



## The De Haan Family

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investing time and research into the development of Kernza, probably knew every one of them, in fact. There he was, in Europe, being told that research scientists in some Belgium university, people he didn't know and had never met or even heard of, were doing work he had no idea was going on.

For a long, long time already, De Haan has dedicated his professional life to Kernza, the development of perennial grains as a means of making agriculture—and all of our lives—more environmentally sound. It was an interest of his for a long time, but at TLI it became a calling, for which, he says, he's probably especially fit.

"I love working on a project like this," he says, "something that's going to take a long time, something that's as demanding as Kernza is, but something that promises what it does, real rewards."

By experience, by predilection, and by passions, it seems clear a Minnesota farm boy turned world-class researcher discovered in Kernza a job, a calling designed for him—or that he was designed for it.

Career counselors like to say that a *calling* is the place where your passion and gifts connect with the world's needs. Dr. Lee De Haan would look up from his lab work, smile, and undoubtedly nod his assent.

JAMES CALVIN SCHAAP ('70)

## KERNZA IN THE DORDT PRAIRIE

It's been here for years already, just about as long as Dordt has had its own prairie. One can assume that Dr. Lee De Haan didn't have to twist his brother's arm too far to talk Professor Robb into some research-and-development space.

Back then, on any walk through the prairie east of the campus, you could not have missed the Kernza plot; but today, you need to look just beyond the south end of the soccer field, where, come July, a tall and healthy field of row crops—mostly Kernza—stands up proudly.

Dordt's research contribution to the development of perennial grains, as Biology Professor Dr. Jeff Ploegstra explains, helps examine the way a northwest Iowa environment affects "genotype interactions, overall yield, and changes to soil microbiology."

Dordt's research plot is one of many. "One can imagine," Ploegstra says, "that plants that have improved yield in Kansas may not actually perform better if grown in Iowa, and vice-versa." Thus, sections of Dordt's research plot are testing various seed types, to see "how temperature, precipitation, disease vectors" affect growth and yield of the grain, as well as the bacteria and fungi of the soil itself.

Drop by sometime. The plot is quite beautiful—in more ways than one.



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Pictured are the Rog and Dorothy De Haan family—Greg ('88), Dorothy ('61) Roger ('60), Robb ('85), Susan ('88), and, in front, Lee ('95).

## THE DE HAAN FAMILY

Lee De Haan says he was just a kid when his dad and his brothers started talking about perennial grains. From their farm near Hollandale, Minnesota, Dad and brother Greg went off to Rochester, Minnesota, one night to hear Wes Jackson speak. Jackson, the long-time president of The Land Institute, was—and still is—a trusted, booming voice in sustainable agriculture.

They came back fascinated, but fully conscious of the fact that a radical move toward perennial grains would require years of research and development, as it has. That speech was 35 years ago.

Meanwhile, brother Robb ('85) and his family were spending three years in Africa for Christian Reformed World Missions. When Robb came home, he made clear what he'd learned about African agriculture: what was needed badly was "different kinds of plants."

Lee says he was only a kid back then, but he remembers that for some time thereafter the whole idea of "different kinds of plants" kept finding its way into discussions during chores and around the dining room table, often enough that De Haan couldn't help but be interested himself.

When Robb and his family returned from their three-year term in Africa, he went to graduate school at the University of Minnesota, where "different kinds of plants" continued to be his interest and his academic focus, so much so that he told his graduate committee what he wanted to do for his thesis was work on perennial grain, specifically high-yielding Illinois



bundle flower. He even got so far as to make crop collections from a variety of places in the Midwest. He was ready. A box of seeds sat there in his office.

But his graduate committee was wary; they believed the study he was proposing was altogether too likely to fail. After a couple of years of hard, hard work, they advised him that he could end up with nothing. The whole idea of perennial grains, they said, was still, well, "out there."

Just then, Lee was finishing a double major at Dordt (plant science and biology) and looking to attend graduate school to get the same kind of education brother Robb had at the University of Minnesota.

Like serendipitous juxtapositions? Try this one. At the very same time, De Haan was beginning what his brother was just then finishing. In fact, when De Haan was traveling to the Twin Cities to interview for acceptance at the U of M, Robb was travelling to Sioux Center to interview for a teaching job at Dordt.

Remember that box of Illinois bundle flower seeds? When, later that summer, Lee got to the university, he moved into the same office his brother had used and thereby became heir to Robb's dream dissertation project. "Here's the seeds," Robb told him. "I couldn't do anything with them."

That old box was, in its own way, both a challenge and a dream.

The four children of Rog ('60) and Doris (Maas, '61) De Haan continue to share a serious interest in and concern for creation, about the world God's created, the world in which we live. The oldest son, Robb, has taught agriculture, biology, and environmental studies at Dordt since 1995.

Greg ('88) is in Florida, where he works for ECHO, a non-profit that begins its mission statement like this: "For the 795 million people who are hungry today, the world is a challenging place." ECHO aims to "promote sustainable farming techniques, nutritional plants, and appropriate technologies."

Way back when, Dad De Haan would tell his kids that while none of them would likely stay on the farm, each of them would have the valuable childhood experience of growing up on a farm.

Rochester, Minnesota, she taught grade school kids from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Sudan, Japan, Korea, and Latin America in a room with "Newcomers" over the door. Today, she's a classroom teacher's aide who helps kids with hearing issues.



**Pictured are the Lee and Sheila De Haan family—Lee ('95), Sheila (Rasmussen, '95), and children Jamin, Alicia, and Malachi.**

Susan ('88) spent three years volunteering at a Vietnamese church plant while doing a TESOL master's degree at Wheaton. Her passport is stuffed with stamps: China, Russia, and, finally, Romania, where she spent six years as a teacher. For several years in

And then there's Lee ('95), who has been developing Kernza for 16 years—and, for the record, still occasionally spends time developing Illinois bundle flowers.

Way back when, Dad De Haan would tell his kids that while none of them would likely stay on the farm, each of them would have the valuable childhood experience of growing up on a farm, planting and harvesting, working with livestock, fixing machinery, keeping up with chores, appreciating, heart and soul, the beauty and power of nature all around. Lee says his dad wasn't wrong.

Mom De Haan, Lee and his siblings say, taught them compassion, forever baking things for people she knew who were having trouble making a go of it. That was the mix, the family chemistry—that and always a strong faith.

Whatever it was—something in their DNA, something in their childhood, their education, their time at Dordt—commitment is boldly visible in the family, a serious commitment to what Dordt calls "kingdom work."

JAMES CALVIN SCHAAP ('70)