

## Ecosystem Service and Idaho's Farmers

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.

R: Since I was born.

I: Since you were born?

R: Yeah, in the old country. I'm from Spain.

I: How long have you been in this area?

R: Since 1973. Forty two years.

I: Okay, have you been farming the whole time?

R: Yeah

I: What do you grow?

R: Right now I grow alfalfa, wheat and cattle.

I: And how many acres do you farm?

R: 560 acres, and I lease about 80..

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

R: Not at all. Not out here. It is a pretty little town.

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

R: Yeah, I have been leasing for 2 years, for wheat.

I: Do you have any current plans to sell or lease any more of your farm?

R: No

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

R: Probably sell it. Not for a while. I have people wanting to lease.

I: Okay, how important would it be to you that your farm remains an agricultural operation?

R: Oh, very important. I hope so.

I: So it means a lot to you?

R: Yeah, there are relatives of mine that want to farm it, that would like to buy it, so.

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

R: Yeah, whatever the government tell us. And, they check from time to time and tell us it's okay.

I: What type of conservation practices?

R: Oh, rotation. We do a four-year rotation. So, that is what we do.

I: Okay, anything else?

R: No

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

R: Oh, just Roundup.

I: So, what kinds of pests or weeds do you use them for?

R: Oh, every kind of weed you can imagine. Um, with the sugar beets we use Roundup, and that's it. We use so many different kinds. That's the main thing now, Roundup. For the potatoes we used to use Sencore. Now for the beets it is Roundup, and Counter is the insecticide. In alfalfa we use Roundup in the Spring to clean up the weed over there. So, that is all we use.

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

R: By looking. By looking and experience from years before. That's what we do.

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: Positively. I hoped they did this about 20 years ago. Yes, it is pretty nice. I use less chemical. We used to put so much chemical on the sugar beets before. Now it is one-time Roundup and that's it.

I: So, you use the GE sugar beets?

R: Yeah, and hay. This one I didn't plant, but that one over there is Roundup Ready.

I: The alfalfa is?

R: Yeah. This one I didn't plant because the seed was too expensive. So, I will wait and see. But, the other one we got about three times more this year because of Roundup. It really controls the weeds.

I: So, have you used any other GE seeds?

R: No

I: What is your opinion of genetically engineered crops?

R: Good. It is pretty good, I guess. I don't know why they are so worried about them. We use less chemical than before. Before we used to put so much chemical over there that you couldn't believe it. And now, one time. So, we might die, but we are all going to die sometime.

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: Yeah, this year I think it is a little warmer earlier. About two weeks ago it was much warmer than usual. It's not usually too bad out here, but two or three weeks ago it was pretty hot, like 90's.

I: What do you think is causing these changes?

R: I don't know. It will change.

I: It will change?

R: Yeah

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: This year it was close. It came in late years ago, but it's a plus. We won't have to replant any sugar beets this year, so that was a plus.

I: Any changes to the length of your growing season or when you plant?

R: Maybe a little longer now. We started earlier this last year in the spring, and the crops are coming up a little earlier. So, it's a plus. I can get three crops of hay. Maybe a little bit longer. The wheat came up ten days earlier this year, too. It started turning yellow. Just this year.

I: So, just this year?

R: Yeah, last year we had a lot of rain at harvest, so.

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

R: Well, the last 3 or 4 years we have had less snow around here, and I like it, especially when I have to do the cattle. No snow on the ground is a plus. And, I don't like the warm water either. I like the cold water.

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: We had quite a bit this spring. We were kind of desperate, and we got quite a bit. So, it is hard to tell if it is much different. We was pretty bad in the winter time. We were pretty desperate for the cattle, and then right in one weekend the rain just came. We were happy.

I: Yeah, we had some good rains this spring.

R: Yeah, it was good.

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

R: Yeah, we worry a little bit. There is fighting over the water rights. They had a meeting about the water rights. I don't know. I would say the biggest problem we have is too many lawyers. They just want to make money. I think that is what it is really about. We are going to be okay this year, water wise.

I: Where and how do you receive your water?

R: I get it from the canal. That is where I have water rights. On this one I have a deep well too. The other one, canal water.

I: So, both ground and surface?

R: Yeah.

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

R: I don't even use half of the water I have. Over here, I have um 80 shares, and over there I have 80 shares, and I don't think I use 60 shares of water. But, I still have to pay for what I don't use this year, so.

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

R: No, but I have some bees. Somebody put some bees over on my farm. I get some free honey, so.

I: Do they pollinate the alfalfa?

