



Levi Findley: Following His Heart & His Legacy

By Lynne Hayes, Growing America

Levi Findley knows a thing or two about strong roots—and not just the kind that make for the healthy bounty of cotton, peanuts, corn, and produce he grows. After all, his farming roots stretch back eight generations, to the 1750s, when his ancestors made their way to America from Scotland. The early Findley clan settled first in South Carolina, moved on to Georgia and Alabama, and arrived in Mt. Carmel, Florida in 1922.

All in the Family

Named after his great granddad, Findley is most at home in the cab of a tractor or picker working the land. True, there was a moment in college when Findley considered becoming a firefighter, but in the end, he had to follow his heart.

“My happiest memories as a little bitty boy was my granddad picking me up and putting me on my great grand-daddy’s tractor,” Findley recalls with a smile. “I could barely touch the clutch of course, but I just loved watching the seed go into the ground, taking care of it, and seeing how it turned out at the end of the season.”

“My great-granddad, my granddad... they had so much passion for farming. They passed that on to my dad, Burlin, and then to me.”

Burlin purchased his own farm in 1972, and by high school, Findley was working right there with him. Along the way, he acquired some land of his own and by 2005, he was managing the day-to-day operations of 650-acres, with his father working right alongside.

“That’s when I came up with the idea of calling all this Wild Boar Farms,” he says. “People think it’s because of the wild hogs around here, but really one day I was looking at the logo on my bush hog and got the idea. It just stuck.”

A Great Honor

Last year, the two Findley families (Levi’s and Burlin’s) were named the 2017 Santa Rosa County Farm Families of the Year, a great honor for the hardworking dad and son team. The deeper meaning of the achievement was not lost on Findley.

“There aren’t many jobs where you can work together with your father. It’s made me a better person and I’m grateful to have the chance to be a whole lot closer to my dad doing the job we do.”

Working side-by-side with those who’ve done it all before you has advantages. Findley credits his dad with teaching him plenty about rolling with the flow and facing the new challenges that each season brings.

"My dad's been farming on his own for 46 seasons now, so he's got an understanding and a historical take on things that I'm still building," he says. "There's lots of struggles, but then good times, it's stressful and then rewarding...we're always being tested. Dad's got a good feel for when it's time to just sit back and wait. He's good at that."

People who Understand

Findley says surrounding yourself with good people beyond your own family is also important.

"There are so many variables in farming...it only takes one bad year to mess you up, so you need to surround yourself with people who understand that about agriculture, especially when it comes to the people who loan you money," advises Findley. "I saw that quality in Farm Credit."

When Findley first met with Farm Credit of Northwest Florida six years ago, he says he knew immediately that he'd found a lender who "got" farming.

"Some lenders you go to...they just don't get it," observes Findley. "They don't understand what paying on a farm plan is or why sometimes we have to ask for a couple of extra days to pay because we're holding onto the crop for a higher price."

"Farm Credit knows what's going on out in the fields," he says. "They know ag, so they know what you need. Everything they do and say is in your best interest."

Mark Waggy is Findley's current lender at Farm Credit. He's watched the 36-year old Findley go through the trials, as well as the deep satisfaction, that farming brings.

"Levi is a very hard worker," Waggy says. "He's taken what he learned from his dad and others before him, and still strives to learn new ways to improve his farming techniques."

Waggy believes what drives Findley more than anything else is his desire to make sure Wild Boar will continue to flourish so his young son has the opportunity to become a ninth generation farmer.

Findley, ever pragmatic, is the first to tell you that ensuring that future includes being smart with his hard-earned money.

"With all the ups and downs of agriculture you and your lender become very close. Mark has been great to work with. I can sit down and explain what I need, and

he and I can talk about how to make it work. He's a very professional guy."

Waggy says he, along with his Farm Credit colleagues, focus on building relationships rather than customer numbers.

"Having a relationship is very different from just being a customer," explains Waggy. "Building trust and confidence...and having a true understanding of not only my customer's business and challenges, but also of their passion and dreams...that's a good recipe for building a great relationship."



Bright Future

With his dad by his side, and the continued support of Farm Credit, Findley sees a bright future—and hopefully a long one—ahead for Wild Boar Farms.

"Our son, Keith Levi, is 13 months old now and I can already see how much he loves the farm life and the outdoors. Of course, I'm hoping he'll want to be a farmer, too, when he gets older."

Findley jokes that it might actually be tough for Keith Levi not to get involved in farming since his mom, Kaylen, is the ag teacher at the local high school.

"But at the end of the day," he says, "as my dad told me... 'it's your choice.' And that's a good way for a dad to be with a son."