Influences of Their Own Children

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
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.