

# City-come-lately eroding 122-year-old farm

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By Joe Kimball  
Staff Writer

**St. Cloud, Minn.**  
Two years ago, David Kuhn grew corn on a corner portion of his farm just south of St. Cloud. Today, on that land, a Happy Chef restaurant has cropped up.

Across Hwy. 152, on land where Kuhn used to raise grain and hay, a boat manufacturing company and a printing materials firm have taken up residence.

Even the highway, built in 1936, is on land that used to make up the Kuhn farm. And last spring, the state bought five more of Kuhn's acres to complete the 1-94 hookup south of St. Cloud.

When Kuhn's grandfather, Frederick Kuhn, homesteaded the land in 1854, the farm totaled 160 acres. It grew to more than 200 acres at one time, but is now back to 160.

Progress and the city, it seems, have begun to gobble up the Kuhn farm.

It is not a pleasant prospect for Kuhn, his wife Mary, and their eight children; the third and fourth generations of Kuhns to live on the farm, which has been designated the oldest continuous farm homestead in Stearns County.

"It's inevitable that I'll have to sell the rest of the land," Kuhn said. "It's just a matter of when," his wife added.

(The Kuhns are not alone in their predicament. Last year, the state Agricultural Department estimated that 50,000 to 75,000 acres of farmland are lost each year to urbanization in Minnesota. Some farm experts think those figures are low, when considering land for food production, since much farmland close to cities is converted from food production for humans to grazing land for horses or other less intensive uses.)

Until 1966, Kuhn had a modest dairy operation. He had 20 milking cows, enough to support the family, when combined with the money from crops he grew on the farm.

But in the mid '60s, dairy farmers "had to get big or get out," according to Kuhn. New equipment, including bulk tanks, became popular and the farmer needed a big investment to stay "modern," he said.

Kuhn got out. He took a full-time job as a mechanic in 1966, but continued to raise some crops in his spare time.

Meanwhile, the St. Cloud city limits kept moving out, closer to the farm that once had been "in the sticks."

Rising taxes and high land prices then combined to "pressure" Kuhn to sell some of his land to industry. "They came out here and reappraised the land and our taxes doubled," he said. "It became a hopeless case."

So in 1967 he sold 20 acres across the highway for industrial use and in 1974 sold the land for the restaurant.

Kuhn said others want to buy more of his land. "Lots of industries want to build along the highway," he said. "It's convenient for them, being close to the city and close to the highway. I had three people here in one day wanting to buy land."

The Kuhns have given a St. Cloud real estate firm an option to sell 100 acres, subject to their approval, Mrs. Kuhn said. Should they decide to sell, they will receive a "substantial" amount for the land, Kuhn said, but he maintained money is not the only factor in the decision.

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Mr. and Mrs. David Kuhn say rising taxes and high land prices are the reasons they have granted an option to sell 100 ac

They have more than 120 years of roots in the land, and even though he works full-time in the city, the family still is a farm family, he said.

This year, they raised rye, corn, oats and alfalfa on the land. The family also has two horses, one milk cow, two heifers, three steers and three chickens, and a daughter raises rabbits.

"We all love it here," Mrs. Kuhn said. "But if we ever have to move, it would be to another farm. The children are active in 4-H and the boys help with the farm work."

Part of the irony of the situation, according to Kuhn, is that the original deed was signed in 1854 in nearby Sauk Rapids.

"I don't think there even was a St. Cloud then, and now it's practically on us," Kuhn said. Indeed, the land for the city wasn't surveyed until 1855.

Kuhn continued on page 15F-x



David and Mary Kuhn: the third generation of Kuhns to live on the farm. Staff



A telephoto lens makes highway and restaurant appear right next to the Kuhn barn. The restaurant is actually a quarter