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THE KOHLER CHRONICLES:
Advice & Anecdotes from a Third-Generation Land Broker
 By Jon Kohler, JD
JON KOHLER & ASSOCIATES

Cattle, Pines and Granddad:

How We Lost the Family Farm – and Got It Back

by Jon Kohler

I remember the first time I went to a neighbor's farm. What I remember was the way the family organized around the land. It was how each family member worked and knew their responsibilities.

It wasn't his land in the way we think of ownership today – a deed, property lines on a plat map. It was ours. The family's.

Then, something happened. Slowly at first, then faster. That world went away when everyone left the farm, only now to come back to "help grandad."

But I'm here to share what happened to many a rural family farm – but also the news that it's coming back. Different, but coming back. And, if you understand why it left, you'll understand why what's happening right now on hunting land across the South is nothing short of bringing back the family.

Back then, everyone had a different level of ownership – some held deeds, most held sweat equity. You earned your share. You'd spent July afternoons put-

ting up hay. You'd helped pull a calf. You trapped the foxes that ate the hens that fed the family.

The land was the bond that kept families close. Raise their kids where they were raised. Multi-generational living wasn't some lifestyle trend – it was just life. The land held us together because we worked it together. Then something changed.

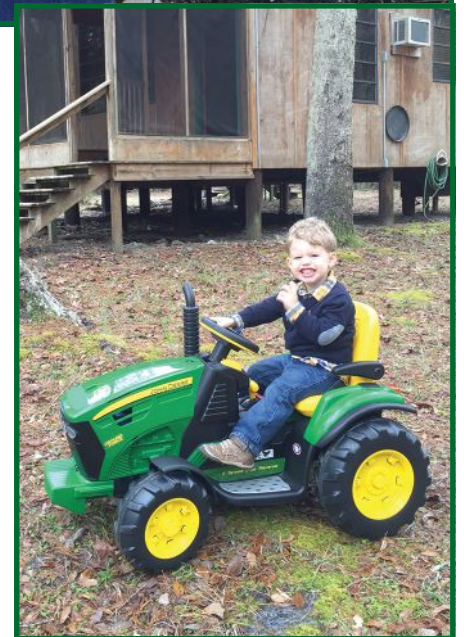
Over 35 years in the land brokerage business, I've watched it firsthand. At first, I simply brushed it off to "changing times." As I became wiser, I realized it was deliberate. How deliberate? Was this engineered? If so, why?

I've looked into all the theories. Federal programs. Globalist schemes to depopulate rural America and herd everyone into controllable cities. And while there's no question that pressure exists today, I went back and looked at what actually happened when it all began in the 1980s.

Cattle have been a part of our rural lifestyle from the earliest European ex-



"TODAY, WHAT BRINGS MANY OF US TOGETHER IS WORKING FOR RECREATION. It's bird dogs. It's big bucks. Grandkids learning to call a turkey. Granddad is in the middle of it all, not alone anymore, sharing God's great creation with the people he raised," said the author, Jon Kohler.



plorers. Florida recovered from the Civil War faster because it traded cattle for Cuban gold.

Yet now, replacing pasture are mostly miles of pine trees. Neat rows.

Fence posts with rusted wire disappearing into the woods. Old pastures swallowed by timber. What happened?

It's as hard to believe that cattle
(Continued on next page)

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The land has given the family another reason to come back

(Continued from previous page)

were once about everywhere as it is the fact that Publix used to be closed on Sundays! In fact, the Taylor County Sheriff had a posse whose job was to round up strays. They came to our farm several times.

It wasn't until I was about 15 that the rebounding deer population finally outnumbered the number of cows seen on the side of the road. Neighbors helped neighbors. Branding. Fencing. Hay season. Cattle required constant attention – and that meant there was something for everyone to do. From the oldest man to the youngest boy, everyone had a role.

Then, in the early 1980s, the cattle market collapsed. Interest rates spiked. Drought ensued. Prices tanked. I watched ranchers sell land as the last resort. Folks whose families worked that land their whole lives – forced to make hard decisions due to forces they couldn't control.

