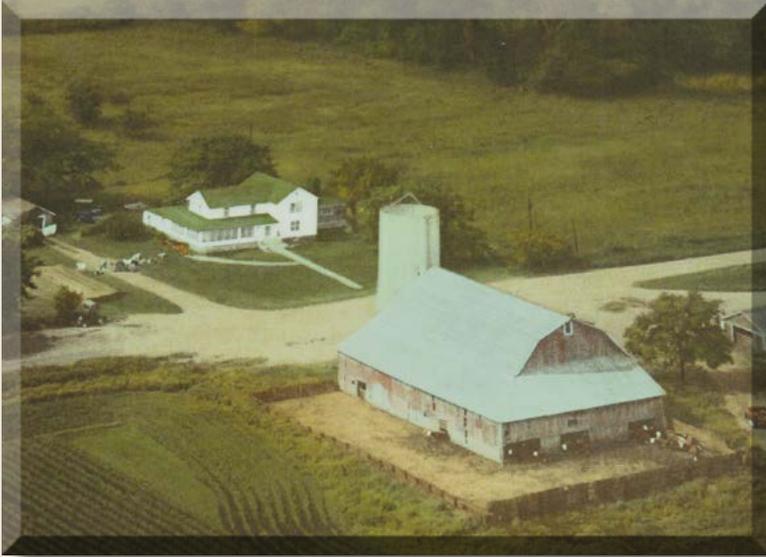


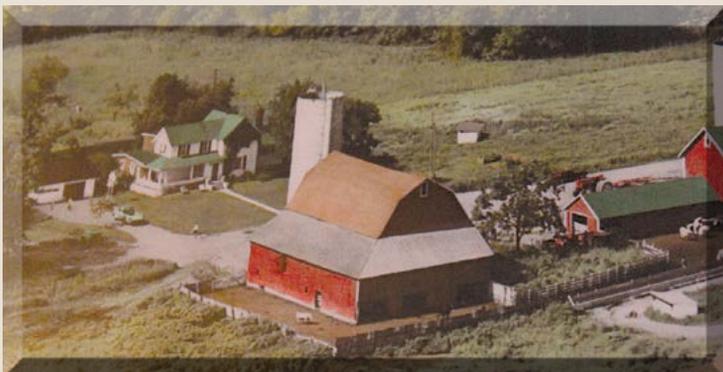
# LEWIS J. OSWALT FARM

## VICKSBURG, MICHIGAN

### ESTABLISHED OCTOBER 20, 1893



*Above: Some of the farm buildings, circa 1960. Right: A north side view of the farmhouse. Below: Some of the farm buildings in 1974.*



Lewis J. Oswalt was born in Wayne County, New York, on October 13, 1874. When he was three years old, his family moved to Brady Township, Michigan, just south of Kalamazoo, where his father found work as a farmer.

Between 1893 and 1913, Lewis acquired 14 parcels of land—totaling 470 acres—for a farm. He married Ellen C. Foster on December 24, 1902. Their honeymoon included a trip to Ferris State, where Lewis studied agriculture.

During the early twentieth century, Lewis and Ellen grew peppermint on their West Michigan farm. From 1902 to 1929, the Oswalt's peppermint farm was a success. Lewis was demanding of himself as well as those who worked for him. Those who were willing to work hard were rewarded, while those who were not were told to “hit the highway.”

Farming during the Great Depression was difficult and not often prosperous. Since peppermint was no longer in high demand, Lewis and Ellen's son, Foster, and daughter-in-law, Marian, who also worked on the farm, began looking for alternatives. To sustain the farm during hard times, they added cattle, hogs, sheep, and chickens, as well as rotations of corn, wheat, oats, and hay, to their operations. Lewis passed away in February 1946.

Two of Foster and Marian's sons, Gordon and John, worked on the farm while attending Michigan State University during the 1950s. In 1958, Gordon married Helen Axford, a Rochester, Michigan, native. The couple settled in Vicksburg on the Oswalt farm to start a family.

By the late 1950s, raising livestock was becoming less profitable. After Foster's passing in August 1959, Gordon and

John left the cattle business and began raising sheep. It proved to be a good decision—while cattle were too heavy for the farm’s muck soils, sheep did well in the soft ground that grew excellent grasses.

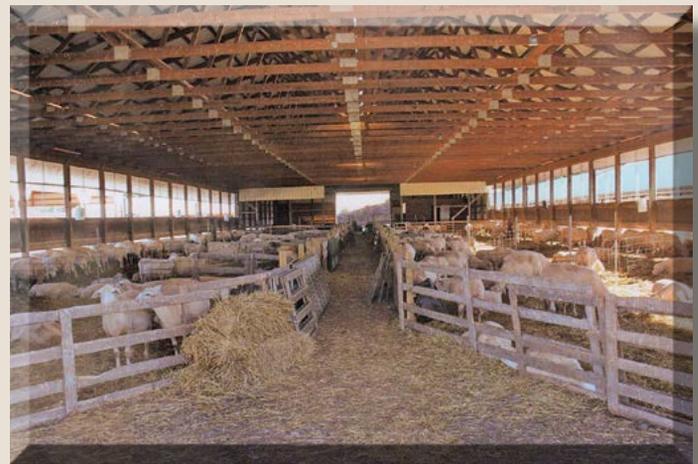
In 1977, Marian Oswalt sold her interest in 11 parcels of the land to her sons Gordon and John and their wives, Helen and Linda. The two families owned the land jointly but farmed independently until 1982, when the parcels were officially divided between them.

During that time, Gordon and Helen reintroduced cattle into their operation, which grew to include about 200 cows and 500 ewes. They continued to raise feed crops until the late 1980s, when their son, Steve, found that a by-product of seed corn would be an excellent feed source for the farm’s growing number of cattle and sheep. His discovery has been a key factor in the continued success of the Oswalt family farm.

Today, the Oswalt farm is a Limited Liability Company operated by many of Lewis Oswalt’s descendants. Gordon and Helen Oswalt, their sons Scott and Steve, and Steve’s daughter, Taylor, work full-time on the farm. A number of Oswalt children and grandchildren have also worked part-time on the farm during their youth.

The Oswalt family farm now measures 865.49 acres—including 158.8 acres of Lewis Oswalt’s original 470—and boasts approximately 1,200 ewes, 325 cow/calf pairs, and 13 bulls. A contractor recently rebuilt the original barn and added a feed deck for the cattle. Many additional improvements have been made to upgrade facilities for better care of the animals as well as the environment.

The farm currently runs a freezer beef and lamb operation licensed by the State of Michigan, which allows buyers to purchase meat in bulk for their freezers. It was also recognized as the Cattle Business of the Year in 2013 by the Michigan Cattleman’s Association and as the Commercial Producer of the Year in 2014 by the Michigan Sheep Producer’s Association. ☒



*Top: A northwest view of the “Old Barn.” Above: The lambing barn. Below: The new feeder barn.*

