

## Loren Kisby - Prohoe

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Let's go to California, where firefighters are battling a wildfire with high quality hand tools produced by a company halfway across the nation in rural Kansas. These hand tools are also serving gardeners, growers and others around the nation and beyond. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Loren Kisby is owner and founder of Prohoe, the company which produced these remarkable tools. Loren grew up at Clifton and went to K-State. He became a teacher, served in the Army, and worked in business before farming. He also met and married Judy through their sisters who went on a church trip together.

Loren and Judy moved to a farm near Munden in Republic County and had two children. As their family grew, their farmhouse needed to expand also. Loren hand-dug a trench for an addition to their house – but then it rained, and the trench caved in.

Loren looked at the muddy mess and realized he needed a special tool to clean out the mud. He welded a chunk of broken disk blade onto a metal handle to make the tool. It worked great.

He tossed the tool in the junk pile when he was done, but while doing fieldwork, he needed something to clean the mud off his farm implements. He fished the tool out of the junk pile again.

After five years of doing this, he noticed that the handle was bent but the blade looked like new. He realized such a durable tool could have several applications.

In 1990, he built a prototype garden hoe to give to family members for Christmas. The hoes worked so well that he started making them as a business. This professional hoe was heavy duty and durable, so he named his company Prohoe for short. He named his product Rogue.

“Rogue has two meanings,” Loren said. “It means someone who's fierce and independent, like a rogue elephant, but in raising seed corn, for example, it means taking out the weeds and uneven plants so you get a great field of corn. These hoes have great strength and are also great for cleaning up a field,” he said.

The reason these hoe blades are so strong is that they are made from the “recycled” disk blades of a farmer's implement which are made to withstand tough field conditions. Growers and gardeners loved them. Loren expanded the business.

He started making Rogue hoes in an empty chicken house on the family farm. In 1993, the grade school in Munden closed. Loren purchased the building and “recycled” it into the location for Prohoe. “We moved the business into the old school,” Loren said. “Of course, the business was only me, and it kind of echoed in there.”

Loren credits the Small Business Development Center for providing key help to his business. Business students from K-State helped with his early marketing plans.

Over time, the business grew. Prohoe continues to make high quality, durable hand tools for outdoor applications. Agreement has been reached with the City of Munden for Prohoe to purchase and “recycle” the soon-to-be-replaced community center. This will double the production area for the company's 14 employees.

“We listened to our customers very carefully and developed products in response to customer needs,” Loren said. In addition to garden hoes, the company now offers field

hoes, scuffle hoes, collinear hoes, scrapers, and fire tools with various lengths and types of handles. “We have 45 different models, but when you add in all the different handle lengths and types of handles, there are 134 different tools that we can make,” Loren said.

Recent growth has come in demand for Prohoe’s firefighting and trailbuilding tools along with online orders. Prohoe has sold products from Washington to Florida, Canada and England. This is quite an accomplishment for a company in rural Munden, Kansas, population 119 people. Now, that’s rural.

For more information, go to [www.prohoe.com](http://www.prohoe.com).

It’s time to leave California where firefighters are using a tool from halfway across the continent in Kansas. We salute Loren Kisby and all those involved with Prohoe for making a difference with entrepreneurship and hard work. These tools will definitely come in handy.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.