

Ontario 150 Project "Living Off the Land"
 Edited Clips of Oral History Transcript of Kevin Rosein

	CLIP 1	
DB	Kevin, let's start with when you bought this farm and moved here.	
KR	We purchased the farm, I think, September 4, 2015, so a year and a half ago. We bought this farm which is one hundred and seventy seven acres. We came from a little hobby farm which was seven acres which is down the White Lake Road. On the hobby farm we had different animals, some pigs and some chickens and some cows. We also had a big garden and and just wanted more, wanted to expand it and certainly this farm has what I call my retirement project, to keep me busy when I retire. I love working on the farm.	
DB	Good. Did you grow up on a farm?	
KR	I cannot say I grew up on a farm but my grandparents had a farm, and, of course, every summer holidays my brother and I would be shipped off to the farm. So we'd spend summer holidays, March break, Christmas holidays up there so I certainly spent a lot of time on my grandfather's farm. It was very similar to what I am doing here. It was quite a diverse farm. They had everything from beef cattle, they had pigs, they had chickens, meat birds as well as laying hens. They had a big garden, they made maple syrup, they worked in the bush and did firewood as well, so I certainly had a good cross section growing up of diversification so that's certainly what we will try to develop here now.	
DB	What were some of your earliest jobs on that farm?	
KR	Everything from, ah, some of the dirtiest jobs, cleaning out the cows to riding the stoker behind the baler. <i>You know those hot summer days you'd be just covered in chaff, you'd be hot and sweaty. There was always a little pond near down by the farm so after a good day haying you had a chance to go for a swim.</i>	
DB	Were there any jobs you liked In particular though?	
KR	I certainly always liked working... my grandfather had a blacksmith's shop so if there was anything that was broken on the farm, he would literally make it. He had the forge there, and I remember even as a young child going down, and my job was to crank the forge, the blower that blew the hot air onto the coals. I certainly watched my grandfather heat all these parts up and bend them. So I certainly always have fond memories of that. And then in the blacksmith shop my grandfather, he always had many many projects on the go. He used to make cant hooks for all the loggers in the area. You know it's a wooden handle and he'd make the metal parts. He had an old lathe there that he would make the wooden parts on. Funny story I'll tell you. You know my grandfather was very particular about the shape of this cant hook stock. He had me on the lathe making these and I had made five or six of them. He had the pattern there and he'd make them and take them out and sand them. I got a little bit bored so I had the chisels there	

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	and started making one. I added a couple of little designs in it and stuff like that. My grandfather came out and he shook his head, he looked at it, he didn't say a word to me, but he took it out of the lathe. We went out behind the blacksmith shop and he threw it as far as he could into the bush and he said, "Follow the pattern."
DB	That's a good story. What education and career did you pursue?
KR	Well, actually I went to Conestoga College for wood products technician. It was a two years course. A little bit of background here. As I was growing up I had a woodworking shop with a whole bunch of equipment from a guy who had retired. So I had a woodworking shop set up in my parents' basement so I was making everything from plant stands, bird feeders, small furniture, stuff like that, so I certainly had a passion for woodworking. I didn't want to just take a cabinet making course. I want something more diverse in the industry. So I did the research and Conestoga College had the wood products technicians' course and they taught you everything from human relations to cabinet making. There was a dry kiln in the shop so you had to learn how to dry lumber, and everything right up to high production equipment, finishing. There was drafting and mechanical engineering part of it as well, so, again, it was quite an intense course. From there, coming out of college I started manufacturing again kitchen cabinets for people in my parents' garage. Then I got so busy that I couldn't keep ahead of it, so what I did was... I knew about Jim Deslaurier up on the river road so I approached him to see if I could buy kitchens from him because I had sold more than I could produce myself. At the end of the conversation Jim had hired me to come and run his plant. So it necessarily backfired on me, but from there it's been a thirty year career with Deslaurier starting with setting up. It was actually right after their fire and so I came into their plant and I set up the whole manufacturing plant because that was my background, what I had taken in school. From there I trained all the employees, and trained the sales reps in the product itself. So now at the tail end of my career I am actually doing the design work so I get to meet all the customers. It's the fun part of the industry.
	CLIP 2
DB	Okay so you have had a bit of farming background, you must have know what you were getting into when you bought this place.
KR	Yeah, yeah, we took a good look around and knew there was going to be a lot of work. Jack and Gail who had it before had pretty much not did a lot on the farm for about ten years because they were so busy with the truck stop. There was another gentleman who came and took the hay off. So yeah, there was a lot of work to bring it back up to what I'd say is a modern farm, I guess, standard. A lot of fencing had to be did, a lot of repairs, fix up the water troughs for the

