

CornTalk

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NebraskaCorn.org

Contrary to popular belief, family farms do exist.

Lots of them.



Ask most people across the U.S. what is happening to family farms, and they're likely to say that few of them exist anymore.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. The 2012 Census of Agriculture shows that 96% of corn farms in the U.S. are family-owned operations.

What is a family farm? According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), a family farm is any farm where the majority of the business is owned by the operator and individuals related to the operator—including through blood, marriage or adoption.

Hubert Harner, director of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)—a division of USDA—said, “What we found is that family-owned businesses, while very diverse, are at the core of the U.S. agriculture industry.”

They are also at the core of Nebraska's economy—and have been for generations.

In this and future editions of *CornsTalk*, we will be featuring multi-generational family farms in Nebraska and how they are using innovation, technology, research and talent to grow more with less—and ensure that their family farms stay productive and sustainable for future generations.

Cumming Family Farm Spans 122 Years in St. Edward



Brian Cumming is a fourth-generation farmer near St. Edward, Nebraska. The farm has been in the family for 122 years. After getting a degree in Ag Business from a community college, he returned to the farm. "It's in my blood," he said. "It's the only way I know how to live and work."

Cumming's 79-year-old father still comes to the farm every day to help when he can and to offer advice and insight. "Dad has been mentoring me from early on," Brian said. "I began attending agronomy meetings when I was 10 years old and he let me start running the planter at a very early age. He told me I needed my own crop to have something for my cows to graze on in the winter."

In the 1950's, the Cummings operated one of the largest feedlots in Nebraska. "My grandfather loved feeding cattle and was still buying cattle two days before he passed away," Brian said.

Today, they still manage a cow-calf herd comprised of some 200 head, which provides diversity for the entire operation to help mitigate risk. He tells the story of his aunt Janet who returned to the farm to live with her father—Brian's grandfather—to help him as he aged. While raised on a farm, his aunt had spent most of her life in Omaha.

When Aunt Janet saw the cattle being loaded in the truck and headed to market, she turned to Brian and said, "You must be sad about this. These animals are like your pets."

"I told her that actually I had worked two years with those cattle to get them to this point—and now I was finally going to get paid for that work," Brian said. "That helped her understand that we're raising and caring for these animals as a business and to provide a healthy, nutritious protein supply."

While raising cattle comes with its share of challenges, Brian says it has significant rewards. "Watching a little calf get up on its feet for the first time and take off across the pasture is a great feeling," he said.

Brian and his wife Vanessa have six children and one grandchild. His hope is that the farm stays in the family for future generations—and he's doing his part to ensure the sustainability of his operation. "We're using more no-till practices to maintain and build organic matter in the soil and preserve moisture," he said. "We're also using cover crops, which are grazed by our livestock while improving soil health."

96%

of corn farms in the United States are family-owned operations.

18%

of principal operators on family farms in the U.S. started within the last 10 years.

88%

of all U.S. farms are small family farms.

Source: USDA/NASS

How Nebraska Corn is Used

The Animals

(2014/15 Marketing Year)



72.3%
BEEF



That Eat Nebraska Corn

(2014/15 Marketing Year)



22.0%
PORK

3.7%
POULTRY



1.6%
DAIRY



<1%
OTHER

Types of Corn Grown in Nebraska

2014 Planted Acres

YELLOW DENT CORN (Field Corn)

8,936,885 acres

Primarily used for ethanol production and livestock feed. The "dent" appears in the corn kernels as the ear dries down for harvest.



SWEET CORN

1,016 acres

This is what you buy in the grocery store or farmer's market as fresh sweet corn for your family. Sweet corn is also available frozen or canned.



WHITE CORN

182,886 acres

Used for human food, especially in products such as chips and tortillas.



HIGH- AMYLOSE CORN

665 acres

A high-starch corn primarily used by the wet-milling industry for use in textiles, candies and adhesives.



POPCORN

93,251 acres

Nebraska is the national leader in popcorn production.



RED CORN

120 acres

A unique type of sweet corn with an especially "nutty" taste.



BLUE CORN

1,822 acres

Used primarily in human food products, especially in chips and Native American dishes.



ORNAMENTAL CORN

12 acres

Also known as "Indian Corn"; Comes in a variety of colors and patterns.



NebraskaCorn.org



Fourth-generation Indianola farmer a pioneer in no-till practices.

It wasn't that long ago that farmers prepared their fields for planting by tilling the soil repeatedly and creating a pristine seed bed, much like preparing a backyard garden.

Today, reduced tillage—including no tillage at all—is considered a best management practice in an effort to preserve soil moisture, reduce erosion and improve soil health. Leaving stalks, corncobs and leaves in the field—known as “residue”—is an important strategy in sustainable farming.

Paul Schaffert, an Indianola, Nebraska, family corn farmer, converted to no-till practices several years ago. In fact, he was named “No-Till Farmer of the Year”—in 1977!

