



Bob Kemp



Bob Kemp with his two Belgian horses Doug and Justin.

George Washington once said, “I had rather be on my farm than be emperor of the world.” I think Bob Kemp, of Poplar Grove, IL, would agree. Kemp grew up in town. He spent many years of his life as a physical education teacher and basketball coach. However, Kemp always had a passion for agriculture.

“Even though I grew up in town, my Grandparents and some of my aunts and uncles were farmers, and I used to enjoying going out there,” said Kemp.

Therefore, he purchased a farm in 1973 in the North Boone School District. He taught, coached, and farmed. “The farm kept getting bigger and bigger,” said Kemp. He farmed close to 1500 acres, 100 head of beef cattle, and a handful of hogs.

Eventually, Kemp and his wife realized that farming as well as having jobs off the farm was becoming too much. “We decided to just be farmers,” said Kemp.

Coming from a non-agriculture background, becoming an agriculturalist was a gradual change. “I enjoyed the rural life,” said Kemp, “and to be honest, I thought it was a great place to raise kids. It was a good move for us.” Kemp has 5 children, 17 grandchildren, 9 great-grandchildren, and 1 more on the way.

Currently on the Kemp farm you will find 4 horses. Two of them are Belgians and the other two are Morgan/Percheron crosses and will be having babies soon. “I always enjoyed horses,” said Kemp. “My girls used to like to ride so I always had a horse around while they were growing up.” Kemp, however, delights in driving horses. He has participated in this activity for 25 years.

Kemp's horses seem big to me, probably because I am so used to beef cattle. However, he said they are nowhere near as big as the horses that used to be raised on his farm. According to Kemp, before he bought the farm, a man named Emerald Bussey lived there and used to raise Clydesdales. Rumor has it that Mr. Bussey sold Anheuser-Busch their very first Clydesdale. He sold it for 1/3 of the cost to earn their trust and went on to carry out 16 more horse transactions. I had no idea that the first Budweiser Clydesdale came from right here in Boone County but according to Kemp, the tale stands true.

Kemp also has experience with the Conservation District and has served on the Soil and Water District Board. He and a couple other past members formed a foundation in efforts to raise money for the Soil and Water program. The foundation now offers a scholarship as well as financially supporting the Soil and Water District.

Due to his experiences with these organizations, Kemp had a hand in writing the Boone County Comprehensive plan. This plan laid out the ideas for the development of Boone County, and some parts of Winnebago County. "Being a farmer," said Kemp, "I wanted to keep as much of the ground into farm land as possible and I have always used my efforts to do that."

Besides his involvement in the agriculture industry, Kemp devotes a lot of his time to the community. He volunteers his horse teams for events like the Belvidere Hometown Christmas Parade. In 1992 the main barn on his farm burnt down. However, before that happened, he hosted barn dances for farming and town friends. These dances eventually served as fundraisers for the North Boone Boosters Club. He remembers there being over 250 people at these events.

He now opens up his new barn for games and activities for nursing homes, Lions Clubs, and Leos Club members. Kemp is a member of the Lion's Club and the Advisor for the North Boone Leo's Club. Kemp enjoys woodworking and donates a lot of his work to fundraisers to help both the Lion's and Leo's Clubs. Kemp even has a basketball court at one end of his barn and hosts a Basketball Decathlon. I even took a couple shots.

Kemp has been a Farm Bureau member for close to 30 years. We at the Winnebago-Boone Farm Bureau are so thankful to our long-term members for all of their dedication to the industry and the community. (Published December 20, 2016)

Update

Since this article was published Bob has had health conditions, which lead to his decision to sell the horses. His wife stated that the horses were such a joy have and they have made many lifelong friends and memories from them. (Updated August 6, 2020 by Chloe Gustafson, WFBF 2020 Intern)