

Farming for Generations: Rodney Cheyne

By Dylan Frederick, Rushlight Agency

Like many of his contemporaries in the farming industry, Rodney Cheyne loves working the land his family has farmed for generations. As a fifth-generation farmer in the Klamath Basin, Rodney started early. “I went out with my dad in the combine when I was just a kid. When I was five years old, I raked my first field of hay by myself,” he says.

Having lived in the Henley area all his life, Rodney always knew he was going to go into farming. In fact, in 2002 while just in eighth grade, he leased 11 acres of land to grow hay. He hasn’t slowed down since. After graduating from Henley High School, he earned an Associate of Science Degree in General Agriculture from Linn-Benton Community College. Today, Rodney works approximately 1,200 acres alongside his father and uncle. He also credits his wife, Nichelle, for her patience during the long hours that he spends working the land. The family understands it takes everyone pitching in to make a contemporary family farm work.

His great-grandfather emigrated from Scotland in the 1880s and homesteaded in the Klamath Basin in 1909. Like many farmers, Rodney hopes to pass down the land and love of agriculture to his four children – two boys and two girls.

Despite being younger than many of his contemporaries by decades in some instances, Rodney has stepped up to take a leadership role as Klamath County President of the Oregon Wheat Growers League. “I got started because my dad, who was active with the Oregon Wheat Growers, got more involved and started being pulled in a bunch of different directions and they needed somebody to represent Klamath County. I’ve been at it about six years now,” Rodney said.

Rodney’s dad, Brent Cheyne, was recently elected President of the National Association of Wheat Growers. Rodney recognizes the many challenges that ag producers face – not just from the environment and weather but from misguided edicts from elected officials who don’t know farming. “Like so many other issues in the state, so many of our government officials fail to realize that Oregon is not comprised of just Salem and Portland,” he said during testimony fighting a proposal that would increase taxes on farm equipment and off-road fuel.

Rodney credits the Oregon Wheat League with keeping the most important issues for Oregon’s wheat farmers at the political forefront. This becomes even-more important when the agriculture industry sees that it can be taken for granted. “It’s great to have a voice in the industry. Obviously, that spills over to more than just wheat, but the benefits to Oregon wheat are just so important,” he says.

Like most farmers, Rodney is a realist. He recognizes the challenges that face Oregon wheat farmers, and the entire agriculture industry as a whole, but he has hope for the next generation. “We’re a multigenerational family. This is our 114th year here. A lot has changed, and a lot is changing with new technology and better equipment, but it is more a lifestyle than a job,” he concludes.