

Interview with Ken Winger

SC: Sara Carrico

KW: Ken Winger

SC: So, the first thing I want to ask is... how long has your family been farming?

KW: Just me or the whole family?

SC: The whole family.

KW: Since 18... no, down in east Tennessee they were farming down in there to.

SC: So, they've moved farms?

KW: Well, I went down to the farm they moved from, I don't know what they raised back then, probably some corn, and that was probably around 1800 to 1830 something. They came here in 1840 I think. The whole family, the Winger family, has probably farmed since 1800.

SC: What kind of farming do you do?

KW: Beef Cattle farming.

SC: Are there any practices that are specific to you, that you know other people don't do?

KW: Yeah, you have to take care of your cattle, you have to worm and doctor them. A grain farmer doesn't have to worry about cattle or animals. You have to have a fence, keep your fences up, you have to raise hay, feed for you cattle, and you have to learn how to manage your grass lands because cattle can eat it down to close and ruin your grass. You have to move them to different pastures before they eat it down to short, and then you have to put them in to eat it before it gets too high because if it gets too tall it'll punch them in the eye and they'll have eye disease.

SC: How many cows do you sell each month, or year?

KW: Usually from 15-20 head.

SC: Is there a certain time when you sell more? Do you sell more in the winter, in the summer?

KW: Usually about August, to the end of October.

SC: How big is the farm?

KW: It's 212 acres.

SC: How old were you when you started helping around the farm?

KW: Oh, probably about 5 years old.

SC: Has it always been Beef Cattle?

KW: No, when I was a little boy, people didn't have Beef Cattle like they do now, most farms only had about 2-5 cows on the whole farm. And they milked those cows. Plus they raised one that they killed to eat every year, most of the time that was there meat crop. They raised hogs back then, and they killed 1-



2 hogs every year too, for their meat during the winter time. They raised a lot of corn, and my first job, when I was probably six years old, I remember riding on the old team wagon and daddy and another guy picking corn by hand, and they showed me how to pop the rings, showed me how to get the horses to move when they got ready to pick. They would pick in one area then have you pop the rings and move up when they were ready for another.

SC: Do you have any superstition that you adhere to? I know that you don't castrate bulls on a full moon, right?

KW: Yeah, you've got to watch the signs. When the signs are in the heart I learned that when you castrate or wean a calf from a cow, that when you castrate they'll sometimes bleed to death. When the signs are in the knees to the feet they don't bleed hardly. And you can wean a calf off a cow with the same signs.

SC: What does the mean, the signs?

KW: On the calendar it's got different signs like Scorpio, and it's listed on your calendar. If you get a calendar that shows the signs, it'll show the head, heart, loins, knees and feet and each sign has a meaning for something, but I don't know all of them. I wish I knew all of them but I just know some of them.

SC: How long is a work day, typically?

KW: On the farm?

SC: Yes.

KW: Well, depends on the weather. If it's raining or bad you could have a work day for three or four hours, but if it's really pretty you might work from six o'clock that morning to 10 or 12 o'clock that night during hay season. Grain farmers now, they go in shifts, their tractors never stop they go all night at different times when their planting and harvesting. When I mowed hay before, I mowed until 12 o'clock at night trying to get the hay all in, because I was doing public work too. On weekends you work all day, and then late that night you come in to get the hay, to try to get it all down. It depends on the season too. Some seasons... summers always busier, you have longer days to work.

SC: So, do you do something different during the winter?

KW: Yes, in the winter time, when you feed cattle you don't feed them on the pasture, you have to put out hay for them. In the winter you do little odd jobs you can do inside or inside the barn or trim fence rows because the weeds die down in the winter, and cut trees and cut fence posts.

SC: Are there any specific tools that you use?

KW: Yeah, when you do fencing you have to have special tools, you have to have a post driver or a post hole digger. And your crops, depends on what you raise, then you're gonna have to have a tractor and special tools to harvest your crops. Like hay, you have to have a mower to cut your hay, and you have to have a hay rake to rake it, a hay roller or a hay baler to bale it and then you have to have a wagon to haul it in. Then you have to have a bush hog to bush hog your pastures in the summer and fall.

SC: How many cows do you have?

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KW: Well, there's 68 right now and usually around about 80 something in the summer.

SC: When the highway cut through the farm, did that decrease –

KW: Decreased, yeah. Yeah, I had a winter pasture that I lost and now I use it for hay because I can't pasture it now, I can't take the cattle out to the other side of the loop so I got to use it for hay. And then it cut down on my head of cattle, we used to have 100 head, but you can't raise as many cattle you've got to cut down on the size of your cattle so that cuts down on your profits too.

SC: What, when you're looking to buy a cow, what is a person looking for if they're going to buy it?

KW: Well, if you're looking for a heifer to make a cow out of, to raise calves, you want one that's good natured not wild, and you want one that really looks nice, that looks like it's gonna be a good size and big enough to raise a calf. And also you want one that has a real good look to it, one that's built real good, they have to be so large and so wide to have calves, if they're too narrow and too small then their gonna have trouble having calves, and it's gotta have a large enough sack so that it can give good milk, if you don't have one that gives good milk then it won't raise a good calf.

SC: What are some problems that you've had with cows in the past, like, general problems?

KW: Well, years ago, there used to be some different breeds you would breed to, and they would have trouble calving and their calved would die. Then there's certain breeds that have foot problems, and then there are some breeds that get to big and they eat too much and they eat your profit so they don't eat you out of house and home. And then the market, the Black Angus bring more on the market, you have to watch your market to see what breeds are bringing the most and that's what breed you have to select.

SC: It changes over the years?

KW: Yeah, it seems like every ten years, the market changes what they want. Actually it's gone back now to what it was years ago with the Black Angus and the Black Angus Cross. Now they've found out that the Angus and the Angus Cross does better with all the other Crosses so it's gone back to that particular one. They like a three way cross, they like three different breeds that grow good bred together so that it'll grow a better calf

SC: So, you've had pigs too, in the past.

KW: Yes.

SC: And you've always lived on the farm?

KW: Yes. The good thing about growing up on a farm, you grew up learning how to get thing done that needed to be done, whereas if you weren't raised on a farm you wouldn't have learned those things.

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