

Location: Aberdeen

Date: 07/06/2015

Time: 1:05 pm

Interviewer: So, just to begin with a little background information. How did you get into the farming business?

Respondent: Umm, I grew up on a farm, but my dad kind of didn't grow with the other farmers, and he eventually took up carpentry. My cousin gave me the opportunity to farm with him and then eventually I went on my own.

Interviewer: Okay, so how long have you been farming?

Respondent: Umm, on my own?

Interviewer: Either way. Was your father a first generation farmer?

Respondent: Yeah umm, I have just lived on a farm all of my life. I worked as a teenager on the farm, and eventually in 95 I went on my own.

Interviewer: Alright, and what do you farm?

Respondent: Umm, I grow wheat and sugar beets.

Interviewer: Okay, and how many acres?

Respondent: Approximately 1100 acres.

Interviewer: Okay. So, what ways if any has construction or urban expansion affected you or your farming?

Respondent: So, now?

Interviewer: Any sort of construction or urban expansion?

Respondent: Alright, I know what you are saying. Umm, I can't say that over here to me anyway, I don't think we have had any expansion in this area.

Interviewer: Yeah, it is pretty remote.

Respondent: Yea, it's not like the Boise valley where farmers are getting pushed out.

Interviewer: Okay, alright. So do you have any current plans to sell or lease all or part of your farm?

Respondent: Umm, in the back of my mind I wouldn't say that I have any definite plans, but I am almost 60 and I am kind of starting to think about it.

Interviewer: So, on that note. What do you think you will do with your farm when you stop farming it?

Respondent: I would like to find some younger person that is interested and help them get going

Interviewer: So, would you still remain in control?

Respondent: I don't want to sell my land that I do own. I just kind of want to rent it out, and . . . I don't know how much control I would have, but.

Interviewer: So, would you say that it is important to you that your land remains in agriculture?

Respondent: Yes, I do. There's something about owning land that . . . it's a big deal, and it's getting bigger and bigger all the time because it is harder and harder to get.

Interviewer: Right, land prices are definitely going up there.

Interviewer: So, have you implemented any sort of conservation practices into your farming operation?

Respondent: Yeah, we've done things like strip-tilling to stop the wind erosion. Just trying to till as little as possible, and handle the stubble in a way that you don't work the ground to death.

Interviewer: Keep that good soil?

Respondent: Well, yeah I guess it is really hard on the soil to be doing major tillage to it.

Interviewer: Alright, what about anything water wise?

Respondent: As far as conserving? Well . . . I guess you try not to over water. It is expensive to over water. The power costs are high, so we do try to watch it as close as we can. We don't have drip irrigation, I mean that would be a major water saver. I haven't seen anything currently that . . . really you know at some point maybe they will figure it all out. At this point, I haven't seen anything that . . .

Interviewer: Yeah, it seems like you are in kind of a dry area, and you are definitely going to have to use water.

Respondent: It's true, and for some reason it's getting drier here. Warmer winters, and . . . We are going to get ourselves in some water trouble eventually.

Interviewer: So, what types of pesticides or herbicides do you use?

Respondent: Do you want me to name names? Or, what do you want me to?

Interviewer: You can do that, or just what kind of pests do you use them for?

Respondent: Well, for umm . . . we don't really use pest . . . well, I guess when you say pesticide that would include herbicide? Is that what you are saying?

Interviewer: Right, and insecticide?

Respondent: Okay, well on the wheat we have to spray for broadleaf weeds. Well, I can name names of what we use.

Interviewer: Okay, you can do that as well if you would like, or just what you use them for. Either way.

Respondent: So, what type of weeds do you mean?

Interviewer: Right, what kind of weed problems or other pest problems do you see?

Respondent: Okay, umm well there are all kinds of broadleaf weeds; kosha, and red root and lambs quarter that would turn that field right there totally green instead of what it is right not. So, we use cold sword and umm let's see what else. We didn't use any wild oat herbicide. Oh uhh, affinity, there's a little affinity in with it and that's a onetime spray...about mid-May.

