



Todd and Brenda Aves of Belvidere, IL stay busy operating their 135 cow dairy in Belvidere and raising their four children, Allison, Hayden, Madeline, and Bryson. The family farm was established four generations ago by Todd's great-grandfather in 1900. The Aves, who have been on the farm since 2003, have experienced the same challenges every young farm family faces and some that most are lucky enough to never see.



Calf on Aves Dairy Farm

Todd starts everyday pretty much the same. He wakes up around 4:00 a.m. to start milking the dairy cows. However, he mentioned that if he can make it to 6:00 a.m. before any major catastrophes, he considers it a good day. Brenda, who works off the farm at a local vet clinic as the Practice Manager, also agrees that farming a couple thousand acres along with managing the dairy herd can be a chaotic lifestyle, but she appreciates all that it is teaching her children.

“Even though it is long hours and a there is a lot on our plates, we are flexible enough that we can make time for our family,” said Aves. “The challenge of it, though, is that it is all ours. We make or break the whole thing; the success is on our shoulders.”

The success of the farm, though always in the back of their minds, became something Todd and Brenda worried about more than usual in April of 2015. Around 7:30 p.m. one Thursday evening last April, Todd and Brenda watched their farm be torn apart by an EF4 tornado that stretched from Rochelle to Belvidere.

“We were actually pretty blessed,” said Aves. “We had people come out of the woodwork to help us clean up. By Saturday morning, besides all of the buildings being gone, there was hardly any sign of the storm.”

The Aves felt extremely lucky after enduring such a horrific experience. No one, including livestock, was hurt and their house was completely untouched. Within twelve hours of the storm coming through, the family had a temporary milking facility set up and was able to continue caring for their livestock.

“We’re tough,” said Aves, “the next day was just another day. For farmers in general, issues like this seem to be less of a crisis because we deal with challenges every day.”

The Aves gracefully handled what could have been a very negative situation for their family business, and came out stronger because of it. They have always had a desire to share their pride for the agriculture industry. The Aves family enjoys guests on their farm. They take advantage of the opportunity to educate visitors on the truth about today’s farming practices.

“Sometimes the first piece of information a person bumps into, they deem accurate,” said Aves. “People today are so many generations removed from the farm, they don’t always get to experience it first-hand.”

Todd and Brenda also relish in giving their children the opportunity to “show off” all of the hard work they do on the farm as well.

The family planned on doing their part to advocate for agriculture last year by hosting the annual Winnebago-Boone Farm Bureau Foundation Farm Breakfast. This event draws in a crowd of around 1,200 people. For some, this is their only opportunity to step foot on a working farm and see the details of an operation first hand.

Going through the aftermath of a tornado made it impossible for the Aves to complete that goal. However, they made a new goal to have the farm ready to host the event this year. Just over a year after this major catastrophe, they are now in full planning mode to host this event. This year’s Farm Breakfast is momentous to the Aves family. It shows how far they have come since this time last year, but it is their way of giving back to their community, their way of saying thank you for all of the support they have received. Without the support of their family, friends, and neighbors, they would not have been able to keep the farm running.

The Aves know first-hand that farm life is not always glamorous. Yet, the rewards of living this farming lifestyle outweigh the challenges in their eyes. “When it comes down to it, seeing a new



Hayden Aves (9), is known around the farm as the “Poultry

calf's life start and seeing it all the way through or planting a seed and watching it grow until harvest is what it is all about," said Aves. "Who wouldn't be satisfied with that life?"

The 19th Annual Winnebago-Boone Farm Bureau Foundation Farm Breakfast will be held on Saturday, June 11, 2016. Come out to the Aves Dairy Farm (1105 Pearl Street Road, Belvidere, IL) from 6:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. for all you can eat pancakes, local whole hog sausage, applesauce, ice cream, milk and coffee. For \$6 per adult, \$3 per child 6 and up (Children 5 and under are free), you and your family can enjoy the breakfast, horse-drawn wagon rides, petting zoo, children's games put on by local 4-H clubs, Ag in the Classroom activities, Cow Pie Bingo, Craft show and vendors, antique tractor display and more! Visit the Winnebago-Boone Farm Bureau Website at www.winnebago-boonefarmbureau.org for more information. (Published May 27, 2016)