

Ecosystem Services and Idaho's Farmers

Interview Fifteen

I: All right, let's begin with a little bit of background information. Please tell us a little bit about how you got into the farming business. And how long have you or your immediate family been farming in this area?

R: Family, been a farmer my whole life, since I was even 2-3 years old. My grandparents started here in the 1890s down in the bottoms of the Snake River, before the reservoir came in. It doesn't mean we were continuous from that. There was not a succession thing or anything like. We just chose to stay in the area. I have been farming since 1974.

I: What do you grow?

R: Potatoes, sugar beets, wheat, silage corn, sweet corn.

I: And how many acres do you farm?

R: We are a large family operation right now. We've got 25,000 acres.

I: In what ways, if any, has urban expansion or any nearby construction affected you and your farm?

R: Not much. We are a pretty remote area. We have not purchased or rented land right near the cities. Here there has not been much expansion.

I: Do you have any current plans to sell or lease part of your farm in the future?

R: Don't have those plans, no.

I: Do you have any idea what you will do with your farm when you stop farming it yourself?

R: It has become. It is becoming a company that is going to be. It will continue on. The company is being designed to just keep on going.

I: To like another generation or to people that you would sell it to outside of the family?

R: There will be people in it in the family or outside the family, depending on how well everybody performs. This has become. It is an agriculture company right now; but it is becoming more than that. We have other businesses and trucking, the fuel, the truck shop, other things like that.

I: In terms of the farm land itself, how important would it be for you that your farm remains in agricultural operation?

R: The type of farm that we have it would be very important.

I: Have you implemented any conservation practices into your farming operation?

R: I'm not sure exactly what they are trying to say there, conservation. Everything we do, we have to sustain this land. Everything we do is trying to keep the highest productivity, the healthiest land that we can keep in order to produce for the next year, for the next generation, for those who will come along. I don't want to have any type of inclination in this that we are trying to deteriorate the farming practices; because we want this ground to be as healthy as possible so that it will be healthier for the next person.

I: What kind of methods, if any, do you use to make that happen, any strategies, any new things that you have implemented even in the last ten, twenty years to say conserve water or improve the health of the soil?

R: There are different things that come along, different products that come along. I guess one of the biggest thing maybe we are using some compost now that seems to help with a variety of nutrients. Still the commercial fertilizer, a lot of people put their nose up at commercial fertilizer. It is just a fertilizer, just a plant food. Everybody is learning and there is certain things that will work in conjunction with other things, humic acids, carbon type things that will help improve the texture of the soil, the productivity, just to keep it healthy as possible. There will be things that will change all the time as far as the type of crops we take off. It might more alfalfa eventually some place along the line, might be more corn. Potatoes and sugar beets are a big part of it. As soon as we get those crops off, we try to plant wheat in there as soon as possible, sometimes it's corn, but that's not til next spring.

I: So crop rotation and stuff?

R: I'd say we probably try to till the soil. We don't have a no-till system or anything like that; but we till the soil the least amount possible so that we don't degrade anything that way.

I: What kind of pesticides and/or herbicides do you use on your farm?

R: You mean specific ones? We get them from the suppliers, the manufacturers of these chemical companies. We use things that will control. If you are looking for herbicides to control broad leaf weeds, to control everything, we use we use the most minimal amount possible. The chemical companies are trying to be very responsible for what is going on there. We are too, because if you get something that goes into a different crop and it stays in the soil for some reason it will affect the next crop. So we just very careful about those type of things. We want things to be healthy. Compared to what they did 40-50 years ago, we probably use less chemicals now than we did then because of the amounts that we use. We might use a few more chemicals, but the amounts of the chemical are very very minute per acre and each application.

I: Compared to what they did 40-50 years ago, just cause they didn't have as technologically advanced?

R: The parts per million. It used to be parts per thousand. Now it's parts per million. It is very, very minute.

I: How do you make decisions about pesticide and herbicide use and application?

R: There is a variety of things through the university, the University of Idaho, or different. There are other universities too that are working on those type of things, so different university information is a lot of it. What they've seen and tried to do and what's been negative, positive through some of the trials of chemical companies that will give grants to people to see what they can do. That's probably some of the biggest things. We are very cautious. If a new chemical comes out, we don't do anything with it for a few years; because we want to know how it reacts. Somebody else might want to use it first. So we let them use it first and see what that does. If we find something that is favorable that we can use and does not hurt our crop or our soil, then we will go ahead and use it.

