

Southwest Family Farms

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The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of 2022

Putting together the newsletter is always enjoyable, as it's a time to sit back and reflect on the year. Each year the weather constantly provides hardships for the agricultural industry, and 2022 was no different. Heat and drought were once again the main challenge this year.

In early to mid-June, parts of southwest Kansas received some much needed rain. However, the heat following the cool spring and rain event was intense. Cattle in the surrounding feed yards struggled to adapt to the extremely high temperatures with days of no wind to cool them off. Thousands of head of cattle died due to the extreme heat and humidity. Cattle can acclimate to the hot summers and our typical windy days help keep them cool, but this heat wave was so sudden and intense that the cattle weren't able to adapt. Water supplies were hard to maintain and local fire departments were called out to help cool the cattle and provide extra water. While we don't personally raise or feed any livestock, it was heart breaking to see the care takers and cattlemen struggle through this period of intense heat. It was an event many in the cattle feeding industry won't soon forget.

Back to the farm...Last fall was so extremely dry in Morton County that we were not able to plant 80% of our expected wheat acres. We could not get the seeds planted in any soil moisture, and our fear was the ground would blow behind the drills. We ended up chiseling all of those acres to create clods to keep the powdery soil from eroding with the winter wind storms. Fortunately, this kept soil loss minimal, and we received a rain in late May that allowed us to plant milo into moisture in early June. Our planting operation appeared flawless, and it looked like we would get an amazing stand of milo. However, as the milo was just about to poke through the soil surface, an intense hail storm passed through Morton County. Some fields received up to 4" of rain in 30 minutes. In those fields, milo stands were cut in half, meaning half of the seeds we planted were lost. The majority of the stand reduction was caused by the soil crusting. After the hard rain the temperatures soared into the low 100s. This caused the soil to "bake" or create a hard layer of crust. Some seeds had emerged in time, but some seedlings were trapped under the crust. We were torn on what to do. We could replant the field and hope for a better stand, or we could keep the reduced stand and hope it would be enough to yield well. We decided to keep the reduced

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stands because of the drought we had experienced the prior fall and the continued drought that was being forecasted. The decision proved to be the right one. The fields with the worst stands ended up being some of the best milo, proving once again that farming takes tremendous faith. Times like this often make us think of Proverbs 3:5 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.” What a great verse to read when you’re struggling with the whys and hows that life throws at you. We had waited nine months for a rain, planted, and it was excess rain that was going to cause a potential replant. The rest of the summer was drier than normal, but a few timely rains fell that kept the milo alive. We were able to harvest some very respectable yields given the conditions. Harvesting a good milo crop in Morton County was a blessing that we were not expecting.

Our irrigated and dryland crops back in Seward County struggled to thrive. After being blessed with above average yields in the two previous years, we fell well below average this year. An interesting stat that shows how good things were in 2021 versus 2022 on our irrigated corn: our highest yielding field this year was worse than our whole farm average yield in 2021. The soybean yields were average, and the cotton yields were lower than expected due to the lack of rainfall.

Looking forward to 2023, we are optimistic that we will see the La Nina weather pattern we are in fade away and hope to see more average rainfall. Once again in Morton County, the fall was too dry to establish stands of wheat so blowing soil will be a concern again this winter. All of the farm work for the season has been completed thanks to a dry fall. We are busy maintaining and cleaning equipment to get it ready for another season. Everyone is looking forward to the Holidays and time together with family. We pray that this newsletter finds you and your family well, and we want to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a safe and prosperous New Year!

New Technology on the Farm

Next year we are looking forward to using a new spray technology from John Deere. The new technology called ‘See and Spray Select’ uses cameras mounted to the spray boom to detect weeds growing in bare or fallow fields. When a weed is seen by the cameras, it sends a signal to the processors to turn on a specific number of spray nozzles to apply herbicide to just the weed(s) detected, all in the blink of an eye. Even weeds as small as a dime are detected and sprayed. The new technology goes a step further with a package called ‘See and Spray Ultimate,’ where the cameras utilize artificial intelligence (AI) technology, allowing the cameras to determine the difference between the growing crop and weed species. The sprayer is also equipped with two separate tanks, pumps, and booms that allow two products to be applied in the same pass. The value of this technology will shine when we apply a solid rate of growth regulator to our cotton with one tank, and then utilize the second tank and nozzles to apply a chemical to control invasive weeds detected by the system. It will also work well on our dryland corn acres where we apply an expensive chemical to help control bindweed in Morton County. Instead of applying chemical to the entire field, we will



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now be able to use the technology to see the bindweed spots growing amongst the crop. The cameras can recognize the weeds and command the nozzles above that weed to turn on. As you can imagine, the new technology will greatly reduce our herbicide use and also reduce any adverse crop responses some chemicals may have on the growing crop.

As mentioned in our previous newsletter, the price of Round Up, Liberty, and several other herbicides sky rocketed last year. This new technology, although an expensive investment, will help greatly reduce our herbicide cost per acre and also allow us to be better stewards of our resources. In some applications, our herbicide use is expected to be reduced by as much as 80% versus the previous technique of applying herbicide to the entire field. There is growing excitement to see what other possibilities this technology opens up in the ag sector.

Taking a Look Back

In March, one of our landowners sent us an article she ran across while cleaning out a storage room. The article was written in 1979 by the local paper, The Southwest Daily Times. The article tells of how Kathryn had to make a decision whether to continue the farm after the passing of her husband, Gerald. Gerald Reiss passed away in 1978 of an undetermined illness, leaving his wife, Kathryn, with the decision of whether she would continue to run the farm. Their son, Stan, had only been back on the farm for three years after a short tenure of teaching at our local high school. Together they made the decision to continue farming. The article writes about Kathryn and Gerald being very close and how Kathryn would tag along with Gerald daily. Naturally, she picked up on almost every aspect of the farm. Kat was usually found during harvest running the grain cart. She taught Clint and Brett how to run the grain cart, and there was always a joke that Grandma Kat wouldn't let her grandkids run the grain cart themselves until they could beat her in arm wrestling. Back then it took a little more strength to operate equipment than it does with today's technology and "push of a button" features.

Grandma Kat has been more than a grandma to us. She's been a mentor, business partner, leader, and a pioneer. The sacrifices she has made have not come easy. Her courage, dedication, and love of

her family and farm are a huge part of where our family is now. Kat turned 94 this September and is still living on the farm and is seen out in the shed or driving around the farm daily. She also makes sure we have a steady supply of snacks and treats in the shop kitchen.

To the left are the pictures from the article, including a picture of Kathryn with her father-in-law, Oscar. The full article is framed and on display in the shop office if you want to see it. Thank you to Nancy Douglas for finding and passing along this treasure!