Interviewer: Okay

Respondent: So, on the sugar beets. They are roundup ready beets and so we sprayed those two times. So, we used a . . . the seed comes with a seed treat on them called Pancho, which takes care of most of our problems. We get what are called leaf minor which actually burrow into the leaves of the sugar beets and kill the leaf so we use what is . . . what is . . . so, when we spray the beets we use an insecticide to control those.

Interviewer: Okay, so is that it?

Respondent: Well, that is all we generally use.

Interviewer: Okay, so how do you make decisions regarding herbicide or pesticide use?

Respondent: Well, past experience. We use the advice of the crop consultants and a lot of past experience I guess.

Interviewer: Yea, so you use an outside source?

Respondent: Right, I have a guy that sells fertilizer and also sells chemicals and is trained to consult.

Interviewer: Okay, alright, so we are going back to your sugar beets. So, the use of genetically engineered seeds has been quite controversial lately. Has the use of GE seeds affected you as a farmer, and if so, how?

Respondent: In a good way or a negative way?

Interviewer: Either way

Respondent: I would say, and I know they don't want to hear this, but it has revolutionized the sugarbeet industry because we use way less chemical way less labor and our yields are phenomenal compared with what they were ten years ago.

Interviewer: So, you have seen a large increase?

Respondent: Huge

Interviewer: So, overall what would you say your opinion is of genetically engineered seeds?

Respondent: Well, I would not say that I am just gun ho and that everything should be genetically modified and I know it isn't fair for me to. . . sugar beets were a huge problem before because we didn't have good ways to control weeds, and umm the chemicals that we used we had to spray a lot and it was hard on the beets and it just didn't do near as good a job . . .then you had all of the hand labor on top, which is non-existent now.

Interviewer: So, would you say it has saved you a lot of money?

Respondent: Well, it costs . . .the seeds are very expensive. So they have figured that out. They are going to get their money out of ya, but it has saved us money. The increase in yield has helped...it has helped me mentally a lot.

Interviewer: Less stress maybe?

Respondent: Less stress. That and GPS, those two things have made my life so much better (laughing).

Interviewer: So, turning to the subject of environmental change. Have you noticed any changes in the environmental conditions in your area that seem beyond normal year to year variation?

Respondent: So weather?

Interviewer: Yea, the weather or pests, anything really that involves the environment. . . .precipitation.

Respondent: Well, the weather I guess is never the same. I don't know.

Interviewer: Have you seen a change in the length of your growing season, or the first and last frost dates?

Respondent: Change? Well, I have never seen as warm a winter as we had. I have never seen wheat grow in February like it did, and you see how yellow that is. It is ripening way ahead of schedule. So, it's different. I don't know what to attribute that to. Anyway, I am not sure what to say about it.

Interviewer: No, that is great. Again, we are interested in your observations.

Respondent: But, every year is different. Next winter could be the wettest snowiest winter ever. Like back east. They had quite a winter.

Interviewer: Have you noticed any changes in average winter temperatures? You mentioned this last winter. Has it just been this last winter or have you noticed changes for longer.

Respondent: The past two have been extremely dry winters. There's no question about that.

Interviewer: So, going back to the issue of precipitation. You know many of us have heard about the drought hitting the western United States, so have you noticed any changes in yearly precipitation? Has it affected you? The lack of precipitation that is.

Respondent: Well, if we didn't get all the May that we did in May, yeah it would have been a big problem.

Interviewer: Yeah, that was some good rain.

Respondent: Yeah, it really saved us.

Interviewer: Have you noticed any changes in the type of precipitation? Rain versus snow? Anything like that?

Respondent: Well, we didn't get enough snow. I just know that. We didn't get enough to even talk about.

Interviewer: Yeah, there was no skiing last winter.

Respondent: There was just nothing, It's pathetic, but the whole west. Our son in Washington...I don't know if the ski areas were open hardly any all around the Seattle area.

Interviewer: So, do you worry about water availability or maintaining your water rights?

