

Ecosystem Services and Idaho's Farmers

Interview Sixteen

I- ok so I just want to begin with a little background information. How did you get into the farming business?

R- I always wanted to farm, my parents didn't farm. I worked on farms while I was in high school and college. decided the only way I could get into it was to get a good job and earn enough money to get started. I got a degree in civil engineering and moved to Sothern Idaho and worked for the site, worked for them for ten years, got a master's degree while I was there, my P.E. license, made good money and got enough; kind of saved to buy a little farm. Just traded that and expanded, and so that's how I got into the farming business.

I- what do you grow?

R- now just wheat, malt barley and alfalfa, I have raised canola for a number of years. I do rent a little bit of my ground for potatoes or sugar beets when I need a rotation, but for the most part the crops I'm raising, I get the rotation I need.

I- and how many acres?

R- I'm farming 2000, I own 1000.

I- How long have you been farming?

R- Probably about 35 years, I worked when I started farming, and I worked for ten years, before I got enough to where I could go full time. when we started farming my wife quit her job and she stayed home and raised calves, and we had hogs. She did the farming work because I could make more money than she could so. I kept working and she took care of the farm. so probably, I think I quit working in 82, so I've been farming full time for 32 years or so.

I- ok, so in what ways if any has urban expansion or construction effected your farming business?

R- not much, because I kept moving away from it because it was the only place that I could afford to buy any ground. I mean the first farm we bought was north of Blackfoot, we had 80 acres and a little house. it became obvious to me that they were getting more little acreages and stuff there and prices were going up and it became obvious I needed to get out of there if I wanted to farm full time. so I just kept moving away from it, so I guess it made me move. but other than that, our price of land out here isn't driven by the housing market.

I- do you have and current plans to sell or lease part of your farm?

R- no, when I decide to retire I will lease my ground. I believe that it is a good investment, it's a diversification. I have no plans on selling, I have one son who, he's 25 now, he's not interested in the farm, but I keep thinking when he gets married and has kids he may change his mind, you know so. kind

of want to keep it going for a little while to give him the opportunity. if I was to sell all my equipment and stuff he'd have a difficult time getting started.

I- so that's what your hopping what will happen?

R- no not necessarily, I want him to be happy but I do know that kids think they know what they want to do then they get out in the real world and find out how it works; there opinion can change.

I- How important would it be that your farm remain in agriculture?

R- that is important to me. I'd hate to see it develop but you know I think it's those kind of things that makes Idaho a good place to live, wide open spaces, agriculture, and thinks like that. and when you take it out the less of that you have and the more your like California.

I- so have you implemented any sort of conservation practices into your farming?

R- I have gone basically no till everything, which is probably my biggest conservation practice. I kind of, I was the first one in the area to try it and you know made lots of mistakes but could see some benefits. there is a lot of people that are doing some it now because of the things I learned, and it's a great conservation practice.

I- Alright, anything else you can think of?

R- Well no tilling is a big thing because we quit plowing the ground and its always covered and never blows, the water always goes in, you don't have runoff. It was a pretty steep learning curve and still is. As my yields have gone up the challenges have gone up and I've had to change my program four or five times to adapt to the changing conditions. You know what worked when I raised hundred bushel barley doesn't even come close to working now.

I- So sort of constantly adapting?

R- Yes.

I- As far as pesticide or herbicide use, what types do you use on your farm?

R- Well he have to spray hay usually every year one time for bugs. You want the chemical names?

I- you can name the chemical names or just what they are for.

R- Lowersbad are for aphid and weevil. Pesticides normally we don't need to use anything on the grain; only a couple times in the last twenty years I sprayed grain with a pesticide. Herbicides you know we have to use broadleaf control and where I no till I Roundup everything in the fall so Roundup is a part of my program too.

I- How do you make decisions about herbicide or pesticide use?

R- Scouting, Talking chemical with my field guide and divisors as far as what I was seeing. Decide whether, I personally don't like to use pesticides, I try to avoid them because I'm really into birds and pheasants; that's my big thing. You see my bird dogs, I got three of them. And so everything I've done is to try and not hurt them; there is times when we have to raise the crop because we still got to make money to keep going.

I- So the use of GMO has been in the news a lot lately.

R- Right.

I- I was wondering if you have been impacted in any way negatively or positively?

