

## Ecosystem Services and Idaho's Farmers

### Interview Ten

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: Okay, I got into the farming business about, well my father bought our first farm when I was five years old. And, the land is right out here north of us, and uh, so I grew up helping him farm. I went to college, and uh, graduated with a master's degree in accounting, and I'm a CPA, but this is where my true love was, and as my father got older I started getting involved, and expanded the farm. And uh, that is what I do now. I just do farm work.

I: And how long have you or your immediate family been farming in this area?

R: Um, my father was raised in this area, and his father farmed when he was a kid but not on any of our land that we currently own. And so, but I farmed since, well I bought my first land when I was 21. So, now I'm 59. So, for a little while.

I: What do you grow?

R: wheat and barley, mostly barley.

I: And how many acres do you farm?

R: Just a little over 10,000 acres.

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

R: No, we are rural enough that there hasn't been any like residential construction. They are currently talking about putting a power line out through the country and that affects a lot of our land. But, well we border industry on the other side. We border two agro-chemical companies, and we have actually sold land to them. They have been able to expand as a result of that, but we still farm the land that we sold them. So, it hasn't affected our operation.

I: Yeah, it seems like it is pretty rural out here.

R: Yeah

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

R: No

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

R: Well, I currently farm with my son and my son in law and a nephew, and uh we have a mission statement that states. Well, is this something you would like me to read to you because it is a well written mission statement?

I: Sure

R: Yeah, it talks about the continuation of the farm.

I: Okay

R: So our mission statement reads: We are a family owned and operated farm, and plan to ensure that this opportunity for the next generation. Our goal is to produce the highest quality commodities for a global marketplace using old farm and family values, coupled with innovation, technology and education. We strive to use excellent land stewardship practices utilizing efficient input, and do our utmost to attain the highest prices thus providing an unparalleled quality of life and standard of living. So, it's our goal to pass on the opportunity for future generations in our family, if they choose to be farmers.

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

R: Um, it's, yeah I would say it is fairly important.

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

R: We have been involved in the CSP program, and done things through the USDA CSP program.

I: Okay, what does that entail?

R: Rotation with cover crops, and uh we have had Austrian winter peas for nitrogen purposes so we apply less nitrogen. Just things like that.

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

R: We haven't really used pesticides because we don't have a real pest problem, but we use a broad leaf herbicide, like a 24D, and uh, we use a wild oat herbicide called axial which kills wild oats. So, that's about all the herbicide we use. We use some Roundup in the spring every year. We also, in the spring every year we have purchased no till drills, to where we are able to put the seed directly in the ground without disturbing the ground in front of the drills. So, we think that helps conserve the moisture without stirring the ground up, so we do that, as well. We also use guidance systems so that we don't double apply fertilizers and pesticide, or herbicides, so we use. We were one of the first down here to use guidance systems, but everything whether it's our sprayer or combines, our seeder, they're all on guidance systems, so.

I: Yeah, it is amazing how technology seems to be improving many of these practices.

R: Yeah, it really has.

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: You know, it hasn't affected us because we don't use them because wheat and barley aren't genetically modified. But uh corn, which is like one of the driving forces in the market place as far as commodity prices go, ya know, that has affected us, but, because it does affect the price of grain. But as far as our production, it hasn't affected us, so.

I: So, I know there have been wheat and barley patents that just haven't been marketed. Why do you think that is?

R: I think it is public acceptance for one thing.

I: Okay

I: How do you feel about that?

R: You know I'm actually in favor of genetically modified crops, just because they predict by the year 2050 there will be 9 plus billion people in the world, and there's going to be starvation if we don't, if the farmers can't raise the food. And God's not making any more farm land, so the farmer's that exist and, as you know there's becoming less and less farm land all the time with urban encroachment and things, so the remaining and existing farmer have to increase more and more food in order to feed a growing population. And so, I'm actually in favor of genetically modified crops. I think we need to understand the technology. Ya learn that it's not all that bad, but if you could find things that are more nitrogen efficient, water efficient, and be able to grow greater quantities on the same acres than I think that is good stewardship of the environment.

I: If you would be able to sell it?

R: Yeah, Yeah

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: You know my father passed away last year, but he farmed for over 50 year, and he said that within those 50 years he would have expected to see two years the same, but every year was different. And uh, some years are wetter, some years are drier, but everything is made up of averages, and I don't know whether. Like this year we haven't had a frost, and normally in this country we have a lot of frosts in the spring of the year, and we haven't had a frost. So, I don't know that the climates getting warmer, but last year for example, we had frost week after week after week. So, uh I don't know whether I can see a change or not. You know we keep thinking that it's getting drier, but last fall and this spring we just had a lot of rain, and so. Uh, I don't know whether you would call it a change, whether the weather patterns are changing or not,

but it's, everything is made up of averages so if you have some dry periods ultimately you are going to have some wet periods.

I: Have you noticed any persistent changes in the first and last frost dates of the year?

R: Yeah, in general I don't think I have seen them shift.

I: Okay, has your growing season remained about the same?

