



As Eddie Robinson sits in his Wellsville, Mo., farm office, he is surrounded by decades' worth of plaques, trophies, banners and photos. He's spent his time in the limelight, having driven and bred many champion boars and gilts under the OBC Genetics name at shows across the country.

But, he says, the greatest moments of his career didn't result in an award to join his already-vast collection. Eddie says the highlights are found in having a great stockman as a father and mentor; building a happy family with his wife, Tammy; and developing relationships with other producers from coast to coast.

The start of OBC. OBC Genetics began with the FFA project of Eddie's father, Claude, in the mid-1950s. Raising Hampshire, Duroc and Yorkshire gilts that year, he decided his favorite was the Yorkshire, and he never looked back.

Once he graduated from high school, he began row cropping and raising Yorkshires full time on his grandmother's farm. In about 1965, Claude purchased a Yorkshire boar named Mr. Clean that Eddie says put him on the map.

"Mr. Clean was a little bit different type of hog for the time," Eddie says. "That kind of got things started."

Claude held his first production sale in 1968, with people in attendance from 13 states.

In the 1970s, Claude decided to begin a registered Angus cattle herd. By the early 1980s, Claude had made a name for himself in the Angus industry as well, with a bull named High Guy. He produced a bull and heifer that each won the Triple Crown of the American Angus Association – an award presented to any bull or female that is named grand champion at the All-American Futurity, North American International Livestock Exposition and National Western Stock Show.

Today, Eddie's older brother, Allen, manages the Angus and American Quarter Horse operations, which consist of about 50 cows and 25 brood mares. Eddie's passion, however, has always been Yorkshire hogs.

LIVES

well lived

For the Robinson family of Wellsville, Mo., the greatest successes aren't found in their many awards through the years. Their greatest joy is found in their children, and in contributing to future generations of swine producers.

By Christy Couch Lee

A lifetime passion. Eddie began raising Yorkshires when he was about 10 years old. He says he learned a great deal about the industry simply by listening.

"I was fortunate to be in an area with several prominent breeders," he says. "I don't know how many times I was the kid in charge of the hurdle while they were out looking at the hogs. They

were discussing those hogs, and I got to take all of that in. I got to hear a wide variety of opinions from across the country."

He built upon that practical experience and continued to raise Yorkshires until he began college in 1981, at which time he sold his herd to pursue his education.

Eddie attended the University of Missouri (Mizzou), where he joined

the agricultural fraternity Alpha Gamma Sigma. His plan from the beginning was to attend for only two years, taking his choice of agricultural classes.

"I was a sophomore in senior animal science classes," he says. "I just wanted the college experience."

He returned from college in 1983 and jumped into Yorkshire production again. The following year, he married his high-school sweetheart, Tammy. She completed her degree in accounting and agricultural economics at Mizzou after they were married, commuting the 52-mile distance from home to campus each day.

Eddie's Yorkshire operation grew, and in 1989, he and Trent Tiemann of Martinsburg, Mo., held their first production sale.

Eddie and Tiemann began a three-breed marketing co-op called Mid-MO in the early '90s. Tiemann managed the purebred Hampshires and Durocs, while Eddie raised the purebred Yorkshires. A few producers also raised F1 gilts for their three-site operation.

"At the peak, we were selling between 600 and 700 commercial boars a year," Eddie says. "Then, with the bottom dropping out of the hog market, the whole thing just disappeared almost overnight. That evolved to where we are today. The biggest percentage of our business now is selling females to raise showpigs. The showpig side of it keeps growing every year."

Today, the Robinsons manage about 80 sows and sell nearly 400 showpigs yearly.

They have seen success in the show ring, but Eddie says that's not what has been most important to him.

"When we leave this world, the trophies aren't going with us," he says. "What matters to me is that those hogs go out and work for the people who buy them. When we buy a boar, it's going to go over 60-70 percent of our herd. We're trying to build some consistency in our genetics."

