

## Ecosystem Services and Idaho's Farmers

### Interview Twenty-Six

I- How did you get into the farming business?

R- My dad had a farm and worked part time at the farm and part time at a full time job. So when I was ten years old I tell my boys I started driving barley, that's how I got my start.

I- how long have you been farming in the area?

R- The farm that we are farming now was farmed by my dad's uncle and he started in 1942, still got that farm in the family and we have never added to it.

I- About how many acres do you have now?

R- Were about 3600 presently?

I- what do you grow?

R- Wheat and barley, and this is the first year we have 35 acres of canola.

I- In what ways if any has urban or construction affected your farming practices?

R- It's been a pretty good impact on us, you know we have subdivisions that have moved in right next to the farm. You know it makes it tough on us because as soon as they move in all the sudden it should be the city, and so all the dust blows over on them and everything else and some of them get a little excited about that. Um we have to deal with their trash; we got one place, I don't know why it is, I guess because it's because we are down wind where the major wind comes from. But they will put their garbage cans out and they will tip over and all their trash will blow over the field. So we will go pick up three or four garbage sacks of garbage every spring over 300 acres. We shouldn't have to deal with that but we do. We have to be really careful when we spray weeds because in one case down in the west of town we were up to the line, there was no road between us and the subdivision and so we had to be careful. You know even if a slight breeze, even less than we have today, we couldn't spray with the subdivision next to it. If the wind was coming the right direction, if it was the prevailing wind direction then it would help us. Some of the folks in the subdivision don't understand when water runs off of a field its gonna go somewhere, and it's done that for eons of time, and when it runs down through there little lot they get a little excited about that. And then you know road congestion you know the ones that are out on the farm country are on the county roads, and you know there is more congestion on the roads, you know our roads and our county aren't really wide enough for the big equipment that we run up and down the roads now. So you people on there that live there, and one road here the west of town they made an agreement with the commissioners that they would paved the road for them when they had ten houses built for the subdivision. So last summer they added there tenth house and they went down and paved it. So now we have a drop off about that high on the shoulder, and so we can only get over so far and the cars have to back up. We've been working with the commissioners on that; to widen the shoulders a little bit so we can pull off. You know all the roads were made back when they had littler equipment and just hasn't kept up and when you add more residents and more vehicles you know. So that causes an impact to us. I guess we have had it all to ourselves for so long it's hard to share. You

know we try to get along to do that, but it does cause them grief and us too. And a lot of that could be the county does need to gear up and put wider roads in.

I- Do you have any current plans to sell or lease any part of your farm?

R- I'm going to transition it to my two sons. I'm not going to sell it to anybody outside, and it is doubtful we would lease it you know with the two boys there. You know if the boys came back to the farm and to this business then yeah id be looking into doing some of that kind of stuff fairly soon.

I- So when you stop farming yourself, what do you plan on doing?

r- Basically just retiring and you know it's probably not going to happen for a while. As long as I can continue to do something I'm going to do it, because I don't know what I'm going to do; I mean I've worked two jobs all my life and if I went to zero, there's only so many fish you can catch.

I- So would it stay in the family?

r- The farm?

I- Yeah.

R- Oh yeah! That's my intent is for the boys to end up with it.

I- So how important is it for your farm to remain in agriculture operation?

R- Well I think very important because you know because the boys are going to need it for a living. It's kinda hard to take what we got invested in it and not do anything with it, there is not really much you could do with any of it. I guess if industry just flocked to the area we could sell it to the industry, but that is not going to happen and so it basically has to stay as a farm.

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

R- We've done some, you know we are trying to reduce the tillage that we do. The next drill that we buy is going to be a no till type drill, which will let us in the cultivation practice even more. You know all that has to be done in time; we have to pay for it. It would be nice to go out and buy all the toys that you want and do what you want to do but you cannot do that. Another thing we've done on everything that we farm south and west of town. We've cooperated with the government several years ago and put in diversions in the drainages and they came in and put little dams. We've built some of our own and clean them out and beef them up every year and maintain those, so if the water does run so it catches in those little sentiment basins. The tillage that we do we try to open it up so that the moisture does go in. On the fields that are real erosive we will use a ripper and will open it up and we will have very little soil leave the farm in the place. You know and we open it up and it just melts and just soaks it up like a sponge.

