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# ALL IN THE FAMILY

*The story of four brothers and a dad keeping their farm dreams alive*

Gary Godbersen knows the ups and downs of farming all too well. His father, Vern, was like many farmers in the 80s. Low commodity and livestock prices, coupled with extraordinarily high interest rates and high input costs, forced him out of the production ag business.

But there is something to be said for how deep the roots of agriculture go, along with a strong desire to keep a family unit working together in one business.

For Gary, it was he and his brother, Wayne, who were determined to continue to grow corn and soybeans in the rolling hills of northeast Nebraska. Even though they both worked full time at a local feedlot, they would farm at night, while their dad took care of necessary chores during the day.

But the 240 acres Vern still owned in **Wayne County** wasn't going to be enough to sustain a living for multiple families. So, Gary and Wayne put an ad in the local newspaper looking for land to rent. It didn't take long before an elderly couple looking for someone to farm their land came calling. It became a relationship that spanned more than 35 years.

It also became a formula that Gary and Wayne used to expand their operation enough to make it their full-time occupations. And the formula that created the successful **Godbersen Farms** based in Wisner, which includes Gary and his four sons: Jack, Austen, Dixon and Logan. Unfortunately Gary's brother, Wayne, passed away after a battle with cancer in 1998 or he would be right there alongside them.

**The Godbersen Family (from left): Jack and fiancée Paige Dietrich, Logan, Carmen, Gary, Dixon, Arlo, Jessie and Austen.**

## ALL ROADS LEAD TO GODBERSEN FARMS

"Remembering the 80s and even the 90s, there was a long stretch where farming was ugly. My wife and I had zero extra money and all we did was work," said Gary. "So at that point I said 'I'm not going to be disappointed if my sons do something else.' But low and behold they wanted to farm, so that was a good thing."

As the Godbersen sons have grown older, they each have had to decide on the path that eventually would keep the family farming together.

Jack, the oldest, had an interest in farming early in life but things began to change a bit as he got into high school.

"I started getting interested in other things besides farming," Jack said. "I decided to go to college at the **University of Nebraska in Lincoln**. But then I ended up in the ag college, and it didn't take me long to realize I needed to be back home farming."

Jack got his degree in mechanized systems management, which he may not have known at the time, would be important to his role as part of the family farm operation. That also was the case with his other job off the farm, selling seed.

Austen, next in the pecking order among the brothers, also chose to go to college. However, he always knew he wanted to go back home to farm.

"I guess I never questioned it much," said Austen. "I grew up riding shotgun with dad, putting hundreds of miles on in a day checking center pivots. It really wasn't much of a question for me what I wanted to do."

Austen's education and experience in agronomy has not only been important in making decisions in the family operation but has also allowed him to have additional employment as a local agronomy consultant.

For Dixon, the third brother in line, farming is all he ever wanted to do.

"I really never thought of doing anything else," he said. "I've always wanted to farm and I stuck around and learned by doing it hands on."

Dixon spent a lot of time around his dad learning the production side of the business from planting to harvest. He was also able to learn the ins and outs of maintaining and fixing equipment from a former hired hand who had a lot of experience in mechanics.

The youngest brother of the four, Logan, is just starting to forge his path. He is currently a sophomore at UNL studying diversified agriculture.

"I'm taking a lot of classes in agronomy such as plant sciences, but I'm also interested in livestock so I am studying animal science as well," said Logan.

Like his brothers before him, Logan started on the bottom rung of the ladder doing such mundane chores as sweeping out the shop. But soon he was helping run equipment and still takes time on weekends to run the grain cart during harvest.

"I am not exactly sure what I will be doing in the future but my plan is to go back and help on the farm," Logan said.

*Logan is studying diversified agriculture at UNL's East Campus.*

## MAKING IT WORK

*Austen utilizes group texts to coordinate scheduling on Godbersen Farms.*

With the brothers and dad working together side by side, day by day, one would think there would be a lot of differences of opinion on how things should be done. But the Godbersens have found a way to keep the challenges to a minimum.

“We have a lot of communication amongst each other,” said Jack. “We all try to understand each person’s point of view. Everybody pitches in and gives their opinion and we decide collectively what our next moves will be.”

So, how do they communicate?

“One thing we utilize a lot are group texts,” said Austen.

The reason the group texts work so well is that they don’t rely on just one person having to remember what has to be done the next day. It also gives them a written record of the communications. That’s important when numbers are involved such as how much fertilizer they plan to apply on a specific field the next day.

Another key Godbersen dynamic is each member of the family assumes roles that best fit his skill set.

According to Jack, “We all have an area that we are really good at and we just stay out of each other’s way when it comes to those areas.”

Dixon is the day-to-day manager of the operation overseeing equipment and production needs; Gary and Logan help operate much of the equipment during peak seasons; and Jack and Austen utilize their work and educational experience to make agronomic and product selections.

Carmen, wife and mother of the family, is very involved in the operation as well assisting with bookkeeping and providing valuable input on important decisions such as marketing.

## UTILIZING THE FORMULA

As Godbersen Farms continued to add family members to the operation, the need to find additional land to farm increased. However, with high land costs and limited acres available for sale, the opportunities to purchase land were limited. So, the family went back to the same formula Gary and Wayne used initially to expand: find landlords willing to rent land to them.

Finding farmland to rent was challenging at times given the stiff competition among area farmers. By building a reputation as good stewards of the land they rented, the family acquired several rental contracts.

"We use conservation practices such as no-till and implement precision agriculture methods that we know are good for the land we rent," said Dixon. "We have the philosophy to try to leave the land in better condition than when we got it."

Meanwhile, Jack and Austen utilized a program administered by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture called **NextGen**. Under this program, a land owner is able to receive a tax credit by entering into a contract with beginning farmers who meet specific requirements.

"The primary advantage the program offered us was to be competitive with more established farmers that have the ability to pay higher rent," said Jack. "The tax credit incentive put us on a level playing field."

*Jack and Dixon discussing the next day's schedule.*

NextGen allowed the brothers to enter into a three-year agreement to lease much needed additional land.

## KEEPING IT TOGETHER

Having to rent the large majority of land they farm, the Godbersens understand how important it has been to build and maintain relationships with all of their landlords.

In addition to communicating directly with the owners, the Godbersen Farms website provides a special log-in portal that allows landlords to track exactly how their land is being farmed.

The Godbersens also believe in utilizing the latest technology in order to farm their rented ground in the most efficient and practical manner.

Gary has seen all the ups and downs of farming throughout the years. But with the love of farming all of his family members possess, he knows they can all ride the roller coaster together.

"Some people have one kid on one coast, and another kid on the other coast," he said. "We're lucky enough to have all our sons close by, which is really special."