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	animals. Yes, it was a busy first few months this moving in, but it's coming.
DB	Okay, can you describe it, how big is it, what areas are tillable, what's pasture, crops and so on?
KR	So what there is, is a hundred and seventy seven acres according to the purchase agreement. A hundred and seventy seven acres, originally a two hundred acre farm. There's been some lots taken off the corners. Lorelei which is a subdivision taken off. Some of the other corners were taken off. So a hundred and seventy seven or a hundred and sixty six, I'll have to check on that. There's about eighty five acres of tillable and a forty acre maple bush coming in from the Kippen side. There's a little cedar bush up in the corner here. There's some usable pine on the property and eighty five acres tillable.
DB	What were your plans when you bought the farm? Did you have a vision in mind?
KR	Yep, and I think that vision is still holding true, I mean what I wanted to have. I started off with three cows at the other farm and I want to expand that and I want to do some breeding, you know, to raise a herd. I have always had pigs and I want to have more pigs. I have always had meat birds and I have always wanted more. I just wanted bigger. I mean it all started off just having it for our own use and for family and friends, and everybody loved it that it was all natural and organic and so then there is a long waiting list of people wanting the pork, the beef or the chicken from us. It's funny. You take a look at this field out front from us here, actually a little eleven acre field, and when I first saw it, I thought, yeah, I'm going to call that my field of dreams. So even the first spring, which is a year ago now, we planted... there's twelve hundred strawberry plants, there's three hundred high bush blueberries planted, there's four thousand garlic planted. We have another section where there's a garden. Last fall I dug a big irrigation pond. So my vision is this eleven acre field is going to have plum trees, apple trees, apricot trees, blueberries, strawberries and garlic. It will just sort of be my orchard, my fruit orchard, I'll call it.
DB	I know as I gradually withdraw from some of my gardening where I am going to come. DB- What changes or modifications have you made?
KR	The first thing I did when we moved in was put up a new building over here, sort of my workshop. I've got all my woodworking tools in there. As well, we have divided part of it off. The front section, the shop itself, is forty by seventy two. So I divided off the front twenty feet, twenty by forty, and that's going to be what I call a farm gate store. Eventually we'll have that and be able to sell produce and that right off the farm. The back section is more woodworking shop. My eventuality, part of my dream, what I'd like to see happen, is to have a butcher shop right on premise. I can take the animals out to be slaughtered, but I can bring them back in. I'll have a meat cooler. I can hang the meat and then I can cut it and wrap it to people's specifications. The big thing that I found before is that I'd take some pigs up to another slaughter house and I was always worried, was I getting my own meat back because we are so so careful in

