



Ben Maney: Continuing a Family Legacy

Farming is like no other profession. The days start early and typically go past sunset. There are no sick days or rescheduling for tomorrow. There is risk and sacrifice. But it also provides a family with a legacy, and a story that can continue into the future.

Ben Maney knows this well. As a fifth-generation farmer, he is familiar with the realities of relying on the fields for his livelihood, like his father and grandfather before him. It has also created a family legacy that can continue through future generations.

The land he and his wife, Julie, farm is the family farm that was established in 1892. There are many stories that capture the changes over time. His great-great grandfather used wooden combines that were pulled by a team of mules. When his grandfather farmed, plowing started in February or early March in order to turn the dirt over and control weeds. The steel track tractor ran every day until harvest. Growing up, Ben remembers GI trucks being used to carry grain to an old wooden gravity-fed elevator.

Changes have continued over the years. Three years ago, Ben started a cattle operation, diversifying his operation.

While Ben still uses conventional practices, the type of equipment used and the efficiency has improved. Technology has also changed the game. Equipment can be auto-steered through GPS. Yield monitors track bushels per acre using satellite imagery, giving him the ability to create a variable rate prescription for fertilizing the following year.

"Things are changing quickly," Ben says. "What we can do in 10, 20 years could be a totally different ball game."

But one thing that hasn't changed is the fact that farming is a lifestyle as much as a profession. Families not only provide the support needed to complete the work, but in taking care of the land for future generations.

"The mindset of the family was always, if you wanted to farm you would have an opportunity to farm," he says. That was the opportunity his grandpa gave his dad, and his dad gave to him. Ben hopes to give his son, Rhett, the same opportunity.

"Our legacy is making sure that if Rhett wants the opportunity to farm out here, he can."

The risk and challenges of farming remain. Even as harvest wrapped up this summer for his soft white wheat crop, Ben reflected on the previous season and the uncertainty he faced due to the weather conditions.

“It was so dry last year,” he says. “It was still quite dry in the fall for seeding, so we weren’t sure what was going to happen in 2022.” Then, the rain arrived, producing some of the best yielding wheat in years.

While farmers may be accustomed to dealing with shifting weather patterns, the global pandemic added a new layer of challenges over the last few years that have impacted farmers. Economic shutdowns caused supply-chain delays, making it harder to get parts when equipment broke down. The rising costs of fertilizer is also forcing him to reevaluate his practices and get creative to find solutions.

But no matter the challenge faced Ben says, he has adapted.

“Farmers are unique in the idea that they will find a way to make it happen,” he says. “We had input challenges, but we found alternatives. We found a different way to do things.”

Following the summer harvest comes the planting of the winter wheat crop in the fall. The early days continue into the twilight as another season ends and begins, all in an effort to continue the work of previous generations producing food to feed the world.

“This farm has been here a long time, it’s been profitable for a lot of years, and it’s here for the future.”

Ben Maney is a member of the Board of Directors for the Oregon Wheat Growers League, and served as President in 2022.