

Spring reminds us of change



Farmer's Daughter
By ANNA ZIEGLER

HEAVY rains washed April into May, turning everything into a muddy mess.

The ground had dried out enough to begin fieldwork, but rumbling thunder warned of the approach of another spring storm, and lightning signaled its

arrival shortly thereafter.

As the sky let loose and raindrops began to pelt the ground, a young farmwife set out after her husband. She worried he would get struck by lightning out on the open tractor or get soaked to the skin and catch cold.

The unpaved road was a mess of muddy ruts, and she got the car hopelessly stuck about a half-mile away from the house. Nearly eight months pregnant and with a toddler on her hip, she headed back on foot.

"There I was, great-big pregnant, carrying a 3-year-old in the mud, and I lost a shoe," Grandma laughs as she tells the story. Fortunately, the neighbors rescued her before she hiked the whole way home.

"That year we never got to plant any corn until Memorial Day," my grandpa says. Of course, in the spring of 1960, planting in June would not have cut into yields as much as it would with today's hybrids. No one planted corn before May 10.



Understanding the significance of blacktop roads, cab tractors and early corn hybrids might be difficult for my generation, but my grandparents lived through these changes. Change has been a constant companion in the more than 50 years they have been farming.

Before livestock trailers, Grandpa used to drive cattle up the road six miles from one farm to another. Today that task would be nearly impossible because most farmers have torn out the fences that used to mark property lines. Even in the range of my memory, the number of fences has dwindled as fewer farmers run cattle on the cornstalks. Removing them also accommodates bigger machinery.

Hope springs eternal

Despite all the changes and improvements in agricultural technology, the rhythms of farm life remain largely the same. Spring still means planting season and pressure to get the crop in on time. From the time the hitch pin falls, hooking the planter to the tractor, farmers feel the compelling itch to get out in the field and plant.

A fresh growing season offers the promise of a new crop mixed with apprehension of potential problems with rain: too much, not enough or not enough at the right time. Pests, diseases and weeds can be yield robbers.

No other business requires such a steep investment in inputs with such uncertainty about the outcome. Farmers sow seeds with only vague estimates of yield and market price when the crop will be harvested.

Crop insurance and marketing strategies can help limit the risks, but farmers still deal with a lot of unknowns — especially in a time of unprecedented prices for commodities and soaring input costs.

As my grandmother says, "The stakes are higher on the financial side." Yet in the hope of springtime, farmers plant the seeds and pray for a bin buster.

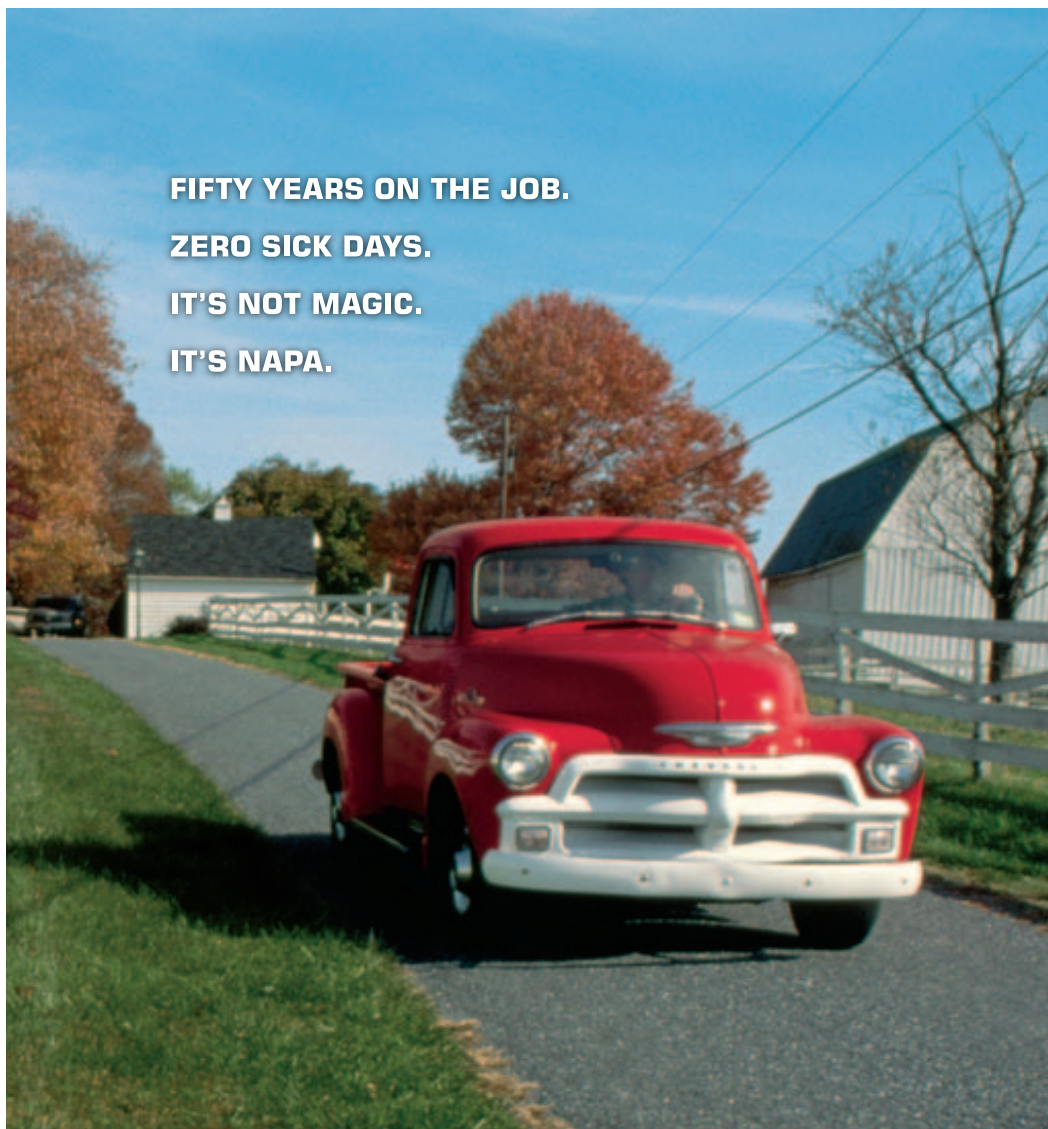
Note of gratitude

In honor of Mother's Day, I want to say thanks, Mom, for all of your help editing and proofreading my columns. Thank you also to the rest of my family for allowing me to write about your stories and experiences.

Ziegler grew up on a family farm near LaHarpe and is a senior in ag communications at the University of Illinois.

Missing My Generation?

Holly Spangler, *Prairie Farmer* field editor and author of the My Generation column, is celebrating the birth of her daughter Caroline with husband John, and children Jenna and Nathan. Look for My Generation to return soon.



**FIFTY YEARS ON THE JOB.
ZERO SICK DAYS.
IT'S NOT MAGIC.
IT'S NAPA.**

At NAPA, we have over 310,000 parts. Parts that are built to stand up to the tough demands of your business. From heavy-duty batteries to tools to filters to fluids, if it carries the NAPA name, you know it not only meets the manufacturer's specs, it often exceeds them. It's no wonder people who count on their parts count on NAPA.

800-LET-NAPA / www.NAPAonline.com



We are proud to support FFA



Get The Good Stuff.®