



Michel and Hanneke Camps

where the money is,” he says. “High input, high risk, high return” is his goal here. “Beets give us good cash flow early in fall. That way we can store potatoes longer, making a better return.

“Corn is after potato and beet harvest,” he continues. “Also, I can sell corn to whomever I want. Wheat goes to the Canadian Wheat Board, leaving me with little control over my cash flow.” He’s into sunflowers “only because it looks like an interesting crop, no particular other reason. This is only our second year.”

Lessons have been many, the hardest being that “if you make a mistake, you’re going to pay,” he says. “Ten years ago my fertilizer bill was \$25,000 and now it is \$250,000. We had to learn to deal with that. If for whatever reason you can’t pay a bill right away, 9 times out of 10, our suppliers have no problem if we tell them that in advance.”

“We value long-term relationships with suppliers more than the lowest dollar,” Camps continues, adding that his Massey Ferguson dealer, Hanlon Ag Centre in Lethbridge, is one of the best of those suppliers. “My dealer got me into my old 8160. Hanlon trusted me and gave me the opportunity early on. They’ve been with me since day one. I do have Massey pride, and that is why.

“We’re in a very time-sensitive business, and frost is a serious concern in the fall,” he continues. “We need to get potatoes out of the field and into a storage facility in a 3-week period.”

Camps says his equipment is up to the task, but every so often something breaks. “When it does, the dealer keeps us going with another piece of equipment if needed. The Massey guys have proven they can help me get the job done, seven days a week, 24 hours a day.”

Michel, however, says his most valuable partner is his wife, Hanneke. “Taking care of four kids, she doesn’t spend a lot of time in the field anymore,” he says. “But she keeps the paperwork organized and takes care of meals for a crew of 25 at harvest time, among many other duties. She’s a force to be reckoned with on the farm.” —KW

Make Plans, Roll With the Punches

As in life, so it is in farming:
Something worth doing seldom comes easy.

LUKE AND LIBBA PEEK

AGES: 31 and 32, respectively

CHILD: Halle

OPERATION: Collinsville, Ala.; 90 acres of mainly hay, plus 40 head of cattle and a few horses. Farm real estate, average value per acre in Alabama, 2007: \$2,200; in 2011: \$2,050

MASSEY FERGUSON/AGCO EQUIPMENT: MF471 and MF271 tractors; Allis Chalmers 7045 and 7000 tractors; Hesston by Massey Ferguson 1756 round baler; 4855 New Idea baler

DEALER: Snead Tractor, Centre, Ala.

ADVICE: Keep working towards those goals. “We used to get so frustrated because we felt like we needed a new barn, a tractor, a new hay baler, and it seemed like there was no possible way we could get those things. But, then we stopped and looked back over the past 5 years. Little by little, we realized we’ve been able to do a lot of those things. We still have a lot of things to do, but we’ve accomplished a lot, too.”

LUKE PEEK OFFERS A REASON why fewer young people are farming these days. “It gets harder and harder to do every year,” says the producer from Collinsville, Ala, who also works as a welder. “In the older days, you know, people used to just farm for a living and that’s it. Now, it pretty much takes a job just to keep the farm going, and if it weren’t for our jobs, I mean, we wouldn’t have this place.”

So why do he and wife, Libba, farm? “Because we love it,” says Libba, a nurse anesthetist. “We do turn profit on occasion, but it’s definitely because we love it, not because it’s the easiest way to make a living, for sure.”

“It’s not a hobby for us,” adds Luke. “I do rely on my farm for income. I really do enjoy it, though. It’s been a part of my family for a long time, and I just grew up doing it.”

In addition to income, the couple says they farm because it’s a way of life. Farming offers a sense of independence, but also brings a community together when someone needs help. It also provides them the opportunity to teach their 2-year-old daughter, Halle, an important set of values.

“Both sets of our parents [farmed],” Libba says, and the farm required effort and hours from every family member. “It was a lot of work that none of our friends were having to do, but as I became an adult, I realized teaching your children about working hard ... is one of the most important things you can do. You can’t tell your children to work hard if you don’t show them that you’re willing to do it.”

The Peeks still work with family. They live just down the road from Luke’s parents in a quiet northeastern Alabama valley, and their 90 acres sits among another 700 owned by various members of the family.

“Family involvement helps me out tremendously,” says Luke. “Libba grew up on a farm, too, and after she and I got married, she just sort of fell right into place and helps out. My dad, he’s nearby, and my mom,

FAST FACTS: Getting A Start /// Average farm size in the U.S.: 414 acres /// Average land price: \$2,350/acre /// Average farm cost: \$972,900