I: So, the use of GE (genetically engineered – also sometimes referred to as GMO) seeds has been in the news a lot recently, but the coverage only rarely discusses how American farmers are being impacted – either positively or negatively – by this technology. Has the use of GE seeds affected you as a farmer, and if so, how?

R: GE seeds, you mean you're talking about the GMO? These have been a very positive thing. People are scared of it. I don't think I see. Everybody can get all their different information. They can get lots of emotional information off of the social media thing. Everything I've seen, the GMO type products that I've seen, have been very favorable and there is no negative impact. We tried some GMO potatoes back in the 1990s. They are very good. The only reason why they got taken off the market is because of the emotional thing that they did in Europe. Nothing was based on science. That technology was a great technology. They don't want chemicals and also they don't want genetically modified crops. They want to go back to the crops that their grandparents had 50, 70, 80, 100 years ago; but the life expectancy back then was less than it is today. The advances that we've made have created the longevity. The other thing that it does with the GMO crops is it makes productivity better; so those that are buying the crops, buying the food from those crops, are going to get, in my estimation, they are going to get a good product for less money.

I: Are you currently using any genetically engineered seeds?

R: Sugar beets, some alfalfa, corn (not sweet corn but silage corn, grain corn).

I: It has generally been a positive impact on your business?

R: Very positive.

I: You would characterize your general opinion of GMO crops as favorable. Have you had any trouble selling any of your crops to?

R: In the 1990s. It is kind of interesting. I can't remember the guy's name we talked to last, did a potato convention last winter in Florida. This guy was one of the head people of this group that was pushing no-GMO products and was destroying the crops/plots. I can't remember. I can look his name up here on the internet. I can't remember what his name was. He was one of the main ones that was pushing that. He wanted to be a scientist. He created this thing in Europe that they will not do GMO crops. Now, as he was a scientist and started studying, three or four years later he discovered that there is nothing wrong with them. Now he's trying to reverse it; but he is having a hard time reversing it cause everybody says he's. The media. The sensation out there. The emotion is against GMO crops.

I: I'll have to look up that person. I don't think I know.

R: He just talked in Boise about two or three months ago, this person.

I: So he kind of changed his mind after being kind of an activist against GMO?

R: One hundred and eighty degree turn. He gave all of his. He showed what he was doing before and he showed what he is trying to do now. He showed some of the confrontation. He has it documented. I can look his.

I: Maybe we can follow up with you. I will have to see if I can find who that might be online. It sounds like an interesting story.

R: It is really interesting. When he started talking I thought man. When he started talking about what he was doing in Europe there during the late 1990s, I was wondering how he was going to get out of that room, that potato growers group, alive. He told his whole story. He brought that out.

I: Is he American?

R: I think he is from England.

I: Okay, so he was over there lobbying their governments to kind of restrict GMO.

R: They showed him going into fields, the plots with these white suits on and masks because they thought they were like you know GMO radiation or I don't know what it was and destroyed them so the people that were doing the test plots could not even.

I: Like hinder the study?

R: Yes. Stop the studies. All they want to do is see is it good or is it bad. They took that out and then they created emotion in the media, cause they had the media there, created emotion, created the people that was something negative.

I: Turning now to the subject of environmental change, have you noticed any changes in the environmental conditions in your area that seem beyond normal variation from year to year?

R: Every year is different. They talk about norm, the normal. I don't know what the normal is. Every year is different, a little different animal. The winters might be a little bit drier. I don't think we get the snow that we got when I was a kid. Talking to my grandparents, who have since passed away, they said that back in the 1930s and 1940s they those dry winters like what we are experiencing. So I don't know of if it's all that much. I can just remember a section of years from about 1960 to 1965 that had a lot of snow in them. My reference is always back to that. The same way we have the same type of snow. As I talked to my grandparents a few years before they passed away, they said oh yeah back in the 1940s we had these dry winters, things like that. They were worried about whether they were going to have the moisture like they should.

I: Have you noticed any persistent changes in the length of your growing season, or the first and last frost dates of the year?

R: No. One year will be different. One year the first frost might come at the end of August. The next year it might be til the 10th of October. Every year seems to be different.

I: Have you noticed any persistent changes in average winter temperatures and average yearly snowfall?

R: I don't have the total records there. I would say we are a little drier in the winter.

