



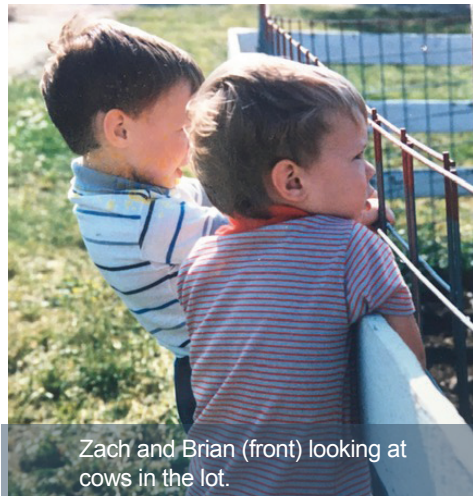
# Kautzky Century Farm

## Roots are 123-years deep for Iowa family farm

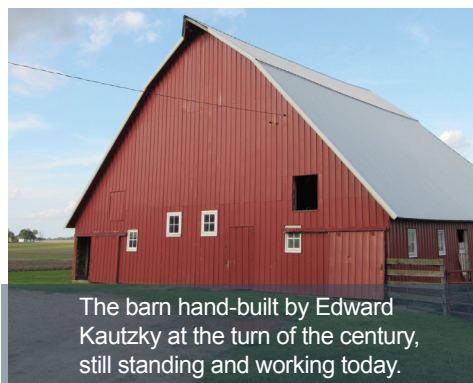
By Kara Storey



Zach, Brian and Ashley riding bikes in front of the barn their great-grandfather built.



Zach and Brian (front) looking at cows in the lot.



The barn hand-built by Edward Kautzky at the turn of the century, still standing and working today.



Greg and Lori's children: (front) Jenny and Ashley, (back) Aaron, Brian and Zach.



Brian and Bridget's children, Louis (4), Clare (6) and Joseph (8), are the fifth generation of Kautzkys to live on the farm.



Ed and Jenny, sitting in front of their fireplace mantle, were the first generation of Kautzky farmers.

About five miles south of Perry, Iowa, on a country gravel road, sits the Kautzky Century Farm. It is a serene and well-kept place with the house sitting a ways back from the road. Nearby stands an eye-catching red barn. A couple of 4-H cows graze lazily in the pasture.

A sign out front, noting the farm's establishment in 1899, hints at the farm's rich history. Brian Kautzky, 36, is the fourth generation to farm the land. He and his wife, Bridget, 36, who's due with their fourth child in July, live in the house his great-grandfather built in 1920.

Today, between what the family owns and rents, the farm has grown to 1,800 acres. Brian and his dad, Greg, 66, are partners on the farm, both farming full time. They mainly raise corn and soybeans, and the family anticipates 400 acres will be certified organic later this summer. Five thousand pigs pass through their hog finishing facility each year and local farmers will hire out the pair to do custom harvest work, too.

Four generations strong, Brian is aware that the farm is not just a property, but a way of life. It is one filled with memories at every turn, as he relives many of his own experiences through the eyes of his children.

"The thing I like most about farm-

ing is raising the kids out here,” Brian said. “It provides order in a chaotic world. Being out here is a salt of the earth way to grow up.”

### **Creating roots**

The farm began with the life of a small orphaned boy from Austria. Edward Kautzky was seven when he came to Iowa with his sister and moved in with distant relatives. As a young adult, he worked as a hired man at a nearby farm, eventually buying the current place when it went up for sale. In 1901, he and his wife, Jenny, were the first couple to be married in Perry’s newly built St. Patrick’s Catholic Church. Besides building the house, Edward also built the barn by hand. Edward’s youngest son, Joe, began farming with his dad around 1930.

Greg, who was the youngest of Joe’s seven children, also grew up on the property, though at the house next door. Although he went to college to study business on a basketball scholarship, he always knew he wanted to come back home and farm, which he did in 1975.

“It was fantastic for me growing up and I thought it was for our kids, too,” said Greg, who sat next to his wife, Lori, 64, at Brian and Bridget’s dinner table.

Greg and Lori, who have been married 38 years, are the proud parents of five children. But before Greg could put a ring on Lori’s finger, he first had to initiate her into farm life.

“I remember when we were dating he brought me out to check the calves and stuff,” Lori said. “Going out at night with the flashlight was new to me.”

After the wedding, the newlyweds made their home in the house Greg’s grandfather built. While Lori quickly grew to love farm life, she could not be involved as much as she desired due to caring for the kids. Then, when their youngest was three, she began commuting 30 miles to Des Moines for work.

