

2021 Farm & Garden

Arthur: Farming for the future while remembering the past

By Tony Hooker

In today's hypercompetitive farming world, you have to innovate to succeed.

For Justin Arthur, a fifth-generation farmer who still farms land that his great-great Grandfather George once tilled, and his team at Hindsboro's Arthur Farms, innovation is an everyday occurrence. I recently sat down with Justin as he and his crew began to prepare for spring planting to discuss his farming career and a whole lot more.

You graduated from Tri-County High School?

No, that's incorrect. I graduated from Mattoon High School.

Birdsboro.

Douglas County?

Yes, and we drift down into Coles county a little bit. My grandfather's from the Mattoon area, so we still go down and farm the family ground down there.

How long have you been in the business?

I graduated from the U of I in '03, so we're touching on 20 years almost, but I was involved for probably ten years before that.

In those twenty years, how has the industry changed?

I would say it's become



Justin Arthur of Arthur Farms.

Photo: Tony Hooker

higher tech/high speed. Probably more competitive. Auto steer has changed everything. We can run all night long without any of the fatigue we faced from running a couple of hours after dark twenty years ago. If you planted 160 acres 20 years ago, it was a big day. Now, with some of the equipment we run it's almost a poor day.

Did you ever consider doing anything else?

When I was a kid, in ju-

nior high, I considered becoming an engineer. I had four uncles who were engineers and two of them were in the ag industry so I kind of had that in the back of my mind, but as I got older, the opportunity seemed to be here for me.

What's your favorite part of farming?

I assume it's the harvest. The fruits of your labors, and all of that?

Exactly.

Is your family involved in the operation?

Jena's (his wife) is our secretary. The kids are seven and nine, so they're just getting old enough to appreciate it a little bit.

They like to get on a tractor with dad and scratch a little dirt?

Exactly! <smiles>

Have you taken over the operation completely from your grandfather?

On the farming side,

pretty much. He still has a couple of fields that he farms. For the most part, he's retired from farming, and then he and I are partners in the shop.

You're selling ag equipment?

The name Arthur's Repair Shop was originated by my grandpa, Wayne, and his father, Zethie. They would have started it over 65 years ago at our Mattoon farm. My grandpa moved to Springfield and then moved over here in about a five-year period, and as his father's health declined, they decided to move the shop here.

You also sell farm equipment. Did that spring from Arthur's repair?

Correct. It was probably only a repair shop for about a year and then they started the retail side, selling new equipment. The name really isn't relevant to anything we do. We service what we sell, but we're not really a welding shop or anything like that.

What brands do you sell?

Our two main lines are Batco conveyors and Kuhn Knight livestock machinery. We've had Kuhn Knight machines for over sixty years.

Doubling back a little bit, you were talking about how everything is modernized and bigger, but you've

also embraced some 'old school' techniques that I've noticed, with the cover crops and the manure spreading. How did you come to that decision?

My grandfather had livestock during his early career, and the fields that always yielded the best had manure spread on them. We looked at that as an old school fertilizer that could increase yield. We tried our hand at organic farming, but that was just too time and labor intensive to work with what we had going on. That kind of went hand in hand with the chicken litter, and we just carried that through the conventional side of farming.

Do you see better yields?

I think the soil health is better. I don't know if that always translates to better yields, but I think a lot of times the ground drains better and it just seems to be a little more alive.

What about the cover crops?

It's kind of the same difference with soil health. I think there's some benefits there to the soil health. I'm not sure it always increases yields, but I think the ground's in better condition.

So, you're walking the

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For Burris, Belted Galloways are a labor of love

By Tony Hooker

Tony Burris wasn't really planning on having a large herd of cattle, including Herefords and Belted Galloways.

He just thought the Belties, known colloquially as "Oreo Cows", would be a nice addition to the family freezer, based on research he had done that showed they were leaner than other breeds. From that bit of internet research, his herd now numbers nearly 40. I recently caught up with Tony as he tended to his bovine charges and we talked about the how's, whys and what the heck was I thinking of his operation.

How long have you had the Belted Galloways?

I think this is my seventh year.

What drew you to this particular breed?

I guess the internet. I got on the internet and it's really a cliquish thing. If you want to, you can sell them on the internet, and if you get into showing them, they sell good, but we don't do that. I just got them and started butchering them. Everyone likes them. I don't think I've had anyone who wasn't a repeat customer. I just kind of stayed with them, and I just decided to get some Herefords. I kind of



Tony Burris tends to his herds of cattle at his farm in Villa Grove.

Photo: Tony Hooker

like them because they're calmer. I don't think I handle these (the Galloways) enough.

The Galloways are a little feistier?

They seem to be. They used to be really calm. I don't know if people bother them or what. They're fun to watch. They're easy keepers.

How long have you been in agriculture?

I started farming here in Illinois in 1969, so it's been 51 years.

Where did you come from?

From Kentucky. Dad always had cows and I liked working with them.

Have you had cattle here since you started in '69?

No, I just got these seven or eight years ago.

This is your first herd then. And of course, there's grain farming. Are you still actively involved in that?

The boy says I'm not! <laughs> Rhett's pretty much taken over all of that. He does all of the marketing and buying fertilizer. Everything went to the internet and I'm not an internet person. I don't really like email and all of that junk. <smiles>

Does he still let you drive the combine or are you relegated to Auger Wagon duties? <smiles>

I haven't driven a combine in three or four years. We've got a semi and so I haul some of the grain away. I drive it in the spring and fall, hauling for United Prairie in the spring and Monsanto in the fall.

What's the difference between the Galloways and other breeds of cattle?

Size, mostly. Herefords get bigger. The Angus people have kind of taken over the marketing side, but if you take the hide off of them you can't tell any difference! <smiles> These red ones (Herefords) I got because you can buy them a lot cheaper than you can the Angus. I got these off some people who had a

herd.

How do the Galloways fit in the pricing structure?

They're at the bottom. As far as selling on the market, at a sale barn, the Galloways won't bring as much. Buyers want something with big, long, lanky legs. I guess it's more about looks than anything. As you can tell, they're a little dumpy kind of cow. They're a lot smaller.

Do you have any idea why they've developed the Oreo coloration?

I have no idea. They're a breed that was developed in an extremely cold climate. If you've ever been by here when there's snow on the ground, these cows love it. They love cold weather. Hot weather's a little hard on them. Supposedly, they've got a layer of wool and then the hair on their hide. That's why they don't put on any fat.

Is there anyone else around here that has the Belted Galloways?

You'd kind of be surprised. There's a herd in Effingham, a few around Champaign.

Are you going to continue keeping cattle?

I don't know. I'm getting old and it's a lot of work. Here I am today, and I was grinding feed yesterday, so it's really just about every day.

Sixty hours a week on a hobby, right?

Yeah. <smiles>

Are the boys interested in taking over the operation?

Not really. They know it's too much work. My son Jason is a barber, and he said 'Dad, there's a lot of climate-controlled offices and places you can work!' <laughs>

Is there anything I missed?

I'm not really an interview kind of person. I do enjoy your Ag edition every year.

HENSON FARMS

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