



Rural Portraits

Farm family: Ray and Julia Tardif

Hometown: Albans, Vermont

Children: Ray, 18; Amanda, 16; Dominic, 15; Marc, 13.

FarmFacts: Ray’s father purchased the farm in 1959

Tending to 100 milk cows and replacements, as well as 1000 trees producing rich, delicious maple syrup, Vermont farmer Ray Tardif and family represent the lifestyle typical of many rural Americans.

It’s a story that started with Ray’s father in 1959, when he purchased the farm of about 120 acres near Swanton and St. Albans. The farm heritage of the Tardifs continued when Ray and his wife, Julia, purchased the farm in 1972 – so 2002 marks 30 years in family agriculture for a second Tardif generation on this farm.

Ray’s father remained dedicated to working on the farm until a few years ago, when he was well into his 80s. And Ray’s oldest son farms full time with him, while the younger two help on the weekends.

The farm provides the livelihood, but Tardif shares a rich life within his community, too. A one-grocery store town, Swanton offers an array of civic groups such as the local Chamber of Commerce, Masons and Kiwanis. Four churches call Swanton

home, a largely Catholic community with a population of about 4000.

Tardif belongs to Knights of Columbus, and is active in his parish. This year also marks 30 years of membership in National Farmers Organization, and nine year on the national Board. Julia, a licensed nursing assistant, works for the Visiting Nurses’ Association in the hospice program.

And the high school encompasses the four neighboring towns. Two factories provide the lion’s share of employment, but the economy is heavily dependent upon agriculture.

Like many rural Americans, Tardif has watched rural America follow a difficult path. Small stores in Swanton and nearby St. Albans are struggling, he said. “When you lose farms, everyone loses,” he emphasized. “We’re down to 1500 dairy farms in Vermont today. Back in the 1960s, there were more cows than people in Vermont.”

And Tardif has seen changes in farming, too. Dairies are growing larger and employees are scarce, so the profit concerns in agriculture aren’t solely due to price.

Despite the allure of shorter work weeks in urban America and all the challenges in agriculture, Tardif hopes his children will seek a future in farming.

Tardif Family Farm

- ◆ Dairy herd: 100 cows, plus replacement heifers
- ◆ Maple Syrup: 1,000 maple-syrup producing trees
- ◆ Crops: 100 acres of corn for silage and high-moisture corn, 20 acres of soybeans