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

R- We use 24D, and we use Ally and that's for broad leaf; those two. And then we use Axial for wild oats, and we use some Roundup, we don't use a lot of roundup. I guess that is a conservation practice that we do use. When we summer fall, if we can catch the summer fall when it's wet then Roundup works; Roundup doesn't work in dust. So if we catch the summer fall when it's damp and spray it we will use

Roundup and spray the weeds and save that tillage trip. So that's probably the extent of our roundup, you know we probably use 50 or 60 gallons of Roundup every year.

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

R- Well what we do is when we're in the combines, we got notebooks in there with maps in them. So whoever is driving the combine makes notes on those maps of areas where we have an oat problem, Russian thistle problem. Then in December of every year we take off and spend a couple days in Salt Lake or Las Vegas or somewhere and do a strategic planning session. And we sit and analyses those records that we have kept during August and say ok this field here needs this kind of treatment. So if we got wild oats then you know we have got to use the Axial, if we got Russian thistle then we use the Ally. We try and do the cheapest and you know the most cost effective chemical that we can to get the job done that needs to be done. You know we just don't want to go put 24d on Russian thistle because it won't do it; it will stun them but it doesn't do it.

I- Ok so it's very organized?

R- You know that's one thing that we try and do not only with that but the rest of our farm operations covered during that strategic planning session. You know review the chemicals and decide what crop rotation we are going to have. A lot of our weed management we try and do with summer fall. The chemicals work great in that crop but a rod weeder doesn't leave many weeds when you summer fall and so.

I- Has the use of G.E. seeds affected you as a farmer in any way?

R- This is the first year we have ever had a GMO crop, the canola is GMO, its Roundup ready, and it was sweet. We had wild oats in there volunteer wheat, we had grass. We went in when it was time to kill all the broad leaves and sprayed it with a pint of; you know the manufacture said to use a quart, and we cut in half and used a pint and I mean it cleaned everything out. We are moving pipe through that, we are moving to wheel lines and a hand line through that canola. I haven't seen a weed that had survived it. So from that standpoint it is very advantageous to me to have that tool in the tool box. As far as having the products; you know the two other crops that we raise: wheat and barley, don't have any GMO. So there is a lot of discussion now with wheat coming out with biotech traits and when I got put on the wheat commission six years ago they said "that's twelve years away", and they are still saying twelve years away. And a lot of the problem is is that the customers are not ready for it, and a lot of the growers aren't ready for it. And until the growers are accepting of it, and the customers that buy the wheat are accepting of it it's not going to happen. Maybe an area where it has affected me is, like with corn; they've come in and put all these biotech traits in it and increased the yield corn. And so there is more corn out there; which corn sets the price for everything else and reduces my price of wheat and barley. So I've been having kinda an economic effect from that. And a lot of people, maybe some of it is being mitigated by the fact that people that can plant corn and wheat will plant corn. So that takes wheat acres out which drives that wheat price up a little bit. So maybe it is; it could affect me a lot, but there could be a little effect there.

I- So what is your opinion on genetically engineered seed?

R- I don't know if I really have a problem with it. You know there is a lot of problems that we have that can be dealt with with genetic modification. And it can be dealt with with conventional breeding, but I'm

not going to live long enough to see those kind of things you know come about. You know one thing that they have done with corn is that they have introduced a trait for drought resistance. You go back four years ago when we had the drought in the mid-west, and we wound up with the fourth largest corn crop ever. And the reason was is that everyone had this drought resistant, drought tolerant trait in the corn seed, so even in a dry year it did really quite well; that would be really nice in wheat. Another thing that would be nice would be nitrogen use efficiency, so we wouldn't have to use as much nitrate. That's in corn too, where the plant makes better use of the nitrogen that's in the soil. So I think it needs to be tested, we need to make sure it's safe; as long as that is done I don't have a problem with genetically engineered seeds.

I- Have you noticed any change in environmental conditions in your area over the past few years, you know beyond normal variation?