The greatest frontier. Eddie says he's made some good decisions when purchasing boars for his herd. Without a doubt, he says, Frontier was the best purchase of all.

Eddie noticed Frontier in the pens

of Lorenzen Farms of Chrisman, Ill., at the 1996 NSR Fall Classic. His littermate was named Reserve Champion Yorkshire Boar, but Eddie set his sights on Frontier.

"We didn't have the money, but God was watching out for us," Eddie says. "I walked into the barn on sale morning and told [NSR

Field Representative] Sam

Howell, you need to find me a partner, because I need to buy this boar. It just so happens Sam found me a partner – Wilbert Moench of Terra Bella, Calif."

They purchased LFC6 Frontier 273-4 that day for the top-selling price of \$11,000. Eddie estimates they sold \$70,000-\$80,000 worth of his semen. And, he says, it would be tough to estimate how many successful daughters also descended from that sire.

Frontier's progeny includes such influential boars as SFYY8 Chisholm 3-4, purchased by Swine Genetics International of Cambridge, Iowa, and Grimm Purebreds of Maynard, Iowa; RHO0 Law and Order 14-6, owned by Lean Value Sires of Carlisle, Ohio, and Ron DeOrnellas of London, Ohio; SLI7 It 24-6, bred by Eddie Farms of Storm Lake, Iowa, and selling for \$52,000 to Top Cut Showpig Sires of Hollansburg, Ohio; BOF1 Main Squeeze 6-2, bred by Wes Barone of Caruthers, Calif., and sold to Real McCoy Genetics of Bloomingburg, Ohio; KMHF9 Full Court 10-1, bred by Hammock Hog Farm Okla., and purchased by Top Cut Showpig Sires for \$50,000; and RNV4 Reno 13-4, which Eddie purchased from Russell Pedrett of Minden, Nev.

"Frontier helped us get through the hog market crash of '98 and '99," Eddie says. "If we hadn't had Frontier, we may not still have Yorkshire pigs."



NJSA events provide excellent family-time opportunities for the Robinson family of Wellsville, Mo.: (clockwise, beginning lower left) Katelyn, Lindsey, Will, Eddie, Annie, Tammy and Lauren.

Because of his legacy, Frontier holds a special place in Eddie's heart.

"I can remember when I was a kid and Mr. Clean died, that's the only boar I remember dad making a big to-do about burying," Eddie says. "Frontier is buried right next to Mr. Clean."

Learning from mistakes.

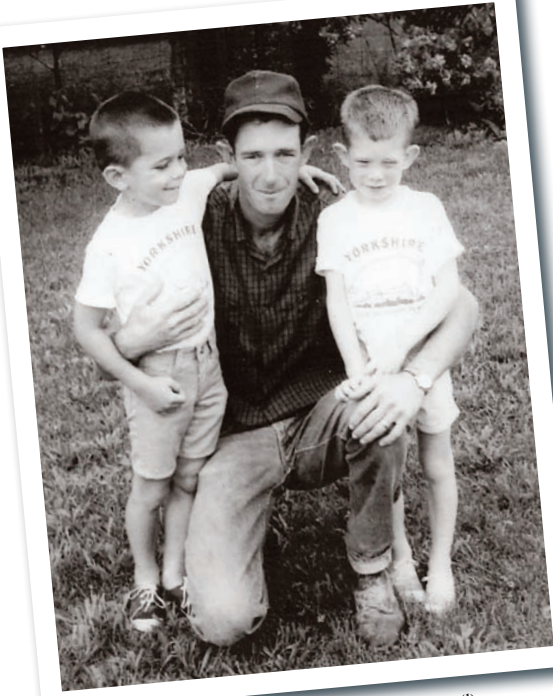
Eddie says not every decision he's made has been as successful as his purchase of that boar. Just the year before he acquired Frontier, he made a not-so-successful choice.