Respondent: Yes it is a big issue.

Interviewer: How and from where do you receive you water?

Respondent: Well, we receive, the river and the canal system comes right behind our house right here. So, it is surface water. It is gathered in the Palisades, Jackson and American Falls reservoirs. We have a well on two different fields.

Interviewer: So do you use ground and surface water?

Respondent: Yes, mostly surface water.

Interviewer: So, about how much of your water allocation do you use in a season?

Respondent: Well, I just got the thing today. I could show you it. Well, last year we had plenty. Some years we really have to tighten up and they have even shut off the canal system at the end of August for the month of September and then we got just enough to water the harvest. The ground has to be wet to harvest or at least damp. That was in the early 2000s. I don't remember the exact years.

Interviewer: But a while ago? Is that a large concern when it comes to farming?

Respondent: Yes, we don't want to go back there again. We keep thinking we are going to get out of this thing, but I just hope the California drought doesn't move this way. It's a big deal.

Interviewer: So, do you rely on bees to pollinate any of your crops?

Respondent: No, wheat is self-pollinating and we don't want sugar beets to go to seed. It doesn't, you know, you don't get sugar out of those. So, there's really is no need for bees with those crops. We use them in our raspberries back here.

Interviewer: Well that counts, I guess.

Respondent: Bees are a big deal. There's no question about that.

Interviewer: Have you noticed any changes in the bee population?

Respondent: Well, they are coming from somewhere because we have tons of bees right behind our house right here.

Respondent's Wife: The neighbors have one or two hives this year.

Respondent: Last year a lady had a couple hives and needed somewhere to put them, so she put them right back here. It was kind of interesting.

Respondent's wife: Yeah, they do really good they make 2 cups of money per hive.

Respondent: Yeah it's almost worth it okay.

Interviewer: So, thinking specifically about climate change, how concerned would you say you are about that issue?

Respondent: How concerned? I guess I am not at all convinced that I can change it. You know, I don't want it to get drier or warmer or whatever. I'm not at all convinced that I can make a difference there.

Interviewer: Okay, do you think that any changes in regards to precipitation, or you know you mentioned the heat, temperature changes, do you think any of these changes are caused by people primarily or just part of a natural cycle?

Respondent: Well, I guess part of the natural cycle. Myself, you know our son lives in, one of our son's, lives in Kentucky, and they had unbelievable rain. 8 inches I think in May and a snowy cold winter and we are out here dry. I just can't figure out how I can, how it can be the humans can change that.

Interviewer: So for you other than water because of course we know that is extremely important, what is the other most valuable natural resource needed for farming? For your farming operation?

Respondent: Well the land.

Interviewer: Yeah, I guess you have to have soil.

Respondent: Yes, is important to take care of the land.

Interviewer: So, is soil held a concern for you?

Respondent: Yes, Yeah

Interviewer: Alright, any other natural resource?

Respondent: Like?

Interviewer: Well, I suppose if you have sun, water, and soil. You don't rely on bees?

Respondent: No, but they are important for food.

Interviewer: Are you worried about the health or availability of natural resources in your area?

Respondent: So like?

Interviewer: So yeah you mentioned that soil health is a concern. Are you worried about the availability of any other natural resources?

Respondent: Like fertilizer?

Interviewer: Yes sure.

Respondent: Well, I guess not really at this point. Hopefully, it will not become an issue.

Interviewer: Have you changed any of your farming practices or decisions in recent years, such as the crops you grow, when you plant, or how you manage pests? Anything like that?

Respondent: I wouldn't have made any major changes. I just try to limit my use of chemical as much as I can.

Interviewer: Okay, so what would you say are the biggest challenges to farming in southeastern Idaho?

Respondent: You know I would say competition for land, and just water availability. The aquifer concerns that . . . I'm, you know we had a meeting that we are all supposed to cut back 13% on groundwater pumping. I am very curious how they are going to do it. I would like to, well I have my opinions of how, the farmers around here tend to shorten rotations, produce more high-value crops that use more water, and I think it's been a huge mistake, and I do feel like we need to lengthen our rotations. It would be better for the land and hopefully use less water. Like we use way less water on wheat than on sugar beets or potatoes.

