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Southern

A Family Affair

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Abstract

On April 13th, 2013 I interviewed my cousin Dustin St. John and my uncle Gleneth St. John who are both local soybean farmers in Newark, AR, in lieu of the Arkansas Soybean Scholarship Contest. During the interview Dustin and Gleneth were able to answer the basic questions I posed for them. In addition they talked about personal experiences and their basic knowledge of soybeans farming. I was able to take a close look at their experiences as well as the basic facts to describe the importance of the soybean industry as well as the hidden facts about the industry. Soybeans are a major crop for Arkansas, and are one of the most economical crops being grown. The farming industry is more than growing crops and feeding the world. There are technological and business aspects that affect the success of a farm greatly. Farming involves a multitude of planning and labor.

Soybean Scholarship Essay

Dustin St. John is a fourth generation farmer who lives in Newark, Arkansas. Stereotypically he's "just another farmer" wearing cowboy boots and torn up t-shirts. However, Dustin isn't just a farmer, he is a soybean farmer and he didn't choose to farm soybeans, soybean farming chose him.

Dustin's father has put many years into the soybean industry, sparking Dustin's interest in farming. Gleneth St. John, Dustin's father and my uncle, has been a soybean farmer for 38 years. Not surprisingly, Dustin likewise began farming soybeans when he was nineteen and is currently farming his seventeenth crop. Gleneth joined Dustin and I for the interview, providing me the chance to learn from two generations of farmers. Dustin recalls starting out on his own and taking a chance by putting all of his efforts into soybean farming, uncertain of the business' success. Despite the possibility of failure, Dustin's crops produced in his favor. Reminiscing about his childhood, Dustin explains "All I've ever known is soybeans. Farming soybeans was our life and we were happy about it." Evidently, Dustin had no question about what he wanted to do for the rest of his life.

During our conversation, I learned many interesting facts about soybean farming. In fact, upon further research I found that "more soybeans are grown in the U.S. than any other country in the world." (Arkansas Soybean Promotion Board, 2011) Dustin added, "Soybean crops are a cheaper, less expensive crop to grow because of lower input costs and typically better profit margins." He then illustrated how a crop that is inexpensive to grow will produce more profit, because less money is spent on growing the crop and more money is gained in profit. Dustin also major part of success in growing soybean crops, which is crop rotation. He pointed out that

“soybeans do not add nutrients to the soil, whereas corn and milo add nutrients back into the soil.” Another advantage of crop rotation is weed control. There is no question that farming, whether it be soybeans or other crops, takes knowledge and strategy in order to be successful.

Near the conclusion of our discussion, I presented Dustin with a question. The question was about how he believes his role as a soybean farmer allows him to give back to the world. Oddly, Dustin laughed and looked away puzzling through possible answers. He then expressed his opinion that people in agricultural organizations such as FFA or 4-H like to sugar coat the farming industry and only talk about the pretty sides of agriculture. He feels that farming is rewarding, however there are many burdens to bear along with the title “farmer.” Dustin expressed that “farming must be given an opportunity, a chance. It also takes a lot of business management and causes mental stress.” There is a highly technical side to farming. During our discussion, Gleneth and Dustin compared the ways technology has changed from the time Gleneth farmed to farming in today’s society. Farming is not a career for the mentally or physically weak. Farming takes strength, strategy and knowledge. However, Dustin said he finds great pride in farming because he “helps feed the world.”

People often talk about the down sides to farming as if farmers do not enjoy what they do. However, Dustin explained to me that the downsides to farming are not enough to keep him from working in the industry. Laughing at the end of the interview Dustin said, “I farm because I want to. I love it.” I say again, Dustin didn’t choose soybeans, soybeans chose him. He is proud, not only to farm, but to farm soybeans.

References

Arkansas Soybean Promotion Board. (2011) *Top 10 Things You Should Know About Arkansas Soybeans*. Retrieved from: <http://www.themiraclebean.com/facts-about-arkansas-soybeans>