

Emery Gentry: Following in the Family Footsteps

Emery Gentry has a farm just outside the small Eastern Oregon town of Weston. With several hundred acres, he raises dryland winter wheat, along with a small cattle operation. His work has built off of what his great-grandfather started so many years ago.

His great-grandfather – also named Emery – wore many hats throughout his life. He grew up as a cowboy, driving horses from Heppner to Arlington in the early 1900s. When he came to Weston, he became a businessman and entrepreneur, starting a Ford car dealership and operated a service station that sold farm trucks to farmers during the Depression. The family has stories of how he used to take trade-ins from farmers on whatever they could, even accepting a rifle as a down payment for a new farm truck. He also owned his own fleet of trucks that were used to haul peas to the cannery and firewood. When his great-grandfather bought the ranch, he grew some wheat, but it mainly operated as a cattle ranch. And perhaps as a tribute to his business, their cows are branded with the V8 register, a clever nod to the fact that he bought the ranch when Ford came out with the Ford V8 motor.

As a young man, Emery entered Oregon State University with the goal of coming back to farming. He went on to earn a degree in agricultural science, and minors in crop science, animal science and business. This, in combination with the knowledge gleaned from his family, provided him a substantial foundation for leading the family's future.

Emery started farming six years ago when he worked in partnership with his dad. When he joined his dad, much of the farm was foothill ground so went into Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Since they needed to generate revenue, he worked with his dad to start their farming business. He went on to expand this business when a neighbor farmer retired, giving Emery the opportunity to work with him for a while and then purchase his equipment and take over the leases. It makes for a unique blend of multi-generational and a startup farming operation.

Emery talks about the changes to wheat farming that have taken place over the years, particularly related to technology. Satellite imagery can now be used to look at a field and determine the soil profile. By figuring out where the light spots are on fertilizer and nutrients, varying levels of fertilizer can be applied to specific areas.

"My grandfather and great-grandfather couldn't even fathom what would be happening today," he says. A large portion of what Emery focuses on is the chemistry, inputs, and fertilizer application. By working with an agronomist, he can control the weeds to get maximum growth potential out of the crop in an affordable way.

Emery continues to work with his dad who drives a truck, as well as a cousin who also farms near Milton-Freewater, continuing and building on what his family has created. As for his own legacy, he wants to make sure the next generation has a valuable asset, whether or not they wish to take up farming. "I want to do my part and do the best I can," he says. "I just want to be productive with my time so I set them up to have something they can either take on or have something of value, a valuable asset that they could do something else with. I want it to be up to them. I want to do my part to make sure it's worth something when I'm done with it."

Emery Gentry is a member of the Board of Directors for the Oregon Wheat Growers League and serves as the Umatilla County President.