



## PRODUCER PROFILES: Holmquist Family Farm

*By Tim King*

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Clarissa, MN - Violet Holmquist was gifted with another great grandchild in mid-July, her son Allen proudly announced just before he began a tour through the nearly two acre garden that he, his mother Violet, and other members of the extended Holmquist family manage within the town of Clarissa.

Allen has in tow his five-year old granddaughter Caelyn. He calls her his precious treasure.

“We can trace our family back five generations in this town,” Allen said. “This farm, where the garden is, was my grandfather’s farm.”



Caelyn picking an onion.  
Photo by Jan King.

There are now four generations of Holmquists living and farming in Clarissa. Violet, at 87, is the oldest. She is, of course, Caelyn’s great-grandmother. Caelyn loves to pick things from the garden. She runs out ahead of her grandpa and returns with a cucumber. Then a bell pepper. Then she has an onion.

Her great grandma loves to pick things, too.

“We have a big raspberry patch,” Violet said. “Yesterday (July 10<sup>th</sup>) I picked in the morning and in the evening. So did Allen. We picked eight ice cream buckets.”

Violet takes the raspberries to the farmers’ markets.

“This morning, after I picked berries, I went to the farmers’ market in Verndale and sold some,” she said. “Tomorrow I’ll go to Nisswa farmers’ market. The people there have been calling and asking me when I would come but I haven’t had enough until now.”

At the same time, Allen and Violet were also harvesting and selling peas, string beans, cabbage, early broccoli, and potatoes, such as Russets and Yukon Gold. In addition to Verndale and Nisswa, Violet takes produce to markets in Staples, Hewitt, and Long Prairie. She and Allen, along with help from Allen’s wife, Patsy, also take boxes of produce to Whole Farm Cooperative in Long Prairie.

In years past Allen went to the farmers’ markets. But in the last couple of years his cow milking duties for the family’s herd of Jerseys have kept him closer to home. He is looking forward to a day off in late July when he and Caelyn can go together to market in Wadena.

“I really enjoy the markets and I know Caelyn will be a big help, too,” he said.

Meanwhile, he is a bit in awe of his mother's capacity to keep up the pace that she does.

"She's pretty amazing," he said.

Like her son, Violet gets a charge out of taking the garden's bounty to market.

"I enjoy selling," she said. "I have met so many nice people and have made new friends. I enjoy visiting with them. That's what I like to think about."

Violet hasn't always been a salesperson. She has always been a gardener, however.



Violet at the Long Prairie Farmers Market.  
Photo by Colin King.

"I've been on this farm for 68 years," she said. "I've never moved once and I don't think there has ever been a year I haven't had a garden. Years ago, the garden was just for myself. But since Allen started going to farmers' markets ten years ago or so, that has changed."

After all those year of planting, caring, for, and harvesting gardens, Violet still gets excited about the crops that are coming into their harvest time. She also takes pleasure in the new farming technologies that Allen has been adapting to improve the quality and earliness of the harvest.

"We've got some hoop houses and we have pretty big green tomatoes in there already," Violet said in early July. "We also have peppers in there and some raspberries that grew into there on one side. They are doing very well and so are the cucumbers that are under the tunnel."

Allen and Caelyn showed off some of those vegetables in the hoop house on the garden tour.

Violet also appreciates the drip irrigation system that Allen has installed. It irrigates the muskmelons, tomatoes, watermelons, and other crops that he plants through the green plastic mulch. The plastic mulch stops the weeds and eliminates the need for herbicides. But mostly, Violet appreciates the gift of her health and the opportunity to work hard, contribute to the family economy, and have enjoyable social contacts.

"I think it's good to keep working," Violet said. "I have a couple friends in town that sold their homes and moved into apartments. Now they can't walk. My wish is to stay on my farm until the end comes. I don't mind picking raspberries in the evening. I finished up at 8 o'clock tonight."

When Allen sees his mother coming home from market or from the raspberry patch, he is reminded that he is blessed and has much to be thankful for.

"I come from a line of hard working women," he said. "My grandmother, my mother and also my wife are all very hard workers."

The hard working women, and men, of the Holmquist family have helped and encouraged Allen to nurture a dream. Allen will turn sixty soon. Since he was twenty years old, he has worked to add to the family's land holdings. Now



Allen in the garden. Photo by Jan King.

days, what Allen likes to call “The Ranch” includes about 700 acres of farmland near Clarissa.

“I’ve put it into trust so nobody can sell it,” he said. “I want it to be a place where our family can farm, or if they don’t want to farm, they can live here. The land will always be productive enough to pay the taxes even if they only rent it.”

There will always be a place for his mother, Allen and Patsy, their children, the grand children, and, Allen hopes, he and Patsy will someday be great grand parents just like Violet. He is proud that there will be a place for members of the Holmquist family for generations to come.

“We like to call it Holmquist Corners,” Violet said of the place where a number of the Holmquist family’s houses are near to each other.

## Glossary of Terms

**Hoop Houses**, or high tunnels, are large green houses made from aluminum poles and heavy duty plastic. In hot weather the sides can be rolled up. In cold weather the sides are rolled down. Because they hold heat and provide frost protection, they allow for early and late season harvests. Allen Holmquist says they also prevent disease in tomatoes and raspberries.

**Drip Irrigation** uses small, usually one-half inch hoses with tiny holes in them. The holes are often ten to twelve inches apart. The irrigation water slowly drips from the hoses. Drip irrigation allows the water to be delivered directly to where the plant needs it rather than spreading it throughout the field like other irrigation systems do. It is an excellent way to conserve water. It is usually used in association with a plastic or organic mulch. The mulch retards evaporation, among other things.