

MEILON HILDEBRANT

Interview conducted in 2017 by former Western Sales Representative, Luke Dukart



your germination and ultimately your plant populations. A low-density plant stand is very hard to remedy when we are all already pressured with getting a crop in timely.

How do you best decide your crop rotation and what is your main rotation?

The decisions on crop rotations are never cut in stone on our operation. We consider some of the following

- 1) value as a cash crop
- 2) soil building properties as far as conserving and building organic matter
- 3) conservation of nutrients and ability to add Nitrogen
- 4) reduce weed and pest control and
- 5) labor and equipment demands.

There are certainly more things to consider but we start here. The yields of crops grown in monoculture will decline as a result of the buildup of stubble and soil borne diseases that follow or are specific to that crop species. It is not uncommon to see yields boost 20-50 percent depending on these disease pressures and the reduction of those. So, I cannot say we have a main rotation as it is ever changing and evolving.

Do you plant any annual forages? If so which one is your favorite and why?

We have planted annual forages but not many. We do some very small acreages as I like to leave the residue rather than harvest it off the field. It is used for our own livestock production. Our chosen one would be Oats and Peas due to the high protein and palatability as well as tonnage and our second choice has been a sorghum / sudan mix.

Have you seen any benefits of raising pulse crops on your following years crop?

Yes, we have. As an example wheat following a pea or lentil crop sequence results in a boost of the wheat yields. The peas and lentils also build residual Nitrogen levels and have left deep residual N untapped due to their shallow root systems.

How have you helped improve your soil health on the farm?

By increasing diversity in our plant community, I

BACKGROUND OF OPERATION

I have been farming for around 30 years and was raised on a diverse livestock and crop farm. I had a love for this occupation from the start and was urged and then pushed to go to college which looking back was never a mistake. A lot of resources and contacts were at NDSU that I still use today.

I started farming in 1988 and was faced with a drought very similar to the one we just went through in 2017. It meant finding other sources of income and diversifying the operation to weather events like this season. We also were in our infancy years of no-till and were experiencing a big learning curve as well as some terrible self-inflicted mistakes. Fortunately, we were surrounded by several forward-thinking farmers that offered up advice based on mistakes they had made as well.

What is the biggest obstacle that you have had to overcome with growing field peas and lentils?

Our biggest obstacle was always lining up a good seed source with respectable and honest germination values. Also recognizing that not only how we properly handled our pulses was necessary but also our seed suppliers. They are so susceptible to damage so loading and unloading, seed cleaning, combining and even how you load your drill are huge obstacles so you do not tamper with



SEED GROWER SPOTLIGHT

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feel we have directly impacted the soil biological community. We tend to lengthen the growing season with continuous live roots as well. We have decreased our soil disturbance to a minimum and eliminated unneeded passes in the field. The result of a lot of this is our ability to maintain adequate soil cover.

Do you have any advice for new growers into the pulse industry?

The best advice is to:

- 1) never be too proud to ask someone more knowledgeable or with "reputable" experience for information or help. Make sure it also pertains to your area and you give out pertinent information on your cropping system and what the issues are and what you hope to achieve.
- 2) Do not just grow the pulse crop but take care of them. Plan a year ahead in order to treat weed problems, fertility and chemical usage. For example, planting wheat ahead of a pulse you may want to add additional Phosphorus (not highly water soluble or soil mobile so it will stay put if not used) to be available for your pulse crop that is sensitive to salts and fertilizer and thus eliminate throwing it down with your pulse crop seed.
- 3) Do not skimp on inoculant and be sure you have thorough coverage whether it be granular, liquid or powder.