I: Do you keep track of temperatures in the winter or in the summer?

R: Not totally. We haven't been that good. We are starting to do that now with this change in the company, trying to become. What is the word I am looking for? Anyway, continuous without stopping. We have people placed who are starting to monitor that.

I: Collecting data as you go.

I: Many of us have heard about the drought affecting the western U.S. right now. Have you noticed any persistent changes in yearly precipitation?

R: Just in the winter. The things that is amazing. I've seen it twice in the last ten years. May, just like this year, rained; 2005 was exact same, was almost identical. I remember that is, because the water, water board, underground water here, we had a meeting to do with both canals and this underground water in 2005 as we did in 2015 at the first of May, with the water thing looking very bleak in both years. May rained enough that we got through like we are doing this year.

I: So it is just kind of maybe a little bit of difference in the winter that you have noticed but not overall?

R: We have been able to get through so far with the amount of water that we have needed. I am not sure why, but.

I: May you were trying to make some decisions and then the rains came?

R: Yes and not just a little bit of rain; but enough to change the whole dynamics of the thing. We thought we'd run out of water by the middle of August.

I: Do you have any idea what would be causing those changes of less snowfall in the winter?

R: I went to a seminar this winter in Salt Lake, the farm organization that brings in people. There was a lady there had studied the weather her whole life. Her dad studied it and now her son is also studying it. She says sometimes that there are different things in the environment that change that. She talked about volcanoes. There is a couple volcanoes in the last couple years further to the north. I don't remember exactly where she said that was. She said that pushes things around. That's what she says is causing the California drought.

I: Is the volcano?

R: The volcano, the way it is kind of forcing some of the direction of clouds, the air flow. I don't know. I can't remember. I'd have to go back to that. It has been about six months ago. She just says there are different things in nature that come along and all of a sudden force things around a little bit, change things a little big. Then there are cycles in nature that she was following. She was really interesting. She had everybody's attention for two hours there.

I: That was down in Salt Lake City you said. Was she at the University of Utah?

R: No. She was from. I don't remember where she was from. I got some information. I'll have to go back and look at that, what it was. She was really older. At least I can say older if it's my age, ha, ha. Maybe a little older than I was, but she was pretty enthusiastic about what she said. She loves what she does. She studies. She's pretty intense on what she does, so it's fun to watch her.

I: Do you worry about water availability or maintaining your water rights?

R: Yes. There is always somebody there that wants the water. The environmentalists always want what is yours. Says maybe you don't know what the congressional legislative bodies will do. You worry about that. We live in a desert. We have to have water so you worry about it.

I: Where do you think the challenge would come or the kind of? Where do you worry that the pressure to change current water allocation would come from or do you just worry that there would not be as much?

R: No. I worry that people are trying to reach in and take what has been there. If you have an allocation of so much water per acre that they come and reduce that to take it someplace else. It would be legislative. Environmentalists trying to do the same thing to protect a bug or snail or whatever it is. Worry about that part of it. Lawyers, worry about lawyers because they seem to

have enough. Anything they can start a fight on, they can just bring up a little thing, especially on water. All of a sudden everybody is paying to do stuff and they're fighting you.

I: You are worried about other groups coming in and taking it rather than there not being as much of it to go around? Is there tension like with other farmers about water?

R: There is. We have a deal here with farmers in the Magic Valley who have had the water right from the surface side of it longer and so they. Things are all tied together in the state, water, how it gets into the aquifer and everything. They are trying to. There is that part of it. I think here in the area we are all kind of in the same boat. Here I don't feel it so much. I'm sure there is a little bit; but not major. The major part is there is an area there that feels like they are getting injured. I don't think they're getting as injured as much as they think they are. That is their perception. They are getting injured. So they are wanting us to reduce or pay or, reduce pumping or pay money.

I: So farmers in other parts of the state?

R: Yes. That's a big conflict.

I: Where and how do you receive your water?

R: We receive it from the mountains. They come into the canals. Big part of it is also the aquifer out here. We get a lot of it in the aquifer. The aquifer gets it from the mountains when it runs and comes across the, goes down the rivers or the canal systems. A lot of that water percolates through lava fractures into the aquifer.

I: So you get some of your water from the canal and some from deep water wells?

R: Yes.

I: If you have a certain amount of water allocated to you, about how much of that water do you usually use?

