

# Tied to the Land

## Salute to Agriculture

Fourth in a Series

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Leader Editor/GM

*March is the time to recognize farmers, ranchers and dairymen and the role they play in putting food on our tables. March 18 is National Ag Day, and as Box Elder County is a leader in the state in agricultural production – field crops, cattle, sheep and dairy cows – this series salutes those who wouldn't trade a tractor seat for a seat on Wall Street and prefer punching steers to punching a time clock.*

Looking back, there are a few things David Smith regrets. He should have listened more in those “boring” chemistry classes or paid attention when his college professor discussed the composition of soil.

Maybe he should have taken off “the blinders” a little sooner when it came to agriculture and “broaden my horizons.” Perhaps if he had worked harder to expand his crop ground, increase his cattle herd and make more money, he would be in a different place.

Then on the other hand, this farmer and rancher couldn't be happier with his plot of ground in Snowville, in the direction his life has taken and how he is making a living for and with his family.

Dave operates a 1,600-acre dry farm he owns with his brother, raising organic wheat. On the side, he and his family also run about 65 head of beef cattle and tend pens full of soon-to-be show pigs or pork loins, depending on the breeding.

His regular paycheck, however, comes from being the manager of the farm side of what was once the Rose of Snowville Ranch, now in the hands of an investment group out of Idaho, Standee Premium Western Forage.

His path to this present sense of contentment was a fairly straight one, David said, with maybe a twist or two along the way. “I always wanted to be a full-time farmer. I love agriculture.”

That love began at a young age in Park Val-

ley. David's father tried his hand at farming there, but by the time David was eight, the ground was sold and the elder Smith traded his tractor for a nine-to-five job that took the family all over the state. David swore he would revive the farm life he cherished, put down deep roots and raise his children in one place.

When he was older, David headed off to Utah State University, bent on getting a degree in Agriculture Systems and Technology. “I had it in my mind that I was going to college then raise beef cattle and ride a horse.”

He tried that avenue in Coalville with his wife, Trudy. But in 1997, with the help of a FSA Beginning Farmers program, he and his brother purchased the farm ground south of Snowville. “I still had my blinders on,” he admitted. “In my mind, it was, ‘I don't want to dry farm. I don't know anything about it.’”

The operation was done long distance for a time, and then David coaxed Trudy to move to what she considered “the middle of nowhere,” and set up housekeeping in a single-wide trailer, which has since been swapped out for a comfortable ranch house.

They were now dry farmers, harvesting acres and acres of wheat. Dave said he learned quickly from his neighbors what works and what doesn't on a crop that is literally in the hands of nature once it is planted.

Those nearby farmers showed him the value of organic with his wheat crop, and it took only one harvest to convince him that was the way to go. Since then about 800 acres of wheat (about half the farm is left fallow each year) have been void of chemicals and fertilizers.

That clean crop is shipped to Wheatland Seed in Collinston or Logan, and David is proud of the return on his investment of time and effort.

But just as it is in most families, “kids are expensive,” he said – and his four (three girls and a boy) are no exception.

To bolster the budget, David has always held a second job as a backup, just in case the fall moisture is scarce at planting and the weeds

are more plentiful than the stalks come cutting time.

Working for Standee is the best of both worlds, David claims. Unlike the family farm, the larger operation is irrigated land using the best in technology available. Equipment is run by GPS and sprinklers can be activated with the push of an iPad button.

“I've learned that sitting on a tractor or a horse isn't the only way to be in agriculture,” he said. “There is so much other stuff that is so interesting.”

While David is down the road engineering irrigation systems and mapping fields, he can always count on the crew back at the ranch. “We couldn't do it if Trudy wasn't here,” he admits. “She watches the farrowing pigs and keeps an eye on the new heifers.”

His children have learned to step in and help where needed, as well. Family time means walking hogs or lead calves for the next livestock show. There are animals to feed, pens to clean and cattle to move.

The Smith herd has also learned the farm requires a lot of sacrifice, in time and material wants. “We know we can't have everything,” said oldest daughter Kinzie, a junior at Bear River High School. “We always put the farm first. But there is no better place to be.”

The teen takes after her dad in that respect. “Being in agriculture keeps me in the rural area and I like being with rural people,” David said. “My goal was to be involved in agriculture. There are so many different facets of involvement. I love to see the seasons change and the work that goes with those changes. I like watching what I've raised go on to produce; seeing a new calf on an old cow.”

He said he often sits on the combine and reminisces about other years working the same piece of ground and feeling a sense of awe and satisfaction. “I am very tied to the land. I wanted to be involved so it doesn't matter if I am here or over there (Standee), I am involved in agriculture. I am comfortable.”

And for that, he has no regrets.

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