

Farm Produces for Daniels Family

by Sandi Alswager (Columbus Telegram Staff)

August 1998

Picking sweet corn, tomatoes and cucumbers and sitting in the hot sun selling produce are a few things the Daniels family of rural Columbus does for summer fun.

"It brings us closer together. It can be stressful, but we all work together. Everyone has a job, and everyone does it well." Tannie Daniels said about the Daniels Produce business she and her husband, Andy, own.

Their three children: Holly, 20; Jason, 18; and Kelly, 15, also help with the business.

Summertime for this family means sweet corn, sweet corn and more sweet corn. Daniels Produce sells its product from the family's produce truck at the 30 Center Mall in Columbus Monday thru Saturday.



Strong Roots - Clockwise from left: Andy, Jason, Tannie, Kelly and Holly Daniels, posing in a field of sweet corn near their home, have worked for 12 years to make their family business of growing corn, tomatoes, cucumbers and other produce successful.

It is currently selling sweet corn, green beans, tomatoes, bell peppers, cucumbers, cantaloupes, jalapeño peppers, potatoes and will have watermelons in a couple of weeks.

Daniels Produce had its start 12 years ago when Tannie and Andy began selling melons. It was meant just to make some extra cash during the crunch of the 1980's, Andy said. It then progressed into a good business and into specializing in sweet corn, Andy said.

Daniels Produce began selling at the 30 Center Mall parking lot about 6 years ago. It formerly had location at the Mr. Suds lot, which is now Corner Stop, and in the lot across from the drive-in theater, now Wal-Mart. Daniels Produce is also sold at the Haymarket in Lincoln, and 50% of the sweet corn is sold wholesale to Hy-Vee Food Store and other vendors from South Dakota, Fremont, Omaha and sometimes Norfolk.

"If they are short, they'll give me me a call," Andy said.

The Daniels plant 45 acres of sweet corn, 1,200 tomato plants, three acres of melons and 100 bell pepper plants. "It gets hectic. They (the family) all work hard and work together," Tannie said. "This helps our children pay for their college. This year this has been a lot more profitable than hogs, cattle, corn or soybeans," Andy said. "The market (for those farm products) is so depressed." Andy also farms about 550 acres of corn and soybeans.

Holly is a junior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Jason will be a freshman at Central Community College - Platte Campus this fall. Kelly will be a sophomore at Lakeview High School.

Andy said that selling produce was a hard business to get into. "It is hard work. It took us 12 years to get here, to get this steady of a base," he said. There are tough times, too, such as in 1996 when a windstorm flattened some of the sweet corn. Andy said sweet corn is very susceptible to wind. Unlike a field of corn or soybeans, a 40 mph wind can flatten a sweet corn field.

The Daniels also hire seven men to pick sweet corn and about five other young people to help with other jobs such as selling, picking, washing and bagging the vegetables. The sweet corn is usually planted

around April 15-17 and the tomatoes are started early in a greenhouse.

During the summer, the 1,200 tomato plants must be tied up, green beans have to be picked and bagged, peppers have to be picked and washed and watermelons and cantaloupes must be picked, just to name a few of the tasks.

The Daniels begin selling their produce as soon as it is ready, which is usually around July 10-12. The sell until Labor Day.