

# ENACTING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL NATURE OF AG

By Sherry Hoyer

**HE DIDN'T KNOW IT AT THE TIME, BUT A 1966 SWINE SEEDSTOCK 4-H PROJECT WAS THE FIRST STEP IN STEVE KERNS' INNOVATIVE CAREER THAT NOW SPANS COMMUNITIES, COMPANIES AND CONTINENTS.**

"I came to Iowa State in 1970 as a freshman in animal science pre-vet. By the end of my freshman year, I knew I wanted to work only with swine," Kerns says. "Under the direction of Lauren Christian ('58 animal science), Lanoy Hazel ('41 PHD genetics), Al Christian and others, I started doing ultrasonic animal evaluation on swine breeding stock for independent breeders and swine test stations."

For several years the Clearfield, Iowa, native spent his winter and summer quarters doing ultrasound scanning in states east of the Mississippi River and pursued his studies during the fall and spring.

Kerns ('81 animal science) gained unmatched experience during this time that led to the creation of his first company offering ultrasound evaluation in 1977. Mentor Lauren Christian encouraged him to finish his degree before Iowa State switched to the semester system.

"I returned to our home farm to start expanding in Landrace genetics, and we began offering centralized production sales in Nevada, Iowa," Kerns says. "A few years later I started traveling with P.S. Dhillion of American Technologies to work with his clients in Greece, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. I gained a wealth of international contacts and clients."

Kerns' career continues to thrive.

That 4-H project from 1966? It lives on as Kerns Farms Corp./KK Landrace. Also under Kerns' ownership: KFC Agri-Services (the company he started while an undergraduate); MULTIGENE USA, LLC, a joint venture with Multigene Plus from France; International Boar Semen; and, new in fall 2010, Heirloom Swine Farms, a niche market joint venture producing Berkshire pork for high end chefs and restaurants throughout the country.

"I learned early on in my career to always be looking forward. I've tried to be at the forefront of adopting and adapting new technology or the next generation of ideas," Kerns says. "Attending meetings, serving on a variety of advisory boards for industry and education and networking with people in and out of the swine industry is valuable."

The Kerns home operation is as multifaceted as his profession.

His wife, Becky, and sons Karl, a sophomore in animal science at Iowa State, and Matt, a junior in high school, all are part of the operation. The family has six farms producing five breeds of boars and gilts; 115 row crop and hay acres; 200 acres of pasture for 55 registered Angus cattle; and 200 boars in stud producing semen for fresh and frozen domestic and international sales.

He has held numerous leadership positions in the Iowa Pork Producers Association, including president. He also



Photo: Jeff DeYoung, Iowa Farmer Today

*Steve Kerns sorts hogs in one of his barns near Clearfield. Kerns started his first business as an undergrad at ISU in 1977, which is still in operation.*

serves on committees on the National Pork Board and National Pork Producers Council. In 2000 he and Becky were honored with the Master Seedstock Producer Award.

In honor of his distinguished career, Kerns was inducted into the Iowa State University Animal Science Hall of Fame in 2010. 