

Ecosystem Services and Idaho's Farmers

Interview Twenty-One

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: I was born into it.

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

R: In this area?

I: Yeah

R: 53 years

I: So, before that were there other generations that farmed?

R: No. They started in a different place, but my dad and his brother were the first in their family. They had uncles and what-not, but . . .

I: What do you grow?

R: Alfalfa and wheat and grass and cows.

I: And cows' growth is connected to the alfalfa and grass, right?

R: yup

I: And how many acres do you farm?

R: Approximately 800.

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

R: Not mine.

I: You are far enough out here?

R: Yeah

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

R: Die

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

R: Um, I have rented some cash crops out for potatoes, for rotation, but other than that I haven't. I don't foresee renting it out.

I: Possibly pass some along to your family?

R: Yes

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

R: Uh very, highly, extremely.

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

R: Yes

I: Would you like to share some of them?

R: We . . . With the ASCS we have the highly erodible land program. We try not to leave any ground foul over winter. If we do, we try to cover it.

I: So, that's different than some of the other farms nearby?

R: I can't say. I can't speak for anybody else.

I: Any other conservation practices you can think of? Maybe something connected to water?

R: We are always trying to conserve water as much as we can.

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

R: We use insecticides for pests occasionally, and we use herbicides for controlling weeds in grain and alfalfa.

I: What pests do you have a problem with?

R: Weevil and aphids, and uh cutworm.

I: Cutworm is in what kind of crops?

R: Alfalfa

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

R: Recommendation from my field man, and visual. If they are eating the hay, then you do something about 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: No.

I: Are you currently using any genetically engineered seeds?

R: Not on purpose.

I: What is your opinion of genetically engineered crops?

R: Um, not really.

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: Just the weather.

I: Okay, would you like to talk a little bit more about that?

R: The weather seems to be a little more extreme, and not as predictable. The weather has never been predictable, but it's been. Like this spring, it started off really early and then it turned off cold. It was dry and then it was wet. And now it is hot a little early, so the weather pattern has been a little different the last few years.

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

R: Well, that is part of the weather pattern. Yeah.

I: Would you say that the growing season has shifted because of that?

R: Um, I wouldn't go that far. No.

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

R: A little out of the ordinary.

I: So, have you seen colder winters? Warmer winters?

R: Yeah

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: Yeah

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

R: Every year.

I: Where and how do you receive your water?

R: Some of it's from canal, and some of it's from the ground.

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

R: Most of it. It's a rare year when we don't use all of our water rights.

I: Have you ever ran out?

R: Yes

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: No.

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.

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

R: Sunshine, fertilizer.

I: Would you also consider your fuel to be part of the natural resources, too?

R: For growing? No. For harvesting? Yes.

I: Okay, so it is part of your farming practice?

R: We don't use any natural fuel to fire any pumps or anything; hydraulics or electricity. So, I guess people do farm off of a natural resource around here, with hydropower.

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

R: Sure

I: Specifically? Earlier you mentioned water, it that a pretty major concern? Or soil health?

R: Well, it is if you couldn't have fertilizer to help build it up. Yeah, there could be diseases that could prevent you from raising a decent crop, if you couldn't fight it.

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

I: So, you've done thing pretty much the same for quite a few years?

R: Yeah

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

R: Special interest groups.

I: Would you like to say anymore along that line?

R: Not really.

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

R: No

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

R: In southeastern Idaho?

I: Or farming?

R: Being able to work with the land, and the cattle. Being out in the open air. Being away from the city.

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

R: Local news on the T.V., the internet.

I: Any particular websites?

R: Just the app on my phone. The weather channel.

I: So, do you follow the weather pretty regularly?

R: Until I get so fed up with the fact that they can't predict it right when I'm trying to put hay up that I just don't pay attention anymore.

I: At some point you just have to cut the hay, right?

R: Yep

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

R: the USDA, FSA

I: FSA stands for?

R: Farm Service Agency

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

R: Generally positive.

I: How was it positive?

R: They were helpful and considerate.

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

R: I will have to think about that one. There's always don't raise taxes and provide more services. How do you do that?

I: What kinds of services?

R: Better roads, um, thinks like that.

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

R: What organizations are we talking about?

I: Well, sometimes there are cooperatives, or things like that.

R: Not that I can think of. The only one I can think of are special interest groups. They are always trying to find something wrong. I think some people have too much time on their hands, and try to create problems rather than try to solve them.

I: So, you are a hay farmer? Do you link with other hay farmers, or cattle farmers? Or, are you pretty independent?

R: I'm pretty independent.

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

R: No. That's not to say that I wouldn't be interested in it.

I: So, you would be interested in using them in the future?

R: I think there are a lot of advantages to it.

I: So, in what ways do you think they would be a benefit?

R: You could cover a lot more ground. You could get aerial views, which is a big benefit rather than just on the ground. You can see a lot more from the ground than you can from the ground. You can cover a lot more ground in less time.

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: Two

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

R: Conservative

I: And what is your age?

R: Over thirty. 55.

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

R: I think sometimes that farmers get a bad review for different reasons, but I think that uh, it would be kind of hard to eat without farmers. I think for the most part farmers are conscientious about the things that they do. They try to help the environment rather than destroy the environment. The number one thing that bothers me most about special interest groups is they fight about, to complain about, the farmers who raise cattle and how they handle their cattle, but if they wanted to really come out and visit the farm, if they were truly interested in what really happens, if they wanted to come out and spend some time, they would be welcome to come out here with me in the middle of the winter when it's 20 below and a cow is trying to calve. And then they can see what truly happens. That's probably what bothers me the most.

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.