



# Sara Wright Eastern

Soybeans and My Dad: A Living Legacy

Sara A. Wright

Hoxie High School FFA

### Abstract

Soybeans have always been a part of my dad's life. His relationship with soybeans evolved throughout the years. When he was a young child, he "farmed" them in his sandbox. His heart has never been far from farming, in fact my mother sometimes jokes that he loves the fields more than her. He now farms around 2000 acres with his dad and brother, an increasing number of which is going in soybeans. During the interview, he told me about how soybeans have become more efficient in a relatively short amount of time and how agriculture has always been a vital part of his life. He has witnessed soybean yields approaching levels thought impossible from the time he started farming to today. My daddy was the obvious choice for the interview and there is no one else whom I would rather talk to about this topic. He is very knowledgeable in the soybean industry of Northeast Arkansas, as he has witnessed many of the changes which have occurred throughout his 49 years.

## Soybeans and My Dad: A Living Legacy

### **What I learned**

Although I have been actively involved with the family farm since I was a young girl, I found the interview process very enlightening. It started out by my being able to picture my usually mature father as a young child who was selfish about his sandbox. I also learned that my knowledge of soybeans is basic when I compare it to my dad's. I view it from today's technology while he has many years of experience on which to base his views. I was astounded to learn that 30 bushels per acre used to be considered a bumper crop while today it would barely cash flow to bring in such a measly yield. This interview gave me a greater appreciation for today's technology and today's soybean market.

### **Background**

As I thought of people to interview, I immediately thought of my dad, Mike Wright. My dad has always been one who tries to beat the odds and usually succeeds in that endeavor. You see, he was born two months early and weighed in at a whopping 3.5 pounds. From the time he was a small boy, he knew that farming was for him. He grew soybeans in his sandbox and would not let his best friend, Greg Hogue, play in the sandbox until harvest because that was where his prize crop was. He actually started working on the family farm about the time he was 8 when he drove soybean seed to the planter. In high school, he was the Hoxie FFA president his senior year, 1982-1983. He also graduated with a 3.5 GPA, making him an honor graduate. After graduation, he attended Arkansas State University and received a Bachelor's Degree in Agribusiness in 1987. In 1990, he married my mom, Laura Cooper. Six years later, I was born. He raised me to be active on the farm and in agriculture in general, and when my brother Cooper was born in 2001, he raised him the same way.

### **Agriculture beginnings and how long?**

Even though my dad was delivering seed to the planter by the time he was 8, he did not become a full time farm hand until he was 13. He made his first crop loan in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, at the age of 16. It was a FHA (Farmer's Home Loan) which was available at a low interest rate for students involved in agriculture. That year he raised 80 acres of soybeans using the family equipment. That first year quite different than his earlier crops in the sandbox, he found out pretty quick that there is this thing called bills and they demand attention. In 1987, the family formed a partnership, bringing him and his brother Kevin into the family operation as partners instead of simply being hired hands. In total we farm about 2000 acres of land where we grow not only soybeans, but also rice, corn, wheat, and hay. We also run about 50 head of cattle. My dad has been involved in agriculture his whole life, 49 years. In fact he said "Agriculture is the only life I have ever known and I hope it will always be a part of my life."

### **Personal Soybean History**

At the time my family started, the soybean yields averaged 25-30 bushels per acre. During the interview, my dad attributed these seemingly low yields to lack of irrigation and seed that would be viewed as inferior when compared to today's standards. He said "Keep in mind, that was considered a pretty good yield for our area at that time. Like now, United States farmers had the best seed technology in the world." He reminded me that "over the years we have increased our yields to where we average 35-40 bushels per acre with several fields providing us with yields from 50-60 bushels per acre." In recent years, we have increased the acreage of soybeans grown due to alternative uses causing an increased demand for "the miracle bean". When I asked about how soybeans have changed our farming operation, my father replied, "Over the past few years, we have looked at soybeans more and more as a staple crop in our rotation

because it works well in the soil and climate with which we work. We have also paid more attention to our extension agency as a viable resource. They have encouraged us to take part in verification fields and other soybean yield based projects”

### **Giving back**

Of course, when I asked him how he gives back to the world as a farmer, he stated, “I help feed the world.” However, the longer he thought about, the more ways he saw that he gives back. He constantly works with the Hoxie FFA Chapter where he encourages not only his own children, but other students as well to see that agriculture goes far beyond farming and that it affects everything about their life. “Everything starts at the ground and works its’ way up” is how he replied when I encouraged him to go into further detail. Being the modest man that he is, this is about all I could get out of him on how he gives back, but I can assure you that he gives back to his community in so many small ways, that I know it has made a difference somewhere in the world. He may never know about it, but then again, is it really all that important for him to know?

References

Mike Wright (row crop farmer), interview by Sara A. Wright April 30, 2014.