PULSEUSA

SEED GROWER SPOTLIGHT

MARK BECKER, TIM BECKER

Interview conducted in 2018 by Pulse USA Eastern Sales Representative, Austin Fitterer

BACKGROUND OF OPERATION

We run a small grain and livestock operation. Plant and have planted a large variety of crops – currently HRS wheat, soybeans, corn, peas, oats, flax, and annual forage which includes millet and sorghum X sudangrass. Have planted dry edible beans (both pinto and navy), lentils, triticale, HRW wheat, oil sunflowers, Rye and barley.

We have no tilled this farm since 2000, planting with a single disk opener since 2004. Currently, we run a Shelbourne Reynolds stripper header on wheat, oats, and flax crops. We have a cow-calf operation, calving in the spring, weaning in November/December and backgrounding until January/February. Peas are included in the background ration for the calves. Typically use the cleanout from the seed production.

How has your involvement with pulse crops impacted your operation, whether that be through livestock or seed production?

It has definitely diversified our operation, allowing a broadleaf portion of our rotation for an early option for harvest. Rain doesn't come very willingly in this part of the country. The seed production gives us an opportunity for more income, but also comes with more management challenges such as planning rotation to avoid variety contamination, cleaning out drills, combines, trucks, bins and conveyors. The pulse crops offer good aftermath grazing with early harvest and allows for opportunity to plant cover crops to be utilized later by the livestock.

What goes into deciding your crop rotation, and what rotation have you found that works best for your operation?

We typically alternate between broadleaf and grass crops, the exception being corn on wheat. Corn planted into stripped wheat stubble works very well for us. The stubble has held more snow giving a little extra moisture to the corn crop. The tall stubble, when pushed over, gives good soil armor for weed suppression and moisture conservation. We've never seen a problem with soil temperatures. But, generally a broadleaf will follow a grass crop and we alternate between the broadleaf crops so that there are enough years in between. If field peas are raised this year, it will be at least 4 years until that ground will see peas again. If corn slips into the rotation that would push peas out to every 5th year.

Have you incorporated cover crops into you rotation, if so what how have you incorporated them, and what effects have you seen?

Typically we like to plant cover crops after field peas or wheat depending on harvest timing and moisture availability. Since we run livestock we like to get our cover crops planted by the 10-15th of August to get some growth on them for grazing. Since this year has been so dry for us having no rain in July and August we were unable to get any cover crops seeded as there has been no moisture to germinate. The drill was loaded waiting for a rain that did not come. Our cover crop mix usually will contain oats, turnips/radish, peas, and what ever got cleaned out of the drill from spring planting. Where we have planted cover crops in the past the ground seems mellower and we have seen less weed issues in the spring.

What advice would you give to a new producer looking to plant pulse crops for the first time?

I would stress that with every new crop that you plant on your farm that there will be challenges with that crop until you figure out how to raise them. Pulse crops are not like raising soybeans

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– plant, spray with roundup, harvest. Learn as much as you can about the crop and talk to other producers that have raised them about their successes and failures. Also, identify your market beforehand.

What is the biggest obstacle that you have had to overcome with growing pulse crops?

Probably the learning curve, more management goes into raising pulse crops. From planting and handling the seed more carefully, to spraying with different chemistries, to harvest and storage handling them a little more carefully again than you would any other crop..