

BRENNAN FARM HAS BEEN IN THE FAMILY 118 YEARS

John Brennan was 16 before the family bought their first tractor. For three years before that, beginning at age 13 when Brennan graduated from the simple chores around the farm to helping drive the threshing machine, Brennan and his father, William E. Brennan, used horses to farm roughly 200 acres in Lakeville Township at what is now the western edge of Farmington.

Things have changed since then the horse drawn thresher has been replaced by a tractor and later by modern machinery. Corn picking, originally done by hand, has been taken over by machines as well. But Brennan is still there. Today at age 75, he farms slightly less than half the land his grandfather, John E. Brennan, bought in 1883. His farm was recognized recently by the Minnesota State Fair Board and the Farm Bureau as a Century Farm,

Century Farms need only to have been in continuous operation for 100 years, but the Brennan name goes back farther than that in Dakota County, Brennan's great grandfather, John L. Brennan came to the United States from Ireland in the mid-1800's. After a short stay in New York State he came to Minnesota and settled on a piece of land on Dodd Boulevard, just north of Brennan's current home. "He walked from St. Paul to Faribault and came back and homesteaded saying, "That's the best place between St. Paul and Faribault." Brennan said. Brennan's grandfather, John E. Brennan died in 1913 just 30 years after starting his own farm. Brennan's father, William, bought that land from the estate in 1934 and when he died John took over the operation.

"My Dad had 200 and some acres" Brennan said. "When they settled the estate I bought 100 acres." Brennan later sold 28 acres for a

nearby home. Much of the rest of his father's land was ultimately bought by developers. Now the land over which Brennan once guided horses is the site of housing developments.

The farm itself has changed over the years. The old farmhouse was replaced in 1985. A milking barn blew down sometime in the mid 1980's and the barn that once housed hogs, at one time Brennan's main source of income is put to different uses. This was a victim of the construction jobs Brennan worked for 22 years while trying to make ends meet and send four of his seven children to college.

For a time Brennan worked 10 hour days on construction sites and then came home to handle farm chores. "It got to be just too much for me and my wife milking the cows, so I sold the livestock," Brennan said. Today much of the land Brennan owns is given over to corn, beans, grain and hay. There is also pasture land for 30 or so head of beef cattle he raises. "Just enough," he said, "for them and the Arabian and Saddle Bred horses raised by his son, Mike."

In the yard were coops for chickens and ducks and cages for rabbits. Most of those along with the three peacocks and one peahen have the run of the yard. They belong to Mike as well.

Mike and the others help out around the farm when they are needed- they were out recently to help bale hay- but at 75 years of age Brennan still does much of the work himself. With the exception of three years at the end of the 1970's he has worked the land himself since he bought it.

"I like farming," he said, "I was in farming and construction for 22 years I farmed all the time I was working in construction."

Because of that love of farming and a distaste for the growth he has seen spring up around him Brennan has no plans to sell his land to the developers who offer ever higher prices.

"A lot of people want to buy the land," he said, "{ But } I plan on owning it as long as I

live. I'd rather do what I am doing. It keeps me out of trouble."

Still Brennan sees signs of progress all around him in the construction of new houses and in the recent widening of Cedar Avenue in front of his home. That project has taken half of his front yard and a Box Elder tree planted by his grandfather and grandmother. "When that tree got knocked down it was kind of sad to me," Brennan said, "I don't like progress. I don't. I'm from the old school. I have a different word for it."

"You give it another 50 years, there won't be much farmland around here unless they make a law."

For now and into the immediate future, though Brennan's farm will be there. He 's got a second cutting of hay in for the year and a field full of crops.

And a year after he applied for it he has been recognized for the longevity of his family's farm. The Century Farm designation is not something Brennan ever gave much thought, but when a cousin suggested that he apply for it he went along.

My cousin said, "You should do it." and I thought, "maybe I should." Brennan said. I never gave it a thought. My cousin was the one who told me I should do it.

Brennan first applied for the designation last year, but didn't send his form in until after the July 1st deadline. As a result he had to wait until this year to receive the sign and certificate signed by Governor Jesse Ventura, that comes with the recognition. "The designation is nice," Brennan said, "but it doesn't change the daily operation of the farm. It doesn't make it any better," he said.
Nathan Hansen, Farmington Independent
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