Southwest Nebraska typically has high temperatures and little rainfall during the summer growing season,

“It's like going out into your garden and putting mulch or straw on top of your tomato plants—and that's what we're doing. We're basically mulching. We're leaving those old stalks and stubble out there to capture moisture for the following crop,” Schaffert said.

“Now when we get a hard rain in a short period of time, it stays in the field instead of running off, creating ditches and breaking out terraces,” he said.

Leaving residue in the field is especially critical in the winter. “The more residue we have, the more potential we have of catching one or two snows during the winter—and that can be equal to three to four inches of moisture that stays in the soil,” he said. “I think we're picking up a 20 to 25 bushel yield increase with that residue in place.”

“Another advantage of residue management is that it will lower the soil temperature in the hot summer months by 10 to 15 degrees. By keeping it cooler, the plant has a better chance of producing a good crop for you,” Schaffert added.

Schaffert says that one indicator that his soil is getting healthier is an increase in the earthworm population. “By not tilling the soil, we're not destroying their home,” he said. “Earthworms create pockets and channels in the soil that allow moisture to percolate into the soil and stay there. Where you have earthworms, you're going to have good till in the soil—good, good soil.”



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Schaffert Family Farm Originated with Homestead Act

Paul Schaffert of Indianola, Nebraska, is a fourth-generation farmer who lives in the house built by his grandfather. His son Kris (the fifth generation) farms the ground that Paul's great grandfather originally homesteaded more than 100 years ago.

“My grandfather used to raise hogs and he would actually ride in the caboose of the train when his hogs were being transported to the market in Chicago,” Paul said. “Other producers would ‘slop’ their hogs with whatever they could find to feed them. But grandpa turned his hogs out into the cornfield. That diet made them leaner and more muscled—and he was able to command a higher price for his pigs.”

Will there be a sixth generation of Schaffert family farmers? Paul suspects there might be.

“My grandsons—10-year-old Aden and 7-year-old Kade—are my right-hand men on the farm,” he said. “I'm thinking one or both of them might be the next ones to take up farming.”

Scott Spohn sees breakfast cereal a little differently than most of us. While most of his fellow corn farmers in Nebraska are growing corn to feed ethanol plants and livestock, Spohn's top customer is the country's most famous name in breakfast cereal—Kellogg's.

"Our corn is ending up in everything from Kellogg's Corn Flakes® to Corn Pops® to Frosted Flakes®," Scott said. "It's a point of pride that what we grow is giving people a good start to their day—and it also carries a lot of responsibility."

The fact is that most of the corn grown in Nebraska does not end up in human food products. The vast majority of Nebraska's corn crop is fed to livestock in Nebraska and outside the state—or transformed into ethanol. Distillers grains, a co-product of the ethanol process, is also a high-value livestock feed.

However, some Nebraska corn farmers grow "specialty" corn hybrids developed for a specific use. White corn is used in tortillas and corn chips. (Nebraska is also the nation's leading producer of popcorn.) Some corn hybrids have a higher starch content which makes them well suited for ethanol production.

A fifth-generation farmer, Spohn has found a good market for his food grade yellow corn by becoming a preferred supplier to Kellogg's.

Each year, Spohn meets with buyers from Kellogg's headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan, when they visit his farm near Friend, Nebraska, to discuss which hybrids he will grow and to outline the management practices required to ensure integrity and quality—practices that are commonly used by corn farmers across the state.

"Kellogg's wants corn hybrids with excellent milling characteristics so they can maintain consistency and quality in their food processing facilities," Scott said. "When corn is fed to livestock or used for ethanol production, it doesn't matter if it flakes or breaks. To a food processor such as Kellogg's, flaking and breaking are bad things."

Grain storage and handling is a critical step in the process since the food grade corn that Spohn grows cannot be mingled with other types of corn. He works directly with the Bunge grain facility in Crete, which keeps Spohn's corn segregated and handles shipments to Kellogg's plants across the U.S.

Kellogg's needs corn all year long, not just when it's harvested in the fall. So Spohn has invested in on-farm storage to keep the Kellogg's corn distinct and separate from other corn he grows—and he delivers corn as needed to Bunge throughout the year. "Growing a specific type of corn with exacting standards and unique storage and shipping conditions adds to the workload and expense for us," Scott said. "At the same time, we are able to capture a premium price for that corn that adds value and revenue to our operation."



Irrigation is a key factor in Spohn's ability to deliver on his promise to Kellogg's year after year. "Having water available for the crop regardless of weather conditions is huge," he said. "It also helps us manage the corn in ways that result in consistently high quality and reliable yields."

Scott Spohn is proud to be the fifth generation of his family to provide high quality corn for the marketplace.

He's implementing practices on his family farm to sustain its value for future generations. "I want to see a sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth generation farmer in our family. This is something I want my kids and grandkids and great grandkids to do just like my grandpa and great grandpa did for me," he said.

So the next time you pour yourself a bowl of your favorite corn-based Kellogg's cereal, it might be Scott Spohn's corn that makes your breakfast taste "GRRREAT!"

