

Ecosystem Services and Idaho's Farmers

Interview Twenty-Seven

I- Can you tell us a little bit about how you got into the farming business?

R- Well we moved out here, we ended up with three acres of ground out here of the Jones' property. They had some ground in Washington and they decided they wanted to go out there and farm that, so they asked us to come farm this place. So that is when we started farming and it just progressed from there. I always had a full time job up to eight years ago.

I- so this is a family farm from many generations back, how long has this farm been in your family?

R- Well, what, you moved out here in 57? 60... since 1960, her family purchased this farm then.

I- What do you grow?

R- We are raising hay, pasture grain for cattle.

I- And about how many acres do you farm now? I know you said it started off as three acres.

R- Well we are farming about 140 right now.

I- have you changed any of your farming practices or decisions in the recent years, and if so why?

R- Well we are pretty much doing the same thing as normal or we always have I guess, just different. You know there is different chemicals and fertilizers that we are using that we didn't use to use.

I- ok, well that was one of the things that we wanted to ask about. Has urban expansion or nearby construction effected you and your farm?

R- Not here, we are on the reservation so. People really don't like to move out here or start a business on the reservation because they have to deal with the Indians and their tribe, and all their regulations. People aren't familiar with them and they don't want to get involved, so why cause a problem. And a lot of industry does not want to work with the Indians to try to develop a business or anything out here other than farming.

R- So there hasn't been any new housing developments?

I- No all the housing that is put in out here is mostly done by the tribe for their tribal members and that is subsidized by the government.

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

R- No.

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

R- Well right now we have a custom farming operation, and my son, Joyce, and I are all partners in it. I own 40%, my son owns 40%, and she owns 20%. So at some point my son will take over the whole operation; the custom part and the farm.

I- How important would it be to you that your farm remains in agriculture operation?

R- Well it is important, I don't see it being anything else.

I- have you seen any environmental changes in the last few years and if so what changes have you observed?

R- I haven't noticed a whole lot, everything seems to be about the same. You know some years we have ups and downs with drought years. Some years we got plenty of water, it changes from year to year, just kind of with the environment.

I- So no particular environmental changes that you have noticed that are consistent from year to year?

R- No, I mean things will change a little bit, but it's from wind erosion and changes.

I- For you what is the most valuable natural resource for successful farming?

R- Water.

I- Are you worried about the health or availability of any natural resources, including water in your area?

R- Yeah I'm a little concerned, of course you don't know what's going on the corporate world as far as fertilizer and chemicals, and everything else. And the environmental, EPA and everything is going to try and change or make things harder to grow crops.

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

R- Not really, we have some around but we raise alfalfa and stuff like that. You know we do have a few trees and different plants and stuff and you see bees around doing their thing.

I- have you noticed any changes in the bee population in recent years?

R- You know it's something that I don't really pay that much attention to, because we are not really dependent on the bees out here; we don't have to bring them in from outside to pollinate anything so. We haven't really noticed, we have noticed more hornets around you know more than anything.

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

R- We have always tried to be very conservation, you know to take care of the land. A lot of this ground hasn't been plowed for years, it has just been a pasture and grass and stuff. We run cows on it so it stays fairly stable.

I- so the use of G.E. or genetically engineered seeds has been in the news a lot recently, but the coverage rarely discusses how farmers are being impacted, positively or negatively. So has the use of G.E. seeds affected you as a farmer?

R- Well they really haven't affected me that I know of, but it is a little aggravating to listen to these people talk about it that don't really know what is going on. I mean your seeds has changed over the years to the positive direction. Something has changed, whether it be natural or scientific they are going to cross pollinate; they are going to do this or they are going to do that. So they just can't tell me you have got a GMO seed, there is a verity of things that happen to make them the way they are. Because a seed will cross pollinate over here with another different plant. We have plants and weeds and stuff show up on our farm all the time; well where do they come from? And then they are new breed weeds,

they are new varieties. So people need to stop worrying about them more than they do about the GMO stuff. And I have never heard of anybody getting hurt by this corn or whatever else so I don't know what they are worried about. You got 20-35 bushels of wheat back then and now you get 140-150 bushels of wheat. How are you going to feed the world if you go back to where you were 100 years ago? You are not going to be able to do it. These people that are wining about it are going to starve to death, but they will be the first ones to get the food, the other people won't, and that is my opinion.

