

Why I farm ...

By Mark Lott
Special to the
Reveille/Between the Lakes

As a boy growing up in the Pan Handle of Florida I was very active in FFA, I had some bee hives, raised some hogs, and our family farm grew soybeans, corn, peanuts and raised Charolais cattle. I am mechanically inclined and as a teenager picked up many skills from a mechanic in our town. He taught me many things and I kept in touch with him until his death.

In 1980 I moved from Florida to Seneca County and began farming with my father (Rodman Lott). Later, my brother Ralph joined us and we farmed together for a number of years. However when my father decided it was time to slow down, I decided it was time to fulfill my own goals and established Lott Farms LLC with my wife Kathleen.

Farming is what I always wanted to do. I love the diversity and challenges of it. There are many different types of farmers. I am primarily a grain farmer and I raise crops for food, animal feed, fuel and other commercial uses. Planting a seed, nourishing it and harvesting the finished product are very rewarding.

Life in the day of a farmer can be very complex. It can involve planting and harvesting, research and development, shipping and receiving, repair and maintenance and marketing to name a few.

The farmer today is not what one thinks of from the history books. Today it is very crucial the farmer has a vast amount of knowledge and skills.

Computers, iPad, iPhone and GPS are integral in the day to day operations. We operate much like major companies with the philosophy of just in time. We must have our fertilizer, seed and equipment lined up and ready, so when the soil and weather are right conditions, we are ready to go. Soil samples are obtained to monitor nutrient levels and as spring approaches the temperature is monitored for the right time to put the seed in the ground. We must preserve the soil we have been entrusted with, therefore we practice being good stewards of the land.

Heavy clay soils are a challenge in Seneca County and we have experimented with numerous different tillage practices to obtain the highest yield. We primarily use a no til or minimum til practice to reduce soil erosion, reduce compaction and use less fuel by reducing equipment usage. Therefore, we rely on the earthworm to maintain our soil structure.

We work very closely with natural resource and conservation services (Soil & Water). We have installed engineered waterways in areas of our fields that have a natural water flow to reduce erosion and buffer zones along edges of the fields to prevent runoff. We improve microbial activity and soil health by planting cover crops (such as a mixture of rye, peas and radishes) and wheat. Drainage tile is installed in areas where there is surface water so the water can be taken down through the soil rather than run off. This helps keep the nutrients needed for the crops in the soil rather than the water running off and taking the nutrients with it



which was subject to many impurities and limited us to a growing season.

The development of Bt (bacillus thuringiensis) crops has been very advantageous. These crops contain a gene from the bacterium bacillus thuringiensis, this is a bacteria found in all types of terrain and soils that naturally control insects. The bacterium Bt produces a protein crystal that is toxic to insects. These protein crystals have been used in organic farming for over 50 years to control insects. The genes producing these proteins are now engineered so that plants can make the protein in their cells. The plants produce insecticidal proteins to provide an effective, environmentally safe pest control.

Covering years of scientific studies there has been overwhelming evidence genetically modified foods have failed to produce any untoward health effects. In an article published by *Forbes* it stated, "We now have a large set of data, both experimental and observational, showing that genetically modified feed is safe and nutritionally equivalent to non-GMO feed. There does not appear to be any health risk to the animals, and it is even less likely that there could be any health effect on humans who eat those animals. In order to maintain the position that GMOs are not adequately tested, or that they are harmful or risky, you have to either highly selectively cherry pick a few outliers of low scientific quality or you have to simply deny the science."

GMO Food for Thought: Would a farmer produce/use a crop that would make his animals, himself, his family or others sick or cause death? Where would we market such a product if there was no one to market too?

We also must be good stewards of genetically engineered crops as they are a must to deal with drought and pests, whether it is fungus, disease or insect. Today we can take the best traits from a plant and insert that trait into the DNA in a controlled environment. Before technology we had to wait years to develop new varieties because we had to crossbreed the plant in the field,

Farms use large amounts of energy, therefore two years ago we invested in a wind turbine. The wind in our area averages 12.5 miles/hour. We decided to capture that wind and produce wind energy to reduce our usage off the grid.

We have recently donated land for the installation of the Department of Homeland Security, New York State Mesonet which is installing 125 weather stations across the state for early emergency weather detection. The station on our farm will monitor and create data for Seneca County.

It is very important to continue to search for new and better ways as in any profession. Therefore, I network with farmers in various area of the United States, attend workshops offered through Cornell Cooperative Extension and local agricultural companies and take classes through various colleges.

As you can see there is a lot to the operation of a farm and it is rewarding in so many ways. Thus the reason I farm.

I have been able to pass that enthusiasm on to my two girls who are both getting their college degrees in the agricultural field.

Mark and Kathleen Lott own Lott Farms LLC located on County House Road, just south of Seneca Falls. With key employees and their two daughters they raise corn, soybeans, wheat, sunflowers, and have a sweet corn stand. They also do custom application of fertilizer and crop protectants in Seneca County.

Why I farm

This is part of the NY Farm Bureau/SCFB Promotion-Education initiative to connect local farmers with non-farm consumers for understanding why farmers do what they do when they farm.