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Century Farms Carry on Tradition

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Century farms carry on tradition

Swedish immigrants Frank and Anna Jernstedt were newly married when they moved to Carlton in the late 1800s, bought a cow and a plow, and began farming.

Now, more than a century later, their grandchildren, including Gordon Jernstedt '60, continue to cultivate their 640 acres in Carlton. The success of the Jernstedt Century Farm, and other farms like it, is the focus of a Linfield College research project.

Tom Love, professor of anthropology, and two students researched more than 90 Yamhill County century farms – those that have remained in the same family for more than 100 years – to determine the secret to their endurance.

“They’re doing something right because they’re still going 100 years later,” Love said. “What is it that’s led to this longevity?”

With the support of a Linfield collaborative research grant, Love and sociology students Kelly Stewart and Sirpa Peterson, both '06, decided to find out. They have spent two years investigating environmental, economic, social and cultural factors.

Stewart and Peterson surveyed the century farms registered in Yamhill County, conducting phone and personal interviews to piece together family histories. They combed libraries, phone books and the Internet to find census records, marriage licenses and birth and death certificates.

“Some of the homesteads are absolutely gorgeous,” said Stewart, who was raised in Banks, and whose godfather owns a century farm. “These are the first farm families to settle here, so to learn about that history has been a great opportunity.”

Tracing the family trees proved particularly satisfying for Peterson, who grew up on a farm near Dallas.

“It’s really interesting to find out that a lot of these families are intertwined,” she said. “In many cases, they know just as much history about

their neighbors’ farms as their own.”

Stewart and Peterson also mapped the farms using geographic information systems (GIS) technology. The overall view let them analyze geographical aspects that might affect productivity and provide clues to the farms’ success.

They found about one-third of the farms on record are no longer in existence – one is a trailer park; another, a housing development – and they reported that information to the Oregon Historical Society, which maintains the state’s master list.

Love and the students have begun to draw a number of conclusions, which they are summarizing in an online report to be made available this summer at www.linfield.edu/soan/. They found one of the leading indicators to farms’ longevity is location. Farms that produced multiple crops weathered the agricultural markets over the years. Another factor is the families’ involvement with farming organizations, which instilled a love of farming in children who would eventually take over the farms.

“Farming is important to the families,” Stewart said. “They’ve



Sirpa Peterson, left, and Kelly Stewart, both '06, spent two years studying Yamhill County Century Farms and meeting with farmers including Gordon Jernstedt '60 of Carlton.

passed on ideas from generation to generation about working hard and preserving the family farm.”

Students also learned the significance of agriculture in Yamhill County.

For Jernstedt, the research project is tracking a valuable aspect of local history.

“This farm is part of the history of this area,” he said. “The people who lived here, whose farms are into the second century, are part of the development of Yamhill County.”

— Laura Davis



Swedish immigrants Frank and Anna Jernstedt, center, began farming in Carlton in the late 1800s, with their children Ernest, left, and Albin, on bike. The Jernstedts had four more children, Fred, Maurice, Signe and Leonard. A hired hand is pictured on the right.