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Interview with Steven R. Winiger (FA 779)

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Western Kentucky University, mssfa@wku.edu

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Interview with Steven Wininger

SC: Sara Carrico

SW: Steven Wininger

SC: The first question I want to ask is: where did you learn to farm?

SW: Multiple family members.

SC: Specifically?

SW: My dad, both grandparents, my uncles, aunts...

SC: How old were you when you first started learning?

SW: That's a good question. I can't remember back that far to be honest. I remember being very young in terms of helping in gardens, helping with cattle, things like that. I want to say at least four or five years old.

SC: How did you first start with the cattle and the chickens, after you moved? How did that first start?

SW: First of all, multiple degrees, after I got my doctorate I was living in the city for the first two years, and then my second job was in kind of a suburb. Third job first house was a neighborhood or a suburb and at that point having helped with the family farming and actually taking our kids down to the family farm, we were like 'Oh, wouldn't it be neat to have some land ourselves, and we would at least have some chickens, maybe some cows so the kids could have that experience.' So then we bought the small farm that we have now. The first thing that we got was the chickens, well no, the first thing we actually got, somebody donated us some sheep and we had no fencing or anything so that was interesting.

SC: What happened to those sheep?

SW: Well it actually worked out really well for the people that owned them, because the mother had died and we raised the babies until they were big enough to take care of themselves, then they took them back. So basically we raised the babies for free for them. But anyway, after we got our fencing done we got some cows and we've had multiple groups of chickens now. Even before we moved to the small farm we started doing some gardening in terms of some blackberries, raspberries, tomatoes, herbs, things like that, but now we're much bigger and we also have the orchard with cherry trees, apple trees, pear trees, plums...

SC: Does the property backing up to the highway affect how you do things?

SW: It just makes me a little more nervous in terms of wanting to walk around and check the fence on a regular basis because if they get out and get onto a parkway it's a little scarier than if they just wander onto a road, so that's probably the only thing. We haven't really noticed that the animals have been bothered by it, but the nice thing for us it that you know nobody's going to build behind you.

SC: You have coyote problems, did you?

SW: When we first got there people had told us, the neighbors had told us about these packs of coyotes and the lady was a big animal lover and she would put out food, not only for her animals, but also for

the coyotes. I think about six months after we moved there we bought a Great Pyrenees, and since we've been there, which has probably been about five or six years now, we've only actually seen coyotes one time. We've heard them, but we've only seen them one time, mainly because I think, because of the Great Pyrenees.

SC: What are the main tools that you use?

SW: For the garden, garden tiller, shovel, hoe, pick axe, hammer, t-post driver. And then for the cattle, just having to have the post hole digger, the fence tools in terms of patching the fence like if a tree falls down over the fence, and cutting the barn wire, and the woven wire, fixing the wire. And then for the cattle, razor blade for castrating, and then syringes in terms of vaccinating.

SC: Uncle Ken won't castrate a cow on a full moon. Will you not do that?

SW: We usually look at the signs – because anytime I do anything I have Papa Ken come and help we almost always look at the signs and make sure it's not in the heart or anything so that supposedly it won't bleed more.

SC: But, you don't really...

SW: I'm sure there's got to be a little bit to do with, I would think the moon fazes since obviously it effects tides, it has some effect of gravity, so you might think that something would bleed a little bit more if the gravitational pull is heavier or something. But my thought is that, if people have been using it for thousands of years and it's not inconvenient to use it, then I'm not losing anything, so...

SC: What do you mainly feed your cows?

SW: Mainly they're pasture fed. We feed them a little bit of feed, I want to say a little bit, like for four cows, probably just like, two gallons a day of just basic feed. And the main reason for doing that is not so much nutritional, it's to train them to come to a certain area every day, and it's for them to see that they're getting fed out of this particular bucket, so if I need to go get them up, I'll walk out into the field with that bucket and they follow me exactly where I want them to go. Same thing if they get out. Our neighbor left a gate open a couple weeks ago and when we woke up in the morning all the cows were at the back door, so you just run a get the bucket, take the bucket, take them through the gate and into the back lot and they follow you in. So the feeding of the feed is mainly to train them, it's not nutritional. Mainly it's pasture and in the winter some hay.

SC: How long do you usually work outside, each day?

SW: I mean, it really depends on the time of year. If it's the late spring or summer, with the garden you might work outside for two to four hours in a given day. But recently, with no garden, and the cattle not needing any work or anything, I mean, we may only spend twenty minutes, in terms of, by the time you feed the dogs, feed the chickens, replace their water, fill up the water for the cows, feed the cows, like I said, mainly it'd be twenty minutes. Some days if you're working on the fence and working on the garden and something else, you may spend six to eight hours. But most days, typically though the year, probably somewhere around an hour would be the average.

SC: This is about the other farm, up in Glasgow. Do you remember when they built the highway right through there? How did that start?

SW: It started about fifteen years before, the whole process took like fifteen years because some politicians went ahead and bought up some land where they thought the road would go, and then they tried to get things moving and the citizens opposed it, and then about fourteen or fifteen years later they finally got all the budget approvals, started buying up all the land, and I think – I want to say – that Papa Ken's was the last piece of the puzzle sold. I remember when they came and told him 'Alright, you've got to sell, this is what we're gonna give you.' And he said 'No, this is not what you're going to give me', and they said 'Excuse me?' and he said 'I've got all the records from the newspaper where you paid other people, and you're offering me much less.' And so they turned around and talked to him and went 'Okay.' And they gave him something that was somewhat balanced, not a high price, but balanced.

SC: They cut through one of the grazing fields, right?

SW: Well, it cut through one of the pastures, it cut through, it went over top of the old house, and then overtop one of the springs.

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