

Killam Farm, Inc., *Santa Rosa County*

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Lucas Killam is a fourth generation farmer who began farming full-time with his father in 1996 when he graduated high school. The Killam agriculture tradition started with both of Lucas' great grandfathers. His great grandfather, on his mother's side, was involved in agriculture in the timber industry and also operated a country general store. His great grandfather, on his father's side, sold truck crops along with working as a prison warden at Camp 5 in Escambia County.

Lucas began farming with his father, Benny Killam, in 1996 with 30 acres. He also attended Pensacola Junior College in pursuit of a drafting degree which he received and uses to operate L.K. Designs. The design portion of his operation has been a steady business away from farming for the Killam family. He and his wife Kendra were married in 2003, and she serves as a Biology teacher at Jay High School. Lucas has continued to grow and diversify his business operations portfolio over the years. Killam Enterprises was started in 2000 and operates as a custom vegetation control and trucking business. In 2007, Lucas saw a void in the custom lime and fertilization application business and started that division as well. All along this time, the farm grew from 30 acres to over 1000 acres in farm production that Lucas operated.

Lucas has lead Killam Farms, Inc. to become a much diversified operation with many different business ventures. Lucas discussed his business operation by saying, "I don't want to put my eggs all in one basket and that is



why we choose to diversify so we always stay sustainable economically." Lucas also mentioned, "I always plant some cotton, peanuts, soybeans, and wheat, not just all peanuts, because one crop may not do as well in any given year." He also has been involved with cattle to further diversify. Lucas has used a different approach to marketing than some farmers in the area. Using a conservative outlook, Lucas watches the market daily and strategically locks in his price when the market has hit his number. Following in the tradition of his great grandfather, this year he began to experiment with vegetable crops and working with the Panhandle Fresh Marketing Association as he starts a vegetable division. The goals of this association of local vegetable growers includes expanding into larger markets.

Killam Farms, Inc. was an early adopter of precision agriculture by taking advantage of GPS, grid sampling, and variable rate lime and fertilization application. The custom lime and fertilization application developed into a business, and he offered the services to other local farmers. Always looking for new opportunities to remain sustainable, Lucas has shifted emphasis to other divisions of his operation. The farm also places a strong emphasis on soil conversation therefore implementing strip-tillage on all row crops for the past eight years.



Improving Agriculture through Extension Involvement

Lucas has worked closely with UF/IFAS Extension – Santa Rosa County in several different capacities. He has been a vital part of the Santa Rosa County Farm Tour which is led by extension personnel. The Santa Rosa County Farm Tour committee has requested Lucas to do several tasks for the tour in the past including hosting an on-farm peanut harvesting demonstration and also a precision lime and fertilization application demonstration. In cooperation with the Farm Bureau board, he has also provided refreshments each year for the tour.

Lucas has been a leader in the Esca-Rosa Young Farmers and Ranchers group with Escambia and Santa Rosa County Extension Agents. Along with providing leadership for the group, he hosts an annual crawfish boil social at his farm to attract prospective members. As a part of the leadership, he has helped the branch to grow into one of the largest in the state of Florida. The group under his leadership has focused to educate the community on local agriculture with various events like F.O.C.U.S (Farmers Offering Consumers Untold Savings). The event helped educate consumers and elected officials through information kiosks at shopping centers and county proclamations, which were presented at the Board of County Commissioners' meetings for Santa Rosa and Escambia Counties. They also worked on supporting local agriculture by volunteering to serve lunch at the 2012 Northwest Florida Agricultural Innovator luncheon. Additionally, Lucas' wife Kendra has been involved with the Young Farmers and Ranchers group along with working with Extension in her biology school classroom.

Impacting Agriculture in Northwest Florida

Lucas has served on various boards and organizations as an advocate for agriculture in Santa Rosa County. His service includes three years on the Santa Rosa County Farm Bureau Board, seven years as leadership of the Esca-Rosa Young Farmers and Ranchers group, and was elected and has served five years on the Blackwater Soil and Water Conservation District committee. He also has given service to local schools in judging the sub-district and district FFA tractor driving competition for three years. Through involvement on the various boards and organizations, Lucas has made trips to Tallahassee and Washington D.C. to advocate for local, regional, and national agricultural issues.

Lucas also has a strong sense of serving those around him. Lucas realized when he started farming that not every

young man or woman has had the opportunities that he had with his agricultural heritage. With these thoughts in mind, Lucas has helped mentor an employee of his, Tyler Brown, who does not have the family farming background that Lucas was afforded. Tyler has been a part of the Killam Farm for more than 10 years, since he was 13 years old. He has been able to learn from Lucas about farming while trying to build his own farm. ■



Lucas Killam
Jay, FL

