

Interview Transcript, Maasdam Sorghum

MARGE & JENNIFER KRAMER, Lynnville, Sorghum Producers

MARGE: Sorghum started in China, is the way I understand it, and it spread from there. It was harder to get sugar and stuff, so this was a natural sweetener, along with honey and maple syrup.

My name is Marge Kramer. I was born and raised right here on this farm.

JENNIFER: My name is Jennifer Kramer, and I married John Kramer, Marge and Charles' son.

MARGE: This year is our 80th year of making the sorghum, so we've been in the business a long time. I believe this is seven generations. The younger ones are seven generations. They do a few things to help out, definitely the taste testing. They are doing taste testing all the time. Jennifer?

JENNIFER: My favorite thing about sorghum is the uniqueness of this business and just the old-fashioned equipment we use and taking people through and their amazement at the operation.

MARGE: They started making sorghum in 1926. In 1945, my grandpa told my dad he could have the sorghum business if he moved it to his farm, which was a half a mile away, and at that time he built the mill that we have now and he made it so that when the juice is squeezed out of the stalk, the stalk goes up an elevator and falls into our furnace and we use that as our main fuel to make steam to run the steam engine and to cook with. The leaves are blowed outside and they are pushed all on a big pile and our cows will eat them in the wintertime. And the excess stalk that we don't burn is put back on the field

just as a mulch. My dad, Leonard Maasdam, built this mill here in 1944 or '45. '45 was the first year that they used this mill, and in 1926, my dad, Leonard, and his brothers and sister convinced their parents to start making sorghum again because they wouldn't buy enough to last a whole year, and so then that's when they got started was 19—they had made before and quit for a few years, but then in 1926 they started up again.

JENNIFER: Put the sorghum in baked beans, or I have a really good ham ball recipe that calls for brown sugar and we substituted the sorghum for that; a meat loaf topping.

MARGE: She's got a really good cookie recipe, too.

JENNIFER: A cookie recipe that uses warm spice and mulling spice so it's very quick and easy as far as ingredients, as far as mixing.

MARGE: What I grew up on was sorghum a lot. Other than eating it on bread and pancakes was popcorn balls. It makes very good popcorn balls or caramel corn. Eating it out of a lid—JENNIFER: Eating it out of the lid.

MARGE: —is the kids' favorite thing, yeah.

JENNIFER: One time I found our youngest—I'd left the squeeze bottle on the table, and I came into the kitchen and he was just sucking out of the squeeze bottle, the sorghum.

(Sound of the mill.)

JENNIFER: I had no idea what sorghum was until I met John, so I'm learning a lot.

MARGE: She has learned a lot. She does a lot for the company.