



## Advancing Traditions

**C**ameron walks out of the agricultural sciences and natural resources building at West Texas A&M University and sees cars lined up on Main Street. Groups of friends are walking across campus, chatting on their way to grab lunch before heading off to their daily routine of watching movies, playing video games, and finishing the occasional homework assignment. Instead, Cameron jumps in his pick-up and heads west until he reaches Wildorado, Texas, where his dad and two older brothers have been working since sunrise.

According to the U.S. Census, there are more than 300 million people living in the United States. Less than one percent of those people claim farming as their occupation. The number of students returning to the farm after college is decreasing, while the average age of farmers continues to increase.

Recently, a rise in the number of family farms being acquired by large corporations due to children's lack of interest in farming. Most families are lucky to have one child who is willing to take over the family operation. Fortunately, the Gruhlkeys have three.

Cameron is the youngest of three sons who decided to follow in their father's footsteps and take over the family farm. His eldest brother, Braden, graduated in 2009 from Texas Tech University with a Bachelors of Science in interdisciplinary agriculture. Braden was the first of the three brothers to return to the farm.

Braden said that although he is glad he earned a degree, he decided to go back to the farm after graduation because he loved farming and never considered doing anything else.

Brittan, the second oldest, graduated with a Bachelor of Science in interdisciplinary agriculture from West Texas A&M University (WTAMU). Cameron, the youngest son, followed Brittan to WTAMU and recently earned his Bachelor of Science in plant and soil sciences in December 2013.

Although Cameron is currently beginning his life as a full-time farmer, he is well accustomed to the lifestyle and has already been working on the farm for several years.

"Farming and going to college at the same time can be very difficult," Cameron said. "I know my



*The Gruhlkey's using the advanced technology in John Deere equipment to harvest corn last fall.*



brothers are out here working while I'm sitting in class. I love farming just as much as they do, so it makes it difficult."

Bill Gruhlkey, father of the three boys, started the Gruhlkey farm operation in Wildorado, Texas in 1981 on approximately 250 acres. Since then, the family farm has grown to more than 4,500 acres. Bill said, although he loves farming, he probably would not be doing it anymore if it were not for the help of his boys.

"I enjoy farming, and it is rich in our family's blood. I've dreamed of having a family farm for years," Bill said with a grin. "I've always treated my sons as owners because I realized that they were going to inherit the land, and eventually become the owners."

Although Bill has been the leader and the teacher on the Gruhlkey farm for several years, he is now switching positions. Bill said he realizes with all the new technology and changes in farming, his sons are now going to have to become the teachers.

"One day, I sat the boys down and told them, 'I'm proud of you and I love you,'" Bill said with compassion and reassurance. "You have learned from my mistakes, and have listened to everything I have told you. Now, if I have a brain, I will learn from you."

Now that the three sons have taken over some of the responsibilities on the farm, they have adapted to the new technologies available and are using them to their full capability.

"We're more willing to take something that's new and really try to understand it," Braden said.

In 2007, John Deere introduced Swath Control Pro™ technology. Swath Control Pro™ is technology used to ensure no area of the farm is skipped or covered twice while spraying or planting. It uses GPS guidance to monitor the land and determines what area has been treated and adjusts the planter or sprayer accordingly.

Brittan said that since he has returned to the farm, his family has started utilizing Swath Control Pro™, which shuts off individual sprayers nozzles or planters boxes to improve the efficiency and productivity in farming.

The Gruhlkeys have also adapted technology to assist with irrigation efficiency. Due to the

lack of rain and high summer temperatures, new technologies have been developed to ensure that irrigation systems are working properly and the crops are sufficiently watered.

"Our sprinklers and irrigation systems call us when they lose pressure or get stuck," Brittan said. "The minute it happens, we know about it."

Brittan said that without this technology, it could be almost a day before someone noticed that their crops were not getting any water. With high

temperatures and low rainfall, Brittan said this could result in crops dying or decrease in overall production.

Braden said the future of farming technology is exciting. He said they expect to see major advancements within the next 30 years, including driverless equipment, more

drought-tolerant plant varieties, and even more efficient irrigation systems.

As for the future of the Gruhlkey farms, the family could not be more thrilled about what the future holds. Brittan and Cameron agree when Braden expresses his excitement about getting to raise his family on the same farm he grew up on.

"I'm excited to know that my kids will be raised on this farm," Braden said. "When we were little, our dad made us feel important, like the farm belonged to us."

Agriculture has provided the Gruhlkeys a way of life that many can only dream about. Their adaptation to technology, hard work, and willingness to learn has proven to be their equation to success. Through the hard times, they said they will continue to do what they can in order to advance their farming operation.

"We figured out real fast that life isn't always fair," Brittan said. "If you want to be successful, you have to work at it. **T**

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*Amber Halfmann*  
Garden City, Texas