Eddie fell in love with a boar in 1995 on a trip to Europe. He paid \$24,000 to purchase and ship the boar back to the United States.

"Long story short, he wasn't sterile, but his semen wouldn't ship or keep," Eddie says. "And, he probably wasn't as good as I thought he was."

Some might think this would be his worst experience in the industry. But, following the industry trends in 1998, Eddie says, was almost the end of his operation.

"All you heard at that time was that you've got to get bigger. We basically fell into that trap," he says. "We were up to 360 sows. We were selling lots of F1 females and boars, and had a three-site production for health like they said we needed. Then, the hog market broke, and we could not make changes fast enough to compensate."



Eddie Robinson (r), says he and his brother, Allen (l), gained incredible livestock knowledge from their father, Claude Robinson (c).

Eddie says he was selling pot-loads of butcher hogs for \$6,000, which normally would have brought \$20,000-30,000.

Eddie says that experience taught him to be careful of following fads in the industry.

“Don’t fall in hook, line and sinker for the fad,” he says. “Many times, I wish we just would have stayed where we were. It took us eight years to get it all back.”

Eddie says one thing he’s learned, though, is to not be afraid to make big decisions.

“Somewhere along the way, you’re going to fail,” he says. “But, don’t be afraid to fail. In a way, you have to throw caution to the wind, and don’t be afraid to make a decision.”

Making that decision can lead to great success and satisfaction. In the past, Eddie says, his greatest satisfaction came from receiving a phone call from a commercial producer, saying that a set of OBC boars was doing a great job for him. Today, it’s a phone call from a junior exhibitor saying he or she had a great show season with a pig from OBC.

“We’re building those kids’ character and sense of pride,” he says.

Eddie and Tammy also believe in developing their own children’s character through the swine industry.

No small task. The Robinson family consists of five children – Lindsey, 12, Will, 10, Katelyn, 8, Lauren, 6, and Annie, 4. Eddie and Tammy didn’t plan to have what some might consider a large family – it just happened that way.

“I always thought we’d just have two and go on,” Eddie says. “But it was always, ‘Just one more,’ with this puppy dog look from Tammy. One more ended up as five.”

Every Robinson child has a responsibility around the farm, from walking and brushing the pigs

to cleaning the barn. And, Eddie says, working together leads to good bonding time for his kids.

“Every once in a while I’ll come up and just stand and listen,” he says. “I’ll hear some intense discussion and carrying on sometimes, but they’re not too bad.”

Each child has different reasons for loving the show ring. Will says it’s because of the education and friends.

“I think it helps you learn a lot, and it can be really fun,” he says. “When you go to the NJSS, you can test your skills. So, if you want to become a breeder, you know what to do.”

Lindsey says the friendships she’s developed are special.

“It’s neat to get to know people,” she says. “I have friends from all over the country.”

For Lauren, it’s the challenge of the skillathon competitions, and naming the parts of the pig. And, even Annie enjoys the shows and competing in the judging contest.

Spending time with her siblings is special to Katelyn.

“You learn a little more about them when you work together,” she says.

Because the Robinson children show through the NJSA, Eddie was concerned that some might believe

they keep their best pigs. But, he says, the Robinson children purchase their state fair barrows out of the OBC showpig sale, just as all customers do.

The kids also have a few Hampshire sows, which they hope can begin producing showpigs, too.

The Robinson children first entered the show ring at about 3 years old, and they usually attend about five shows a year, including the World Pork Expo in Des Moines, Iowa, the National Junior Summer Spectacular in Louisville, Ky., the NJSA Southeast Regional in Perry, Ga., and county and state fairs.

“If three months go by and our kids haven’t shown a pig somewhere, they are kind of out-of-sorts,” Eddie says with a laugh.

When it’s time to prepare for a show, each family member has a specific job.

From the time they’re old enough to show, they begin packing their own bags and help with the cooler and food preparations, Tammy says.

