

MN Agriculture: Doug Hoffbauer, Farmer Doug



Day 3 of my "30 Days of MN Agriculture" is Doug and Lois Hoffbauer, or better known as '**Farmer Doug**.' Doug and Lois live near Duluth. (By the way, Duluth is absolutely one of my favorite places in Minnesota!) Doug is also a [MARL \(Minnesota Ag Rural Leadership\)](#) alumni. We visited his farm during one of our MARL meetings and I can tell you his farm is truly a family affair. Many of the family members are directly involved in caring for the farm. In the summer Farmer Doug sells produce and flowers at the local [Duluth Farmers Market](#) and in the late fall/early winter, he sells Christmas trees. Hope you enjoy his story!

Social Media Sites: Website: www.balsamwreath.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/farmerdougduluth

Tell me a little about your farm and/or business?

We purchased the land for our Christmas tree farm in 1986 and immediately began planting trees for the purpose of Christmas trees. We began a cut-your-own in 1993, and in 1997-2001 son Derek went to Crookston for college and hockey and began selling trees in Grand Forks. We began wreath production at that time, following many years of small family production. In 2001 we began our first retail lot in Superior, Wisconsin. We opened a second site in 2004 at Duluth Farmer's Market.

We currently market at both locations. We plant about 3500 seedlings annually and currently have about 40 acres in trees. In 1994 our son Derek, began a website www.balsamwreath.com and that has developed into a mail-order Christmas wreath business that employs 6 people from mid-October through mid-December. We also market wreaths at our two tree lots and have a few

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fundraiser accounts. Our second son, Jesse balls and burlaps about 200 trees annually for landscaping purposes.

How long have you farmed or been in business?

After graduating from U of M (forestry) in 1976 we purchased our first farm which is currently growing about 10 acres in vegetables and cut flowers. We currently have 5 high tunnel/greenhouses used for tomatoes and flowers (this is Duluth).

Where do you sell or provide services to? Who is your end consumer?

We sell trees and wreaths retail at the two locations, mail-order trees, wreaths and other Christmas decorations. For summer produce, we attend 5 farmer's markets weekly, and service several restaurants, flower shops, and grocery stores, primarily with flowers. As shown, with Direct-marketing, most of our products are sold directly to the end consumer.

What makes your farm/business unique or special? What are you proud of?

Being successful in Duluth area has its own challenges: weather, poor soils, lack of infrastructure/suppliers. To become successful has had many challenges and many rewards. There is not much competition in the Duluth area for what we do, which has allowed us to venture into many areas successfully. The recent surge in popularity of local grown/food has contributed greatly to recent growth, which has allowed us to bring our sons and their families into the business, each with their own niche.

Why do you grow/raise/produce? What went into your decision to do what you do?

Being limited by climate and soils, our options were limited. Trees have always been my passion. The veggies started as a 5-10 year plan while we waited for trees to mature. 40 years later we are still growing produce. The transition into cut flowers started a few years ago, as our son and his family showed interest in it.

If there is one thing you could change about farming it would be . . .

Choose a farm with better soil...less rocks. I have been fighting rocks for 40 years, and I don't think I am winning.

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What do you love most about farming/business?

Beating the odds, and producing quality products for the local area. Many customers have become friends over the years and support us energetically. Being a respected and appreciated member of the community means a lot.

What is one thing you wish consumers knew about what you do or your farm/business?

After 40 years of direct marketing, our lifelong customers know a lot about us already.

What makes Minnesota the place to farm/grow/raise/produce/service?

The connection I made during the [MARL](#) program in been invaluable. With the demise of the extension programs, these connections have become my go to for advice...i.e. new trends on weed control etc. Minnesota has a very diverse Ag industry, and it is quickly adaptable, to fill the needs of consumers.

What is one thing about Minnesota that people from other areas do not know about or are missing because they don't live here?

The diverse landscape, and that all Minnesotans are only a few hours form a lot of different geography and scenery.

What is your favorite Minnesota location?

Where I live.

More pics . . .