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	<p>how they're raised, all organic and really cared for, always running around the pastures, even the pigs, not just penned up. We wanted to make sure we were eating healthy ourselves and that's the way it started. We wanted to raise our own meat. I was concerned when I opened a package of pork chops. These pigs were all raised identical and one pork chop would have two inches of fat and another pork chop would only have a quarter inch of fat on it, and my instinct was I am not getting my own meat back. I have been talking to many people and they basically said the same thing. The chances of getting your own meat back are impossible. So I thought okay, what do I do about it. So I thought well, I want to set up my own butcher shop here. So I've got all the equipment here for setting it up and I want to set up to make sure, you know, I'll get the Department of Health involved, that it is done properly so I am taking baby steps to get to that too.</p>
DB	<p>That sounds like a wonderful dream but very ambitious.</p>
	<p>CLIP 3</p>
DB	<p>Did you tap any trees last year?</p>
KR	<p>We tapped three hundred trees last year.</p>
DB	<p>Did you have pipeline?</p>
KR	<p>No, no, we did all by buckets. I'll tell you a little story about maple syrup. We were doing maple syrup on the other property to start off with so I bought a little evaporator about ten years ago. A little evaporator, a two by three evaporator, and we had tapped I think a hundred and fifty trees, probably more than we should with the little evaporator, but we were pretty ambitious and we boiled and boiled and boiled. The little evaporator we could boil down five gallons an hour. So then three years ago I bought a bigger evaporator, and we thought we were really expanding because it could boil down twenty gallons an hour. So we went from five gallons an hour to twenty gallons an hour. An interesting thing when we came to look at the property here the first time. We walked over, and there's a building over here and I said, "What's in this building?" And I walk over and I open up the door and my eyes got as big as saucers because there was an evaporator there that would do a hundred gallons an hour. So I was going from five gallons to twenty gallons to something that would do a hundred gallons which probably means you have to have a minimum of six hundred trees to start it up. It's a big hungry monster there and once you get it rolling it will really produce maple syrup. It's got the automatic draw off on it and everything so it's got the preheated on it. I haven't used it yet. I'm anxious to use it. So last year being our first year I actually had the evaporator that I had from the other camp that will do the twenty gallons an hour set up temporarily in the yard here, a nice little shelter around it. So we did three hundred trees, three hundred taps on buckets and last year was just a it started off a little scary because it ran a little bit and then stopped and everybody was so worried that it</p>

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	<p>was going to be a bad year, and when it started it was an absolute tsunami. It just wouldn't stop flowing. We produced, produced, produced. Normally the rule is that with a hundred taps or with one tap you produce one liter of syrup, and that's a good year. So if you do three hundred taps you should be able to get, in a good year, three hundred liters. Well, last year we got four hundred liters of syrup and we ended up dumping about another close to a thousand liters of sap at the end of the season because we had ran out of wood three times. We were going to the bush and cutting down the dead trees and just scrambling. Unfortunately there was a whole bunch of cedar rails that were up on the fence line and I got desperate and burnt all the cedar rails to do the maple syrup which I am a little sorry I did. It would be nice to have those now.</p>
DB	<p>What are some of the key factors in producing a good product in maple syrup?</p>
KR	<p>One of the key factors is boiling as soon as possible. You don't want to store because if you store it you are losing some of the quality in it, so if you can collect it and start boiling right away, having the right system set up. So we set up on the float system so there's always a constant level in it. We've got the gauge on it and taking it off the right... there's a scale on it, always at seven it comes off on, not 6.9, not 7.1. You want to take it off at 7. I can always remember my grandfather making maple syrup and he never had a scale or anything but he had an old wooden ladle, and when he dipped the ladle in and when he had three drops forming into one, it was ready to come off. So even though I am watching the scale, I have my wooden ladle out there and do a comparison between the scale and the wooden ladle, and sure enough his method was as good as any scale. So I take the maple syrup off and from there the big key for us is filtering it. We do something very very specific with our maple syrup and this is we have all our maple syrup in Mason jars, and the reason it is always in Mason jars is that I want to see the clarity, and if I'm happy with the clarity, my customers are going to be happy with the clarity. I see so many people putting it in [plastic]. We did a test last year and actually went and bought some maple syrup last year that was just in the plastic containers from different local people. So we'd take it out and put it in a Mason jar and saw a world of difference. Theirs would be cloudy and, not that they're deceiving anybody. <i>I think we probably take ours a bit further than necessary, but again, it's a real pride issue when you can hold it up to the light and you can see through it and you can see that beautiful golden colour to it.</i></p>
DB	<p>Does the age of the tree affect the flavour?</p>
KR	<p>I am not one hundred per cent sure. What my grandfather taught was that we won't tap small trees. I've got the maple syrup manual in there and it's saying don't tap anything smaller than a twelve inch tree, and we don't tap anything smaller than a fourteen or sixteen inch tree. So I really want to keep the maple bush growing so the small trees, I am allowing them to mature, allowing them to grow stronger before we start tapping. Some of the trees that are out there must be one hundred and fifty years old and they've been tapped a lot and they've been tapped with some big taps as well. The old taps were big taps and the new taps are a smaller hole, you</p>

