

2015 Celebrate National Ag Day

Melvilles seek to carry on a family farming legacy

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Tim and wife Audry began experimenting with direct seeding in the 1970s, shortly after establishing their own proprietorship not far from where Audry's family homesteaded in the 1880s. According to Kurt, when very early on, the family witnessed the disastrous effects of a down-pour on a just-cultivated field next to a field of stubble (which emerged unscathed) it "sealed the deal."

No-till requires more management and crop rotation in order to limit disease and pest issues, but the long-term aim is to reduce the need for "inputs" (agricultural chemicals) by increasing the health — and diversity — of the soil.

"Back in the '80s, Dad just did wheat and barley," said Kurt. "Now we have peas, mustard, Timothy hay, alfalfa, canola and others in the mix. It's definitely more intensive from a management standpoint, but direct seeding has already been widely adopted in many countries with zero government subsidies. I think that's proof that this is the most cost-effective way as well as better ecologically."

The family has embraced the advantages of evolving technology. For example, global positioning systems are installed in many of the farm's implements to allow precise placement and application of seed and fertilizer; these devices prevent waste and over-application that could happen due to driver error. There are also several solar projects on site to offset



Jennifer Hobbs photo

Kurt Melville explains how a commercial no-till seed drill works. The family will likely soon replace this machine with a low disturbance drill that looks similar, but leaves a nearly invisible footprint on the field.

For more information

Call: Cornerstone Farms, 541-398-0166
Website: www.cornerstonefarmsjv.com.

the energy consumed by the operation.

Keeping the farm going through the years has included leasing and renting land in addition to what they own, as well as creating custom farming and harvesting services. These and other strategies allow them to leverage their resources in a market that often has very slender profit margins.

"The cost of machinery and land continues to go up faster than the commodity that we are producing goes up," said son Kevin Melville, who manages approximately 1,000 irrigated acres under K & K Farms, LLC. "Change is always hard no matter what you're doing, but you have to be willing to diversify to make it work."

Much of what the Melvilles grow is sold as seed; Cornerstone Farms is also a certified seed warehouse. According to Kurt Melville, many criteria must be met to qualify for seed production. Producers have to go through strict certification and inspection processes, but there is also a higher value placed on the end product.

The Melvilles have cultivated both local and regional partnerships in an effort to keep costs down and maximize value-add in everything they produce. One key partnership Tim Melville highlights is with Shepherd's Grain. Cornerstone Farm is one of nearly 60 certified sustainable growers who raise wheat for the Spokane-based mill whose goal is to produce a high-quality product that fosters a strong connection between producer and consumer. A person who purchases a bag of flour from Shepherd's Grain can use the serial number on the package to discover which farm grew the crop it came from.

"We grow wheat. Wheat that represents locally grown, family farmers," said Shepherd's Grain co-founder Fred Fleming. "By purchasing [our] products not only do you become a food activist, you also become a disciple to save the family farm."

Other associations Cornerstone Farms works with to promote growers' interests, research, and collaboration include: The Food Alliance, Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association, Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center, and Oregon Wheat Growers League. But at the end of the day, the most important relationships to the Melvilles are found at home.

"The greatest farming legacy is one that can be left for our future generations," states the Cornerstone Farms, J.V. site. "Tim received that

legacy from his father and grandfather. Both of Tim's sons, Kurt and Kevin, have followed the farming path. Now a fifth generation waits in the wings. Establishing a sound business, progressive practices, conservation and

a joy of farming in seven grandchildren inspires our progress into the future."

For more information about Cornerstone Farms, call 541-398-0166 or visit their website: www.cornerstonefarmsjv.com.

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Wallowa County Agriculture Tidbits

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as being A.C. Smith. Yet, one of the first individuals to recognize Wallowa County for its value as grazing land was James Tully in 1871.

An Era of Legislation

The 1992 listing of the Snake River Chinook Salmon was the first listing of an anadromous fish in the United States, and spotlighted areas with the salmon. Wallowa County happened to be one of those areas.

Current Situation

Over 60% ownership of cattle operations is at least two generations old (Williams,

2005). Grazing continues to be a major part of the Wallowa County economy and social structure. The livestock industry still produces approximately 50% of the agricultural money in Wallowa County. Agriculture accounts for approximately 19% of the county's income.

Change is inevitable, but with the perseverance that Wallowa County stockmen have shown for over a century, the livestock industry will continue

to be a major part of Wallowa County's economy and community. With wise management of the land, the collaboration of the local managers of the federal lands and the knowledge of local land owners/managers; cattle ranching will be profitable and sustainable.

Tidbits were compiled from the Wallowa County OSU Extension Service Office's website, www.extension.oregon-state.edu/wallowa

Animal Counts

	1910s	1940s	1970s	2000s
Sheep	300,000	65,000	15,000	1,500
Beef	18,000	28,000	26,000	27,000

Did You Know...



You should remove the leafy green tops from radishes, beets, turnips, and carrots before refrigerating. The greens pull moisture from the vegetables causing them to lose freshness. If you're going to use the greens, wrap and refrigerate them separately.

Email questions and thoughts to sherri4@myfrontiermail.com

Currie's Farm Direct Market
Open Friday and Saturdays
8am to 3pm in Joseph (next to laundromat)



Bank of Eastern Oregon



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