



Farm Preservation

BRADFORD FARM

PLACES CREATE STORIES



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PLANNING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Bradford Dairy Farms is located in West Michigan's storied Fruit Ridge area, where topography and microclimate create ideal conditions for growing fruit and other crops. Linda married into the Bradford family, ancestor William Bradford came over on the Mayflower and led the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts. His descendants established the dairy farm in the 1850's and Linda's son, Jason, is the fifth generation on the farm.

"I feel strongly, as my family does, that this land is prime and unique and is excellent for crop and food production. We want to keep it as farmland," says Linda.

Her love for the farm and its legacy led her to seek protection options—and not only for her farm, but others on the Ridge as well. Some years ago, she participated in a Pennsylvania farmland preservation tour, and she was very inspired by the successful preservation of farmland in Lancaster County. She returned to the state to join the committee that helped launch Kent County's Farmland Preservation Program. Ultimately, in a series of transactions through the county program, Linda and her family sold the development rights to 328 acres of the farm, now permanently protected with perpetual conservation easements that will ensure the land is never developed.

The decision not only keeps significant farmland in production, it keeps the farm whole. Remarkably, the Bradford farm remained relatively intact as it was passed down through five generations.

"We were really fortunate," Linda says, "Good decisions were made that kept the farm together."

FARM FACTS

PROPRIETORS

Bradford Family

YEARS FARMING

Over 150 years

FARM SIZE

1,300 acres
(328 permanently protected)

LOCATION

Kent County, Michigan

FARM TYPE

Dairy Operation
1,500 cows are milked three times daily

EMPLOYMENT

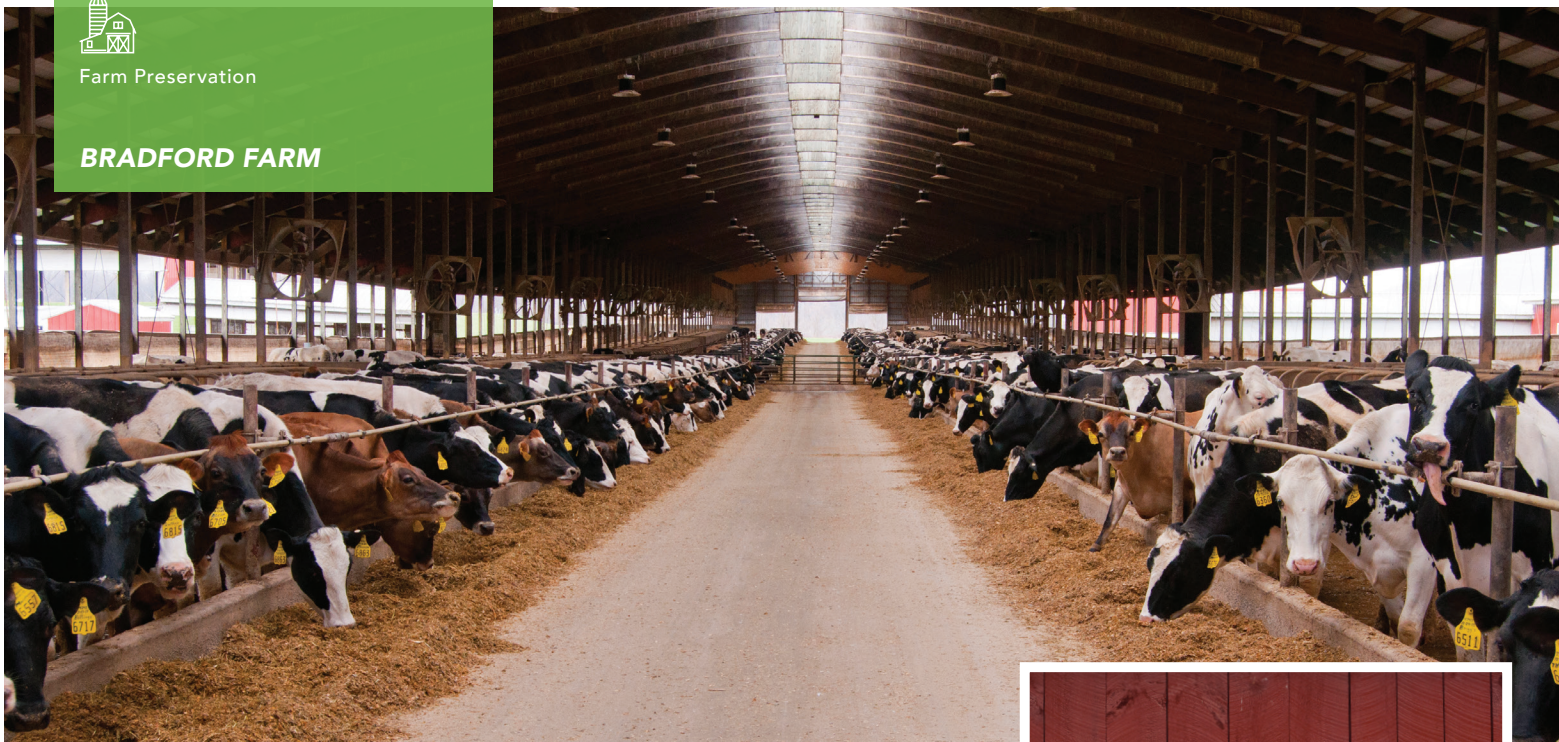
23 full time employees

FARMLAND PROTECTED

Development rights were purchased and conservation easements placed on 300 acres through Kent County's Farmland Preservation Program with various funding sources, including Kent County, Grand Rapids Community Foundation, the Frey Foundation, and the USDA Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program.



BRADFORD FARM



But when her husband passed away and Linda took over the farming operation, only one of Linda's four children was interested in operating it. Many farm families face similar circumstances and all too often are forced to divide or even sell the most significant asset, the farmland itself, either because there are no heirs to farm or to ensure an equitable inheritance among heirs.

By selling the development rights, the land can still be continued to be farmed. The proceeds from the sale can be used for capital improvements, reducing debt, retirement or estate planning.

"It preserves, not only their dad's legacy, but that of the three generations preceding him, and greatly improves the chances for the farm overall. Preservation provides confidence in making investments in the dairy, as it insures a long term environment in which to farm," explains Linda.

Such decisions have positive impacts far beyond the immediate family.

In the Bradford's case, 23 full-time employees live on the farm, and their children go to local schools. Local services, such as machinery sales, feed companies, repair shops, and local businesses are also supported. "Anything good for the farm is good for the agricultural services in the community and therefore rural economic development," Linda points out. "The impact of a farm in the community is huge."

Inspired by the Bradford family, two other neighboring farms have taken the steps to permanently protect their land by also selling their development rights, which has resulted in a large block of contiguous land protected from development.

"The expansion of metro Grand Rapids has brought residential development to the Ridge. But there's a place for housing and a place for farmland, and the Ridge is unique with great natural beauty and multi-generational farms. I would like to see it remain as farmland. There are many good reasons to participate in a purchase of development rights program, and



my family's decision to do so has been positive for us, as well as for our really special agricultural community."

Now newly retired and with less demands on her time, Linda hopes to finish a long-awaited task on her "to do" list, complete the process required to document the farm's history and earn their Sesquicentennial Farm designation from the Historical Society of Michigan.

With their farm well over 150 years old now and still going strong, Linda and her family are ensuring it meets their hope of always remaining farmland.

