

An Innovator in the Farming Industry; Ray Kenneth Smalling Passes Away

Tuesday, November 11, 2008



Ray Kenneth Smalling, 78, of the Kirbytown Community, passed away Tuesday afternoon, Nov. 4th, at St. Thomas Hospital in Nashville.

Ray Kenneth was born on March 3, 1930 in Macon County, Tenn., one of two siblings of the late Wendall Wesley and Lillian (Massey) Smalling.

He married the former Cozella Patterson on October 12, 1946, who survives.

Ray Kenneth's passion in this life was his love for his faithful wife of 62 years and farming. Anyone that worked with him would describe him as very innovative, always willing to try new ideas in the farming business.

He has done extensive work with the agriculture officials, not only in Macon County, but also with the University of Tennessee and the University of Kentucky, testing various plants, chemicals, means of growth, and varieties of tobacco on his farm. He had gained a reputation of accomplishing a few tobacco farming "firsts" on his land. He was among the first to raise waterbed plants and set no-till tobacco with homemade equipment. He was known for growing two tobacco crops a year.

Macon County UT Field Agent Steve Walker remembers the vital role Smalling played in introducing waterbed tobacco plants to Macon County in 1990.

"At the time, the idea of a waterbed tobacco crop sounded pretty crazy, but I called Ray

Kenneth and told him we were given all the trays, soil and plants to test it,” Walker recalled. “His reply to me was something he always said when we had a new idea that needed experimenting. He said, ‘Well, we’ll try it Walker.’ Well, needless to say those plants did wonderfully and today around 99 percent of the tobacco produced in our county uses that float system.”

Walker, who has worked with Smalling since 1988, will always remember his long-time friend as a man who gave everything he could to the industry he devoted much of his life to.

“He was an amazing person for always be willing to try new things,” he said. “He was very much an innovator in the farming industry and was always there to help out with research. Ray Kenneth’s enthusiasm for farming helped other farmers and the entire industry. We’ll sure miss him around here . . . he was a good man.”

Smalling took care of around 70 head of cattle, making enough hay and feed corn to get them through the winter.

He also raised rabbit crops on contract and would keep about 700 head consistently, selling the newborns that quickly grow to a marketable age when they reach 5 to five and one half pounds. He had served on the Macon County Equalization Board, Farm Bureau Board of Directors from 1977 to 1995, Board Member of the Macon-Trousdale Board of Directors, Soil Conservation Board, Community Committeeman on the ASCS Board, the only Chairman, since it’s forming in 1983 of the Macon County Fair Field Crops Department.

His faithful wife worked most days by his side with the farming operation they have.

Funeral services for Ray Kenneth Smalling were conducted Friday, November 7, 2008 at 1 p.m. from the Chapel of the Anderson & Son Funeral Home in Lafayette. Interment followed in the Anderson and Son Memorial Park.