I- are you using any genetically engineered seeds that you know of?

R- I haven't, but I have been thinking of planting Roundup ready hay, but I haven't at this time.

I- what is your opinion in general in sort of GMO crops?

R- Well I can't see that they are a problem myself.

I- so it's generally a positive?

R- Well they keep changing their attitude towards GMO products and seed and all that. I was at a meeting one time and there was a lady against growing crop using GMO and that stuff. So I said if you are going out to a dairy and getting manure and putting it on your crops, are those cows certified so they don't have any GMO products in them or any kind of chemical that you don't want to use? Well this was several years ago, well she didn't answer the question, and all of the sudden they decided they can't use cow manure unless it has already been certified organic. So it just always raises another question, and they just never get the results that they want; but yet they keep saying "we have got organics". But I really don't think there is anything that is true organics, because something is going to come along and screw it up whether it is a rain cloud that goes by, or the neighbor's pesticides blowing to that field from 100 miles away or whatever. You know and your rain isn't exactly pure, how many chemicals have you got in it, depending on what city it is coming from. I don't think they have ever achieved exactly what they think they are going to, or ever will.

I- What type of pesticides and or herbicides do you use on your farm?

R- I don't use a lot of pesticides, I usually just control weeds, you know we try to control weeds on the fence lines, ditch banks, and stuff like that, and a few weeds like in our lawn or pasture. To control them, as far as like a 24d, Roundup, different chemicals. A lot of the chemicals I put out, you don't have to have a license to put them out is what I'm trying to say, you can buy them at C.A.L. Stores or whatever. I've got a license if I needed it; I've taken classes and everything else but we don't use them products on our farm. If we need to I hire a professional, we have only had to spray they hay one time with any kind of product like that, that you know is labeled.

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

R- We talk to a professional and get their opinions about what we need, what kind of product we need to do to get what we need to achieve. So we will talk to a field man or something; fertilizer representative.

I- So what would you say are the biggest challenges you see to farming in South East Idaho?

R- It's just going to be a normal challenge, challenges we have all the time and keeps progressing. You know you keep running into new problems all the time and have to address them, and you address them

as they pop up. You've got a lot of support outside the farming community to a certain extent to help you out to some of those problems. You know the only other problem I can see that might be, you know like EPA; they have got a little too much authority I think. They need to be toned down a little bit, be able to be held accountable for what they are doing, not just make decisions on opinions of their help. Because a lot of your EPA and these different organizations; the reason they exist is to have a job, and if they don't make a problem somewhere down the line they do not have a job. So they have got to keep making noises so they keep their job. And they are not in business to make money, they are in business to spend money. And that is a whole lot different than what the farmers and the people that are in business are doing. We are in business to make money and support the communities. All the government agencies, a lot of them are just in business to make money, hire more people, hire their friend, they might find a job for their friend and just say "oh lets create a job for my friend" get him in here on the band wagon. That is my opinion about these agencies.

I- so you would call that one of the biggest challenges that you face on your farming?

R- I think so, one of the bigger ones.

R- I think the lack of knowledge from surrounding communities about what goes on and people that say "well if you are in the farming industry you make all this money". They want to make the payments on this equipment? I don't think so... Along with even in education, I work for a principle who one-time said "this farmer he is pulling his kid out of school to go on vacation, well why didn't he do it in the summer?" well because that same farmer was up at five thirty in the morning till midnight, and his kids were out there with him. There is just a lack of knowledge in the surrounding community.

I- I follow your point, and hopefully that is what this project will help with, at least getting some of your perspectives and experiences and stuff like that. So how do you think these challenges that you are talking about are different now than they were in the past?

