie (12) and their son, Jacob (8) will go out to herd the chickens into the huts for safety during the night. Maggie is arthritic yet can still herd hundreds of chickens into housing each night. And Jacob has learned by watching that the chickens respond to both the sound and shadow of a hawk. To hasten the process of herding chicks, Jacob knows how to make the scream of the Redtail Hawk. ❖

The image of Jacob Van Der Pol screeching like a Redtail brings me back to the concept that the second generation is impossible to feature here without talking about the third generation. It all keeps going! Melissa MacKimm listens to Ian in his upstairs crib as we talk in her dining room. Connie Carlson hands crayons to Madeline at the coffee shop. Merrisue Minar notes how the Minar grandchildren work around the creamery, and a playpen was often seen in the main salesroom of Cedar Summit Farm. Josh and Cindy Van Der Pol have moved a house onto Pastures A Plenty, and recently their son, Jacob, asked, "Where will my house go someday?"

As I stood in the yard at Pastures A Plenty, Andrew Van Der Pol (then five years old) walked through our conversation toting half of a five-gallon bucket of water, headed out to some pigs stuck in a certain part of the pasture. Andrew could hardly lift the bucket, but no one stopped to help him; he was doing fine. He would carry and stop, carry and stop. His mom watched and remarked, "**Andrew sees a job and does it.**" ❖

"I wanted to give him the life I'd had."

It becomes apparent that each generation puts its hopes in the next one, and not so much on specific behaviors or dreams of that next generation, but simply on their presence. Even operational changes on their home farmsteads are made in the name of the next



**Merrisue and
Mike Minar,
Nicholas,
Natasha, and
Nathan**

generation. In the Van Der Pol clan, this seems to be true. I remember Jim standing in St. Paul in the Minnesota Project office, one day in 1997 or so, saying that if he hadn't gone into diverse and sustainable operations, Josh might not want to come back to the farm. Now Josh does not so much talk about the opportunity for *himself*, as he speaks of the opportunity to have *his* children there. **"When Jacob was born, I wanted to give him the life I'd had,"** said Josh. ❖

Cindy Van Der Pol talks about sustainability, about how you "live off the land you have." When Cindy is canning, the children come right into the task, and just love it. Hopefully, they will come to love this farming life, and by the looks of it, they already do. [At that moment, Jacob and Andrew were trying to douse each other with the hose off of the watering trailer.] **"The sustainable part is to keep going and keep our kids in on the operation,"** said Cindy. ❖

Cedar Summit Farm is a study in three generations. Mike and Merrisue's oldest son, Nicholas, always talked about "doing something with Grampa." The underlying question has been, "What to do on Cedar Summit Farm that the children can be part of?" As Dave and Florence contemplated changing their relationship to the work, selling the farm was simply not the option anyone wanted—they wanted something that would pull family back to the farm, and provide work for the kids and grandkids.

Finally Dave Minar asked the key question, "Why have a middle man?" and he and Florence began the initial design establishing a creamery on their farm site. All the kids, spouses, and farm partners came together and each was asked to write down what they wanted to do or what they were willing to do, if they could work together in a creamery business. From those notes, it looked like there would be enough interest (the needed labor) and Dave and Florence went ahead and did the financing options. They thought about used equipment at first, and then decided on state-of-the-art small dairy equipment purchased from Israel. Cedar Summit Farm has a complete line of dairy products from their own cows, including cheese, cream, yogurt, ice cream, and, of course, 1%, 2%, whole, and skim milk.

Mike Minar (Dave's son) talks about his motivation to leave the corporate world and come manage the dairy. **"Those jobs called for 12-hour days with the commute and all,"** and Mike found he wasn't home enough with his children. At this point, Mike says his motivation was **"mostly personal . . . I had grown disillusioned with corporate America and didn't enjoy my jobs. I wanted to be part of a small company and be closer to home—nearer to the kids. I wanted to be able to go to lunch with my kids, or go to their school functions. Yet I didn't want the farm side of the creamery business. I wanted to manage the plant."** His wife, Merrisue, couldn't be clearer on this point. **"The flexibility, a job close to home (I even originally brought the kids to work), and I guess I just wanted to be part of all this."** ❖

“Mom, I’m gonna buy a creamery.”

It’s entirely possible that the family’s desire has spread to Nicholas Minar, age 11. Recently his class was assigned “the million dollar project,” a simulation where students learn about economics and investment and real-life scenarios. Each student had to pick an industry or project focus, and Nicholas declared, **“Mom, I’m gonna buy a creamery.”** His mom says he did a ton of Internet research and learned that you have to budget things and make smart decisions. Nicholas often speaks about, **“when I’m old enough to work at the plant.”** And Merrisue reiterates: **“Having something for my children to look forward to, to be part of, was my highest motivation.”** ❖

Yes, the children are influenced and motivated by their parents, yet the parents are also continually motivated by their children. Nicholas’ desire to be part of Grampa’s creamery helps motivate his dad, Mike, through a 60-hour week. All the while, Dave and Florence are right in the middle of their kids and grandkids every day. It goes around, and, in this case, smack in the middle of it all are 150 head of healthy cows eating grass.

As Ian MacKimm talks to himself upstairs in his crib, his mother, Melissa, beams with the pleasure of being home with him and says: **“My family is hugely important to me. It’s my top priority. I can’t even say enough about how important family is to me.”** ❖

Our talk of children leads us directly to hopes . . . hopes for the land and children and the next generations in agriculture.



**John and Melissa
MacKimm with
son, Ian**