



2017 Year in Review

2017 has come and gone, many things in the farming world happened. Xtendimax was finally approved so all farmers have a better chemical to spray in soybeans except just glyphosate. Dow and Dupont merged, Monsanto and Bayer CropSciences also merged, BASF bought the rights to the Liberty platform, and Chemchina bought Syngenta. I've noticed this is what happens when there are tough times in any industry; big companies merge or buy out others. We went from 6-7 Major ag companies down to 4. This means there will be fewer types of technology and a little smaller pool of genetics. But it also means there are more resources behind the new technologies.



Yields

Yields on our farm last year were good for the conditions we had. We were short on water from planting to harvest but we got a few timely rains that helped our crops pull through. The rain in early August was our savior, which made our corn slightly above average; soybeans average to slightly below, and made for a good pinto bean crop.

Agronomic Challenges

This year was a unique year, we had to put the crop into some very dry ground, so the emergence wasn't as even as we wanted it. We had enough rains to pull the crop through but still an average to below average crop. These dry conditions caused the weeds to put on a thick waxy layer called a cuticle, this made it extra hard for the chemicals to work properly. Along with weeds, we had aphids and thistle caterpillars very bad this year. We had to spray almost every acre of soybeans to control the bugs.

Business Challenges

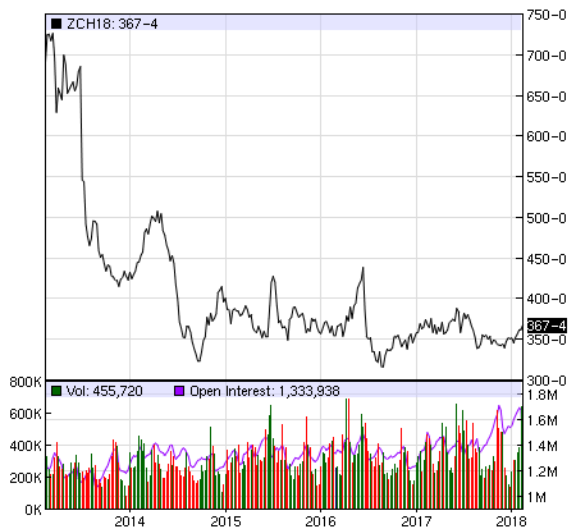
The extra spray and extra passes made our spraying bill a little larger this year. With low commodity prices we have had to find ways to tighten up bottom line so we can maintain a decent profit margin. We do this by utilizing generic chemicals, and tank mixing when we can and spraying when we need to not just because we want to. Zane works very hard at finding the best deals and I watch the fields very closely in the summer to maximize our margins.

2018

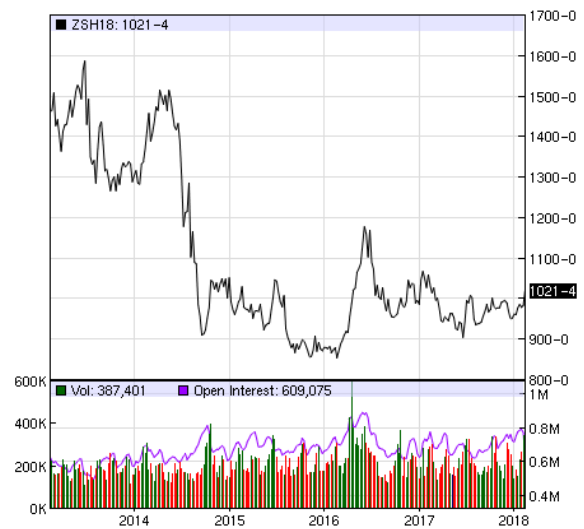
Ag Markets

Since the highs 5 years ago the commodity markets have been on a rapid decline. The two charts below are the corn (**left**) with a 52% loss from the high; and the soybean (**right**) with a 36% loss from the high markets for the last five years. These demonstrate the true lows the markets have hit and the volatility that has been built into this market making it very difficult for farmers to market their grain.

CORN



SOYBEANS



As these charts show these two markets aren't going anywhere anytime soon. There are a few reports of lesser crops down in Argentina that creates small changes in the world's soybean production. This causes little rallies in the market. The recommendations for this next year is to sell in predetermined amounts for an ok price to cover your costs. We cannot afford to hold onto inventory thinking the markets will go up; if we want a true rebound in the market we need to have a couple down years in the world's production.

Business Challenges

2018 looks like another very lean year with the markets the way they are. A big thing we are trying to do this winter is to find the best deals on all our inputs. The markets are currently below our break evens so we need to lower our inputs or market our crop a little better, or the combination of both. We are working on this by trying to lock in good edible bean contracts. I am trying to figure out the most cost effective chemical program. And we are going to strip-till to optimizing the placement of our fertilizer and save costs while maximizing yield.