Most of Nebraska's corn does not end up in human food.

But Scott Spohn is helping put the corn in corn flakes.



Omaha fuel tests indicate high levels of toxic compounds.

Does Omaha have bad gas? According to recent fuel tests, it does—at least in terms of the levels of toxic substances, which approached 30 percent by volume in base gasoline. But adding ethanol to gasoline significantly lowers the health threat of the fuel we put in our vehicles.

In early July, four fuel samples were pulled from the Magellan fuel terminal in Omaha. These samples were tested by an independent lab in Omaha—and they found high levels of toxic compounds—even higher than levels during testing earlier this year. In base gasoline, the level of these compounds approached 30 percent by volume in a gallon of gas.

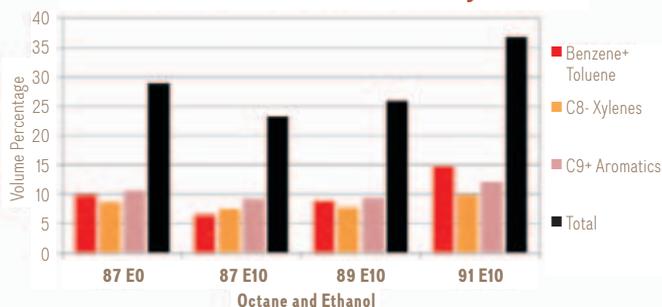
“Harmful toxics such as benzene, xylene and toluene—some of them proven carcinogens—are added to gas to increase octane,” said Tim Scheer, a St. Paul, Nebraska farmer and

chairman of the Nebraska Corn Board’s Market Development Committee. “These cancer-causing compounds, called aromatics, do not burn completely in the engine. They end up in the air we breathe as tiny toxic particles that enter our lungs, hearts, brains and bloodstream.”

There is a clean air choice: American Ethanol is a clean-burning, non-toxic source of octane. The more American Ethanol in our fuel, the lower the levels of toxic carcinogens in our fuel and in the exhaust.

American Ethanol adds oxygen which helps fuel burn more completely. More of the toxic compounds are completely burned in the engine rather than coming out the tailpipe. “Adding 10 percent American Ethanol to base gasoline reduces the volume of toxic compounds in fuel by about 25 percent,” Scheer said. Discover more at americanethanolne.org.

Omaha Fuel Test Results: July 2015



This chart indicates that the level of toxic compounds in E0—or fuel without ethanol—approaches 30% of volume as measured in recent fuel samples from Omaha terminals. That means these harmful compounds make up about 30% of what’s in a gallon of gas.

But here’s what’s interesting: When you add 10% American Ethanol—E10—that drops to around 23%, reducing the volume of toxic compounds by nearly one-fourth. That’s because the American Ethanol replaces the toxic components.

In order to get higher-octane gas—such as 89 or 91 premium—oil companies add even more toxic compounds. So imagine what those black bars would look like if there wasn’t 10% American Ethanol in the fuel!



Roger Berry

Berry Joins NCB Staff

Roger Berry has joined the Nebraska Corn Board staff as the Director of Market Development.

In this role, Berry will work on behalf of Nebraska

corn farmers and industry to coordinate all facets of market development projects to increase demand for Nebraska corn and value-added products. He will work to establish relationships with state, national and international organizations and cooperators to expand market development opportunities both domestically and internationally. Berry will also coordinate educational and promotional activities of corn and value added corn products such as biofuels, distillers’ grains and the Nebraska Corn

Board’s support of red meat, dairy, poultry and livestock expansion.

A native of Red Cloud, Nebraska, Berry is a graduate of Southeast Community College and of Nebraska LEAD (Leadership Education/Action Development) Program, LEAD 19. Before beginning his career in agricultural leadership, Berry was engaged in full-time farming and livestock production for 12 years near Farnam, Nebraska. When he transitioned into agricultural leadership, he served as the central district director of member services for the Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation before becoming the field director for the Alliance for the Future of Agriculture in Nebraska (A-FAN). He then became the vice president of membership at Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation.



District 1
Dave Bruntz
Friend, NE



District 2
John Greer
Edgar, NE



District 3
Brandon Hunnicutt
Giltner, NE



District 4
Debbie Borg
Allen, NE



District 5
Tim Scheer
St. Paul, NE



District 6
Dennis Gengenbach
Smithfield, NE



District 7
David Merrell
St. Edward, NE



District 8
Jon Holzfaster
Paxton, NE



At-large
Alan Tiemann
Seward, NE



Nebraska Corn Board members represent the eight districts indicated on the map and are appointed by the Governor. One at-large member is elected by the other Board members.

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Kelly Brunkhorst
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Emily Thornburg
director of communications



Janet Miller
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Boone McAfee
director of research



Roger Berry
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ON THE COVER The Spohn family farms near Friend, Nebraska. They raise field corn, seed corn, food grade corn, and soybeans. They also feed some cattle.