R: I'd say at least 80% of it every year, not 100%, 80-100%, depending on the year.

I: Do you rely on bees to pollinate any of your crops?

R: No.

I: Have you noticed any changes in bee populations around here recently?

R: I haven't. I just haven't been in areas. Up around Sterling, I used to do a lot more. When I was younger, as a kid, there used to be a lot more, what do they call it, alfalfa seed. That takes the cutter bees to pollinate, the trigger mechanism there to make them go to seed. I haven't.

I: Some of the farmers around here have people put beehives on their farms just to accumulate honey. Have you done any of that?

R: I think my brother John Doe has done that up in that area; but I haven't out here. I farm more toward the Pleasant Valley area. As a kid, I can remember. I grew up there where my dad lives there now. Dad lived there in an older house there. It seemed like there were a lot more beehives that I can remember back in those days which I don't see as many of, but I'm not in that area as much.

I: The Sterling area you mean?

R: Yes. Sterling/Springfield. I don't see them out our way. I think in the Springfield area there is a lot more water, you know the sub. It is in the subby ground in there, down toward the reservoir.

I: Thinking specifically about changes to the climate, how concerned are you about climate change?

R: I don't know if I can do too much. We talk a lot about it. We think we can do much about it. I think it's more of a nature thing. I don't think. We adjust for what the climate change is.

I: So you are not worried about it?

R: I don't worry about it a lot. I try to observe it. See what's going on. I don't know if there is much I can do about it. I think the Lord. I think there is a bigger power that is more in charge of that than I am, or we are.

I: Do you think that any of the changes to the climate some people are talking about are caused by human activities?

R: No. There might be a minute amount, nature.

I: What kind of human activities would be causing changes to the climate?

R: Heavy pollution might cause something different I guess. We have cleaned up since I was a kid. We have cleaned up a lot of the pollution type stuff. I'm talking about the factories where they used to put smoke in the air. Cars burn cleaner, things like that. Especially here, now maybe in the LA area or something like that, California might be a little different story than here. I don't see that we do much. We are not just affected just by this little bit. We are affected from the Antarctic to the oceans to other things too. I think there is something that goes into nature that changes different things. This whole earth has been changing in its whole inception. It changes. Does things different. When a natural disaster comes along, Mount St. Helens blew up. Did we have any chance of doing anything to help that out? No. It just blew up and it did its thing. There was nothing that the puny arm of man could do. I don't think we have a whole lot. When a rain storm, hail storm came through in our area not too long ago, there was not

anything I could do. It just came through and pelleted. I don't think that man is in charge too much in that part.

I: For you, other than water, since we know that is extremely important, what is the most valuable natural resource for successful farming?

R: Land, the soil, the type of soil, and keeping it healthy is very, very important.

I: What does that entail keeping the soil healthy?

R: Putting the right nutrients on each year, enough of them, so you don't rape the soil. It has got to be able to be healthy the next year to do the same thing. We try to keep that in a healthy situation. When I talk to my people that are here, sometimes I see people wanting to say we don't to put too much money into that crop. We want to hold this back. I am sure you are familiar with football teams? If you have a big heavy lineman and you feed him Cheerios every day, he is not going to be a big heavy lineman for very long. His productivity is going to go down. So we try to keep those nutrients in those soils the best that we can, as healthy as we can. The tilt of the soil, which is plant matter, those type of things, try to keep those things in the best way possible so that. Comparing to that lineman, that soil is the healthiest it can be. I am saying we are feeding beefsteaks. We are not feeding them Cheerios every day. Whatever that soil needs, we are putting into that soil so it can maintain itself for the next year.

I: Are you are worried about the health or availability of any natural resources in this area?

R: No I don't think so. We have a few dairies around here, not too many. We have quite a few down country. That is a compost source for us, so that helps. Source of compost, which helps the tilt and health of the soil, make sure the nutrient's there. It has a lot of nutrients. You put on synthetic fertilizers. You put on so much phosphate, so much potash. When you put on this compost, it kind of brings a lot of them together the same thing in a little more natural way. But it takes both to keep, to be able to keep the health the way we want to do it.

I: So you work with some of the dairy farmers to get some of their compost?

R: Yes. Down there we even trade, so the dairy farmers that are there, we switch spud ground on their soil and they put corn on our soil or hay on our soil. We kinda switch back and forth to be able to keep. That creates a relationship to have compost to bring up here. We farm the Jerome area, Twin Falls area also.