Agronomic Challenges

Dryness and weed control are going to be our two biggest issues this next year. For dryness we will implement no-till and strip-till techniques to conserve as much water as possible along with drought resistant hybrids. Once again, the dryness will make it harder to control the weeds so we are going to use good tank mixes with better adjuvants this year to help the weeds uptake the chemical. For resistance we will utilize Liberty Link beans to help keep the fields clean, and tank mix multiple different modes of action. This year I want to get a minimum of 4 to 5 modes of action down on each field to minimize the chances of weed resistance to a certain chemical.

Implementing New Things

We are trying to implement techniques that help save soil and preserve soil health. 1% of OM can hold 25,000 gallons of water and thousands of pounds of main nutrients like NPK. The retention of our soil, soil water, and the building of OM is an area we really want to focus on in our farm these upcoming years. We will do this by no-tilling a few fields, planting rye cover crop on a few fields and finally switch from conventional till to strip-till.

Cover Crops

Cover crops keep green growing plants out in the fields throughout most of the year, this creates a better soil structure and a great environment for microbes to thrive in. To take into perspective how important microbes are, if you take one tablespoon of topsoil, there are more microbes there than people on earth. This means the better environment we make for them the more nutrients they can provide for us. Also with all the plants growing out there it doesn't give the weeds a good chance to start so it suppresses weeds.



The picture above shows what rye interseeded into corn stalks as a cover crop looks like.

Land Improvement with tile

We are working on getting the low production areas in a field tiled this year. This field will be a test to see how tile can benefit our farm by making the acres we have more productive. This is a perfect quarter to try it on due to the lower producing areas and the proximity of a public drain. Hopefully the tile and greater water retention will show substantial returns for years to come. We are currently structuring a contract to allow us to tile our rented land at no cost to the owner.

Strip-Till

We also have invested in a Blu-Jet strip tiller to strip half of our acres this fall. When we strip till we will be placing the nutrients in the perfect place for the roots of our crops to grow into. When you strip till you also get that black strip that warms up nicely and creates a flower pot type of an environment for the plants to grow in. This is done all while keeping crop residue in the fields and saving our topsoil.



The pictures above show how strip tilling is done (Left) and how corn looks emerging in early spring (right)

Technology

Every business needs to be efficient with everything it does, that is no exception with farming. So we impliment technology such as mapping, section control, and variable rate. These technologies all work together by saving product and minimizing overlap or over application in the poor spots. All of this then gets recorded in our fieldview app on the Ipad so Zane knows exactly how much product we applied, and I can use it while scouting our fields in the summer. We are always looking for ways to be more efficient which will ultimately lead to more profits.

Furthering Education

Zane attended The Executive Program for Agricultural Producers or (TEPAP) down in Austin Texas. This taught Zane how to look at problems in the ag sector and see them as possibilities where the farm can excel. It also was a good tool for the management side of things, he brought a lot of what he learned back home with him. We are implementing the things he learned going forward. Next year Zane plans on attending TEPAP unit 2 and I will be attending unit 1 like Zane did this year.



I obtained his Certified Crop Advisor certificate last year so I am attending classes to stay informed on agronomic issues and to get points for my CCA. Many classes have been put on by NDSU like Wild World of Weeds Workshop and Eastern Pest Management School. The Employees Trent and Mike went to a few conferences also.

The employees have also attended classes this winter. Mike went to precision farming classes to further utilize our GPS capabilities. Trent went to the Precision Planting Winter Conference to further his education on planters and how to maximize our current planter.

Family + Hobbies

The most exciting news we have to share this year is that we got to welcome Grayson to the Buhr Erickson Farm. Zane and Cami welcomed him on November 2, 2017, right in middle of corn harvest. He is doing very well and is getting big and strong.



Above we have my mom (Tammy) holding Grayson at a force game (Left). Brayden trying to be like his uncle Reed in the planter tractor (Right).

As you can tell farming runs deep in our family, we all enjoy being outside and driving equipment (or try to in Brayden's case). It all starts with our grandma Colleen Buhr who is 77 and is still our main combine driver. You really cannot replace years of experience that she provides, and the energetic attitude that 2.5yr old Brayden has. This family connection to the farm is one reason we love what we do so much. And I hope we can keep our farm going for another 5 generations, like our family has done so far.



Above is a picture of our test plot with the dryer site in the background, taken from the highway ditch.

Thank You

Everything I have mentioned above is only possible because of the great help we have on our farm. As stated before we have amazing employees that are willing to attend classes so they are more educated. We have a great family that helps everywhere they are needed. And we have wonderful landlords that make it possible for my brother and I to farm. They all play a huge part in the operation and I am thankful for every day I get to work with them all.

Sincerely

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