

# Tuthills adapt to keep its farm in the family



*(Photo: Gillis Benedict/Livingston Daily)*

**Jennifer Eberbach, Livingston Daily**

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Few farms have been operated by the same family for as long as Tuthill Farms & Composting Inc. in Green Oak Township. The family has owned it for over 150 years.

However, that does not mean the farm is the same as it ever was. The Tuthill family has had to adapt and make big changes over the years, reacting to rapid growth in the area.

The family shifted focus to a composting business around 1994, after being primarily cattle, dairy and crop farms for generations.

“If we were only farming, we would be slowly choked out,” said Jim Tuthill, who is also a member of the Green Oak Township Board of Trustees.

Jim Tuthill and his wife, Sandra Tuthill, are the fifth generation to work the land. Their kids James, Emily and Ashley grew up there. Daughter Emily and her husband, Stanley Stinson, currently live there with their three young children — the seventh generation on the farm.

“We were able to diversify instead of being forced out. So, all that growth is really an opportunity,” Sandra Tuthill said.

For the composting business, a wide variety of companies and people drop off organic waste — yard waste, logs, brush, leaves and food waste.

They recycle organics into things like fertilizer, topsoil and mulch, which they then sell.

The family also farms hay, wheat, soy and barley. They also have goats and chickens, but no cattle anymore.

Sandra Tuthill is also in charge of the horse-boarding side of the business.

The addition of the composting business made it easier for the family to maintain the farm in a changing world. Jim Tuthill said their topsoil is being used at the reconstruction of the U.S. 23 and Interstate 96 interchange.

The University of Michigan’s Matthaei Botanical Gardens, Michigan State University’s student organic farm and the General Motors Proving Ground on the county’s eastern border are a few more customers Sandra Tuthill gave as examples.

“The (University of Michigan) business school brings us their compostable tableware. They are trying to have zero food waste,” Jim Tuthill said.

The Tuthills’ recycled organics are used by “a lot of landscaping companies, too,” said son James Tuthill.

“There are more backyard gardeners (these days), which I think has increased business. The market for finished compost is going to stay,” Sandra Tuthill said.

During the last 25 years that Jim Tuthill’s father, Lloyd, was in charge of the farm, “he stopped using chemical fertilizer.”

“It was logical to do compost. We were already managing our organics. It is a traditional way of using your own nutrient source,” Sandra Tuthill said.

Keeping the farm in the family also depended on members of each generation finding their own passion for it.

“Back when the farm started, people got a piece of land, raised a family and a few crops, and that’s how they lived. Our farm started selling cattle and got bigger. When a lot of people sold off to bigger farms, my father and his family kept it going when a lot of families didn’t,” Jim Tuthill said.

James Tuthill works there during the summer and said he is likely to come back full time.

He said he is interested in growing hops for making beer.

“Not too many people grow up on farms anymore, so I feel privileged. Growing up with all this land and full reign over it, and then I went to Brighton High School with all the suburban kids — I saw both worlds,” James Tuthill said.

Daughter Emily Stinson and her family are preparing to move to their own small farm, Good Heritage Farm, on land south of Howell.

She is excited to raise animals like “mule-foot hogs,” cattle, chickens and goats on her own farm.

“The idea (for Good Heritage Farm) is to blend things from the past that are easily lost — heritage livestock breeds and things that haven’t been genetically modified quite so much — and combine that with modern technology, solar and renewable energy,” she said.

“Growing up on the farm, it just feels like it’s in my blood. It’s part of who I am,” Stinson said.

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