R- You know back when I was a kid, you go out east of town that always had a pond in it. Always, I mean it never even evaporated even in the summer. I haven't been out there this spring because my boys have been working that piece, but I bet its dry, I bet there is not a drop of water in it. Which tells me that we are in a dryer climate then we were back in the 60's. I wouldn't dispute the fact that we are in a warmer climate then we have been. But in some respects I kinda like it, because my fall wheat doesn't freeze in June like it use too. You know we haven't had a frost that has effected out wheat in about ten or fifteen years. So global warming, if you want to call it that, or climate change has a positive effect on my winter wheat. But you know it is a little dryer and, some years you know this year we have had eight inches of rain sense the 24<sup>rd</sup> of April up here. My rain gages all over, two of them in different parts of the valley both have over eight inches of rain in them. We had eight or nine inches of rain last fall after the first of August, so I like that kind of a drought. Capital Press said all of Idaho is in a drought, I said geese we got half of our annual rain fall in one month. So I think it is kind of a dryer warmer climate. There again as we adapt with the breeding programs I think we can mitigate that drought problem, with verities that are more tolerant of drought.

I- Have you noticed any variation in your growing season?

R- You know I think it is a little bit longer. You know this year was kinda hard to judge and every year is different. But back in January, February, and March, everybody thought we would be ready to go. And there was a lot of guys here that didn't get done tell like the tenth of June. A lot of them were like, "It's too early to plant the first of March". If it wasn't for tax returns we would have been out there the middle of March instead of the middle of April. Just because I've learned, you don't go buy the calendar, you go by Mother Nature. If the fields are ready to work you go farm them. You know we do have a longer season generally. I don't know if I can say that every year, but I think longer then back in the 60's when I was a kid.

I- what about average winter temperatures or snow fall?

R- I think generally; the winters there wasn't as much snow fall as when I was a kid, and definitely not as cold. I think twenty below was the coldest we had, and that was before thanksgiving. As a kid a remember it being 30-35 below, It got down to 39 below, and that is the coldest I can remember; That's per Monsanto's thermometer. My dad came home one morning and worked all night. He said it got 39 below last night. Their thermometer I'd hope would be more accurate than the one in the back yard. So I think it's generally milder winters. You know there's winters where we have just as much snow as I

remember as a kid. Seems like anymore when you get rain you really do get rain, where back in the 60's if you got rain it would be more even rain. Never really got the real heavy rain storms like we get now.

I- So just maybe more extreme?

R- Maybe more intense, and less of them. You know there is not much of them, but the ones there are theirs a lot more in them.

I- What do you think is causing these types of changes?

R- You know I don't know, a lot of folks think it's man made, but I don't know if I would agree with that or disagree. You know we may be doing some of it, but I don't know all of the warming is causing; climate change caused by man. I wouldn't go there yet.

I- Do you worry about water availability or water rights?

R- We have one farm that we lease that has water on it, and even I dry years that spring just pumps water out like you wouldn't believe. It's amazing what it puts out, it doesn't seem to be effected by the climate, it just pops it out. The city of Soda Springs pulls water out of there for culinary purposes. You know our water right on that is eight cubic feet per second; we're only using about 1/3 of that to water our 250 acres that we water. So I'm not concerned with that, I don't think that's a concern to me. Some of my neighbors that water out of bear river; I think that's a concern to them sometimes. But personally I don't do that, so what's in the Bear River doesn't bother me.

I- and the rest you just dry farm?

R- Yeah.

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

R- We don't, no.

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

R- Not so as I'd really notice it, but it's hard to tell. You know you see them around and you still see them. You know I don't have any bench mark in the sixties verses now. You know I don't know, we still see a lot of bees. In fact that canola I'm getting worried about moving pipe in it because it's got bees or something related to a bee pollinating. I don't know that I could really say; don't know anything to bench mark it with.

I- How concerned are you with the notion of climate change?