“It’s pretty hard to farm and not have benefits or another income because there’s just so much capital involved in farming,” she said. “I really didn’t want to go to work, but my job kept us farming and gave us a steady income. I was willing to do what it took to keep things running here.”

More importantly, Greg and Lori said they relied on their Catholic faith to keep things running during the tough moments of farming, marriage and raising children.

“I remember I had a picture of the Sacred Heart there,” said Lori, instinctively motioning to her son and daughter-in-law’s fireplace mantle. “I would look at it just praying, especially when I got frustrated with the kids or something, and the next minute I’d go to confession and then do it all over again.”

For Greg, the key to everything has been trusting in God.

“You’re pretty dependent on God out here,” he said. “Things are not in your control.”

The couple is refreshingly honest about family life on a farm. But they are humble, too. Greg, not wanting to boast about his farm or life, needed to be prodded by his wife a couple of times to share more details. It was evident Lori is proud of her husband, proud of

the life they created for their kids and proud of the sacrifices they made to keep the farm going.

### **A new generation**

Maintaining a thriving farm was imperative for the Kautzkys. Greg knew he wanted to pass the farm on to one of his children, but said he also respected the fact that they might all have their own dreams. While the farm was available to all of their children, it was the couple’s second oldest, Brian, who showed the most interest.

At the time, Brian was working in finance in downtown Des Moines at Principal Financial Group. Bridget said it was never the plan to come back and farm, but they began having serious conversations about what they wanted their lives to look like when they found out they were pregnant with their first child. After a year of discussion it became clear that the farm was becoming Brian’s dream, Bridget said. During their discernment, they also realized that Bridget did not have to give up her dream of being a lawyer. So in 2012, Brian began farming with his dad. Originally, Brian commuted from Des Moines to the farm, but in 2017 Greg and Lori moved to Perry and Brian and Bridget purchased the farmhouse. Now Bridget commutes for her job.

It is evident the bonds of kinship and love are strong between father and son, as Greg and Brian bantered back and forth, laughing at inside jokes. Although negotiating day-to-day decisions is an ongoing process, both are grateful to be working together.

The pair is especially unified in





Above: The Kautzkys stand next to their century farm sign. Front: Joseph, Clare and Louis. Back: Greg, Lori, Bridget and Brian.

Inset: Greg and Lori Kautzky surrounded by their children and grandchildren.

their belief that the harvest is the best time of year. Greg said he loves being up in the combine in sweatshirt weather, watching the fruits of his labor come in.

"The days when we're harvesting and things are running smoothly and it's a big family affair, there's just no better job," Brian agreed.

Looking back, Brian can see signs from his childhood pointing him to a life on the farm. He said he always enjoyed helping his dad as a kid, the best part being that he didn't have to fold clothes or wash dishes.

"I don't think I was ever meant to be in a cubicle all day," he said. "For me, farming is a good balance of business and working outside with your hands."

As a mother, Bridget said she sees the lifestyle change most beneficial for her sleep - she's never slept better anywhere than on the farm - and for her children.

"I like watching the kids play and the freedom that they have to grow and develop and have new

experiences," she said. "Every day there are toads to catch or they'll help pick things in the garden."

She's also seen a change in her husband. Farming offers Brian flexibility to become a spiritual leader in their family, she said, often encouraging them to sit down and pray the rosary together.

"Well, I went from an office job with 100 emails a day, to a job with zero emails a day, so that frees up some mental space!" Brian quipped.

Faith permeates every aspect of farm life for the couple, not just in the moments they stop to pray. Life and death, hope and grief, are encountered daily on a farm.

"Farming is the ultimate physical evidence of life's cycles," Brian said. "I love that the kids get to see how the cycle of life works, and that life has a spring, summer, fall and winter. You see that with the crops and the animals and everything."

### Passing the baton

The Kautzky Century Farm has

undergone many changes over the past 123 years: horse-pulled plowing, the advent of tractors, raising other types of livestock and acquiring land. But while the Kautzky Farm has personally adapted to changes throughout the years, there's a greater change occurring across the farming landscape. Greg said he used to look out the house window and see four or five neighboring farms. They are now long gone, he lamented, noting that farms have had to get bigger to survive.

"When I first started farming, it seemed a little easier," he said. "We didn't have quite as many acres to get through and the weather didn't seem as dramatic."

Through all the changes he's adapted to, Greg's goal has always been to "pass the baton," he said.

Thanks to hard work, ingenuity and devoted faith, he has done just that. Brian hopes that someday he can do the same. Time will only tell if a fifth-generation Kautzky will return to his or her family roots.