



FOCUS: A TALE OF SUCCESS

The Massey family in 1986

# FAMILY REBOUNDS from LOSS of FARM

10 years later, Masseys credit hard work, unity, counseling, farm values

Naomi, the youngest one, lingered after her sisters and brother had left the room and her parents were left to talk with a visitor.

"Can I stay?" she asked.

"There are so many of these stories I have never heard," she explained.

Naomi was barely past 1 year old and blissfully unaware when the sky opened and then fell in on her family 10 years ago. Ken and Sue Massey lost the family farm in Hollandale.

But they did not do it quietly. They did it in full view of a sympathetic nation, which was drawn to the Masseys' plight through a letter Sue wrote. The four-page, handwritten letter was read at a country music concert and broadcast across the country in the fall of 1985. By that time they already knew. Their debts — feed, seed, taxes, mortgage and everything else — were astronomical. There were not enough hours in the day or dollars in the bank to feed five children or run a farm.

Ken took a full-time job as a laborer at UW-Madison and kept working full time at the 325-acre farm that had been in his family for 80 years.

"There is no hope," said Ken in September 1985, a time when he also contemplated suicide.

By March 4, the farm was sold at auction and the Masseys, in one last tearful appearance in front of the media on the courthouse steps, were deemed to be "no longer a farm family."

The photograph from that day, showing a



GEORGE HESSELBERG

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State Journal photo. FROG

On March 4, 1986, the Massey family leaves the Iowa County Sheriff's Office in Dodge as their farm was sold at auction. The photograph, with Ken, left, Sue and toddler Naomi, is an emblem for the plight of farm families.

The Massey family in 1995

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