R- Positively, you know I have raised GMO canola which is I'm not raising now, but I am raising Roundup ready alfalfa. And the thing that I believe about Gmo's is, they reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides which I think is good for the environment. And they can also speed the breeding process up and get to a better plant quicker. I believe, even though like barley and wheat, they have never approved GMO wheat. I think our customer for barley is the brewing companies, and I think they don't want to touch it either. So that's not available, but we would decrease production and increase the use of pesticides and herbicides if we had them available.

I- So if those were available, wheat or barley?

R- I'd try them yep. I don't have anything against them, I think they are good for the environment, I think they are good for humanity. It increases, If it wasn't for GMO's there would be mass starvation today. If they pulled them all off the market there wouldn't be enough food.

I- So turning now to the subject of environmental change, have you noticed any changes in the environmental conditions in this area in the recent past?

R- well the big thing I noticed is as farming evolved and gotten away from smaller farms and have livestock, and gotten bigger and bigger farms for economy and size; And all honesty aside to make a living on. We have lost our fenced rows and hay stacks and stuff for birds, and the one thing that has affected me directly is the fact that the pheasant numbers are down. It's because of farming practices, you know I've covered all my rock piles, we can farm straight threw and don't have to turn all the time; not much more efficient but it has changed the environment so. Is that what you meant by environment?

I- yeah.

R- That's the biggest change I see. I mean it use to be that there were all kinds of places for birds because people had livestock and they didn't work there ground in the fall, or there was cover all winter long and you didn't see that anymore.

I- So have you noticed any changes in the growing season or the first or last frost dates?

R- Yeah but I think it's a short term thing, yeah it isn't freezing as late this year or last year, but three years from now it may be. I still plant based on probability of frost and. I guess I think this global warming thing is just blip in time. There has been periods in history where it has been way warmer than this; we just haven't seen it. You know our life span and snapshot is pretty little.

I- Have you noticed any changes in winter temperatures or snowfall?

R- In my relatively short life span and the overall scope of things it seems like we are getting less snow, and I don't know. We still get cold, you know I don't see, It depends on the year. Yeah last winter was warm, I don't remember one but I forgot, I'm my lifespan there probably was one. I think to say it is changing would be naive when you look at the overall thousands of years.

I- in precipitation, have you noticed any changes in precipitation, less more?

R- Same thing new, sometimes we get more, sometimes we get less, sometimes we get a whole bunch at one time but don't get any for a long time but I think it has always been that way.

I- Looking at water, that's always an important thing, do you worry about water availability or your water rights?

R- Yes.

I- Ok, what do you worry about?

R- well right not there is a proposal to; they were supposed to have it resolved by the first of July, but I haven't heard of anything so I assume they don't. But there proposal for groundwater pumpers was everybody in the eastern snake river aquifer, they were going to cut us by 13%, but they wouldn't tell us 13% of what, whether it was our license our what we have been pumping our you know I mean. And then they wanted us to say ok. So you know I mean, they are after us and they cut us 13% on my farm that will be two pivots ill lead by; which will be a financial wreck. So I do worry about it and have tried to be a little proactive but the way its set up the people that are paying the money to them have very little say. They had one meeting and they didn't like what we said and we never had another one so.

I- So you don't feel like they are seeking your input?

R- Well not when it didn't agree with what they wanted to do. Maybe they had a good idea, but they didn't have any of the details worked out, so how do you know if it is a good idea or not?

I- so how do you receive your water?

R- Wales, deep wales.

I- Is that how you receive all your water?

R- yes... I had one farm years ago that was on the canal system but we sold it a while ago and bough more ground out here.

I- About how much of your water allocations do you say you use?

R- I'm just guessing, but I would say and when you say allocation do you mean my water license?

I- yeah.

R- Ok, probably and I'm just guessing here but probably about 60% of it. Because your license for a diversion rate, and it's from April 1st to November 1st, you are licensed to pump, you know if you got a two CFS diversion rate you can pump that continuously from April 1st to November 1st. Of course we don't pump continuously because we don't always need it for harvesting or it's in the fall we are drying it up or whatever; so I'm just guessing.

I- Do you rely on bees to pollinate any of your crop?

R- Well there are bees around and people put bees on my farm for honey production it isn't to pollinate the crops. When we raised canola they would bring bees in to pollinate because we were raising hybrid seed where you have males and females and you got to get the male pollen over to the female to get the pods. So we have but now I'm not, most of my crop, well grain always flowers but its open pollinated, it doesn't need something to pollinate.

I- Have you noticed any changes in the bee population in the area recently?

R- I wouldn't be something that I've noticed, could be I don't know.

I- So you have definitely touched on this...