

Greg Wolf – Family Food Store

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

San Diego, California. A package of delicious cherry rolls is being delivered to a customer. Would you believe, these baked goods were prepared by a family living half-a-continent away in rural Kansas? It's today's Kansas Profile.

Greg and Ruby Wolf are the owners of the Family Food Store, source of the cherry rolls which went to California. Greg grew up on a farm near Quinter during the farm crisis of the 1980s. "I grew up thinking I was going to farm, but the farm economy took me away from that," Greg said. "It gave me a desire to help farm families."

Greg grew up in the Old German Baptist Brethren church. "We're a conservative church somewhat similar to the Amish and Mennonite," Greg said. "We drive cars, but we choose a simple lifestyle with no television, radio, or Internet." It's a close-knit fellowship, with lots of connections between churches.

Greg went to junior college in California and then transferred to K-State for a degree in agricultural economics. He took a position with a business in Ohio near one of those churches. Here he met and married Ruby.

One day when they were visiting family back home in Kansas, Greg happened to pick up a copy of the High Plains Journal. He noticed an ad for Kennedy and Coe, offering a team consulting approach to their agricultural clients. It was the opportunity he had been seeking to help farm families.

Greg applied for the job and was interviewed by Kennedy and Coe representatives in Wichita. Then, out of the blue, they offered to place him in the company's Pratt office. It was near the town of Sawyer which has a church from Greg's denomination. Greg took the job and moved to Sawyer.

For 15 years, Greg commuted to Pratt. "Most days I would drive past the café in Sawyer," Greg said. "I saw it reopen under new owners and then close again several times over the years, eventually remaining closed."

Meanwhile, Greg and Ruby were dreaming of a business which could involve their growing family. By now they had six children, five girls and a boy. They wanted it to be a food business because of their ties to agriculture, but they were seeking something beyond the typical small town café or grocery store.

Ultimately, Greg bought that building and started his new business called the Family Food Store. In October 2012, it opened for business in Sawyer. "The store had five divisions when we opened: Specialty groceries such as private label jams, jellies, and salsas; a bakery; bulk foods which we package ourselves; a deli with sliced meats and cheeses plus sandwiches and dining capacity of 35 people; and homemade foods such as frozen pizzas and casseroles," Greg said. "People can buy food and eat it here or take it home," he said. The store is open Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

"Recently we have added two more product lines: Household, non-food items such as aprons, homemade soaps, pillows, gift and boutique items, and outdoor furniture made from recycled polyethylene plastic," Greg said.

A common theme is family. The kids help operate the store and pitch in to bake products on off days. "We wanted our family to learn the dynamics of customer care, and this has exceeded our expectations," he said.

The quality and goodness of the product frequently draws visitors from Wichita as well as passing travelers or those visiting family in the area. “Literally every week there are people from the east or west coast in our store,” Greg said. “We’ve become a destination shopping experience for people in Wichita.” Occasionally there is even a request for their baked goods like the one from California.

That’s an impressive record for a business in the rural community of Sawyer, population 122 people. Now, that’s rural.

It’s time to leave San Diego, where a customer is receiving cherry rolls from rural Kansas. We commend Greg and Ruby Wolf and family for making a difference with innovation and initiative. “We are living the fulfillment of a dream, getting people more closely connected to food and family,” Greg said.

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