

# The Last Word

*Please don't use the 'H' word*

By Ted Brown

Every once in a while, I run into people who have a misconception about my farm.

They use the 'H' word, and I usually just let it pass.

But more recently, perhaps as a result of being that much older and less tolerant, I feel I have to correct that misconception.

And what is the 'H' word?

It usually precedes the word 'farm'.

"So Ted, how are things out there on that 'hobby' farm of yours? I bet you have lots of fun with it..."

It is not a hobby farm. I don't 'play' at farming.

And like any other business, it ain't always 'fun'.

Recently, one guy I know casually, who wanted to sound informed, referred to it as a hobby farm so many times, I finally had to interject.

"What exactly do you consider a hobby farm?" I asked.

He figured it should be 'Oh, maybe five or 10 acres, maybe have a little barn of sorts,' and so on.

Brown Farm is the original 100-acre parcel that was surveyed in the early 1800s, and granted to Jacob Cutler of Butler's Rangers, for military services rendered. Cutler never saw the land, only held onto it until my great-great-grandfather Alexander Brown purchased it, uncleared, for his eldest son, James Brown, in April, 1826.

And it is still the original 100-acre parcel of land- no severances, the exact same boundaries as when it was purchased.

It's the same property and buildings that not only once housed our 40-cow milking herd, and another 30 young cattle and calves, but also produced and stored all the feed for that same herd as well.

So it ain't no 'hobby farm'.

Granted, The Sidekick and I are 'small farmers,' with a moderate flock of approximately 40 sheep- but we're certainly not what I would consider hobby farmers.

Brown Farm turns a small profit every year, is self-sufficient and we both work quite hard at keeping it that way.

As a rule, a hobby farm is a small farm that is maintained without expectation of being a source of income. Some are used to provide recreational land, like having a place to ride a few



horses. Others are run at an ongoing loss, as a lifestyle by people who can afford to do so, functioning more as a country estate than a bona fide farming business.

Hobby farms really aren't meant to generate income, rather provide an outlet, like most other hobbies. If they do make a few bucks, that's a bonus, but usually the money-makers are few and far between. After all, it is a hobby.

A collector of classic cars isn't in it to make money, an amateur camera buff doesn't really expect to make money with his photo equipment, and an avid gardener doesn't have any expectations of charging admission for visitors to see his/her landscaping in the back yard.

It's all for satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment.

Having said that, all farmers- large or small- do share that aspect with the hobbyist- it's that satisfaction and sense of accomplishment. Otherwise, they wouldn't be in the business.

But it's imperative that the bona fide farm operation makes a profit, just like any other business venture.

For me, I need to turn a profit to simply carry the farm. Living in the country on 100 acres has a significant overhead, and the land and livestock must be utilized to the max to meet those

costs.

The hobby farmer often buys hay and grain, not enduring the stress of out-smarting the weather to produce that feed, like the bona fide farmer does.

The hobby farmer isn't required to invest money in planting crops, maintaining machinery, paying the insurance, and carrying the huge overhead that a farmer must, be they large or small.

At home, I own some of my own machinery, which is a substantial investment- for an operation like mine.

But to a huge cash-cropper, what I have invested wouldn't cover their fuel bill for a season.

So, it's all relative.

I hire a custom operator to do some jobs for me, simply because I don't have the amount of work to justify owning the machinery.

Working at my job off the farm, it makes more sense to have a custom operator come in- sometimes while I'm at my desk at the office- to round bale a field of hay, maybe combine some grain or any other job that I'm not fully equipped for. Keeping in touch by cell phone, I know what's being done, and when, and I come home at the end of my day to see the field baled, ready for me to start my other work day, drawing it off the field, to the barns for storage

before the weather changes again.

And that custom work all costs money, taking away from the bottom line.

If a hobby farmer decides he no longer wants to be a 'hobby farmer' it's likely there isn't any huge consequence to his lifestyle. In fact, he may find he could actually save money.

If I wanted to stop farming, I must either sell the farm (and in doing so, my home) or find another means of generating income that would enable me to carry it.

Don't get me wrong here- I'm not complaining about farming and the work that it entails. I'm simply trying to build an understanding for those who are not aware of the distinct differences between a working farm and a hobby farm.

I love most aspects of the farm- the quiet times in the barn watching a lamb being born in the middle of a frosty winter's night; the productive times out in the field on a tractor as the crop is taken off, or the satisfaction of conducting yet another sale of livestock or feed to another farmer- some hobbyists, others not.

And when it all comes together, I feel a jubilation to I see that I've not only made my financial ends meet, but also turned a profit.

So, please don't use the 'H' word when you refer to my operation. There is nothing wrong with those who do enjoy their hobby farms, but mine is more than a hobby.

It's a way of life.



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