

JERRY BLOTTER

Interview conducted in 2017 by Pulse USA Sales & Product Development Director, Emily Paul



BACKGROUND OF OPERATION

In 1977, I purchased our family farm from my father Bill, who had originally purchased the farm back in 1947. We struggled with soil erosion on our sandy-medium soils, so my Dad and I both liked the concept of no-till farming. We mostly had sweet clover-alfalfa in our rotation for our dairy operation. We did what was best at the time with the limited equipment we had to use.

Our first no-till experience was in 1969 when I was allowed to do a three-acre experiment of planting winter wheat on flax stubble. That following year it yielded 62 bushels per acre, which really caught my Dad's attention and we were both interested in pursuing this no-till farming practice. We did several different experiments through the years and became mostly no-till in 1987. I'm thankful that my father allowed me to continue my experimenting.

In 1992, I started planting my first field peas and put them in rotation with other crops. I realized that this was the way for us to farm, using various crops helped us have less erosion, more water conservation, less weed pressure and less fertilizer inputs.

My son, Ryan got involved with the farm around 2006 and has been given more responsibility through the years on decision making. My son, Chris also became involved with the farm in 2014 mostly on the cattle side as I felt we had a lot of

(unused) potential with our land to incorporate livestock.

The inclusion of cattle fit in really well when we started cover cropping more in 2009. We have way more potential for grazing, haying and double cropping and began getting more forage off the same ground in the same year. Although my primary goal of cover cropping was to increase our organic matter production; we have used it for much more. We have flown on winter rye into standing corn in early August which works really well for increasing our organic matter production. This increase in cover crops for forage has made Chris busy with building fences and moving them to utilize our land in unfenced areas. A new thing for us in 2017 was raising barley, two millets, kale, radish, turnip for haylage. Last year we raised rye for early season forage production coming back with another forage crop to harvest or graze late summer or fall. 2017 was a challenging year for many, especially for moisture. There's a lot of potential with livestock in a cropping system but you need determination and able beings to do the work and carry out dreams like mine. I can envision many more improvements in this farms soils and productivity with this teamwork. I am thankful that we as a family are able to work together to continue to be good stewards of the land.

Since your involvement with pulse crops, how have you seen pulses impact the overall agriculture industry? More specifically, how do you see it affecting your operation as a seed producer?

The diversity has helped the overall economy by giving farmers another option to use in their crop rotations. It allows me to have a rotation that incorporates a cool season legume with the ability to plant a second crop for forage or just additional cover crop to increase organic matter.

How have you incorporated cover crops into your rotation, and what benefits have you seen?

We use them to increase soil biology, organic matter and to raise additional forage for our cattle. Benefits that we've seen are improved soil structure, increased organic matter and better coverage for the soil from erosion. We also have seen better water use efficiency, soil tilth and

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fertility retention. By having the additional cover in 2017 our soil temperatures were lower, giving us less water evaporation and better water efficiency for optimal plant growth.

What advice would you give to a producer looking to develop a cover crop system?

Definitely make the first step and do it. Talk to others that have tried cover cropping. This is so important to gain a better understanding of the overall system and the known benefits. There are so many options for producers that have livestock. But even if you don't have cattle the system fits well into crop production.

What advice would you give to someone looking to plant pulse crops for the first time?

To start with clean fields. Fall burndown is a good first step. Watch chemical rotations to avoid carry-over issues. Fields with high-residue are a plus to plant in to. Have a good weed control plan in place.

What is your inoculant and seed treatment program for your pulse crops? How would you explain the importance of using inoculant and seed treats for pulses?

I like to use granular products as they seem to give me the best response and they are very user friendly. If you don't have equipment to meter the granular, my second choice is a peat product that I mix with water and apply as a slurry in the seed flow while loading. Seed treatment options are improving every year with new products available. I like to use Apron Maxx with a growth simulator. Inoculants are a must and at times seed treatments could be but the benefits usually are more favorable to incorporate into your plans. I'm looking at some of the new products and options also.