

# Southwest Family Farms

20494 Highway 160, Plains, KS 67869 ♦ 620-563-7212

## Recap of 2024

The past year has provided challenges but also many opportunities of success and reward, and our family was once again blessed to farm together with a great group of employees. After sending out the newsletter last year, we received 1-3" of much needed rain. December is typically one of our drier months of the year, so this rain event put our wheat crop in great condition for the winter. Shortly after that rain, Southwest Kansas experienced an incredible blizzard on January 8. The exact amount of snow that fell was hard to measure, as winds gusted to over 60mph, creating near zero visibility, and leaving hundreds of motorists stranded along roads for hours. The snow that accumulated in fields with corn stalks and residue was beneficial but most of it accumulated in drifts making the moisture received very uneven across the fields.

The weather pattern turned very dry from that January blizzard through much of May. The wheat crop held on and utilized the profile moisture. Dryland wheat yields in Seward county were slightly above average, while the yields in Morton county came in right at our historical average. Irrigated wheat yields in Seward county were excellent, but harvest was very slow and drug out due to heavy rains in late June. Wheat harvest began on June 7th, and on June 27th we were down to two and a half circles of wheat to harvest when it began raining. Those two and a half circles of wheat received 4-8" of rain over a two week window before they eventually dried out. Finally, on July 15th, we were able to get back in the field and finish harvesting the remainder of the wheat. This is the latest we have ever cut wheat on our farm!

Once again, the pattern turned dry from July through the end of September. The irrigated corn and soybeans enjoyed the June rains, and we were able to let the irrigation wells remain idle for an extended period of time. Most of the corn yields came in with good results, but the farm totals came in at an average yield. We saw similar results in our bean yields. The dryland corn also benefited from the wet June, but the dry weather in August and September took its toll and limited yields to be average in Morton County.

After harvest, the crew quickly switched gears to get next year's wheat crop in the ground. The entire farm received a wonderful 1" rain in late September that provided adequate moisture to drill wheat. All of the dryland wheat was planted, and we were able to establish a beautiful stand on every field! We also started planting cover crops and applying fertilizer for next year's corn and beans. The weather was cooperating so we pushed hard and strip tilled all of the irrigated acres going to corn next year. Pushing hard proved to be a great decision. A week after we finished, we received 2-4" of slow, soaking rain. What a blessing! This rain

## 2024 Continued..

gives us hope for things to come in 2025. The wheat should be in great shape and our subsoil profiles are filled, which will help us get off to a wonderful start next year. We wish you and yours a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

### Mustang Farm Foundation

Over the course of the past year, we have been working diligently on a new, unique opportunity that we are extremely excited about. It has been the highlight of our year so we wanted to take time to highlight it in this year's newsletter! Our local school district, USD 483, purchased 320 acres of farmland that sits directly south of Southwestern Heights High School. The district was in need of additional water allotment that the irrigated ground provided. In October, Clint and Brett proposed an idea to the USD 483 Board of Education. The proposed idea was to form a non-profit 501(c)(3) foundation to farm the ground and use the proceeds to fund scholarships for the graduating classes of Southwestern Heights High School.

Clint and Brett organized the Mustang Farm Foundation (MFF) which has a board of directors that oversee the functions of the farm. MFF leases 320 acres from USD 483, where all farming operations and management are donated by local farmers. The goal of the foundation is to operate the farm using tax-deductible donations from local farmers, suppliers, and community members, leaving the net revenue generated from the growing crops to fund scholarships.

MFF has worked with USD 483 staff and administration to develop a system for awarding the available scholarships. Scholarships will be awarded using a merit-based point system. Points are awarded to each student based on their attendance record, academic achievement, and their extracurricular involvement. We feel that this system will encourage students to participate, and it will reward hard work, dedication and success. Scholarships will be available to SWH graduates who pursue post-secondary education, whether it be college or vocational/technical training. Seward county was recently highlighted in a study that showed we are the least educated county in Kansas. Our area economy offers ample job opportunities for graduates right out of high school, but studies consistently show that lifetime career earnings are significantly higher with vocational training, 2 year and 4 year degrees. Our hope is that MFF can provide a means for students to further their education and change the course of our community. The scholarship program has the opportunity to enhance the lives of many and can also be utilized as a way to promote and retain our student enrollment and community population.

