

AGMag

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(L to R): Jarrod Kash,
Lexy Pedkte, Tricia Kash,
Mike Kash

KASH FAMILY FARM

WHERE FAMILY MEANS EVERYTHING

By Rhonda Hatcher

Picture driving down the country roads, and after a hop skip and a jump on turns and twisty country roads you arrive at the Kash Family Farm. That is exactly what it took for me to arrive at the Kash's establishment in Belle Rive, Illinois. The story of the Kash Family Farm begins with Bob and Darlene Kash of Chicago, parents of second generation farmers Mike and Tricia. Bob worked at Ford Motor Company and was trying to save money to farm full time while driving weekends to southern Illinois to farm. In 1966 Bob and Darlene packed up their children and moved to Ina and began farming full time. It was extremely hard to start farming in those days with no backing and it is even harder today. There on the farm in the middle of nowhere, they are not immune to worldly problems.

Mike and Tricia were married and united as well as business partners

and co-workers.

One thing that will stay in my mind is something that Mike said to me before the interview got underway. He said with tears welling up in his eyes, "I am the richest man you will ever meet and I don't mean money wise." With God, my family and my accomplishments in my life, that is more than any amount of money I could ever possess."

Mike says, "Tricia didn't come from a farm background so all she truly knows is our way and this makes me very fortunate. We purchase our farm equipment, fertilizer and seed locally and we do our banking locally, as well. We purchase our insurance for all of our needs from a local insurance agent. They farm 7,000 acres of grain crops and have 5,000 acres in cover crops of different cocktails.

The hardest working member on the farm is Tricia, Mike says. She is the co-owner, mother, grandmother,

caregiver to three elderly parents, bookkeeper, wife and whatever else is needed all in the same day.

Jarrod, Mike's son, works long hours with no pay to speak of; he is learning that it takes time to achieve goals. Tricia's sons Kyle, and Kole Kluck and their families work public jobs but help with the farm as needed. Gerald Haile works at the farm as well. Mike added with a chuckle, "When he runs out of things to do, he finds something, typically cleaning up things such as pine cones in the driveway, to keep the farmstead tidy."

While Mike's father, Bob is still a huge anchor to the farm, sadly Darlene passed away five years ago but her efforts are still seen around the farm. "Although you don't see her at the end of the field digging up seed to check planting depth

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Jarrod and Mike Kash

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with her head scarf on any more, she is still around."

Tara is Mike's little sister, and her husband Ryan and family help by "Letting us manage the farm the best we can without scrutiny" according to Mike. He also told a story about Tara. When she was little she would drag sacks of beans to the back end of the truck when they were planting and make supper for them when their mom was in the field.

Mike and Tricia wanted to start a business from scratch together as their own. They started with a plan and molded it into a business, "and that's not typical of our region," said Mike. That business is known as Kash Helicopter Services. They truly believe that God sent them a young man by the name of Don Pruett, who is a pilot, and has become their adopted son. The day will come that Don will be majority owner of Kash Helicopter Services. KHS has developed new farming practices from the air when the crop needs attention, rather than for the farmers convenience.

Yield enhancement has been achieved in the new methods. "We are trying to leave the land better than we found it," Mike said. KHS started with a farmer looking for a better way to reach his crops during time sensitive application windows and boost his yield by doing things like trying 5 GPA liquid application instead of 2.5. Others saw the results and started asking for the same service; since then KHS has built a reputation as a reliable applicator. Honesty, integrity and attention to details are first on the list.

As I interviewed Mike and Tricia, I asked the typical questions as to

what time do their days start and end. Mike said, "The normal is from sun-up to sun-down as most farmers would say. There have been three days at a time when there has been no sleep, you're stuck in the fields. You may come home and repack the coolers and hit the fields again, fighting the elements, and you have to get things done when you can. But the most humbling and loving thing is to be out in that field at 3:00 a.m. and all of a sudden you see headlights coming toward you, and you're in the middle of nowhere, and it is my wife Tricia bringing me something to eat and drink. Again he said he is the richest man I will ever know.

Some of Mike's chores growing up on the farm were feeding the hogs, cutting and hauling wood and driving equipment ever since he was little. Some of the biggest changes he has seen have been in the equipment used today versus the equipment they started out with. "You think you are as big as you can get, and then it gets bigger." His dad worked the land with horses, and the proudest piece of equipment his dad and mom owned was a \$700.00 disc. It had wheels on it and they could raise it up. Before that they had to raise the disc up onto a sled and pull it. Since then they have bought bigger equipment, but it is the journey they took and the goals they met that made it their biggest



Kneeling (L to R), front: Mike Kash, Pilot Sean Toomey, Groundsman Ryan Webb; back: Don McKay. Standing, front: Tricia Kash, back: Jarrod Kash. Inside cockpit (L to R) Pilot Nichole Miner, Pilot Don Pruett.

accomplishment.

Mike said he has seen many changes with government involvement in agriculture in the United State. "I was raised to believe that we didn't really need the government to farm; if we couldn't make a go of it we needed to hang up our plows and planters."

I asked if they could go back in

time and work the farm like it was worked in the old days, would he go back, and if he felt like farming was more commercialized today than it used to be. He said he really doesn't feel like they have become more commercialized rather than being family oriented because "Around here we are still very much family oriented. Due to the way I was raised, family

values were bestowed upon me."

Leaving the farm after meeting the Kash family and the employees of Kash Helicopter Services, I felt a sense of old fashioned family unity and the love for what they all do. Even with the huge farm equipment and the helicopters taking off in flight, it is still a family invested, valued way of life. ■



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