

Lessons in Farming: A Pathway of Continuous Education
Board Profile on Paul Reed, Union/Baker County President

Paul Reed counts himself as one of the lucky ones. He spends his days doing what he loves: learning and farming. It is what he grew up doing on the family farm in Union County and what he seeks to continue to do as his responsibilities increase with farm operations.

Initially the farm focused mainly on grass seed production. It was established by his great grandfather who was also one of three founders of Blue Mountain Seeds. When operations transitioned to his grandfather, they started to incorporate mint production and more wheat in their rotation. Now the farm is owned by his uncle Brett and includes both dryland and irrigated agriculture.

As the 4th generation, Paul grew up with that strong family farm focus, riding a combine with his grandfather at the age of four. A lot has changed since then. His responsibility increased over the years from driving combine at harvest, to working full-time and now being in charge of a crew moving handline. He has seen a shift in production practices as the operations moved to no-till which has been a benefit particularly for fields coming out of grass rotation, where he sees a significant benefit in the reduction of diesel use. And the equipment he uses is faster, more efficient and more consistent.

All of the changes and innovations on the farm have inspired Paul to seek opportunities to benefit from mentorship and continuous education. He is currently in his last term at Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) and scheduled to graduate in June with a crop production degree. He states that the program is helping to set him up for success, particularly since BMCC has integrated the critical business aspects, including accounting, into the crop production course work. Producing a crop each year requires a lot of financial resources and Paul recognizes that he needs “to know how to manage it.” His favorite class on ag machinery required him to run the numbers, understand field capacity and consider the advantages/disadvantages of buying v. leasing in various scenarios. At the recent Oregon Wheat strategic planning meeting, Paul contributed actively, despite having spent the night prior finalizing coursework for submission. It is a familiar story to a farmer: long days/nights and a drive to keep on going.

Following graduation, Paul will turn his attention full-time to the field. It will not be the end of his educational journey, though. He is already looking forward to leadership courses and wheat conventions. It is a significant part of the value he sees with the Oregon Wheat Growers League. The network provides a “good opportunity to meet new people and learn new practices,” states Paul. As the incoming Union/Baker County League President, he appreciates the guidance provided by past President Wade Bingaman, and the ability to talk with the rest of the Board and learn how others are doing things. From operations to equipment: “If we have a problem, someone else out there has the same problem and a good idea on how to approach solving it,” he says.