Back then, there wasn't a recreational land market leading the way it does today. Land value came from what you could extract: timber, crops, minerals. The “most improved” land was the land that comes from shared hardship and shared success.

Because human nature dictates that it takes hard work to make a bond. The fact of the matter is that overcoming hardships and persevering to accomplish a goal is what builds character and ultimately a sense of ownership. The reasoning for many things can be found in the Bible.

In the Garden, everything was given. Just abundance.

I can't imagine what it would be like to live during a time when one of the hardest things to do was come up with a name for all the animals. No sweat. No thorns. No frustration. That was until we frustrated God.

And God said to Adam: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you... By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food.”

Not to be too discouraging, but today's pulpwood market is weaker now than when all of this started, while cattle markets are at an all-time high. A problem we help many landowners with is that after they do harvest the timber, they don't know if they should even replant it

or what to do.

Fast-forward to today. Here's the good news – and it is good news:

After COVID, something shifted. It took a pandemic to lead to the resurgence of rural land.

Suddenly, everyone wanted out of the city. Remote work was real. The slower-paced country lifestyle looked good again. And people started coming back to the land – not just to the same land, not only to Granddad's old farm, but to all types of land.

Families wanted to start a new tradition. Not based on cattle or shared labor...but shared recreation. For shared memories. For experiences. Some were more worried about security, safety and independence, and we led them to what we coined Social Storm® Properties. A lot of these are just plain good hunting properties with a lot of extra attributes in case SHTF (you know, when things go sideways).

Others went out and focused purely on recreational tracts with the goal to make them even better – what my firm pioneered as Legacy Sporting Lands™.

While in the end, pulpwood proved to be a bad way to create wealth, it did lead to the abundance of whitetail deer, which is the basis of the recreational land phenomenon. Which is a good thing for family land.

Managing for wildlife takes everyone. Prescribed burns. Food plots. Timber stand improvement. Pond management. Trail maintenance. Infrastructure. The youngest kid can help plant a dove field. The teenager can run a chainsaw. Dad can teach his son about stewardship or a daughter about where the healthiest food really comes from.

It's work – real, sweaty, meaningful work. The kind that bonds people to land and to each other. At the end of the day, deer hunting is a lot more fun than working cows!

I've watched families transform cut-over timberland into properties that now host three generations every Thanksgiving – not out of obligation, but because the land means something again. That transformation, what we call our Working Lands Initiative – from asset to legacy – is what we guide families on how to do.

Here's the irony: it takes massive effort to manage “natural” land. Thank Adam for that.

You have to reset ecosystems that were damaged. You have to undo monoculture pine plantations. You have to remove invasive species like Bahia grass – the same grass we planted for cattle 40 years ago.

You have to fight against the curse – thorns, thistles, invasives, neglect – just to get back to something that looks natural.

Why?

Because the land doesn't maintain itself. It never did. God told Adam that from the beginning. The wilderness is not neutral. It takes dominion – the kind Adam was supposed to exercise in the Garden. The kind we abandoned when we let the land sit idle under rows of pine trees.

But now? Families are taking dominion again. And it's beautiful.

Today, there is a resurgence of being on the land. Improving it. Stewarding it.

I love every minute of seeing fam-

ilies together in the woods. The culture coming back. Tree stands for sale at every feed store. Hunters driving ATVs down county roads. People reading Woods 'N Water because they care about this life.

This is the heyday of recreational land. But here's what I really learned after 35 years of specializing in this niche.

The land was just the excuse that kept us together – branding cattle, putting up hay, mending fences. When the land stopped needing us, we stopped needing each other.

Today, what brings many of us together is working for recreation. It's bird dogs. It's big bucks. Grandkids learning to call a turkey. Granddad is in the middle of it all, not alone anymore, sharing God's great creation with the people he raised.

The land didn't come back. The family came back. The land just gave them another reason to.

And that's the ultimate form of wealth.

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