I: Have you changed any of your farming practices or decisions in recent years, such as the type of crops you are growing, when you plant or harvest your crops, how you manage pests, or other major changes, and if so, why?

R: There might be something that looks like we have changed. It goes to gradual each year. You just adjust a little bit. If I could look back, I don't think major. You just adjust to what comes along.

I: Nothing kind of revolutionized farming in the last few years for you?

R: I think when there is a bug or whether there is a different type of weed out there, you try to treat that weed or that bug or pest, whether it be a weed or an insect. As you treat it and try to control that, it gives the opportunity for another type of insect or something come along. So you are continually having to readjust. There's a little thing that we call psyllids which causes. It's pretty new. Has been about here about three or four years. A psyllid is like a little bug. It's a potato. Can't think of the word. I have it on e-mail here. That was never even heard of seven or eight years ago. Now all of a sudden it's a major concern. Such a concern that we get e-mails on it.

I: It just affects the potato plants?

R: It affects the potato. The plant grows normally. There is a little bit of symptoms you can see in it, a little bit abnormality.

I: Does it give that marbling inside the potato?

R: It kind of causes a yellowing, white/yellow in the potato. Then it reduces yield or reduces size. That was not ever even something we even heard of seven or eight years ago. Now all of a sudden it's a major deal. The universities, the chemical companies are putting out traps. As they catch different things like that in their traps, they send out text messages to say here's, okay, there it is, potato psyllids. Potato psyllid numbers are rising. Some of them will be infected with whatever it is that causes this disease in there. Texted with LSO bacterium which causes what they call zebra chip. So you get a coloring like a zebra. You get black and white. So it has got white and yellow through the potato. So I think sometimes as we treat different things it allows another bug to surface. It takes a different chemical to kill this than it did some of the other ones. Same with a weed. You might be trying to control a certain weed. You are getting this one under control or a number of them. All of a sudden, there is one out here that doesn't. This chemical doesn't do it. All of a sudden, it starts thriving because you're not totally controlling it.

I: Do you have any idea what is causing the psyllid, the increase in psyllids?

R: I think they've always been there. It's just that we have probably controlled different things, controlled other bugs, and so it has allowed these to all of a sudden surface as a stronger, more active bug. That is a kind of a learning process. We go through in all of life. As we control one thing, something else crops up and becomes a problem.

I: What are the biggest challenges you see to farming in southeastern Idaho?

R: Not having enough water is one each year. These bugs is another one. Price for the crops is a big one. We have learned how to raise potato. There is a lot of technology on there how to do that, and that part is probably a little bit easier. Other than these pests. You gotta have enough water to do that. But the pricing.

I: When you say price, do you mean that it goes up and down and so you can't count on it or just that it's too low?

R: Yeah. Potatoes, especially in potatoes, the grain, grow wheat and corn kind of same way too. But potatoes is really a total supply and demand thing. We can out-produce ourselves very easily. So all of a sudden we've got too many potatoes and prices go low and how do you deal with that. One way we've dealt with it is we have started contracting with the processors, those that make French fries and hash browns. Do a lot of this dehydrating potatoes, the chips. The military uses a lot of dehydrated stuff.

I: So you start contracting with them because they have a more stable price?

R: Stable price.

I: Is there competition with other farmers a little bit?

R: Totally. That's just the nature of the game because even in Idaho if we say we are going to cut back somebody in the other state decides they are going to plant a few more. So they think they are going. What really controls it is Mother Nature. Mother Nature throws us a curve, not as long a growing season, or something climatic, or gives us a really good growing season. That controls us more than what we can do sometimes. We can control by not planting as many acres, but also, for some reason, we are always planting more acres, or as many acres as we need, so it depends on whether Mother Nature blesses us or reduces us how the price goes.

I: How many acres of potatoes that are planted even like in the country is just completely up to farmers to decide? There's nobody else regulating that? If you are talking about there being too many potatoes, nobody else is kind of saying, okay, well?

R: The processors, they know what they need. They are already contracted out. They've already got their supplies sold generally. So that's about 70-75% of the market. That's pretty steady. This other 25% out there is what is causing the ups and downs. Fresh market is what we call it. Everybody thinks, well, I can make a little more money on those this year. They plant a few more and all of a sudden the price goes down. That's when you see ? farmers, ha ha. Potatoes are very expensive per acre. They are terrible expensive, around \$3000 an acre, maybe a little more.