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	<p>know. I went to a couple of different courses on maple syrup and they're proving that you don't have to drill a big hole to get the quantity of sap out. Even a small hole, it's called a health spile is doing less damage to the tree. It's allowing it to heal a lot quicker as well.</p>
DB	<p>I think the usual ratio is forty to one of sap to syrup, but I was told there was an area close to Lochwinoch where it was thirty to one. I don't know if there is any truth to that or not. Have you ever heard that?</p>
KR	<p>I've heard there's a few wives' tales out there, and the big thing I always do when people will say to me I got thirty five to one or thirty eight to one. And it's like bring your maple syrup over as I have a refractor metre there that I can check the brix on it, and if it's not sixty six brix, it's not legal maple syrup. So as much as they want to say that, I mean we can prove whether it's right or not.</p>
DB	<p>What do you know about the role the soil plays in the flavour of the final product? Does a rocky soil give you a different flavour than say a clay loam soil?</p>
KR	<p>I think it does, it does have a factor. On the other side of the river there was a lot more clay over there where we were tapping before. On this side it is very rocky. And I was told, and I think I have proved to myself, that being rocky, it is picking up more mineral so I think there is a health quality in it as well, that you are getting a lot of trace minerals in it because it's picking it up through the rock and through that aquifer below the rock system. It there is also more precipitate that comes off it when you are filtering it so I have found that I go through a lot more filters on this side of the river than it was when it was clay soil on the other side of the river. I was told, and I don't know the complete logic behind it, I was told that rocky ground you'll pick up a lot more minerals but you'll also pick up a lot more precipitate.</p>
	<p>CLIP 4</p>
DB	<p>Where are your markets?</p>
KR	<p>At this point it's just word of mouth. A lot of people where I work will get my maple syrup and friends and family. Last year an interesting thing with Deslaurier Custom Cabinets. Every year they've got at least a hundred big builders and customers so they always do up this fancy gift basket. They spend \$150. to \$200. per basket. One year they had Beau's Beer and some Deslaurier glasses in there and crackers and cheese and stuff like that. They did wine. So last year the owner of Deslaurier came to me and said, "I want to do maple syrup with pancake mix," so he ordered a hundred litres of maple syrup from me right off the start and that's why I was a little worried last year when it started off because it started off as such a bad year that I was a little bit worried that I could produce the hundred litres to supply Denis Deslaurier with it. So we did the hundred litres for the gift baskets last year and again he came to me this spring and he</p>

