

Follow The Green Line

By Mindy Upton

FOLLOW THE GREEN LINE . . . This may be the slogan for his business, but it's also a principle he has followed throughout his life; because for 50 years Ruby has been engaged in the agricultural business.

In his early years, Ruby held two jobs. He taught in country schools in both Sullivan and Adair counties and also worked for Stamper's Feed Company. Ruby taught school for three years, first at the Rye Creek School near Novinger and then at the Chapel North School north of Green City. Ruby quit teaching because \$80 a month wasn't enough to get married on. "I liked teaching, it was a lot of fun," said Ruby.

In 1931, while working at Stamper's, Ruby was led to believe that he would become the manager of the unit in this area after the man who had been running it retired. When the time came, Stamper's thought Ruby might be a little young for so much responsibility and, instead, hired a man who had had more experience in the field. "I resented it, so I quit," Ruby said.

On July 5, 1931, Ruby opened the Ruby Green Produce Store; which was located on North Elson Street in the building which is currently *Too Tall's Old Place*. Even though Ruby opened his produce store in the middle of the depression, business was good. "There was a lot of business during the depression," Ruby said. "We were in the egg, poultry, and feed business at that time, and most every farmer had a flock of chickens and usually the proceeds from the chickens bought his groceries."

During the years of the Great Depression, Ruby's business increased every year. This was because the store didn't believe that its customers would have a lot to spend, so the store retained only a modest inventory of basic goods. Ruby said, "You understand that when you start from nothing, everything is an increase." Therefore, net profits didn't increase during this time, but there was gross volume increase in business.

The Produce Store sold a variety of goods ranging from poultry and eggs to furs and hides. The store purchased its produce from farmers. When people butchered their own beef, the Produce Store bought the beef hides. Ruby also purchased a variety of furs including skunk, opossum, raccoon, muskrat, and mink. Most of the furs came from farm youngsters who hunted and trapped. During that time furs ranged in price from 50 cents for an opossum hide to \$3 for mink. Ruby also purchased wool from farmers within Adair County.

The Produce Store remained in operation until Ruby sold out in 1964 and focused strictly on the seed business. When asked why he went out of the produce business and opened the Ruby Green Seed House, Inc. Ruby replied, "I've wondered about that many times and it may seem funny to you, but I think it was the opportunity to sell out and finally have enough money to buy a suit of clothes without worrying about having money for my business."

During his 50 years of business, Ruby has had good years but he's also had bad years. The worst years for Ruby were 1932 and 1937. The Produce Store failed financially both years for several reasons. In 1932 they shipped poultry to New York and lost money in the process. In 1937 they bought flour, hoping the price would go up, but it went down instead.

Weather and market conditions determined the best years

from the standpoint of profit. The length of the seeding season also has a great deal to do with the amount of profit brought in. Ruby said that his best year for profits was in 1974.

Ruby has had two grain elevators in Kirksville since the beginning of the Seed House. The first one is the elevator still in use today, located on the north side of Elson Street near First Street. The second is where the M.F.A. is now.

Soybeans are Ruby's biggest single sale. The first car of soybeans was shipped out in 1939 and by 1945 he had shipped out 175 cars. Most of Ruby's business is conducted within a 100-mile radius of Kirksville. "That is the economical area for us to work," Ruby said. "The bulk of our business is within this area."

"We change as conditions change and requirements change," said Ruby. The biggest change in the past 50 years was the development of hybrid seed corn. It took the experimenting out of the farmers' hands and put it into the hands of big companies that were able to do the research and blend the breeds of corn in a way that produces good seed corn.

Ruby is now making a substantial addition to the cleaning capacity of the seed house. These improvements will double the capacity for cleaning seed. "The seed business will change, but it will still be a solid business," Ruby said. "We'll progress with the changes."

Photo below: Ruby Green, who has been in the agricultural business for over 50 years.