R: Yeah

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

R: Last year there was light snowfall, but then again this winter may be heavy, so. But it was also very cold last winter, and so uh, you know the lack of snow didn't result in warmer weather because we had some really cold weather, but there was less snow, but then we had a real wet fall and a real wet spring. So, we actually ended up with more moisture for the last nine months than we normally have.

I: Many of us have heard about the drought affecting the western U.S. right now. You mentioned that precipitation has been the same?

R: Well, this year, even taking into consideration the dry winter. Uh, you know out here we would normally have 3 or 4 feet of snow, and you know we might have had a foot of snow. But even taking that into consideration, our precipitation for the year is way above normal. So, we normally survive on 12 inches of rainfall or precipitation, and out here in the month of May we had over nearly 8 inches in that one month, so.

I: Okay, are you seeing yearly changes?

R: Yeah, just yearly changes. Some years are drier, some are wetter.

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

R: Well, we are all dry land so we just take what we can get, and what the good Lord gives us, and uh. So, as far as water rights or you know whether there's ground water or reservoir water available, that doesn't affect or concern us from a, from our farm's standpoint.

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

R: No

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

R: No

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

R: Uh, I don't know whether I have an opinion. I just don't feel that, I feel like I said that all weather is made up of averages, and that ya know, you go through warmer, drier periods, and then you have wetter, cooler periods, and so I don't. I guess I am just not that concerned about climate change cause I, over my lifetime, I am not sure I have seen what I could call a definite shift in the climate. Yeah, I mean I don't know whether, you know are the average temperatures going up or down. You know they may be going up a little bit, but I haven't really seen, it hasn't affected us.

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

R: Well, certainly water is, but uh healthy soil for us is important. Yeah, soil and water and good clean air, or uh, so,

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

R: No, 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: No, we have such a short growing season that when it's ready to plant we plant, and harvest when it gets ready, but we've uh, as far as practices go, like I mentioned earlier, we switched to no till drills. To where we don't disturb the soil ahead of planting, and that seems to help conserve our moisture.

I: Uh, you mentioned the changes to how you apply herbicide. When did you start doing that?

R: Well, as far as the guidance systems, we started doing that 6 years ago. And, we do grow a little canola now. We're trying to introduce a non-grain, a non-grassy, crop into our rotation. So, we are trying to, we just started out with low acres to see if it works, but it well for us last year, and our canola acres this year look good, so. It may be that we have another crop in our rotation.

I: Yeah, I noticed that we passed some when we were going down the \_\_\_ road.

R: Uh huh

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

R: Uh, the biggest challenges?

I: Yeah

R: Probably in my case since we are dry land, uh the fluctuations in yield from year to year. And, that depends on the weather. Like I said, some years are drier and some years are wetter, and so just the fluctuations in the yield and the price. Those are the two big challenges.

I: How are these challenges different from what they were in the past, if they are different?

R: No, they have always been that way.

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

R: You know, the quality of life, the lifestyle.

I: Yeah, I can see that.

R: Yeah

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

R: Well, I'm lucky because I have been involved in both an Idaho grain association and barley association, and as a result of those state organizations, I have been involved in the national counterparts; the National Association of Wheat Growers and the National Barley Growers Association. And I get a lot of information from attending meetings. So, that is where I get most of my information is meetings and conventions, things like that.

I: What about regulations? Do you get information on those at these meetings, also?

R: Yep, Yeah

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

R: You know I don't think I've been really, personally involve in, in contact with them, but I know the EPA has a lot of regulations that affect farmers, and uh, I don't know exactly the agency, but Idaho Department of Air Quality, ya know because there are some regulations on burning stubble, and farm residue. So, that we have to deal with, but we incorporate our residue back into the soil, so it hasn't really been a problem for us.

I: So, have you had much interaction with the regulators?

R: No, I haven't.

I: So, in dealing with these regulations, would you say that is much of a concern?

R: Yeah it is a concern that, uh, that regulators impose rules and regulations, and really don't understand what we do in our operation. Because we try to be really good stewards of land, and uh, we realize that if we don't take care of our land, you know that's our livelihood. So, we,

you know I think we are better stewards than a lot of people give us credit for because that's our asset, you know, our land, and that produces our livelihood, so.

I: Yeah, you don't want to ruin what you depend on?

R: Yeah, Yeah

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

R: No, not that I can think of off hand.

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

R: No, ya know I think public awareness to what agricultures all about. Most people, maybe not so much in Southeastern Idaho, but you know you get in these big inner cities and most people think their food comes from the grocery store. They don't realize that it is all grown on a farm somewhere, and uh, I think public awareness of how there foods grown, and what goes into growing and producing the food and the fuel for America. You know, I think public awareness is important, education of the public in general.

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

R: No

I: Would you be interested in using drones in your operation at some point>

R: You know, we've talked about it, and we've actually had one of the implement dealers actually come out and demonstrate a drone, but I'm not sure for our operation. I'm just not sure any, you know, real application or need that we can see from it.

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: In this household, just me.

I: Just you?

R: Yeah, but I have a house in Salt Lake, so uh, my wife lives there, and I live there too, and she comes up here, but.

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

R: conservative

I: And what is your age?

R: 59

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

R: Well, it's a good way of life. Thank your farmers for raising your food.

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.