R- Well a lot of them didn't exist in the past. You didn't have a lot of these problems, and I think the farmers were pretty consciences. You have always got some bad ones that make some poor decisions and they don't care about the environment; all they want to do is make money. These guys that want to farm all the time, they want to stay in business, and they don't want to jeopardize their farm. If they put the wrong chemical on their ground there is a chance they won't be able to get a potato crop on the same ground next year because they put the wrong chemical on their wheat to kill the weeds or something. So they have got to be on top of everything all the time, and make sure that they do not make a wrong move. So they are consciences, I mean it could be failure for them. If they put the wrong chemicals on or something, that could make it a problem for them the next year; you know that could make or break you.

I- What would you say is your favorite thing about farming in South East Idaho?

R- Well I don't know, it's just, I don't know if it is a favorite thing or not, it's just what you get use too. You know you are out in the environment and stuff, you can run your own show kind of to an extent. So I guess it's just being able to get out and do things. You know you're actually, it isn't like a lot of people in town, they belong to a gym or something and they have got to go exercise. Well its different here, we are exercising every day; we got to get up moving and do things. Winter time is a little different, but in the summer we are busy and we are getting exercise, so that's kind of the thing I like about it. It keeps

you active, and when you got a little bit of time in the winter time you can go on vacation or cruise or do something else.

I- So a lot of us, we have heard about the drought generally effecting the western U.S. a lot in the news. Do you worry about water availability and your water rights?

R- Well I do worry about it a little bit, you know the way they went about it way back when they did the adjudication. They came out to all the farms and took the waters away from the farmers. They said "well you have got a coral out here, you're not watering that in the summer time so we are going to take that water away from you; so you don't have it anymore."

I- So how long ago was that?

R- It has been back in the 80's. But what they do with the water is they get it all taken away from us so that they have got a whole lot of extra water. So what do they do with it, they sell it down the river somewhere. So once you do that it is gone, it is not going to come back. So if I decide to go water this three acres someday, and move that coral and get out of the cattle business, are they going to give me that right back. You know that is kind of one thing that I wonder about that kind of concerns me. You know it's just kind of a little ridiculous I think. Because once your water is gone it's gone. Seems to me they are getting rid of more water then what we have eventually it is going to catch up to us, and it always seemed to me that they do it all wrong anyway. You take the guy ahead of the ditch that has the most water rights, well that isn't the way that it works.

I- Do you use most or all of your allocated water rights now?

R- Yeah we use most of it. The thing with the tribe is they have a pretty good water right. The Indians do not keep track of it like everybody else. I think that they do not control it, they don't have the same control like every other water irrigation district. Like you take the ones from Blackfoot, or down to burly or something are pretty organized. They know what is going on, their ditch riders know exactly how much water each farmer is taking, and they can tell you, you have used all your water that you have allotted. Well the tribe can't, they don't keep track of all that; either they have too much in the canal or not enough. And the thing of it is, is that it is run by the B.I.A. Bureau of Indian Affairs, and they have got all mostly tribal members working for them, and they don't really know what is going on a lot of times, and they really don't care, as long as there is enough water coming out of reservoir to keep everybody happy. If they would run it like any other district, if they would get farmers on the board and let them control it, they would have a lot better handle on everything. Farmers know what needs to be done and they are conservative, and they know where to spend the money, and what needs to be done. But they have just got a couple people down there in Fort Hall and they make all the decisions, and all them guys don't have enough brains to blow their brains out; if you know what I mean.

I- So you feel like you know pretty well where your water is going, or how much of the water that you are using is, your keeping calculations of that pretty constant?

R- I used to write down every time I took the water, and every time I shut down. You know I haven't been doing that for the last year but, I don't know why, you get to busy and you can't keep track of all this stuff but. A lot of times I won't have water for ten days, because I don't need it. And if I got water on their schedule, this day to this day, well I don't need it this day to this day. I got my hay all cut, its down on the ground, I can't water field when my hay is cut laying on the ground; doesn't make a lot of sense.

