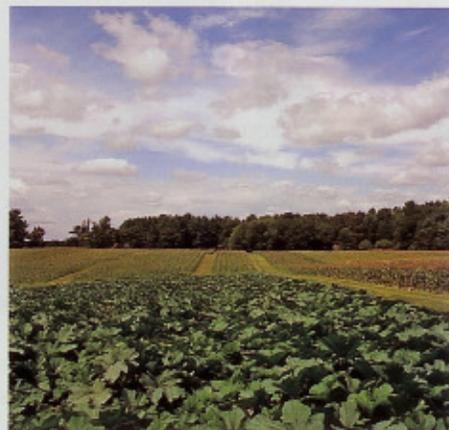


*Eleven generations have tilled
this New England soil.*



The Oldest Farm in America

BEHIND THE WHEEL OF HIS RED PICKUP TRUCK, WILL Tuttle presides over the changing landscape of the 240-acre Dover, New Hampshire, farm that is the legacy of 11 generations. His family's produce farm is more than 370 years old and a fixture in American farming, having the distinction of being the oldest family farm in the country.

Will maneuvers his truck along a muddy double track at the southern end of the Gilman field and makes a right turn to the Oven, a field enclosed on two sides by trees and nicknamed for its scorching temperatures in summer. Will's left elbow hangs out the window as he pauses and looks to the rows of lettuce and peas and corn growing in this seven-acre patch behind his farmhouse.

"This isn't just dirt," he says, gesturing to the land where crops sprout from the earth. As Will sees it, there isn't

by LISA PALMER ■ photography ERIK RANK

Daisy and Grayson are the 12th generation of Tuttle on the farm in Dover, New Hampshire.

"You have to have a reasonable stewardship of the land," says Will Tuttle. It's a credo his family has followed for centuries.

Old-Timers

Not surprisingly, some of the oldest family businesses in America still in operation are located in New England, according to William T. O'Hara of Bryant University in Smithfield, Rhode Island, author of *Centuries of Success: Lessons from the World's Most Enduring Family Businesses* (Adams Media Corporation, \$24.95).

Barker Farm, in North Andover, Massachusetts, was established in 1642 and is the oldest continuously operating family farm in the state. Today, the Barkers farm 150 acres of land, including 60 acres of sweet corn. "It's our biggest crop," says Dianne Barker-Coco. The farm has a 10-acre pick-your-own apple orchard, grows vegetables and flowers, and also has a petting zoo. 978-683-0785.

Allandale Farm, in Brookline, Massachusetts (just outside Boston), is one of only a few farms left inside Route 128. Established around 1700, the farm grows and sells its own produce and operates a summer outdoor program for children. 617-524-1531. allandalefarm.com

Lyman Orchards, in Middlefield, Connecticut, stretches back eight generations to 1741. Today, the 1,100-acre farm has diversified to include two championship 18-hole public golf courses and a golf academy, a corn maze, pick-your-own

fruit orchards (apples, pears, pumpkins, and more), and a year-round farm market and cider mill. 888-995-9626. lymanorchards.com

In 1824, **Ashaway Line & Twine Manufacturing Company** was founded by Captain Lester Crandall in Ashaway, Rhode Island, to manufacture fishing line. Crandall devised and perfected several line-making machines, and the business has grown to become a world leader in the production of strings for all racket sports, surgical suture thread, and custom braided products. Today, three members of the sixth generation of Crandalls run the company. 800-556-7260. ashawayusa.com

Just over the border from New Hampshire and a few miles from Tuttle Farm, **Hussey Seating Company** in North Berwick, Maine, is the Pine Tree State's oldest family business. Today, the company, founded as a plow manufacturer by William Hussey in 1835, produces spectator seating systems. Members of the sixth generation of Husseys manage the family business. 800-341-0401. husseyseating.com



Michelle and Will Tuttle hope one of their children will take over the farm.

merely soil here—there is living, breathing history. Generations have memories of raising families here and buying their vegetables and fruits at the Tuttle farm stand.

The green tract of land spans both sides of Dover Point Road and is just four miles inland from the Atlantic. It's where John Tuttle began farming the original seven-acre parcel in the 1630s (exact dates vary) after emigrating from England. Over time, generations of Tuttle purchased surrounding fields. Today, several farmsteads compose Tuttle Farm, each field retaining its original owner's name: the Hussey field, the Elkins field, the Gilman field.

Will moved back to the farmstead in 1971 after leaving to attend college at Tufts University. He earned degrees in sociology and philosophy, which he says are quite useful when you're a farmer, though "the corn doesn't care."

Will officially took over the farm from his father, Hugh, in 1977. Ownership has always been passed on to the youngest son; Will is the middle of three children and has an older and a

younger sister. Not long after Will took control of the farm, his older sister, Lucy, moved back to the United States from Paris, where she had been working as a teacher. Together, the brother/sister team expanded the farm to include a year-round retail market in the renovated red barn where their mother, Joan, had sold the farm's seasonal harvest since the 1950s.

"We still hang our hat on the fresh produce we grow," says Will, adding that Lucy has introduced European and domestic artisan cheeses, specialty foods, hard-to-find dairy products, wine, and freshly baked goods from her kitchen.

A tall man with an athletic look about him, Will, 59, says he makes it a point to return to the fields almost every day, test nutrient levels, and assess crop production. "You have to have a reasonable stewardship of the land," he says.

As his four-wheel drive rolls past the strawberry patch, a grin stretches across Will's face. "That's where you're required to whistle," he says, pointing to the rows of leafy strawberry plants. In a

life full of hard labor and long hours, Will remembers when farm workers were told to whistle while picking strawberries. "My great-grandfather started that," he says.

The reigning patriarch of America's oldest family farm, Will says he doesn't feel the gravity of the 10 generations of Tuttle's before him. "I know nothing that I do today will change the world today—maybe over my lifetime, but not today," he says. Still, he continually tries new varieties of corn, pumpkins, or peas and then assesses which has produced the most from the land.

Will began working for his grandfather, William Penn Tuttle II, when he was 6 years old. "He was a tough Yankee, but he gave me 23 cents an hour,"



Will's sister Lucy moved back to New Hampshire from Paris to help expand the farm's market and has added specialty foods, cheeses, wine, and freshly baked goods.

Welcome To
Tuttle's
America's Oldest
Family Farm
Est. 1632



Will recalls. "For a kid my age, it was like a baseball deal."

A father of four (two girls and two boys), Will says his sons have an equal chance at taking over the farm. These days, however, he doesn't insist that his older son, Andy, 28, an Army Ranger who joined the service soon after September 11, 2001, help out on the farm. Will's younger son, Grayson, 9, is doing his part. He already seems to understand the importance of hard work and dedication, which are vital for the farming life. "Grayson loves it outside. We have to drag him into the house every night, kicking and screaming," Will says with a smile. ★

*Tuttle's Red Barn (retail farm market),
151 Dover Point Rd., Dover, NH. 603-
742-4313.*