R- You know I think it's something that we need to be cautious of, but I don't know how... You know if man is causing it or he's not. If it's just normal warming and changing in the climate then no sense of working about something we cannot do anything about. And we are not going to be able to move the earth away from the sun if it's not caused by man. I think to a degree that we need to maintain, if man is causing some of it we need to be careful that we don't put ourselves out of business so to speak. You know a lot of people I don't think understand where their food comes from. The wheat council did a deal down by the bull in Wall Street in New York. They had an urban wheat field with pots in various stages of growth at a quarter of an acre of wheat in pallets, boxes, and pots. They asked these people where their bread comes from, "the grocery store" was the most common answer. They didn't realize it

comes from these plants that is making wheat that is making flour. So I think that is something that the American people need to realize is that we are going to really tighten up the regulations on industry and everything else that causes climate change. Well what kind of an impact is that going to have on to maintain food supply. That's the part that concerns me, is that we do not go overboard.

I- Other than water. That is the most valuable natural resource needed for farming?

R- Well I think its soil for sure, you know that's what we try and take care of the best we can.

I- are you worried about the availability?

R- Well the availability is going to change over time as we continue to put in sub divisions. So that definitely causes an impact.

I- Have you changed any of your farming practices or decisions in recent years in relation to what you grow?

R- Probably not significant, we have done some crop rotation to manage wheat pests. Like I said earlier, you cannot do everything you need to do to manage pests. You can use chemicals to do it, but I don't like to use those strong of chemicals, because it's hard on the crop.

I- what would you say is the biggest challenge to farming in South East Idaho?

R- One concern that I really have is regulation and what I see some of the regulators come out with. At one time the EPA was proposing to not let us let dust out the back of our combines. You know we can't run it, because when you thrash the wheat dust come out the back. Another concern is the high price of inputs. You know the price on commodity went up from \$3.50 wheat to \$8 wheat, the price of fertilizer, diesel and everything else.

I- What would you say is your favorite thing about farming in south east Idaho.

R- Well I think the thing I enjoy the most is you can see when you have accomplished something. You know you go out and plant a field and you watch through the growing season and harvest it. And you know it is real disappointing when Mother Nature doesn't do her or his part. And you don't get the moisture you need, or the temperatures you need. Kinda dashes your hopes when you get a June 20<sup>th</sup> frost. But I think just the satisfaction of seeing something grow.

I- Where do you generally get farming related information from?

R- Lately a lot of us come through the wheat commission. A lot of meeting with U.S. Wheat, National Association of Wheat Growers and you know just a lot of resources that are available to me as a commissioner. You know before that it was kind of word of mouth, and what is the neighbor doing, what's successful to the neighbor. You know a little bit from the University of Idaho when they do there test plots.

I- what regulatory agencies have you been in contact with in the past several years?

R- Well the EPA had their north western regional guy here talking to us about fuel storage and the requirements for that. You know one of the regulators we have contact with in the wheat commission is the Idaho Department of Ag; we have a working relationship with them They renew my license so I can use restricted use pesticides, which we don't use very often, maybe once a year. So I deal with them

every three years to renew my license. You know DEQ, we have dealt with them a little bit with field burning; you have to deal with them to get a permit. They have to tell you on what day and when you can start the fire.

I- what would you say your experience in general would be with these agencies?

R- Generally pretty good, as long as they keep somewhat realistic of what they expect. You know if they got everything they wanted we would really be in trouble.

I- IS there anything that the Local, state, or federal government could do for you or your farming to make it better?

R- Like I said earlier they could definitely improve the roads. And no fault of theirs really because I realize that resources are limited.

I- what about local people or organizations?

R- Well I think there is a wide gap in where people think their food comes from. And I think there is a need for some education to educate the public so they are aware of what happens to put a slice of bread on the plate. But somehow we need to do a better way of educating county governments and more public in what takes place, and why a lot of these things that we are fighting for are important to fight for.

I- Have you ever used any Ariel drones?

R- No I have not. You know as time goes on the drones maybe as time goes on it will be more important.

I- besides yourself how many individuals live in your home?

R- One, just me and my wife.

I- In simple terms, how would you describe your political views?

R- I'd probably lean towards conservative, you know moderate to conservative, I'm not tea party.

I- what is your age?

R- 62

I- Is there anything else you would like to say that we haven't covered in the area?

R- I don't think so, I think you have covered it.