



FAR LEFT: Sherwin and son Brendan prepare a load of hay for transport. **LEFT:** Greg and Sherwin. **BELOW:** Members of the Leep family with an old steam tractor posted like a sentry at the entrance to the old family home, the Alberda Farm.



Sherwin:

■ We just can't afford a lot of downtime. Just like yesterday, we had a warm, windy day before this cold set in, and we had about 250 to 300 acres of third-cutting hay; and we had all those machines running all day long, racing. Everything worked perfectly, and we're so grateful because it's a window of opportunity. It's there for a day and then it closes. And so we got all that hay baled and stacked, and so we really appreciate the dependability.

■ We've been reflecting on that dependability since [staff at Churchill Equipment, the dealership with whom the Leeps work] added up all of our repair bills and it was like \$7,100 over five years for seven tractors. That's just not that much, especially considering how hard we run them.

■ [Salesman Gene Dykman] has a sense of what will work. He pretty much knows if he's got a price that's gonna be favorable or if it's the right type of machine for us.

■ At Churchill, they have a good team up there ... the service people, the parts department is refreshingly organized and knowledgeable. They've got good people, and that's worth a lot. They stock a huge amount of parts, really. Churchill's a little bit old school that way. It's been a good relationship.

On The Future

Sherwin:

■ When we look at our operation and how it's evolved, our focus has been trying to grow the base and the acreage, and we've been pretty successful at that, thankfully. [Growth] is not off the radar, but we want to focus more on intensifying things a little bit—maybe sharpening up on varieties and some of the practices, maybe move into more minimum- and no-till, and those sort of practices.

■ We do have an [estate] plan in place that's intended to preserve the operating entity. We're committed to keep that up to date over the years, at least meeting with our attorney once a year. It's kind of a moving dynamic. Neither of us is planning on retiring in the foreseeable future, but you never know. When you get to the age I am—I'm 57—you need to start thinking about it.

■ Obviously being in agriculture we have a real affinity for the land and care about what happens to it and want to preserve it. There's a lot of development pressure here, but our county passed an

open space bond, which enabled people to enter into permanent conservation easements and get some payment toward the diminished [potential value] that was forfeited. So, that was an incentive for us, as well as the federal tax benefit, so we did do that on two of our properties. Preserving the land and having kids interested in agriculture was certainly a factor too. **FL**



QUITE A SCENE.

See video of the Leeps and the scenic beauty of their outdoor "office" at myFarmLife.com/leeps, or scan the code with your phone.