

# Century Farms Keep Heritage Alive Family

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This year, the South Dakota Farm Bureau and South Dakota Department of Agriculture honored 45 century farms and 22 quasiquintennial farms from across the state of South Dakota.

As of 2011, the South Dakota Farm Bureau and the South Dakota Department of Agriculture have honored 2,692 farm families through their century farms program, which began in 1984.

The century farms program honors those who have kept their farm in the family for 100 years. Those who have kept the farm in the family for 125 years or more are also recognized through the quasiquintennial farm program.

Those who were recognized this year attended a free pork barbecue feed for their family after a celebration at the South Dakota State Fair where they received a medal gate sign from the South Dakota Farm Bureau as well as a certificate from the Department of Agriculture.

Each family had the opportunity to say something unique about their family homestead or memories throughout the years, and afterward, had their picture taken under a century farm banner, or a 125-year banner, with their entire family.

Susan Zilverberg, executive assistant to the secretary of agriculture for the South Dakota Department of Agriculture said the participants were happy to take part in this year's event.

"One lady had her granddaughter there and you could just tell they were both so happy to be sharing the experience and the history," she said. "It's always fun to listen to their stories. Some of them talked about growing up on the farm and others talked briefly about the history of their farm."

Administrative assistant for the South Dakota Farm Bureau, Julie Fritzsche has been working with the century farm program for more than 30 years. In 1984 there were about 200 farm families recognized, Fritzsche said. She also said the numbers have dropped over the years, just because the program isn't brand new.

"Everybody came forward because it was the first year - that's why we started the quasiquintennial farms program in 2010," Fritzsche said. "We knew that there would be some 125 year old farms coming up from starting the program in 1984. In 2010 we had 147 quasiquintennial farms, which tells you that a lot of those farms stayed in the family."

Zilverberg said there are eligibility requirements to be able to apply



**Pictured below are Bob Baker and his wife in front of their chicken barn. The barn is the only original building on the property. The Baker's farm, shown above in a vintage photo, has been in his family for 100 years and was recognized at the South Dakota State Fair earlier this year. (Courtesy photos)**



through the century and quasiquintennial farm program. They include keeping the farm in the family consecutively for either 100 years or 125 years and having a minimum of 80 acres of original farmland.

Zilverberg said the program has remained strong because people are still striving to hold on to their heritage.

"There's that connection that people want to keep the farm in the family, whether it goes from father to son or daughter, or even if it goes to an uncle or cousin," she said. "Sometimes ranching and farming is difficult, and you never know from year to year what's going to happen, but I really do think that families can stick together and if someone needs to

purchase that farm to keep it in the family they do that."

Bob Baker and his family, of Scotland, were one of the families recognized for their century farm this year. He said he still plans to keep his farm in the family because his children will inherit the farm.

Baker's grandfather originally owned the property, where Baker now raises corn, beans, cattle and hay.

"My grandfather built the middle part of the house, but we've added on since then."

Baker's parents lived a quarter of a mile away from his grandfather when he was nine, and he eventually bought the land he owns now.

"My wife and I got married when I was in the service," he said. "Nobody lived here after my grandparents passed away, so then I bought it from my parents and we've never moved."

Zilverberg said stories like the Baker's make the century farm program important.

"It's that heritage and the honor of being able to say that this was something they earned, whether it was through hard work or it was passed on from a family member - it's something that you always have," she said. "Farming is hard work. You put your heart and soul into it and you put a lot of time where you miss other things that are going on with your family. It's just an honor for these people."

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"We probably get along better than the average brothers do," Lee said. "I don't know what (my brothers) think, but I get along with them and appreciate them being here."

Gordon adds, "That's where it helped that we beat each other up so much when we were younger. Now, we're tired of it."

They agreed that they enjoy farming because it allows them to work outdoors and to be their own bosses.

"You sure don't have the rat race," Lee said.

"Well, yeah you do (in one sense)," Roy Jr. interjected. "You've got to hurry up and get the crops in. You've got to hurry up and get them out."

The toughest part of farming is depending upon Mother Nature to cooperate.

"She is your partner in farming," Gordon said.

Despite the ups and downs caused by weather and other variables, the brothers said farming has given them a good life.

"I can't complain," Lee said.

"It's worked," Gordon agreed.

I cannot deny it: This uncertainty weighs on me, but I'm not sure what to do about it. The solution will be found in time, I suppose.

What is certain is that this plot of land is where generations of my family have toiled for more than a century to feed themselves and others since immigrating from Sweden. It is the sun around which we've orbited, and it should be revered, cherished and treated with care.

The farm is the dirt pile of my youth, and I can assure you that it is the secret to my happiness.

One day I will reside there permanently — season to season, sunrise to sunset — joining the spirits of those who came before me and welcoming any who wish to assist us in protecting this sacred space.

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