

## Weakland Farms a true passion for owner, sons

❑ Rick Weakland has passed on his father Cutty's love for farming to third generation

By Gary Brower, Editor

Carl "Cutty" Weakland spent his days firing the boilers at the Ebensburg State School and Hospital in Ebensburg, Pa., ensuring that the staff and patients of the facility that housed mentally handicapped had enough heat and hot water to get them through.

It was a good civil job that paid enough to allow Cutty to come home to Portage, Pa., at night and on weekends to pursue his passion – potato farming.

When it came time for harvest it was all hands on deck. Cutty's wife, Geraldine, and all eight of the Weakland children were called into action and all dutifully followed.

But only one of them truly loved it.

Cutty's youngest son, Rick, was enthralled with farming right from the beginning and it never left him. Even as a boy, when he wasn't helping around the farm, he wished he was.

Throughout elementary school and into middle school, Rick would sit in class and daydream about the farm. He couldn't get out fast enough, and summers - when he spent every day on the farm - were like paradise.

"When it was potato picking time my mom and dad made us all pick potatoes ... but I'm the only one who stuck with the farm. I never stopped. I just stayed at the farm," said Rick, who is now a cash crop farmer, equipment dealer and free-lance metal fabricator in Cam-



PGP photo by Brian Kelly

**PASSING IT DOWN:** Brothers Ryan (left) and Doug Weakland have carried on their father Rick's passion for farming, and both are working full-time on the 1,500-acre cash crop operation in Cambria County, Pa. Rick's wife Dawn is also involved, as she heads up the family's fall festivities, which include a popular corn maze, hay rides, pumpkin patch, a corn box for the kids, a craft center and more.

### Weakland Farms

**Owner:** Rick Weakland

**Location:** Portage, Pa.

**Type of farm:** Grower of corn and soybeans

**Employees:** Four full-time

**PGP customer since:** 2012

bria County. "When I was in school, I couldn't wait to get back home and do something. I was the youngest and I pushed my dad to do more than he could afford to do. I wanted to grow and grow."

Rick was so focused on farming that he was forced to complete seventh grade three times. After the third time he'd had

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# Tradition

*Establishing tradition is wrapped into everything we at PGP do. From buying corn, to selling DDGS, to providing freight services, the employees of PGP strive to provide superior customer service and quality products that will endure for generations to come.*

## Midwest harvest controlling prices in Pa., Ohio

By Brian Kelly, Grain Merchandiser

Corn prices continue to reflect a big crop being harvested this fall, but “big” may not be the correct adjective. While we won’t know exactly how big until January’s report, analysts continue to project a 14-plus billion bushel crop, a record 175 bushel per acre yield, and 2-plus billion bushel inventory on Sept. 1, 2015.

The next comment we hear from our farmer-customers is, “But, I’m not having a record yield.” Back in late May we heard, “These prices have to go up; I can’t get my corn planted.”

While what happens with the weather and our crops in Pennsylvania greatly impacts us, it does not matter to U.S. corn prices. In 2013, Pennsylvania’s production of shelled corn was 7.5 percent of Iowa’s production. Another way of putting it is, what was left on the ground as harvest loss in Iowa and Illinois is what we produced here in Pennsylvania.

As you market your 2014 crop and start to market your 2015 crop, we need to adjust our view of what makes a good price. The days of \$6, \$7 and \$8 corn are gone for now. While they may return some day, it will take an unexpected and unpredictable event.

In late September and early October, the December CBOT price hit lows of \$3.20 a bushel. Five months earlier, in late April and early May, the December CBOT price was \$5.15. So, forget about \$6 corn and think about \$3, \$4,



File photo

**BUMPER CROP:** With more than 90 percent of corn off the fields, a record 175 bushel per acre yield is projected for the 2014 crop, pushing prices down. While those expectations may not be met in Pennsylvania and Ohio, the larger producers in the U.S. Corn Belt are driving the market.

### Corn update

and maybe \$5 corn. Now, you are saying, “But, I can’t make any money with 3-something corn!”

While that is probably true, the market doesn’t care about your ability to make a profit. The market will only care when you plant and grow less corn. Please remember, “you” is not you - the Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio farmer - but the corn growers in Iowa, Illinois and Indiana.

So, what do you do now? Last year, everyone wanted \$5 corn. Yes, we

bought a lot when it got to \$5, but we didn’t buy all of it. Farmers were busy with spring planting and others hoped \$5 corn would turn into \$6 corn, so we ended up buying \$5 corn for \$4 and less in the fall.

