

FRUITS OF LABOR

Through toil and trouble, farmers keep hopes high

By Mark Davis
Senior Editor

Many people think of harvest as the end of the year.

But for farmers, it's the time of year when the real work begins — when some must worry about food for their families and livestock and when all must find time for equipment repairs.

Jean Robertson doesn't have much time to talk these days. He and other Midwest farmers have been busy with long days of harvest.

"I have 1,200 acres and I have to get down that road and back before dark," Robertson said, pointing south.

For farmers like Robertson, the hard work of harvest means little profit.

"There's a lot of stress this year," Robertson said. "What with the weather and the prices — it's a lot of stress, so I just take my aspirin and my beer and do it."

Despite stress and low prices, Mike Mitchell of Roca remains optimistic. The 20-foot "smiley face" painted on his barn roof stands as proof.

Mitchell said he, his father and his

uncle painted the giant symbol of optimism because they "like farming."

"Hopefully, I can farm the rest of my life," he said.



But if farming fails, he said, he will have his education to fall back on. Mitchell graduated from UNL in 1983 with

a degree in agronomy and animal science.

Although Mitchell probably will inherit the family farm, other farmers' children have left the field and harvests to find work in the city. Robertson's family is one of these.

"It's cheaper to hire a man to help than keep them here," Robertson said. "One of my sons works in Washington with (U.S. Rep. Doug) Bereuter."

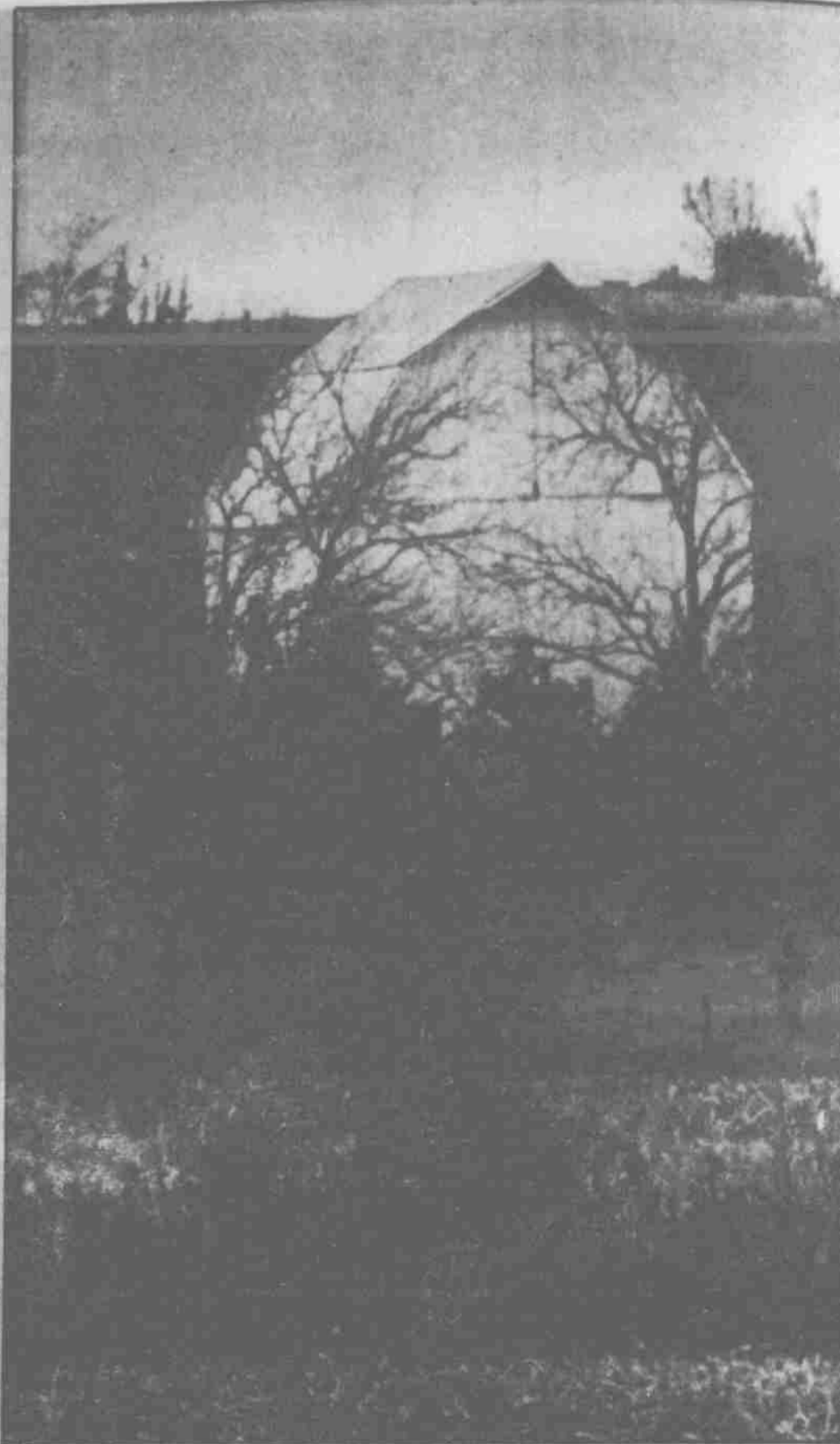
Alvan May, another Lincoln-area farmer, said his daughter and her husband considered leaving farming because profits are low.

"A lot of kids are leaving the farm," he said. "It's just too hard to get a start anymore."

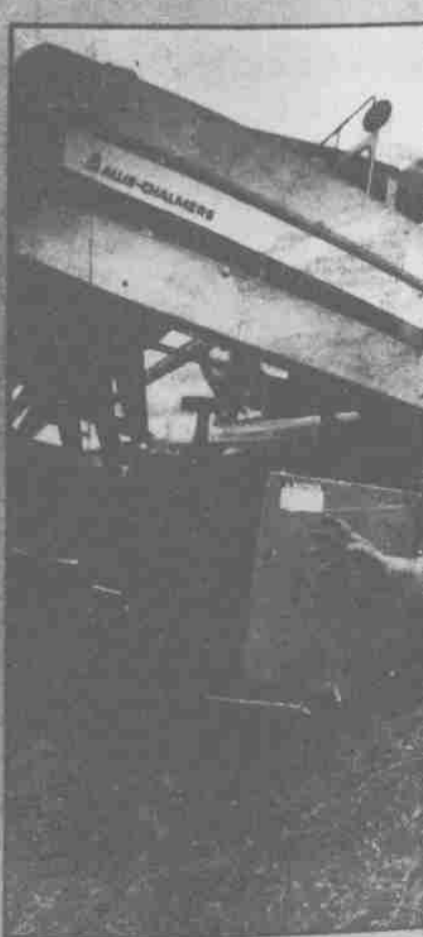
Despite a growing number of failing farms, people like Mitchell continue harvesting and looking toward the future.

Like the Mitchells, other families involved with harvest will continue farming and trying to make the best of things.

As Mitchell said as he stood beside his barn, "There's no use painting a frown up there."



Photos by Mark Davis



Clockwise from top left: Alvan May's grain; the Mitchell farm; Mike Mitchell and Alvan May with wheel of his combine; Jean Robertson and Alvan May walk together on the last day of harvest through a stalk of milo; Jean Robertson and Alvan May work at the Waverly Co. Highway 77; milo grows tall in Jean Robertson's farm; Alvan May and his wife with their combines.