

As fall transitions to winter and Thanksgiving arrives, other changes come to mind. Bill and Alleah both write about how the holiday season with family looks different than in years' past, while remaining hopeful for the future. For Ag Progress, this fall brings a transition as we combine with [Kcoe Isom](#), the nation's leading food and agricultural consulting and accounting firm. We have a long history with Kcoe Isom and many of the business owners they serve, and we are excited to bring more resources to the family-owned businesses we have worked so closely with over the last several years. We are thankful this season for those of you that have supported us, whether through referrals, projects or by simply reading the Dispatch. Feel free to reply with any feedback!

Finding Gratitude in the Struggle

By [Alleah Heise](#)

I can remember a time in the not-so-distant past where I looked forward to the holidays. I loved the subtle shift in the atmosphere from "hurry up and get it done" to kindness and joy. Gathering to share stories and share meals, to catch up on life and what's coming next filled the air with anticipation.

Then, three years ago, my mom was diagnosed with cancer. Last year, her mother (my grandmother) passed away right as we entered the holiday season. Ever since, the holidays have taken on a new flavor for me – more one of anxious anticipation than unbridled excitement. All of the sudden, the things that seemed so solid in my life were not solid after all. I received an abrupt and unwelcome reminder that, for many, the holidays are more about just making it through so as to experience "normalcy" again later.

As I think about the stories I have heard from you over the last year, I know that for some it has been a grind – at best. There might be a gap in this year's celebration – whether it's an empty seat, an empty bin, or an empty spirit. And while gathering with family to break bread and share stories might provide a welcome distraction, the struggle and difficult decisions ahead beckon outside the holiday haze.

Sometimes, holidays are just hard. And that is ok. But, for me, it did not take long to realize that even in really tough times, God winks at us and shows us a way through. I will never forget how our community rallied around us and taught us all about grace and gratitude. When I pulled into my parents' driveway shortly after mom's diagnosis, I found their neighbors hanging Christmas lights. My husband's family sacrificed "their" holiday so that we could spend both Thanksgiving and Christmas with my family. Last year, we toasted to good health and victory over cancer.

I still do not move into the holidays with the same eagerness I did before. Admittedly, sometimes I am even weary. But I am reminded again and again that there is much to be thankful for: a beautiful family, an enjoyable career, and a wink and a sign that even in the midst of the struggle, there is always a way through. May it be so for you, too.

A Different Kind of Thanksgiving

By [Dr. Bill Long](#)

Ever since 2006, when both of our children were finishing college, our family Thanksgivings have been delightful, but rather predictable. The four of us would meet, sometimes joined by the latest girl- or boyfriend, and enjoy a leisurely day of conversation, food, and celebration of shared memories. Our time lived in Kansas (1990-96) would always feature prominently in our conversation. Despite the fact that Kansas was a real change both for my wife (originally from OR) and me (originally from CT), we found in the heartland a place of warmth and security, of acceptance and unexpected successes.



Things are changing this year. Our daughter has informed us that she will be staying far away with her boyfriend and his family; our son, though planning to be present, is also planning a year-long travel adventure, where he would plan to run a 5K (or longer) in each of the fifty states. After all, he is all of 32 years-old and, he proudly tells me, his dad (i.e. ME) had a sabbatical at age 33, so why should I be at all concerned if he is taking off a year to run and explore America?

I know I shouldn't be concerned. Both children are spreading their wings and exploring other places and cultures. They are happier than I have ever seen them. Though my son is normally unemotional and rarely communicates excitement about much of anything, when I asked him on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being "off the charts excited," how excited he was about the coming year, he laconically said, "About 9.5."

Still I feel that even as I bless them, literally and figuratively, I may be losing something—something very important that shaped me as a father and us as a family. I certainly don't look at myself as a controlling person, but there is something in me that wants to say, 'I hope we never lose that sense of laughter and joy that we have felt in each other's presence for many years.' That is my prayer, and hope, this Thanksgiving.

