

## **#FridaysOnTheFarm: The Snider Family Grows a Tradition**

From the kitchen table to the boardroom table, USDA brings people together across the nation for: healthier food, natural resources, and people; a stronger agricultural industry; and economic growth, jobs, and innovation.

Each Friday, meet those farmers, producers, and landowners through our [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) stories. Visit local farms, ranches, forests, and resource areas where USDA customers and partners *do right and feed everyone*.

Spanish moss drifts from live oak trees densely lining county roads that open into wide expanses of fenced fields. Hand-painted signs advertise feed and tractor supply stores in the small towns in route. At least one BBQ stand occupies the outskirts of each.

Farm country is only a short drive out of the city in north central Florida. And for the Snider family, Andy, Nan and their sons Matt and John, life is the farm.

Two miles southwest of the town of O'Brien, they grow coastal hay and oat hay and iron and clay peas on 700 acres. They raise chickens and cows and run two feed stores. The Sniders do most of the work themselves.

His sons refer to their dad as "the boss," but no one has just one role on the farm. Andy is a builder, chemist, and veterinarian, and he's an agronomist and equipment operator. Nan describes herself as a mom, grandma, financial officer, store clerk and gopher. "Normally I am here in the office, babysitting the grandkids or on the tractor baling hay," she says.

John, the oldest son, runs the two feed stores; one is in O'Brien and the other in High Springs.

And Matt manages eight poultry houses, raising more than a million antibiotic-free chickens a year.

### **Teamwork**

Everyone chips in to harvest hay, move the cows or bring lunch and water for whoever is working in the field. Or do anything else that needs to be done.

Morning starts with John, Matt, and their children arriving for breakfast at Nan and Andy's.

The Snider house is awhirl as young children scamper through the kitchen from the adjoining living room with cartoons blasting in the background, Nan cleaning the dishes, and Andy, Matt and John sipping coffee and discussing the day's priorities.

## All in the Family

Nan and Andy didn't start out with a farm when they married 42 years ago.

She worked in a bank and he was a meter reader. They raised hogs and grew watermelons and hay part time. Then Nan and Andy were both laid off the same week. Their children were just babies. Farming went from a part-time to a full-time profession.

The Sniders conserve their resources—they can't afford not to.

They built their first composter soon after they got their first chicken house in the 1990s. "It's more environmentally friendly, we don't want leeching into the ground," Nan says. USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) helped them develop a conservation plan and provided financial assistance.

The Sniders practice no-till farming, disturbing the ground as little as possible when planting, to build [soil health](#). They installed a pivot system to deliver the proper amount of water. Moving their 50 head of Brangus cattle at least every other month to rotate grazing between 50 acres keeps the fields healthy. To Nan it is simple, "Stewardship is a lifelong commitment because it is our livelihood," she says.

## The Springs

And conservation doesn't stop at the Snider's property line. The Suwannee River watershed holds the biggest concentration of freshwater [springs](#) in the world.

The Snider farm is just three miles south from Little River Springs, where crystal-clear freshwater boils from an 11-foot vent underwater and runs 150-feet southwest into the Suwannee River and then 70 miles to the Gulf of Mexico.

When Nan was a little girl she watched baptisms in the springs, swam in it and washed the stains from her hands after working in the tobacco fields. Now she and her kids and grandkids swim there.

The Sniders are members of the Suwannee River Partnership, a coalition of federal, state, local agencies, private associations and businesses working to protect and conserve the water resources of the Suwannee River watershed. The Snider farm has been recognized throughout the years for best management practices. "Our most abundant resource is our water supply," Andy says. "That is why we need to keep it clean and preserve it."



Are you interested in building healthier, more resilient soils on your land? [Visit our new soil health page.](#)

For more information about USDA programs, contact [your local USDA service center.](#)

## **JOIN THE CONVERSATION**

Follow the [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) story series and other news you can use on [farmers.gov](#) and [@Farmersgov](#) Twitter.

*Photo and Story Credit: Renee Bodine*