“It literally takes a day to get things pulled together before we load up the truck,” she says. “They each have their own suitcases and pack their own clothes, but mom checks to make sure they’ve packed what they need.”

Tammy says traveling with five children can be exhilarating and exhausting. But, she says, it’s worth it.

“When the time comes to pull out of the driveway to a hog show, the energy, anticipation and contentment that fills our truck is nothing short of amazing,” she says. “All five children love new adventures, and what better way to stretch their imaginations and goals than through traveling to pig shows? It is teaching our children the world they live in is only limited by their imaginations, goals and hard work.”

Sometimes, Eddie takes one child with him on trips he makes alone. And, once, a 7-month-pregnant Tammy took four children – ages 2, 4, 6, and 8 – by plane to California to meet up with Eddie at the Western All Breeds show.

“When you get on a plane with all of those kids, people look at you like you’re crazy,” Tammy says. “But, every time we needed help, someone was there. The kids had a great time.”

Although Tammy says their days are often fast and furious, she and Eddie wouldn't trade it for anything.

"We do a lot of lovin' in this house," she says.

Patrice Picard of Baldwin, La., has been purchasing bred gilts from the Robinsons for about five years. She and her husband, Brian, and their children, Olivia and Hunter Paul, often will layover at the Robinson home on their return trips from the World Pork Expo. During those times, Picard says, she has seen the Robinson family values first-hand.

had always wanted to attend college and participate in livestock judging.

So, after his passing in 1999, the Robinsons established the Claude Robinson Outstanding Livestock Judge Scholarship through the NJSA and National Junior Angus Association. This scholarship is awarded each year to one outstanding collegiate livestock judge in either the hog or cattle industry.

"I think it's important for young people to travel across the country and see the way different people raise hogs," Eddie says. "We're just trying to give kids the opportunity to relieve

ing the association is important.

"You only get out of it what you put into it," he says.

Eddie says his greatest hope is that his investments pay off – not necessarily monetarily, but in the children he and Tammy raise.

"I've learned in the last 10 years that you don't know what tomorrow will bring," he says. "Hopefully, there will be Yorkshires on this farm and in this family for another generation. But, I'm not as concerned with the future of OBC as I am about what our kids' futures

"We want to raise good, solid kids with Christian values and work ethic. We just want to raise good people." – Tammy Robinson, OBC Genetics

"There's lots of huggin', kissin' and lovin'," she says. "When children can hug and kiss their parents in front of company, you know it happens every day."

Because Eddie and Tammy see the benefits of life in the swine industry, they believe in doing what they can to help build the next generation of agriculturalists.

Paying it forward. The Robinson family has made a great investment in future generations through a scholarship established in Claude's honor.

Eddie says his dad was a self-made stockman, and relied on advice from experts in the industry to gain his wisdom. However, he says, Claude

some of the financial burden of going to college and learn from people around the nation like dad did."

Eddie has also done his part to give back to the NSR.

He served on the American Yorkshire Club's (AYC) board of directors from 1990 to 1996, at which time the National Swine Registry was formed.

Eddie says he learned many life lessons from his experience on the AYC board – the greatest of which is to listen and negotiate.

Following the completion of his term on the AYC board, in 1999, he began his term on the NSR shows and services committee, of which he's still a member.

Eddie says he believes serv-

hold. I hope they find their passion, whether it's here or somewhere else."

Tammy says their love for their family and the operation help to carry them through the trying times.

"Eddie and I work well together," she says. "We want to raise good, solid kids with Christian values and work ethic. We just want to raise good people."

Someday, Eddie and Tammy will look back on their successes in life. Sure, the trophies and banners will be nice. But the greatest joy will stem from photos and memories of time spent with their five children, and the satisfaction of knowing those children have found their passion, happiness and niche in this world. **SE**

Each of the five Robinson children has daily farm responsibilities, which include exercising their showpigs.

