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Making every step count

Every family has traditions. In the Fessler family, we have one time-honored tradition that dates back long before my time.



Kyle Fessler

Each winter — typically on a cold, wet winter Saturday — our extended family gathers in Grandpa’s shop to make sausage.

It’s taken decades of practice, but the process has evolved over the years into a well-oiled machine. Advances in equipment have turned our small Saturday gathering into a massive production process. These days, we can knock out upward of 400 pounds in just a few hours, which is more than enough to stock the freezers of four generations of Fesslers through the following winter.

There are many jobs throughout our process that need to be done for us to be successful. Many of us have settled into a task that we naturally flock to each year. My favorite job was always “taste-tester,” but unfortunately for me, that task has been passed on to my children’s generation.

Each step in the process is just as important as the one that comes before or after it. The meat and seasoning for each batch need to be precisely measured, as well as properly hand mixed together to ensure consistent quality throughout. The task of stuffing and turning links is an art form that takes years to master, and improper time or temperature in the smoker can ruin a batch. Vacuum sealing mishaps can shorten the freezer life of the product from a few years to a few months. All of these elements need to come together to ensure quality sausage.

Just like our sausage making, we have to trust that we have right people performing the right tasks in our growing operations. There are so many steps along the path from plan to sale, and each one has a particular importance that can affect the others.

We all know how a properly mixed batch of soil can be the cornerstone of a successful crop, while a mis-mixed batch can result in plants that struggle to grow properly, as well as additional costs to fix the problem. Proper irrigation techniques can be a tool to maximize the quality of a crop, but poor techniques can lead to reduced quality, disease problems, or even crop loss altogether.

These are important roles that are often front and center of our operations.

It’s also important that we recognize the behind-the-scenes roles that make our businesses truly great. These are the people that come in early or stay late to sweep the floors, sanitize workspaces, and dump the trash. They pull the weeds, dig the plants,

and load the trucks. And as for our sausage crew, they are the ones that come in the night before to prep the shop and stay late to wash the dishes after the fun is over.

I’d like to thank all those working behind the curtain who put in a tremendous amount of effort on behalf of our membership. It’s not often seen by the public, but the quality work of our OAN staff and members serving on committees truly empowers us to be great, and it’s what helps to make us one of the premier associations in the nursery industry today. ©



Henry Fessler (age 8), head taste tester.