So there is ten days there that I am not watering. There might be as long as a month without watering this ground. By the time I shut the water off for a week, cut the hay, get the hay bailed, get the hay in the stack, then we start over again. Then you're almost a month, so it is pretty hard to keep track of. You know if the Indians were keeping better track of it then they would be dumping less water out the end of the canal but they don't.

I- thinking about changes to the climate, how concerned are you about climate change?

R- Well I don't know, I have a problem with them saying the weather is changing. I mean it does change, one year it will be dry, and one year it will be to wet. Just take Texas for example, they were in a drought for a couple years. But if they wouldn't have had that drought they wouldn't have room for all that water they got all the sudden, there would be nowhere for it to go. And now it is going into all the reservoir they built over the last thirty years. Which they have done, for flood control. If there system would have already been full this year, what would have they done? They would have been in a lot of trouble, no place for the water to go. It is just a vicious cycle, things just never stay the same. The more things stay the same the more they change.

I- so where do you go to get information about weather, regulations, or other farming related things?

R- I go to my son, he checks his iPhone; well it's going to blow tomorrow, or there is a 50% chance of rain.

I- and does your son live nearby or on the farm?

R- Next door.

I- So you are all farming the same spot?

R- He's out bailing hay across the road right now.

I- and what regulatory agencies have you been in contact with in the last five years or so? And how was that experience for you, for example was it positive or negative?

R- What kind of regulatory agencies?

I- well you have talked a little bit about the E.P.A. but if there have been any other state officials out here.

R- Well you deal with the F.S.A. stuff like that and that is just normal. I don't have an opinion of them one way or the other. They are doing a job which they think is necessary and it is all government control. The government wants to know how much food is being grown because they don't want you to grow enough to take care of the population. The people in DC don't want to starve to death, so that's why they do all these surveys. It's because they want to know how much food we've got and where it is all at. So they want to control the markets, and they can make money that way too. They have got control and they have got access to all this information so they know where to invest their money. So they're making money off the farmer. And it is a law for us to fill out these surveys.

I- Ok, so it's what your growing and how much?

R- Umm hmm.

I- and that is coming from a federal or state official?

R- It will come from both federal, mostly federal. They will send you, this is the law, you have to fill this out.

I- What we are wondering there is whether you feel you are being excessively regulated or.

R- Well they don't know that you have got other things to do then sit around a fill out surveys. You know it's just like today doing this survey, I'm fine, I'm happy, I happened to have a little time. And I looked out today and I still don't have time, my son says "well dad have you got a little time here" and I says "well what do you need?" "well I need you to hook on to that 30 foot trailer and get it ready to go, also need you to hook on to the little 20 foot trailer, and would you go to town and get some twine?" so see, you never know what your day is going to bring. So that is what I am saying, you get a survey in the mail and you put it in there. So I put it aside and if I happen to stumble on it I get it filled out or try to get it partially filled out. Next thing I know I get a letter saying we didn't get your survey, or they are calling you on the phone wanting your surveys.

I- Well we are almost done here so you can get to all of those tasks that your son has requested. We just wanted to ask a couple of demographic questions. Including yourself how many individuals live in your household?

R- Just me and her, two of us and the dog.

I- And how would you describe your political views?

R. I don't know, I can swing either way, it just depends. You know I think the system is all screwed up. They want you to vote straight democratic or republican in the election and that doesn't make sense to me. You know if a democrat runs against a democrat then, in the primaries either to get into the general election. Once they tag you as a republican or democrat then you are supposed to think like' they are telling you how you are going to think.

I- So you would say you identify you don't identify with one political party?

R- No I wouldn't, I kind of swing both ways. You know if it's just a guy I like, then in the primary I will vote republican, if it is a democrat I like then I will vote democrat. You are kind of locked in to what you do, you don't have a lot of control over it unless you just don't vote at all.

I- and what is your age?

R- 67

I- and finally is there anything else you would like to share with us about farming in South Easter Idaho that we have missed, that you would like to.

R- Well I can't really think of anything that is particularly on my mind.

I- Which you want people to know or like?

R- Well I think farmers as a whole are conscientious and want to be here for the long term, and they want to be able to get along with other people and need to have their views know.