

# Can you make your kids love the farm?



**My Generation**  
By HOLLY SPANGLER

**O**UR little 4-year-old, Nathan, is a typical farm kid. He loves his toy tractors. He could spend all day in the tractor, the combine or the semi riding with whoever happens to be behind the wheel. And he loves cows. Large parts of his day are spent moving toy hay bales around, feeding plastic cows.

But what if he didn't like any of that stuff? What if he turned down repeat offers of tractor rides, and he didn't really want (another) tractor for Christmas?

Could we make him love the farm? It's a thought that can stir fear in the

hearts of farmers, particularly those who dream of handing down the operation, this lifetime of work.

We all know situations where an individual has spent a life amassing ground and has no one to pass it on to — or at least no one who cares about it as he does. Heirs plan the land sale, and farms get divided off. Sure, it's sad to see, but could anything have been done differently? Did those folks make a mistake? Could they have taught their kids to love the farm?

The short answer is no. God made them who they are, with their own interests and personalities.

Take our little friend, Brett. He's a 7-year-old kid whose parents farm, and they've done all the right things to interest him in what they do. But he doesn't care to ride in anything resembling a tractor.

He'll work and do his chores, but farming isn't his thing. If you want to see his eyes light up, start talking sports. He knows all the players, and he'll even listen to baseball with his bus driver. His parents are baffled, but his mom says something just clicked when he saw his first football game.

His parents won't force it, but you can bet Brett will still be exposed to agriculture, even if he continues to be lukewarm about it. Because even though you can't teach them to love the farm,

you can teach them to appreciate it. To appreciate the business, the way of life and the way the land can produce a crop when it's coaxed with a little know-how. And to appreciate the work ethic that goes into that know-how.

**Music Appreciation 101**

There are, of course, a variety of ways to teach on the farm. A child who isn't crazy about showing cattle can still learn responsibility from a good livestock project. Breaking a calf to lead teaches perseverance, daily chores require commitment, and making your way around a show ring requires preparation and mental toughness. If they don't love it, then you just don't go over the top and insist they show at every fair in the tri-state area.

It's not unlike piano lessons. Plenty of adults took piano as a kid — and hated it — but are now glad they did it. Along the way, they learned something about music, rhythm and diligence. They learned to appreciate the music, even if they didn't become professional musicians.

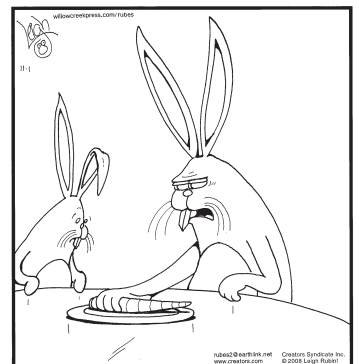
And when their parents model a balanced lifestyle, specifically not allowing farm responsibilities to repeatedly overtake family life, those kids can learn to appreciate what their parents do. When they grow up and go on to a life off the farm, they have a positive background

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to draw on and share with their city colleagues. And who knows? Someday they may even look back and feel a little love.

■ **Comments? E-mail [hspangler@farmprogress.com](mailto:hspangler@farmprogress.com).**

**Rubes**



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