

TJ Bernards: Taking Action to Protect His Family Legacy

The Bernards family runs a multi-generational farm located just outside of Banks, Oregon. With a long-standing history in farming, the Bernards have been actively involved in agriculture for several generations. North Willamette Valley County President, Thomas 'TJ' Bernards, developed a passion for farming at a young age and eagerly pursued his interest despite the challenges.

TJ's passion for farming took root early in life when he was even younger than his elementary school aged son is now. "I tried to get out of going to school because I wanted to be here," he said. His mom caught on to his ruse, however, and sent TJ to school. Nonetheless, his passion for farming persisted. His son, Colton Joe, now carries that passion, sharing that he is the only third grader he knows that wants to be a farmer when he grows up.

The Bernards' farm primarily focuses on cultivating grass seed and several varieties of clover. They also experiment with crops like tillage radish and field corn. Additionally, they grow 300 acres of wheat, which is a crucial component of their farming operations.

As the fourth generation of the Bernards family on the farm, TJ takes pride in the long-standing history of their farmstead, which has been in operation for over 100 years. The original farmhouse stood on the property up until TJ's parents built their own house. In the past, the farm also held an orchard and raised cattle.

Farming near an urban area has presented challenges for the Bernards family. While TJ may not have initially noticed the encroaching urban development, he eventually became more aware of the impact on their farming operations. The increasing growth and proximity of urban areas means more traffic and new housing developments. This makes it difficult for the family to navigate their equipment, and maintain the rural character of their farm. It also makes it difficult to manage the cost of operations and retain land in agricultural production.

When TJ heard about plans to remove farmland for commercial and residential developments in his area, he felt compelled to act. "I probably should stand up and say more...that's the problem, people are frustrated but nobody is doing anything about it" shared TJ. So, he did just that, by first joining the Farm Bureau and then the League, and became more proactive in advocating for the preservation of farmland. TJ and his neighbors initiated a conservation project to create a buffer zone to protect the Willamette Valley farmland. Recognizing the need for action, he hopes more farmers and community members will join their cause.

For TJ, farming is not merely an occupation; it's his life's calling and passion. His dedication to farming was evident from an early age, and he never wavered from his chosen path. His hope is to continue farming his family's land for the foreseeable future and ultimately pass on this cherished tradition to his son, Colton Joe.