R: I don't need it, but I guess they like it over there where the alfalfa is so they put them in over here for the summer time. I don't really need them though.

I: If so, have you noticed any changes in bee populations around here recently?

R: No, I don't like them. Just the honey. They usually never bother me though.

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

R: Not really. It is gonna change. It has been changing for so many years. I don't believe in that. It will change, but I don't think it is. I don't know.

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

R: I don't think so. After hurricane Katrina, they say every year we will have more. We haven't had a hurricane for 6 or 7 years now, so I don't believe that. If it happened, it happened I guess.

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

R: Just the water. Other than the water, I don't know. Just water for the most part.

I: Is soil health an issue? Do you ever worry about that?

R: No, I have to take care of it, you know, we have to put fertilizer on. That is what we do.

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

R: No

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: It depends on the month and the price. We cannot change that many things over here. All there is over here is potatoes, beets, hay, grain. Now they've started corn. Some people plant corn for feed, so, you can't plant any other things around here. That's the only thing.

I: Have you made any changes to how you manage pests in recent years?

R: Uh, we keep in control. We have lots of chemicals. I don't have any. Last year we had to spray one time for the aphid in the hay, but this year we don't have any so far.

I: Well, hopefully you won't have to.

R: Yes, hopefully.

I: What about changes to when you plant or harvest your crops?

R: No, well this year I planted in May. Sometimes I plant in the fall, but I plant in May now. I don't change that much.

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

R: Price of the crops. The wind is terrible. The wind is terrible. This year has been nice. We haven't had to replant sugar beets or anything. That wind raises hell when we plant and it blows the seeds away from the field. They are tiny, and it is kind of sandy, but this year was really nice. No problems this year, but the wind can be a problem.

I: Yeah, it is kind of flat over here.

R: Yeah, and sandy. It is pretty sandy ground.

I: Any other challenges?

R: No

I: Are these challenges different than they were in the past?

R: About the same. About the same. It has actually been pretty nice. We don't have that much wind this year in the spring.

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

R: Lots of room. Lots of room.

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

R: Oh, there are chemical companies that will call you, and meeting too. The USDA office too, if there are any changes they will let us know. Then there are ag papers.

I: So, what about weather?

R: There's the extension station, and if we have any problems with crops we can go over there and they will tell you what you have. That is a big help over here. If you have some problem with some wheat or something, and the doctor will tell you what is the problem. They are pretty nice. It's a big help. I've been over there today, I have some oats in the field. I asked to see a doctor because of some problem with the wheat, but the doctor wasn't there, so they will send another doctor. It is pretty nice. They are pretty willing to come and talk. They will come right away to your farm and tell you. I've used them in the past, and it has been a big help.

I: Absolutely

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

R: I don't know what you call them, the one for the chemicals. You have to have a license for the chemicals, and they check on that.

I: Is it the Idaho State Department of Agriculture?

R: Yeah, that's what it is. That is the one. They check to see if you have the right equipment to put chemicals in the water. I never had any problem. I have always been in compliance with what they tell you. They check, and if there is something wrong they will give you a call, so they never call me.

I: Well, that's a good thing.

R: Yeah

I: Any other regulatory agencies?

R: No

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

R: They are pretty nice. They have to school for three hours a year for the lease, in order to get a license to spray chemicals. It is pretty nice they do that.

I: What about the USDA? How was working with them?

R: They are really nice people there. I am supposed to go there tomorrow and give them my crop report. They are pretty nice.

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

R: Stay out of it. Let the farmers control the crop. The prices control the farmer. If we don't get a good price, we will plant less next year. So, I don't need, ya know. What they can do is sale outside the state crops, that is what they can do. And besides that, nobody knows better than the farmer how to raise a crop. We don't need those guys to tell us how, from the office.

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

R: No

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

R: No

I: Okay, would you be interested in using drones in the future?

R: I don't know. I guess it is going to that. They say it is the future, but we'll see. All they seem to be doing is playing in the little field with those things.

I: How do you think it would benefit you?

R: Oh yeah, it would benefit I think. You can see the dry spots. It would be a help for that. To see the crops, and the niter, they can check the nitrogen level too. They can tell by the color of the crop. Yeah, and then you can see whether you need to use more fertilizer or less, So, it would be a plus. Yeah, it seems to be the future.

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: Just me

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

R: What do you mean?

I: Well, like on a continuum of conservative or liberal.

R: Um, I'm more conservative.

I: And what is your age?

R: I'm too old. 55

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

R: No, I don't think anything.

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.