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Southwest Family Farms

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Southwest Family Farms News

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2025 What a Year To Be Alive!

Seasons greetings from the Reiss family and Southwest Family Farms. We hope you all have had a wonderful 2025! This year was filled with a terrific growing season and a wonderful crew. Despite many challenges and obstacles, we have many blessings to be thankful for as we close the doors on this year and look forward to the next.

We began 2025 with adequate soil moisture, but the weather was stuck in a dry pattern for the entire winter going into spring. Typically, we aim to plant most of our dryland corn acres in early April so the corn has a chance to mature before the August heat gets too intense. We went to the field with the corn planters in early April, only to find the ground was so hard that the planter row units couldn't penetrate the soil to get seed to the correct depth. We made the decision to wait until we received a rain to plant the no-till dryland corn. As mid-April rolled around we began planting our irrigated corn at a quick pace. Irrigated corn and soybeans went into the ground nicely, and were off to a good start. We received rain in late April that provided moisture suitable for planting. We swiftly planted all of the dryland corn, and it was off to a tremendous start with warm weather and timely rains to follow.

The dryland wheat came out of winter dormancy in dry conditions, but the late April and May rains helped carry the wheat to maturity. The mild spring weather allowed for great grain fill conditions, which helped boost yields well above average in Seward County and also above average in Morton County.

Rains continued to be adequate all summer long in Seward County, where we received nearly 25" of rain across a majority of our acres. This allowed us to reduce our irrigation usage and helped boost our dryland corn yields substantially. Rains in Morton County were a little harder to come by. Yields were still good, but rainfall totals were only about 13.5" for the year. Our dryland corn performed very well given the lower rainfall amounts out west.

Irrigated corn yields in Seward County were above average as well this year. The great yields were a huge blessing as commodity prices have struggled to maintain a breakeven price. Local basis on corn and milo were extremely low compared to recent years due to the area seeing above average yields. The abundance of supply flooded the local markets, driving the basis to the lowest levels we've seen in years. Average yields with today's low commodity price would have been an awful combination, so we are extremely thankful for the good

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yields to help reduce the financial impact the low commodity prices have had this year. Looking forward to next year, we have to find a home for our abundant harvest through domestic and export markets. Tariffs and trade wars have had a compounding effect on the American farmer. Many of the products we purchase have been hit with tariffs and other countries have retaliated by tacking on a tariff on many of the crops we produce. The price of machinery, fertilizer, and other goods have skyrocketed in the post-covid era. What we are seeing isn't sustainable, but we have faith that it will correct itself. Afterall, the farmer's motto is "next year will be better." We hope you and yours have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

New Technology on the Farm

This year we utilized a new technology on the farm during the growing season. In July, we hired a custom applicator to fly on foliar fertilizer and fungicides using a drone. While drones have been around for while, their size and efficiency have kept them from being used on large acreage. Today's drones have become larger and able to carry more product, keeping them in the air for longer periods of time. We elected to use a drone this year to test new products in a test plot on a field of soybeans. Changing chemicals in a large crop duster would be inefficient, with the plane traveling back and forth to the airport for small refills. Using a drone allowed us to test many products on a smaller scale for precise application.

So what does the future hold for this technology? Traditional aerial applicators require a large upfront initial investment with new crop duster planes selling for $2 million dollars. Along with that investment comes substantial insurance costs and safety concerns. According to the NTSB it's estimated that 54-60 crop duster crashes happen annually, with fatalities averaging around 10-13 per year. The high-risk nature of the job is due to many contributing factors like low flying altitudes, operator fatigue, and obstacles such as power lines and towers. These factors have driven insurance prices extremely high. Insurance coverage for spray plane runs about 6% of the value of the plane, so premiums can easily run $60,000-120,000 annually. New "large" helicopter drones cost somewhere around $50,000 but only have a payload of 26 gallons, which makes for constant fill ups and battery swaps. On a good day, a drone can cover up to 200 acres, while a crop duster can cover 3,000 ac. The largest drone on the market today resembles an airplane and is priced at $600,000, but they now have the ability to carry 100 gallons and travel 85mph. Drones will have to become much larger and faster to match the amazing capacity and productivity of current crop dusters.

It is amazing to watch a drone at work. With a little setup, an application of a field is completely automated. The drone flies itself on

a flight path and returns to a home point when the battery runs low or when it runs out of product. The operator only has to refill the tank and swap out batteries as needed. The potential for an operator to manage multiple drones certainly would make applications more efficient and productive. New technology also allows the drone to fly above an entire field and create a weed pressure map. The drone can map areas where weeds are present and then can fly to the various spots of the field to apply herbicide, doing so autonomously. In a sense it becomes an operation of "see and spray" as you read about in previous newsletters. Technology like this will help drones become more popular and more widely adopted in the future. Their ability to make precise see and spray applications, and the nimbleness they provide are a great solution to spray small fields like pivot corners. Most current drones lack the capacity and scale that traditional spray planes offer, but they certainly hold the potential to become a very useful tool in the future.

Notes From the Seat

We hope you enjoy this poem written by one of our talented H2A employees, Caty. Caty and Marty were married in South Africa last winter and they both mean a lot to our family and our farm.

IN THE HEART OF THE FIELDS, WHERE DREAMS ARE SOWN
SOUTHWEST FAMILY FARMS, A PLACE CALLED HOME.
WITH HANDS JOINED TOGETHER, SIDE BY SIDE,
IN TOIL AND LAUGHTER, OUR HEARTS OPEN WIDE.

HARVEST DAYS WITH THE SUN'S WARM EMBRACE,
PLANTING SEEDS OF HOPE, IN THIS CHERISHED SPACE.
FAMILY BONDS THROUGH EACH SEASON'S TURN,
IN FIELDS OF GOLD, OUR SPIRITS BURN.

UNDERNEATH THE TWILIGHT SKY, FIELDS STRETCH SO WIDE.
THE TRACTOR'S HUM A LULLABY AS DAY TURNS INTO NIGHT.
WITH EVERY TURN THE GOLDEN GRAIN WHISPERS OF THE PAST
HARVEST TIME, THE FIELDS RECLAIM MEMORIES THAT WILL LAST

SO WE WORK 'NEATH THE STARS, WITH THE MOON AS OUR GUIDE,
THROUGH THE QUIET HOURS, WITH THE LAND BY OUR SIDE.
IN THE CALM OF THE NIGHT, WITH THE SOIL'S EMBRACE,
WE FIND PEACE IN THE HARVEST IN THIS QUIET PLACE.

-Caty Bekker