Already this year, we encountered a couple of major hiccups, but also saw tremendous blessings. Some of the challenges we faced were: a center pivot collapse while trying to water corn up and losing natural gas for irrigation during a two week timespan in July. However, shortly after we lost the pivot, we were blessed by good news from a couple of vendors and business partners, committing their involvement in the foundation for years to come. That good news couldn't have come at a better time, as we felt as if we were moving one step forward and two steps back. We were able to replace the sprinkler quickly, and we worked with fellow farmers to find a new gas source so the crops didn't suffer for very long. While we were without gas, we received about 4" of rain, saving the crop from failure!

## MFF continued...

To find out more about Mustang Farm Foundation search for it on Facebook or contact board members: Brett Reiss, Brady Eakes, Clint Reiss, and Rocky Ormiston. MFF is currently accepting donations to help pay for operational expenses on the farm (natural gas, electric, fertilizer, chemical, insurance etc.). Grain donations can be received on behalf of MFF at ADM, High Plains Ponderosa Dairy, MKC and Skyland Grain. Checks can also be mailed to: Mustang Farm Foundation 20494 Highway 160 Plains, Ks 67869. Any and all support is appreciated!

## Water Dilemma

Last year, Kansas lawmakers passed legislation targeting Southwest Kansas water users. The legislation required that the board of directors of each Groundwater Management District (GMD) had until July 2024 to identify priority areas where they believe there is less than 50 years of water left or where the water is declining rapidly. All of Southwest Kansas was identified as a priority area. By July 2026, the GMDs must come up with plans to address those areas of concern and submit their proposal to the Kansas Chief Engineer to determine if the course of action is adequate. Kansas Geological Survey has been monitoring well levels for years, and they have developed a term called “Q-stable.” In their eyes, Q-Stable is the quantity of water that can be pumped from a region that will balance out or result in a net zero impact with recharge and sub-surface inflow. In other words, Q-stable is reached when net outflows of water and net inflows of water recharge equal zero. How the area can conserve water to get to Q-Stable or near Q-Stable is the literal million dollar question.

Our local governing board is referred to as GMD 3. Board members and GMD 3 representatives have been hosting regional meetings over the course of the last year so farmers and landowners could provide feedback to the GMD. The focus of the meetings has been centered around what percentage of Q-stable is appropriate to strive for when discussing conservation and recharge goals. Getting to 50% Q-stable would equate to doubling the life of the aquifer according to their calculations. The consensus seems to be that we all collectively need to do something to extend the life of our aquifer, but the elephant in the room is what that “something” is. Our hope is that our feedback is heard and the GMD3 board can provide some guidelines that will preserve our water source, while keeping in mind the economic value our irrigated crops bring to our local economy. Thousands of jobs exist because of the lifeblood of our aquifer. Manufacturing, food processing, grain handling, livestock industry and many more revolve around our area’s ability to produce consistent yielding irrigated crops. The fear is that if we (producers and landowners) don’t come up with a plan that can extend the life of the aquifer, the Chief Engineer may suggest for state lawmakers to mandate changes to current pumping regulations. The potential for extreme and drastic changes made by legislatures could affect land values and hurt the economy of Southwest Kansas.

This is not a new issue to Southwest Kansas, and our family has been involved in conservation practices for many years. Changes in our farming practices and new technological advancements in plant genetics and soil moisture monitoring devices have greatly improved the water use efficiency on our farm. However, these steps alone haven’t slowed the decline of the aquifer enough according to Kansas Geological Survey research. We have been looking at options, as we feel that creating our own conservation plan that fits our farm’s needs may be better than a state-mandated plan that is created for our entire district as a “one size fits all” plan. One option we are currently analyzing is creating a Water Conservation Area (WCA). This would

## Water continued...

allow us to develop a management plan to reduce our water use in order to conserve water. Creating our own WCA would allow us to voluntarily reduce the amount of water we withdraw from the aquifer, and would allow flexibility to manage our water wisely and economically. WCAs can offer conservation, and also allow for multi-year allocations or the movement of allocations between water rights. Forming a WCA is completely voluntary, but conservation efforts such as this have a good possibility of being accepted as a sufficient conservation plan. A flexible, voluntary plan could be more advantageous than a mandated plan coming from the state legislature. We will continue to study our options and encourage you to reach out to us if you have any questions or suggestions pertaining to your situation. Conservation efforts such as this will require sacrifice, but could allow us to implement a plan that best suits our farm and situation for better long-term success. For more information and to stay up to date visit [www.gmd3.org](http://www.gmd3.org) or call Southwest Family Farms at 620-563-7212.

