

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture Highlight: Karen Krehbiel Dodson and Brittany Krehbiel

The sixth generation will harvest what a daughter and mother are sowing.

For Brittany Krehbiel, a fifth generation farmer, and her mother, Karen Krehbiel Dodson, this line is more than a cliché.

For more than 15 years together, the two watched Jeff Krehbiel, Brittany's father and Karen's late husband, and his father, the late Wayne Krehbiel, work hard to ensure they would do just this – leave Krehbiel Farms LLC better for the next generation.

Brittany and Karen had no idea that within just six years, the entire 2,500-acre operation and legacy of continuing this tradition would be placed in their hands.

Since December 2016, the mother-daughter duo has been running Krehbiel Farms LLC and the family irrigation business, Southwest Center Pivots, on their own. The farming operation consists of seed wheat, peanuts, canola, milo, soy beans, alfalfa hay and 250 head of Dorset sheep.

As the sun peaks over the horizon on a hot summer morning in western Oklahoma, Brittany and Karen have already begun their day. Brittany is headed to the wheat field to jump on a John Deere combine as harvest is under way, answering phone calls from customers simultaneously. Karen is sending the irrigation employees out for repairs, making a trip to the bank and working on financial statements.

Karen married into the farming operation; Brittany has spent her life in a combine.

"I remember being tiny enough I could lay in the floor of the tractor cab with a quilt taking a nap while my dad drove," Brittany said.

Those times are some of Karen's favorite memories, too, when life was "normal."

Jeff, generation four, died in 2011 at the age of 47 after battling brain cancer, and Wayne, generation three and a member of the Oklahoma Ag Hall of Fame, died this past December at the age of 85.

“During harvest, I’d cook two meals a day, load it all up and take it to the field and put it on a tailgate. Then I’d take it home, clean up and turn right back around and start all over. It was hard work, but that’s when family was ideal, when everyone was well,” Karen said.

Brittany recalls how her passion for agriculture really grew during those times.

“I really just started to fall in love with the farming operation. I loved being around agriculture. I loved the thought that you could put a seed into the ground and ... all of a sudden you have a crop that’s ready to harvest, and then that crop goes out and starts to feed the world. I loved that idea,” Brittany said.

As an only child, Brittany never knew any different than working on the farm.

“As I started to grow up, I really was interested in agriculture and didn’t really know that girls didn’t do that, that girls weren’t on the production agriculture front ... I was kind of taught to go ahead and jump right in and do my part,” Brittany said.

And that’s just what she has done.

Keeping her 6-year promise

Just before Brittany’s dad passed away, she promised him she would come back to the farm. In December, she gets to keep her promise, permanently.

“My goals have kind of stayed the same,” Brittany said. “I still want to come home and farm. I still want to be active on the farming operation, but I did see the value in going off to school and getting an education for what I wanted as well as it would open doors if I couldn’t come back to the farm for some reason.”

Brittany is set to graduate from Oklahoma State University this December with a bachelor’s degree in agricultural economics.

“The times I knew I wanted to come back and farm were actually when I would sit on a combine either by myself or with my dad or grandpa and just get to be away from the busyness,” she said.

We are all searching for what makes us tick – what makes us excited to wake up every morning. For Brittany, it’s farming.

“I love being on a combine,” she said. “That’s when I know. I have this feeling inside of me of this is right where I’m supposed to be. I only get that in a few places in my life.”

While women in production agriculture are a minority, Brittany knows she can handle it.

She recalls the dumfounded look she gets when she visits the part store. The men sometimes look at her like she doesn’t know what she’s talking about because she’s a girl.

“I do have an idea of what I’m talking about,” Brittany tells them. “I may not know the actual name for it, but I can tell you what it does.”

Karen said the local businesses are settling into Brittany's role on the farm, but they sometimes have to be reminded that if something has to be explained, it has to be explained to the girls.

Brittany said, "I think there's a lot of headway being made on women in agriculture, but I still think there's a slight connotation of they don't know as much. They don't have quite that mindset to be able to do all the things that a guy would."

She added, "With two females running the operation, we hit those road blocks quite a bit."

More than farm girls

Aside from the farm and irrigation business, Brittany and Karen are both very involved in their communities.

Karen has served on the state Board of Agriculture since 2013 and is the first female to serve in this capacity. She's on the Caddo County Excise and Equalization Board, was a member of the Oklahoma Agricultural Leadership Program Class X, and serves on her county Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee.

On top of the farm, irrigation business and her involvement in agriculture on a local and state level, Karen is also a certified public accountant and has her own accounting firm.

As the valedictorian of her senior class, Brittany has continued her involvement into college, serving on boards and executive teams. She is on Dr. Thomas Coon's Dean's Advisory Council, the OSU Student Alumni Board, and has served on the OSU Aggie-X Executive Team and the OSU Freshman Representative Council. Both Karen and Brittany have devoted their time to advancing agricultural policies that directly impact farmers and ranchers.

Krehbiel Farms LLC is recognized as an Oklahoma Centennial Farm, and the family was named the 2014 Oklahoma Farm Bureau Farm Family of the Year.

The future

When harvest begins next year, a Krehbiel won't be driving the combine.

Karen is now married to Terry Dodson. Brittany is engaged to Logan Hukill, and the two are set to wed April 14, 2018.

Karen is excited for Brittany to be home full time so that her duties can be segregated like they once were. When Jeff got sick, Karen had to drive the combine more often, which meant the family ate from restaurants during harvest.

"Two years ago, Brittany goes, 'Mom, you know, I really would like to have the cook back.' I said, 'I'm good with that,'" Karen laughed.

For Brittany, agriculture is a cross between two things: a way of life and helping others in their way of life.

“By me doing my job, it makes it easier for somebody in Oklahoma City to do theirs because they get to walk into a grocery store and have a lot of choices,” she said. “It’s not just about me, and it’s not just about the consumer that gets our product down at the end of the line. It’s about that partnership of you do your job and I’m going to do mine, and we’re going to create something that’s better than either one of us could’ve done by ourselves.”

The mother-daughter duo remembers the legacy Jeff and Wayne left behind.

“With the farm, I just need to make enough money to scrape a living, and the perks – the unpaid benefits of raising children in a small, rural community and having lifetime friends and lifetime neighbors and the beauty of the sunsets and the scenery – is my perk. I just want to make enough money to get by. The rest becomes the benefit,” Karen said, quoting it as something Jeff would say.

Karen loves the beauty of farming and laughs as she sometimes gets unfriended on Facebook because she posts too many sunset pictures during harvest.

“Every one [sunset] becomes this masterpiece of what God has given us,” she said.

At the end of the day, faith is what drives Karen and Brittany, both in the present and with future generations in mind.

“You still put it in the ground, and you’re still trusting God to make it sprout,” Karen said. “It’s just a miracle every time that it grows. You’d think as a farmer you would take that for granted, but you just can’t.”

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Editor’s note: This is part of a continuing series of stories on Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture.

The project is a collaborative program between the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry and Oklahoma State University to recognize and honor the impact of countless women across all 77 counties of the state, from all aspects and areas of the agricultural industry. The honorees were nominated by their peers and selected by a committee of 14 industry professionals. If you would like to make a nomination, visit <http://okwomeninagandsmallbusiness.com/>.

Photo Caption: Karen Krehbiel Dodson and Brittany Krehbiel, a mother-daughter duo, are being recognized in the Significant Women in Agriculture series. Together, the two run Krehbiel Farms LLC, a 2,500-acre farming operation in western Oklahoma, and the family irrigation business, Southwest Center Pivots. *Photo credit: Dustin Mielke, Oklahoma Farm Bureau.*