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Pennsylvania Grain Processing, LLC

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## WEAKLAND: Family, farming and fall festivities

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enough and left school altogether. He's been on the farm ever since, and today is one of the most respected producers in the region.

"I bought my first dump truck when I was 14 years old," Rick said. "I couldn't legally own it or drive it, so we had to put it in my dad's name."

Over the years, Rick has dabbled in many agricultural ventures, but long ago gave up on potatoes and hogs to focus his time, efforts and resources on cash crops. Today, he and his sons, Ryan and Doug, farm about 1,500 acres, split evenly between corn and soybeans.

Most of the corn goes to Pennsylvania Grain Processing in Clearfield, Pa., where it is used in the production of ethanol.

"My dad started with about 70 acres. In 1980 we had maybe 300 acres and in 1990 we went to 500 acres," Rick recalled. "In 2000, I think we had about 1,200 acres and it has been inching up ever since."

For a young farmer whose father/partner was in it more as a hobby than anything, growth never came easy for Rick. In fact, several of his neighbor farmers, many of whom he considers friends and even mentors, told him he was foolish to expand. But Rick never backed down from a challenge and his neighbors' rebukes only fueled his fire. Undaunted, he continued the relentless pursuit of his dream.

"They said, 'You'll never make it,' and that just gave me a little more drive to



PGP photo by Brian Kelly

**HITCHIN' A RIDE:** Tractor-pulled hayrides are just one of the many activities that make Weakland Farms in Portage, Pa. one of southwestern Pennsylvania's most popular smalltown attractions in the fall.

do it," Rick said. "There was a bunch of equipment I had to build because I didn't have the money to buy anything. We build our own conveyors. We would bring in things that were pretty much junk and put them back together."

For a time he bought, rebuilt and resold sprayers. As his inventory, and therefore his investment, grew he wondered what his wife, Dawn, must be thinking.

Dawn said she never doubted him and has learned to keep the faith, both in her husband and in the Lord.

"He's always looking ahead, always looking for another avenue that he can provide for his family in case something doesn't work," Dawn said. "He is an amazing guy. He is just a hard worker and I wish more people would notice."

"He's not afraid to make that first move, and I have noticed that in many areas of his life, he would put himself out there," she continued. "I do trust my husband, but I also trust God above. He

is our guide in everything we do. I feel he will guide my husband in the direction he needs to go."

About 10 years ago, the Weaklands were led to expand their operation from farming into "agri-tainment." In 2004, they build their first corn maze and invited the public onto their farm for the first time.

The fall festivities now carry on for about two months, and Rick estimates that between 6,000 and 7,000 visitors come to Weakland Farms each fall. Some who came as young children are now returning with their own families.

"We just kept kind of inching into one more episode," Rick said. "We didn't know how this thing would grow."

On weekends from September through November, Weakland Farms is bursting with color and energy as families from throughout the region enjoy the corn maze, hay rides, pumpkin patch, corn box, barnyard animals, craft corner and, of course, Dawn's beautiful mums.



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# DDGS market continues on roller coaster ride

**By Steve Blackburn, DDGS Merchandiser**

So far, it's been a year of ups and downs. In the summer, DDGS prices fell as soybean meal prices dropped, China stopped importing U.S. DDGS and corn prices declined.

Then in October, soybean meal prices increased due to very tight supplies and high demand, so distillers grains prices increased with the rising demand to replace meal. On top of that, we've seen some additional pressure from our friendly, neighborhood

## *Distillers update*

ethanol plants needing to find domestic markets to replace export sales.

At PGP, our competitive advantage is the quality of our product, dependable trucking and the ability to respond quickly to requests for quick-ship loads. Our sales direct to farmers for dry and wet distillers grain continue to increase.

Kevin Albertson recently joined the DDGS merchandising team. He's been quickly learning our customers and the finer points of the feed ingredient market. Please give us a call if you have any questions or if we can help meet your feed ration needs.

## *DDGS Merchandising*

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# Corn: Midwest harvest pushing prices down everywhere

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While the corn buyers at PGP need to make good buying decisions, one of our job duties is to help our farmer-customers get the best price the market will allow. So, give us a call and talk with us about the bushels you have to

sell, when you want to move them and a price you have in mind. We can give

you a marketing plan.

While discussing marketing this year's corn, what about next year's crop? Currently, next year's crop is worth about 40 cents a bushel more. In the past two years, the best prices paid were to farmers who priced corn a year ahead.

## *Corn Merchandising*

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