Interviewer: Okay, is this challenge different than it used to be?

Respondent: Well, we used to think that we had just an unlimited amount of water but it just is not that way.

Interviewer: Do you feel like it is becoming more of a concern than he used to be?

Respondent: Yeah definitely.

Interviewer: So what would you save your favorite thing about farming in the area?

Respondent: Favorite thing? My dream is to someday do something where I don't worry about the weather, ever. That's it. I don't know my favorite thing is.

Respondent's wife: Taking grandkids in the tractor.

Interviewer: Do they like that tractor?

Respondent's wife: They love it, and the combine.

Respondent: I enjoy a lot of parts of farming; the challenges, the marketing. I like the equipment. I don't know. I just feel pretty lucky to have done what I have done . . . made it this far.

Interviewer: Okay, so where do you get your news about whether regulation basically any sort of farming news or information.

Respondent: A lot off the Internet. I guess primarily the Internet. Then we get, like Thresher will text us about prices. There are a lot of tools for. We have it made. Compared to the ways it used to be.

Interviewer: So, technology has helped?

Respondent: Yeah, well in some ways it made a more complicated because you have to be thinking about year-round instead of just take the crop to town and sell it.

Interviewer: So as far as regulation, you just go online as well for that information?

Respondent: Well, I attend a lot of meetings, and that is where we learn a lot.

Interviewer: So, which regulatory agencies, for example the USDA or any other regulatory agencies have you been in contact with over the several years?

Respondent: Well, mostly the USDA is the one that we deal with. We haven't had any run-ins with the EPA that I know of. I've tried to do the right thing and get along.

Interviewer: So, how has that experience been for you?

Respondent: Well, I can't say it has been bad. Well, there are always concerns that . . . if you use genetically modified seed and then what?

Interviewer: Is there anything that local, state, or federal government to do to help you in your farming practices?

Respondent: Well, the soil conservation does a lot. I was just in a meeting a week and a half ago when a guy, I don't even know where he was from exactly, but anyway he did a demonstration about how water penetrates soil and good healthy soil versus soil that has been overworked and that was . . .those are good tools for us to see.

Interviewer: So, what about people or organizations in the local area if anything they can do to aid you in your farming practices?

Respondent: I can't think of anything more.

Interviewer: Alright, so are you using any aerial drones in your farming operation?

Respondent: I haven't but it would be very interesting. I'm sure there's a lot you could learn.

Interviewer: Is that something you would be interested in in the future?

Respondent: Probably yeah. Hopefully, the price will come down and they will figure out all of the regulatory parts of it. I wonder what it could be like if you get every farmer out here trying to fly one of those things I have watched demonstrations and they are fascinating; what they can do.

Interviewer: Yes, we actually have one professor that is part of the MILES project. She uses them for farming. How would they benefit farming?

Respondent: I suppose being able to take pictures of the crop. When you stand on the side of the field like this everything looks fine, but when you go out there, you will find that the voles have done a lot of damage.

Interviewer: I keep hearing that they have been a big issue lately.

Respondent: Yes, huge. They are tearing up our grass, and I don't know where they came from, but I guess the product of that warm winter. I don't know.

Interviewer: Alright, well we're almost done. We just have a couple of brief demographic questions. So, including yourself, how many individuals live in your household?

Respondent: Just her.

Interviewer: Alright, so two?

Respondent: We are empty-nesters.

Interviewer: So, just in simple terms, how would you describe your political views?

Respondent: My political views? What does that have to do with anything? Well I am a Christian and I guess I am kind of conservative. I will tell you that much.

Interviewer: Okay, and your age?

Respondent: I am 59.

Interviewer: Finally, is there anything else you would like to share with us about farming that we have not touched on? Anything else that you would like to say?

Respondent: I don't think so.

Okay, well thank you very much.