I: But you get usually a higher price for them or that's why they are worth it to grow?

R: Yes. Hopefully you get enough out of them. But it has escalated in the last few years. Fuel used to be 80 cents a gallon, now it's \$3.00 a gallon. Fertilizer costs much more. That causes freight to be more and it causes the repairs, like iron or whatever it is you have to repair, raw materials, stuff like that. That causes those prices to go up. All of a sudden, it is not just a little bit that goes up. It's the whole expense deal you got.

I: What is your favorite thing about farming in southeastern Idaho?

R: There's not a lot of people. I like to be able to go to Pocatello and not have to stand in a big line to either eat or go to the show or whatever it might be. I enjoy that part. I think the climatic conditions I enjoy here. There are seasons and I like the seasons. It is a clean environment. I enjoy that part.

I: You enjoy being able to live out here and do a job is kind of your favorite part?

R: And I'm not around a lot of people. Last summer, we had a financial guy come here from New Jersey. That's right around New York. He just thought you guys are so far out away from everything. There's nothing to do here. After he was here for over a month, he got to liking it. I could hear him on. He says to his wife you gotta come out here. We think we're out here in the sticks, but he says they live 40 miles from town, which sounds like a lot, like if you want to go to Pocatello to go to eat or go to a show or something he says they just get on the freeway and there's nobody, there's no traffic. Back there, if we want to go downtown, it is a half hour to get there through a bunch of traffic. By the time you get there, you're mad, he says. So he says this doesn't look as bad. But his perception when he first come out here oh there's nothing out here, there's nothing to do, that was his perception. After he got used to it for.

I: Yes, it's nice to not be in crowds and traffic all the time.

R: Yes. You drive to Pocatello. You have a little bit of traffic on the road, but not much, not enough to get mad at everybody you know. Anyway, after he got done, he there's advantages out here.

I: Where do you go to get news about weather, regulations, or other farming-related information?

R: Mainly right here on the internet, watching the news there. I try to watch the news early in the morning, 5:00, 5:30 in the morning

I: The local news?

R: Well, local and national. Watch the national news a little bit.

I: That's kind of how you plan ahead for the week in terms of weather and what to expect.

R: The weather I get right off that thing there, the weather channel. The guys on the TV, they want to doll up everything. Yeah, the big storm's coming in. They want to kind of overdo a little bit. I can just get a simple weather report right here.

I: Which regulatory agencies, such as the USDA or other government agencies, have you been in contact with in the last few years?

R: Farm Service Agency, in contact with them a lot. USDA somewhat. Sugar Beet Growers Association, National Sugar Beet Association, National Potato Council, Idaho Potato Commission.

I: How was that experience for you? For example, was it a positive or negative experience, and why?

R: Generally positive. They are usually pretty informative. Sometimes there's things we think ought to be different. When you are trying to move a mass of people, it is just slow. To get things changed, sometimes it is a slow process. But it is basically positive.

I: So you have not felt like any of these regulatory agencies have excessively regulated your business?

R: The ones that I have a real problem with are the Fish And Game. Environmentalists want to come in and say that you can't grow this type of tree in a certain area to do with wetlands are probably the ones that we have had the biggest issues with.

I: Have you have contact with the Fish and Game or those environmental organizations in the last few years?

R: I haven't myself. My brothers, my father have had a lot of contact with them in our operation.

I: What specifically have you had to change due to their regulations?

R: All of sudden they want to come and tell you what. I'll just give you an example. You know all those Russian Olives that grow down there in the Sterling area, which is northeast of Aberdeen. That ground out there used to be normal ground. But as the canal and the reservoir systems come in, they became marshy and subby. The government in the late 1970s, early 1980s, all of a sudden, the government wanted start controlling that land as wetland. It wasn't wetland before. It was artificially made. So listen, they wanted to come in. As people wanted to develop their ground, the private landowner, they started to come in and say you can't do this. You gotta leave so many trees. You gotta do this. They didn't want any of those trees harvested. Those trees, the trees, as they got wet, as those wetlands come in and there is more moisture for them, the trees started to grow more. All of a sudden they are kind out of control, those Russian Olive trees down there. A few of them is great, you know. But all of a sudden they get so thick even the cows can't get through it. Some of it is good for protection, you know, for wind protection; but it becomes overgrown. We wanted to. All of a sudden, they come and started come in and try and tell us no you can't push these down and you can't run a pipeline out there. You can't those type of things. All of a sudden, so we couldn't destroy any trees. About two years later, we hear the caterpillar, the tractor. It's a caterpillar, a brand, it's a big tractor, pushing trees over on the Fish and Game ground.

