



ABBY GOODMAN

A timeless treasure

Age cannot stop 102-years-young Melvin Welch, who still lives life to its fullest

Small towns across America, including Oklahoma, have their treasures. McAlester has Reba McEntire, Yukon has Garth Brooks, Checotah has Carrie Underwood, and Helena has Melvin Welch.

“Melvin does not look like he is 102 years old,” said Kim Anderson, an Oklahoma State University agricultural economics professor.

On March 10, 1906, Welch was born on the family farm in Helena, Okla.

“I still live on the same section where I was born,” Welch said.

Welch grew up in a typical small Oklahoma town. He attended school in a one-room country schoolhouse through the eighth grade. Welch said he remembers his school had 25 to 30 students at a time.

“Each class was given 10 minutes per day, but being a one-room schoolhouse, even the youngest students were hearing what the eighth-graders were learning,” Welch said. “The younger students were always prepared for the following years.”

Welch grew up working on the family farm, growing wheat and raising cattle. After graduating from Helena High School in 1924, Welch said he knew the next step was to head off to college.

“My mother never had a formal education, which

pushed her to want all of her children to attend college,” Welch said. “She sold eggs, cream and butter to help pay for my education.”

Welch’s farming background led him to choose Oklahoma A&M. The day he moved to Stillwater, his family packed their Model-T Ford and headed down the dirt roads from Helena. His family stayed long enough to make sure he found a family with a room available.

“I woke up the morning after I moved to Stillwater and had to go register for classes all on my own,” Welch said. “I walked to the college of music table, and they asked me if I had any previous piano or voice schooling. When I could not answer those with a ‘yes,’ I knew I was in the wrong line.”

Welch said he looked back at his childhood and decided his farming background was leading him to the college of agriculture.

“I chose the agricultural economics department along with a few of my buddies,” Welch said. “Also, it was brand new in 1924, which seemed exciting.”

Welch quickly developed a friendship with the

Centurian Melvin Welch devotes his life to Oklahoma State, wheat farming and his family.



ABBY GOODMAN

Melvin Welch has composed a life of sweet harmony from plow to ukelele.

agricultural economics department head, J.T. Sanders. Welch said Sanders was a big help to him through his struggles in his first few years.

“The poorest English teacher was assigned to teach the ‘aggies,’” Welch said. “She did not like us too much, so she threatened to kick us out of the class and told us not to come back. Well, Carr T. Dowell, the dean of agriculture, said she couldn’t do that and sent us right back to class. We all passed.”

After graduating in 1928, Welch taught vocational agriculture at Merritt Consolidated School in Elk City, Okla., for two years and in Cheyenne, Okla., for three years. He

also worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Soil Conservation Service (now the Natural Resources Conservation Service). He worked throughout Oklahoma with the USDA, but he was transferred to Texas in 1941.

“When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, a lot of the military boys were called to duty,” Welch said. “A lot of the boys down in the College Station, Texas, area were enlisted in the military, so I had to move down there to work in their places.”

Welch continued his work with the USDA until 1948, when he returned to teaching. He spent the next 22 years as a teacher in Wichita, Kan.

After Welch finished his teaching and USDA careers, he returned to the family farm with his late wife Velma Welch. Welch still farms 360 acres with his wife Martha Welch and his family.

“I only farm wheat now,” Welch said. “I used to have cattle, but now I rent my pasture to other folks to use for their cattle.”

Each year, Welch’s son, Mark Welch, returns to the family farm to help his father plant the wheat.

Welch’s daughter, Melva Joy, followed in his footsteps and attended his alma mater, graduating in 1961.

Welch said he has a wonderful life, always doing the things he sets his mind to do. He said he learned in college not to miss opportunities and to achieve aspirations.

“I look back, and I’m sorry I did not try harder,” Welch said. “I did not know the opportunities I had until it was too late. Take advantage of what you have. You don’t always get another chance.” • *By Abby Goodman, Jenks, Okla.*



**Oklahoma pork producers
create opportunities
care for the environment
feed the world**