

Museum on Main Street, Smithsonian Institution
Stories: Yes | Student Digital Storytelling Project
The Future of Farming in DeKalb County, Illinois: Generational Farming

John Ward: My name is John Ward from Sycamore, Illinois. And I've been farming personally, I've been farming 49 years.

Steven Ward: [0:11] My name is Steven Ward, from Sycamore, Illinois. I've born and raised on the farm, the family farm. So I was born in 1970, started working as long as I can remember on the farm. I officially came back to the farm after graduating college in '92.

Dayton Ward: [0:34] I'm Dayton Ward, and I'm the seventh generation of this farm and I was raised in Sycamore as well. And my farm, the Dayton farm, that's a little bit down the road from this farm.

John Ward: [0:45] This farm that we're living on is not the original homestead. My great great grandfather purchased this farm in 1905. And he had five children. And his goal in life before he passed on, was to get a farm for each one of his five children. So my great grandmother had this farm. And over the years we've added to it. The combination of the Dayton farm and the Old Elm farm, concentrate on corn, soybeans, wheat, some hay, and then we raise about 10,000 pigs a year. The grain setup that handles all the grain, is over at the original homestead. Your family makes sacrifices so you can stay on here. The challenge is to see if we can continue to grow.

John Ward: [1:48] The size of the farms just continue to get bigger and bigger and bigger, just unable to support a family or two. The biggest advantages that my wife and I have enjoyed is raising our family on the farm. And in doing that, throughout all the years, there was always something for our children to participate in, or to do. They helped with chores, they showed livestock at the fairs, they'd mow the lawn, bring in loads of hay.

John Ward: [2:19] They all chipped in. And we're really rather inexpensive labor force that take advantage of. [2:26] But when you do that, and you come in and you sit down at supper, and you're all together at the same time, you can talk about your day, and you can talk about their interest and what they're thinking or what they're liking. But I think it is probably a great way to raise a family.

Steven Ward: [2:42] I've seen and hope that it's given them the opportunity to realize and see the benefits of hard work, given them a background of ethics of the more you put in, the more you get out. Given them a relationship with people of, you treat them fair and be honest, you're gonna eventually come out on top or feel better. You can sleep at night in those kind of situations. I hope it's given them the opportunity in school, to carry that over to the schoolwork and moving forward with whatever they want to pursue.

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Dayton Ward: [3:18] Learning how to do certain things on the farm and sharing memories of doing things together to accomplish a certain goal on the farm has brought us closer together. At the same time, though, you kind of get in those little arguments and you feel like you don't wanna work with them anymore. But you come around and you love them 'cause they're your family and I think it brings us closer.

John Ward: [3:42] Well, I think my advice to them would be to follow their dreams and be an honest individual, be a caring person, whether it's to your own family or the community or anybody else.

Dayton Ward: [4:02] I feel like growing up in this newer age and this new time, your parents don't necessarily force you. I feel like back then it's almost like that's what you were there for, you were there to take it over. And now we're exposed to so many new careers and jobs. And they're always changing that. I feel my parents have always told me that they don't care, they want me to do something that I'm happy and passionate about. So for them to kind of take that burden off me, not to feel like I have to do the farm helps me, and it makes me actually appreciate the farm more. Because maybe I'm not gonna always run it but at least I'll always be attached to it and I'll be able to help it grow.

Dayton Ward: [4:45] I think that my grandpa and my dad are gonna be around for a lot longer, so who knows where it's gonna go. I hope that I can like my grandpa said and keep our name attached to it and always be a part of it. Even though I don't have as much interest in running it. I wanna still keep it as an intended purpose.