

Steve Snider still follows the advice of his late father and plans to hand it off, along with the family farm, to the next generation.

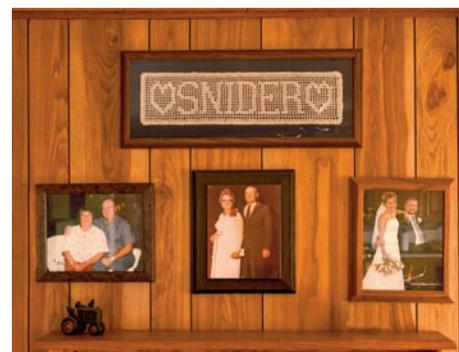
STORY BY TANNER LATHAM /// PHOTOS BY BENJAMIN ZACK

WINTER FARM WORK IN LERNA, ILL., WAS TYPICALLY SLOW. So, Bill Snider encouraged his teenage son Steve to spend those days looking off the farm for productive things to do. The young man occupied his time with odd jobs, including a stint as an equipment operator at a landfill. He also completed computer science courses at the nearby college after the subject piqued his interest.

However, the elder Snider's nudging served a purpose greater than earning extra money or filling the idle hours. It was a proverbial push from the nest.

"Looking back, Dad was urging me to get out and not just be dependent on the farm," says Steve, who is now 38. "He wanted me to broaden my spectrum on the world ... to get a sense of the world and how other bosses are, to see how things work differently."

But Steve says his dad was the best boss of them all. "He taught me about management," says Steve. "Not to overextend yourself. Stay within your means. Try to be a good steward of the ground. And he taught me about conservation, so you don't lose what you've got."



Family photographs hanging on the walls of Steve Snider's home capture images of his dad, Bill. For Steve, however, the most tangible memories revolve around the family farm that continues to operate today because of his father's efforts.

Guidance

Steve's off-the-farm experiences just seemed to make him appreciate his family's corn and bean operation all the more. "I decided that coming back to the farm was the only thing to do," he says. "It still felt right."

There for Each Other

Bill was always there for his son. When Steve drove a tractor for the first time, Dad was right alongside.

And even when Bill developed colon and liver cancer—a disease he fought off and on for about a dozen years, rendering him too sick to work the farm—he still instructed Steve on the finances, the day-to-day tasks and the big decisions. Steve had to step up, he says, explaining how his dad being slowed by illness "prepared me more than anything, because I had to do all the work on the farm. He was around to help advise, but I was actually doing it."

Bill eventually developed cirrhosis of

the liver. And when he passed last Leap Day while waiting for a transplant, Steve was grief-stricken but ready to take over.

The Trust

Steve traces the roots of his farm back to his grandfather, Rufus, who decided to leave home at age 16.

"He took off with just the shirt on his back," says Steve. "He started working, and he built it all from there." Rufus managed livestock—pigs and cattle—and a few acres of corn and beans. Bill grew up working that farm and took over around the time he married Steve's mother, Barbara, or, as everyone calls her, Barb. "Dad progressively bought more land and grew it out," says Steve. He transitioned from livestock to corn and beans.

Today, Steve manages about 1,600 acres, with close to 1,400 of those planted in corn and beans. Another 40 of those acres are dedicated to a herd of roughly 20

Black Angus cattle. The rest are wooded areas.

He performs the majority of the duties on the farm, but gets help from his mother, his wife, Angie, and his sister Donna and her boyfriend. "We all work together," says Steve. "We don't necessarily have specific jobs. We just do a little bit of everything. It's still a family farm."

Steve says the legacy of that land was very important to his father. Because of that, Bill's wish was that upon his death, the farm would be placed in an irrevocable land trust, stipulating that it remain intact and in the Snider family through two more generations. "We just didn't want someone else coming in and taking it away," says Barb. "That's what Steve's grandpa would have wanted too. He worked hard for that."

The farm will pass from Barb to Steve and Angie, and then end with their children Brayden (4 years old) >>