

Kurt Melville: Building a Foundation for the Future

At Cornerstone Farms in Enterprise, Oregon, you will find much more than fields of wheat. Kurt Melville, along with his father Tim, and brother Kevin, have worked together to develop a farm that is rooted in a legacy of stewardship, with an eye toward the future.

“The legacy of our farm, I think, is even in the name,” says Kurt. “We chose Cornerstone Farms because we want it to be here for a long time. We want it to have the traditional values that we grew up with and we feel allowed us to experience that iconic American dream.”

Cornerstone Farms is a multi-generational, family-owned farm. The farm was started by Tim Melville in 1978, after he decided to move his family closer to town. Kurt and Kevin are fourth generation family farmers. Each year the Melville family grows dozens of crops on their 5,000 acres. Nearly half of the land produces wheat, while the rest is split between rotating crops like barley, canola, mustard, hay, quinoa and more. The family carefully plans out their crops and crop rotation to allow for the best soil health, weed control, and crop production. Every decision they make keeps their family, and their land, in mind.

“We sit down, my dad, my brother and I, we develop budgets, we look at cropping systems, while keeping in mind our desire to have a sustainable farm,” said Kurt. “We can’t just look at what will make us the most money this year, we have to look five, ten years down the road.”

Kurt and his family were early adopters of new farming techniques and technology, and today they operate using conservation practices like precision agriculture, variable rate applications, direct seeding, crop rotation, and cover crops. The goal for the farm, and for their fields, is to conserve and improve what they have, while reducing runoff and soil drift. Weather events in the early 1980’s caused significant soil loss, and now the Melville’s are determined to preserve their soil and work every year to make it even better.

Kurt draws on the experience and wisdom of older farmers in the region, coupled with modern research and techniques to constantly improve the farm. He notes that the ability today to snap a photo of a new pest or weed and send it to researchers or other farmers over the internet has been a huge help in identifying and combatting issues that arise. Kurt and his family have been actively involved in various boards and commissions, including the Oregon Wheat Growers League, which has given them a great network of people and resources that make solving problems easier.

Over the years Cornerstone Farms has worked hard to diversify their crops, and they have found success in trying new things. It does not come without risk but growing a dozen different crops has helped with the health of the farm, both financially and of the land itself. Kurt speaks passionately of the work he does, the land he cares for, and about the future of agriculture in Oregon.

“If we don’t look to the longevity, the financial stability, and the environmental stewardship of the ground that we are farming, we will not be able to pass that legacy on to future generations,” says Kurt.

Like many farmers, Kurt hopes that one day his kids and his brothers’ kids will decide to come home and continue the farming legacy created by his grandfather. In the meantime, they will continue to work hard, improve their practices, and enjoy looking out across their fields at the beautiful Wallowa Mountains.

Kurt Melville is a member of the Board of Directors for the Oregon Wheat Growers League, and serves as the Wallowa County President.