

Story by Amanda
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Top: The new chicken barn for 18,000 broilers at the Kuntze family farm in Perth County. Above: James and Arran lay on the kitchen floor playing with their prized John Deere tractors.

From building a new chicken barn to diversifying their chicken and cash crop farm, the Kuntze family is growing in a lot of ways. Their children have grown up in the countryside of Ellice Township in Perth County doing what all farm kids do: participating in barn chores and playing with plastic tractors and farm animals. Two of their four children have taken a real shine to the farm and are proving to be of help at a young age. This story gets at the heart of what farming is all about – family and the courage to take the leap of faith to expand amongst the competing demands of raising a family.



"Be gentle" whispers father Ryan to son Arran.

"I am
already a
farmer!"

All farm members
chime in during tour of
a family owned and
operated broiler barn

Earlier this year, I learned that my neighbour Ryan Kuntze was building a new chicken barn (through a conversation at the feed mill). I was curious and wanted to go see it. Of course Kuntze welcomed me to come visit the farm and I finally got there a few months later. When I arrived, I saw a little boy playing on the house deck that overlooked the then unplanted fields. It was a sunny day and he was engaged in “carpet farming” with his tractors. I asked, “hey buddy where’s mom and dad?” He wasn’t shy and explained that they were busy in the house. I asked him what his name was and he said that it was James. As he was playing with his John Deere toys he began to tell me what fields were going to be planted into what. I was quite impressed by his keen interest in the farming operation so while I waited for Ryan to come out of the house, I asked him how old he was. “I’m four,” he said.

I thought to myself wow he sure knows a lot about what goes on around the farm at such a young age.

Ryan eventually came out of the house with son Arran, aged three. Mandy was still cleaning up from a painting project inside the farmhouse. The two boys were like two rockets of energy and wanted to tell me everything as we made our way to the new barn.

Building a new barn was a big endeavour for the Kuntze’s, but one that they felt was necessary in order to stay competitive in the farming business and raise a family comfortably. The Kuntze’s already had a layer pullet barn, but the new barn is full of 16,000-18,000 broiler chickens. The opportunity to buy quota came in August and as Ryan explained, it was quick decision. Choosing to add broilers helped them diversify while still staying in the chicken business.

Ryan explained his family’s thought process as we were trailing through the new barn with the first batch of chicks. He had his hands full trying to explain everything to me while keeping a close eye on the boys to make sure they didn’t accidentally step on any chicks. James was careful and I could tell that he took the job seriously, while Arran was a bit younger and was

wrapped up in the excitement of the fuzzy little chicks. At one point I asked James if he planned on being a farmer when he grows up. He paused and looked at me and said proudly in his rubber boots, “I am already a farmer.”



Top: Son James oversees the first batch of chicks for the new broiler barn while father, Ryan (above) checks the feeders and waterers.

It was cute. He was a little farmer all right. The two brothers may end up following their father, their grandpa Howard and great-grandpa Russell as the next generation of farmers.

Speaking to Mandy afterwards, she told me that making farming and family work comes down to two things – organization and flexibility. With keeping up with kids’ activities, running a home and the farm is more than a full-time job. She said being organized is a must, but as she explained being flexible is just as important “because even the best laid plans and organization can get thrown out the window in an

instant,” she said.

“Everyone in the family makes personal sacrifices at some point and that is probably the most challenging thing about being a farm family. That said, we wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

The expansion of the farm was in the works for about two years. “There certainly is some risk with an expansion, but with supply management, we felt it was a calculated and manageable one. It really has to be a team effort, housework, chores, kids’ activities all at once can be a challenge for sure! We knew this would be challenging in the short term, but you have to have a long-term vision, and that for us includes succession for the kids at some point in the future,” state the couple.

As we discussed what’s next for the family and their hopes for the future, Ryan expressed hope that his children may one day be able to farm as well.

“I have been on this farm for about 13 years with the first pullet barn that was here on the premise. I had always hoped to expand someday and pass it along to my kids.”

“I moved to this farm when I was in my early twenties, just around the corner from where I grew up on a beef and cash crop farm. I had lots of help from my dad. We looked at several farms, some close by and some not so close by. After looking at some other chicken farms and a pig farm, the opportunity came close to home to purchase this existing operation so we jumped at the chance. There is no way I would be here without the help of my parents; farming requires a large capital investment, without help it’s nearly impossible to start up. I am so thankful every day that my parents were able and willing to help me and I would like to do the same for my kids.”

“I feel the best chance for success in the future for our boys to start is to continue investing in a supply managed sector of agriculture. We hope that some of the kids will be interested in taking over the operation at some point in the future, we are proud to be in agriculture every day!” ♦