I: Cause they're an invasive species?

R: What was happening is they were trying to plant pheasant eggs and there was so many magpies in the greens that the magpies were going down and getting their pheasant eggs. They wanted to eliminate the trees to go get the. So they are trying to tell us what to do and they don't even know what they are. What I'm saying they are trying to telling us what to do. We feel like we are good stewards of the soil. We are going to do. We've planted wind breaks. I've planted

probably 5,000 trees in my lifetime. Not that all of them lived, but the majority of them have. So we are trying to do things that will help save the ground. There's probably more things we could do. But to have somebody from. That's why I asked you where you're from. You get somebody east of the Mississippi trying to tell somebody out here what to do. It is just kind of odd; because their experiences are different from ours. That part is invasive.

I: Is there anything that the local, state, or federal government could do or provide for you to help you do your job?

R: As far as information and stuff, it seems like there are a lot of agencies, with the University of Idaho, the universities, the county extension agents, those things. There's quite a bit of information out there that we can gather pretty quick. I don't see anything else new that we would need that way.

I: Any services or anything that they could provide that would help?

R: I don't see any. Part of it is you got such a network of information that comes already. So with the information that we can gather from off of here our area from different areas. Right this moment, I don't see anything; but maybe if I thought about it for a day, maybe I could.

I: Nothing has kind of been at the top of your mind, like I wish the government would do this or the state would?

R: I wish the government would be less is what I wish. I want less government.

I: What about other people or organizations in this area, can you think of anything they could do to help you farm?

R: Part of the only thing I think if there was a way to have a pool of people. Labor is a concern to us. We do not live in a high metropolis-type area. It is hard to get people to work in the harvest, enough people, sometimes to work in the harvest, the seasons. If there was a pool of people you could draw from from Pocatello or those areas somehow if there was something that was going on there. There is some organization, I can't think what the name of it is, but they kind of want a lot of money to be able to provide you with workers.

I: The temp services?

R: Temp services, yes. Tried a little bit of that in Twin Falls. It gets kind of expensive. So I don't know if there was some other way through an agency that we could. That's a little hard to get someone to drive a truck. Some people just don't understand it. They just have never been around anything mechanical and that's a little bit hard. There is probably a way to do it. Sometimes when you get people in that situation they are not wanting to work anyway. There are a few people out there. If you take 100 people, there's probably 25 of them that really need the job and they want the job. Seventy five of them they need the paycheck but don't really need the job. They are not enthusiastic about doing the job.

I: What has your experience been with immigrants?

R: Very positive. When they come to work, they are here to work. That has been. I'd say probably 95% of them have been just really positive. So like in the H2 program. That parts not good. ? Good for us. It's a little spendy.

I: What is the H2 program?

R: You can get people out of other countries to come here, mainly Mexico, maybe out of Peru, Honduras, anyplace, to come here and do seasonal work. That has been good. But the government tells us what we have to pay them. Then when you pay them this much, then your other people have to be paid this amount of money. It causes quite a bit. Our labor costs have gone up. But we tried it without it one year and we had some real good people. About half of them really wanted to work, the other half didn't really want to work. They just were there for the paycheck. For some reason, the migrant people, when they come up they are to make that money and to get that job done and then go back. That has been really positive.

I: So with the H2 program, you felt like the quality of your labor was just really excellent?

R: It has been really good. Like I say, 95% of them. Maybe have one or two that do not understand or not quite what they thought it was going to be or something. I would say maybe they missed their family. I would. Man. It's a tough thing to go away from your family for six months.

I: About how many people do you employ seasonally?

R: Probably 250 people.

I: Yeah. That's a lot to need to re-find every year. How many of those just kind of live around here or stay around here?

R: 175 of them. So a lot of them, but you still need to fill in some gaps.

I: Are you using aerial drones or unmanned aircraft systems at all for your farming operations?

R: We are just touching the tip of the iceberg with that, trying to do some experimenting with it.

I: So you are kind of testing it out, not using them all?

