



COTTON:

It's in his genes

Chopping weeds in the cotton fields, milking cows, and driving tractors were all everyday activities for one young boy. For entertainment, he spent his time hunting rabbits or working on the farm.

He would often find himself with his father in the middle of a cotton field, studying the variations of the crop. He enjoyed every minute of it. Little did he know one day he would run a farm of his own. That was more than 80 years ago.

According to the 2012 USDA Agriculture Census, the average age of American farmers has been steadily increasing. Since 1982, it has climbed from 50 years old to 58. As farmers are aging, there are not as many young farmers coming along to replace them.

A seasoned farmer once said there are two things that grow on the High Plains of Texas - cotton and family. As he reflected on his past, 95-year-old Felix Macha said his life has been centered on both.

"I grew up on a cotton farm. I never expected to stay here all my life, but I did. It's a good life," he said, smiling, as he looked out the window toward the cotton fields.

After graduating from high school in 1939, Macha said he continued to work with his father on the farm south of Lubbock, until he joined the Air Force at the beginning of World War II, where he worked as an airplane mechanic.

When the war was over, he said he and his two brothers, Robert and Ed, pooled their money to buy a tractor and begin farming.

"I just wanted to go back to the farm," he said will longing in his voice. "Robert was the same way. That was what we were raised doing, and that was what we knew how to do."

The three brothers farmed together until Ed died, leaving the land around Lubbock to Felix.

Felix continued as sole proprietor of the land until the day he got hurt. Interested in airplanes, Felix purchased an airplane for one of his sons. Unfortunately, one day Felix

accidentally backed himself into the propeller, injuring his shoulder and arm. As the primary caregiver to the family of eight, this was a scary time for them, as Felix would not be able to work for a while.

However, about that same time, his son Jim Ed graduated from Texas Tech. Because of the severity of the situation, he decided to take over the farm and after a few excellent growing seasons, Jim Ed had completely bought his father out. Shortly after, Steven, another one of Felix's sons, returned to the farm. They continued to farm with their father until he retired.

"The boys were a lot of help," Felix said. "I could have never done it without them."

Now, Steven and Jim Ed are partners, but their land stretches from Plainview to Tahoka, Texas.

Despite his age, Steven said his father still helps out during cotton harvest by running the

module builder, sweeping and cleaning up the shop, and assisting wherever he is needed.

"He has always been dedicated to his work and dedicated to his family," Steven said confidently. "He has done everything to keep it together."

One of Steven's sons Nick, now a farmer himself, said he thinks his grandfather's secret to a long life is his work ethic.

At 95, he said his grandfather has had to slow down a little, but he can often be seen riding around the shop and areas of the farm on his golf cart, with Spike, the family dog, following closely behind.

"I don't believe that there is a day that's come in his entire life that he has felt useless," Nick said. "He always finds ways to keep himself busy."

In many ways, Nick said, he would describe his grandpa as "seasoned," because he has been through so many things in his life.

"He just knows everything about everything," Nick said. "There's not a whole lot that takes him by surprise."

Since he started farming in 1938, Felix said a lot of

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things have changed. Things used to be really slow, he said, but technology has allowed them to be more efficient.

“Basically, I guess you would say that like now we have nine or twelve row equipment,” Felix said. “Then, we had three-row and then four-row. And then we graduated to six-row equipment. Man we thought we were really progressing good. Now we have equipment that my daddy would say was out of this world.”

Around the time Felix started farming, he said a cotton stripper would cost about \$350, and the older farmers would complain that it was too expensive. Nowadays, he said that would seem like a bargain to him.

“The equipment is expensive and farming got more expensive, and now you have to farm a lot of acres to make ends meet, and it is just kind of getting out of hand,” Felix said. “The boys just got a new cotton harvester, and the dang thing cost nearly \$1 million.”

In addition to improvements in equipment, Felix said the farming lifestyle has changed as well.

“Used to, you had to hire a whole lot of farm workers to hoe and gather cotton and everything, and now you have machinery that does most of it,” Felix said. “It does not take very much labor, and it is progressing more and more all the time.”

The way things operated back then, Felix said most of the work was done at home. They didn’t hire as many jobs out. Because of this, he enlisted the help of his wife, Monica, for tasks such as stomping cotton and delivering loads to the cotton gin.

“She was raised on the farm and knew a lot about the farm, so when we got married, she fell right in with me and we farmed together,” Felix said as he smiled at his wife sitting across the table from him. “She was my right-hand man.”

Married happily for 58 years now, she still remains his right-hand man, even though increases in technology have just about put her out of a job, Felix said with a grin.

Their youngest son Steven said he thinks the secret to their long marriage is persistence.

“They both work for the same goal,” Steven said. “It is amazing how they are in sync with each other all of the time. They just communicate really well together.”

From the time he was a small boy until now, Nick said he has learned a lot about relationships and communication from watching his grandparents interact.

“They taught me that you have to be patient,” Nick said, “even whenever things are less than stellar.”

Reflecting on his life with Monica, Felix said he would not change a thing. Farming has always been up and down, but no matter what, he said it will always be a part of him.

“I grew up on a cotton farm, so I guess I can die on one,” he chuckled. 🍷



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