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	said, "Well, if you're doing maple syrup, I want another hundred litres and we'll do something similar this year."
DB	What are some of the challenges of the business?
KR	Again, part of it is the unpredictability. You never know what the season's going to be. It's almost the fifteenth of March and I haven't tapped yet. People have tapped. My uncle who was tapping has already had two short runs, a short run in February and a short run in March, but it hasn't been the big run, and I could have tapped but I've just been holding off, holding off, holding off. I was always told growing up that doing maple syrup is that when you tap a tree you want to tap and allow the sap to come out. If you get a week or week and a half long dry spell, a really cold cold spell, you can actually get a dry tap hole, and then when it does start flowing you don't get the full abundance. It almost starts to heal itself. So I have always said that I really want to wait, to hold off and wait, to do justice to the tree so that it isn't trying to heal itself and we are getting the maximum flow out.
	CLIP 5
DB	Back to other aspects of the farm. Do you have enough land to be able to produce enough feed for your cattle and pigs and so on?
KR	So we are buying some feed in now, but the intention is the eighty five acres minus the the eleven acre field of dreams I call it here, I am hoping there is enough. Now I can't have forty or fifty head of cattle on the property. I think the right number is going to be twenty to twenty five. So that's what I am aiming for. I have thirteen right now, seven of them are bred or supposed to be bred, so hopefully this spring we will have seven calves. So the idea is to bring the herd up to about twenty heifers and from there the calves I get off, if they're good heifer calves, I will keep them, if they're bull calves, steers, we'll actually raise them for meat for the farm gate store.
DB	You obviously have a full time job right now, how are you going to juggle these two.
KR	Many people have asked that same question. I mean I have been doing it for a year and a half here, and I did it at the other farm as well. A lot of people say, "How do you do it?" I don't see it as work. I came home from work today and I hopped on the tractor... , I snow blowed, I fed the pigs, I fed the cows, and to me it's not work. I think if I saw it as work it would be work, but for me, it's something I love doing, so it's more of a hobby than anything else.
DB	Good. Now you live in a unique house, can you describe it a little bit and describe any of the changes you have made or things you would like to do.
	KR- It's a beautiful beautiful old log home, and the previous owners did an amazing job of

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	<p>restoring it. So the farm house normally when you walk in the front door of the farm house, the kitchen would be on the left, the living room on the right, and that's the way the original farmhouse was. Then when the previous owners, Jack and Gail bought it they added this addition with a bathroom, a laundry room, a back entrance to the basement and then the kitchen area. They added this section on and then what was the kitchen turned into the master bedroom. So it's nice now that really everything is on the main floor for us. I don't have to go upstairs. I am thinking of the benefit. We all do age, and as I get older I won't have to be going up and down the stairs because everything is on the main floor. So in buying the place, when we walked through the place, they'd done a beautiful job in restoring it, but there were a few things I didn't like about it and that is that it was carpet everywhere. There was carpet in the kitchen, carpet in the hall, carpet in the living room and carpet in the bathroom. There was carpet everywhere. So coming from a place, the previous place I had was very similar. It had been all carpet when I bought it and by the time I finished there was no carpet left, just ceramic tile and hardwood. So as you see here now we took the carpet out and out ceramic tile in. We completely put a whole new kitchen in here because I always thought I have been in the kitchen industry for thirty years you know. If I am going to retire in a couple of years I want a nice kitchen so I put the island in and changed it around. The sink was where the stove is now and the stove was down further so again we put the center island with the sink in it. We put a whole new kitchen in. We put ceramic tile in and in the living room and bedroom we took the carpet out and and now have all maple hardwood flooring throughout. Really the only place there is carpet left is the upstairs, but as I said, I very seldom ever go up there. I might eventually change that but it is not a high priority. The other thing that we did is last fall we put the sunroom on here. Now if you can see it out here. It's sixteen by sixteen. I'll just give you a quick little look. It's all screened in here. It isn't much in the winter but it's nice in the summer and in the spring you can open it all up. This is identical to the one I had on the other house. I have spent so much time in there. It's just like a whole other living room off the kitchen. As soon as I bought the place, I said, "I'm putting another one of those on."</p>
DB	Now are you going to use that place for starting plants in the spring or is it not heated?
KR	It's not heated so I do have a nice little greenhouse, an eight by twelve greenhouse. I temporarily put it in the coverall building for the winter and I'll be bringing it out shortly and start doing a bit of work on it and I'll be using it for starting some plants for the garden.