

# Sesquicentennial farms change with the times

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
EO Media Group

Wheat harvest is a busy time of year for John W. Adams and his family’s 150-year-old farm north of Pendleton. Schedules are tight, and he carries a cell-phone in the breast pocket of his shirt to communicate with workers in the field.

Technology has come a long way from the early days of farming when his great-grandfather, John F. Adams, became the first to homestead the area in 1865.

“Basically, it’s gone from mules to GPS tractors and combines, with a lot in between,” said John W., the fourth-generation owner and manager of JK Adams Ranches Inc.

The Adams ranch is one of three farms and ranches in Umatilla County celebrating their sesquicentennial, or 150th anniversary, in continuous operation by the same family. AB Lieuallen Century Ranches, of Athena, and James Monroe Hemphill Farm, of Pendleton, have also reached the sesquicentennial mark.

### Recognized at state fair

All three will be recognized Saturday, Aug. 29, during a ceremony at the state fair in Salem. With this year’s inductions, Oregon now has 33 sesquicentennial farms and ranches throughout the state.

John F. Adams, the original founder of Adams Ranches and namesake for the nearby town of Adams, initially raised sheep on the land before transitioning to wheat. Today, the farm has roughly 3,500 farmed acres, split between mostly winter wheat and green peas.

John W., 58, took over the farm from his father, John P., in 1982. Someday, he will pass the farm down to his own son, John H., extending the Adams legacy to a fifth generation.



**An uncut field of soft white winter wheat grows next to the barn and some old farm equipment at the original homestead of the Lieuallen Century Ranches on Thursday outside of Athena.**

Photos by E.J. Harris/EO Media Group

“It means everything to me,” said John W. “To pass it down to my son is a tremendous feeling.”

When John H. does take over, he will inherit an operation that has evolved substantially over the years. At the turn of the 20th century, farmers relied on teams of horses or mules to pull combines over their fields. Now there are not only tractors, but self-driving tractors steered by GPS.

The amount of physical labor is much less than it was even decades ago, notes John W. He can remember when it took teams of 30-40 men to harvest peas, compared to just three or four guys needed to run the machines today. Seeding has also become easier, with the use of box drills as opposed to lugging around 100-pound sacks of seed.

“I sound like an old-timer, but I’m not that old,” John W. said with a laugh.

Things are only going to continue to change with advances in

precision agriculture, he said. That’s where John H., 31, will soon be taking up the mantle.

John H. recently moved back to Oregon after 13 years working in the film industry in Los Angeles. Though he did plenty of chores growing up on the farm, he said there is still a lot to learn.

He can’t really explain why he gave up the glitz of Hollywood for the life of a farmer — it was just a feeling, he said. Taking charge of the family farm comes with a mix of pressure and excitement.

“You don’t want to be the guy who destroys a 150-year-old farm,” he said. “I’m learning from my dad, who’s a really good farmer, and I’m confident in my abilities to keep it going.”

### Three generations

Meanwhile, about five miles up Highway 11 in Athena, another wheat farm — AB Lieuallen Century Ranches — is also turning 150 and shows no signs of slowing.

Three generations currently live and work on the farm. Brooks Lieuallen, 65, still handles plenty of farm business with help from his daughter, Shandi Scheibner, and her husband, Kevin. The Scheibners’ daughters, 15-year-old Sierra and 13-year-old Ellie, are next in line.

Lieuallen Century Ranches grows about 3,000 acres of wheat and alfalfa and runs 250 head of cattle. The farm still uses the same, slightly altered “JL” cattle brand of its 1864 founder, Josiah Lieuallen.



**Farmer John W. Adams, a fourth-generation farmer, says he will pass JK Adams Ranches Inc., outside Adams, to his son, John H. Adams, and keep the 150-year-old farm in the family.**

The farmhouse and barn from the original homestead still stand to this day, overlooking rows of fresh cut alfalfa along Wildhorse Creek. The structures haven’t been lived in for nearly 50 years and are now treated as monuments to the past.

Shandi Scheibner said she is proud of her family’s legacy, and looks forward to passing those values to her daughters.

“We have a huge family history that goes way back,” she said. “It’s a neat thing to be a part of.”

In recent years, Scheibner said they have embraced no-till farming as a way to conserve precious water and cut down on wind erosion.

Scheibner said they also use computer-guided tractors that allow precise spraying of chemicals and fertilizer. Like any business, farms must embrace new technology and methods if they expect to survive, she said.

“My dad never had computers growing up. Now he’s using a computer in his tractor,”

Scheibner said. “He’s come a long way, and I’m very proud of him.”

### Proof of family ownership

The James Monroe Hemphill Farm, established in 1865, is also turning 150. Members of the Hemphill family could not be reached for this story.

In all, the Oregon Century Farm & Century Ranch program added 11 new century farms and five new sesquicentennial farms to its ranks. To qualify, applicants must show proof of continuous family ownership, and a family member must actively manage operations and earn a gross farm income of at least \$1,000 per year for three of five years prior to applying.

The program is supported by a partnership that includes the Oregon Farm Bureau, State Historic Preservation Office and Oregon State University Archives. The deadline for next year’s applications is May 1.

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