R: Just like a guy doing one field here. We got one guy in Jerome doing one field. Seeing what they can learn.

I: Just to see what the benefits are? Can you think of what benefits that they would be able to provide for you?

R: Just being able to see from the air. I have a little airplane and I fly a little bit. But my main thing is to see what the crops are doing. I take my people up. So we go up and we see what's going on. Just to see what the aerial thing is, is different from what you see on the ground. That part is information. They will have this thing where they have infrared photos off that in the future. It will be able to tell you that there is a stressed plant or a stressed area, things like that. Those things will be important. They will be something that's coming down.

I: How often do you fly over your fields just to check up on them?

R: Once a week.

I: Would the drones then replace that or?

R: Oh, yeah. I'm the only one that does it as we get down the road, and it's kind of an expensive hobby to fly and have an aircraft. There's ways to do it. You can go through clubs and stuff like that. But we got into this little aircraft pretty cheap years and years ago; so it doesn't cost a lot of money. But somebody has to get into it. It is kind of an expensive way to do it, where these drones wouldn't be near as expensive. Especially if you got a company that is doing it over many acres for you.

I: So you are interested in the drones and the unmanned aircraft systems that are coming out?

I: Okay, before we finish here, I would just like to ask you a couple of brief demographic questions. Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

R: One. There are two of us. I'm on the way out. I'm in the over-the-hill gang. Used to have a lot.

I: No children at home anymore?

R: Used to be. We had seven kids in there for a while, so it was a pretty big deal.

I: In the simplest terms, how would you describe your political views?

R: Simple. Less government. Want righteous things to do. I want to go back to where our forefathers were doing. Everybody seems to want to have a specialty, special interest group represent them for just their little interest groups. We just need a nation that was/had freedoms and the opportunity to be able to own property, to, what do I call it, worship as they please, whether they wanted to do that, simple. The government is not simple anymore. We seem to want to provide everything for everybody. Greece was trying that. They couldn't do it.

I: Would you describe your political views then as more conservative, less government?

R: Mm, hm. The politicians when they go out to do their thing they just say we are going to do this for you, we're going to do this for you. Don't just. Just make it so we have freedoms. I think the military needs to be strong, stronger than it is. We have people from the outside that

want to attack us. Not to say that we want to go run somebody. We live in the greatest place in the world, greatest nation there is. But we have challenges too. I would say, yes, probably conservative.

I: And what is your age?

R: 170, haha.

I: So minus 100?

R: When you talk to my kids, they'd think that's pretty old. Sixty three.

I: Finally, is there anything else you would like to share with us about farming in southeastern Idaho that we have missed?

R: It is a great place to farm. It is probably one of the best places in the world to farm. The San Joaquin valley in California is really nice, nice place. A lot of people there though.

I: And they are running out of water.

R: They are running out of water, yeah. I had one of my sons. I don't know if you remember John Doe, my son, John Doe. He did an internship down in Fresno back in 2010. Went there down to visit him while he was down there. It is just a beautiful valley. Except a lot of people. This is. We don't have as many crops and things like that; but it is a beautiful place. It has got water. We have an aquifer that is kind of uncanny that a lot of places don't. The aquifer is because of the volcano. The water can run down there. If you have ever been on the desert and you go through caves and stuff like that. I'm sure that's what the aquifer is. It is just fractures and caves and all that. So that water can move through there. You go to other areas. It is more like a sponge almost. Soils are more like a sponge. So they have draw-down. When you turn a well on here, the water never, doesn't hardly draw down because the flow of it just fills it right back in. So that's a great blessing the way that water is. But there is people that want it so there's a fight for it. It is productive. Sometimes I wish we had just a little longer growing season; but that's. You can't wish for every.

I: If that happened, then there'd probably be more people here, so you'd have that trade-off.

R: One guy says yeah if we had really good weather all the time everybody would live here. I don't know if it's all that way. Had this one experience. Had some people from Texas would come up. Mexican people come up and work from June through harvest. I'd say you guys oughta stay here. We need help in the warehouse doing things. Oh, yeah we think we will. We are just going to stay here. The minute it got cold, oh my gosh, they were out of here. The cold does scare some people away. That way we don't have traffic, so.

I: All right, thank you very much. We really appreciate the time you have taken to participate in this research. It helps us understand what issues you are facing and how steps could be taken to help you do your work, which is work we know benefits this community and others.