

Young Leader Charts Unique Course

Justin Sherlock's path to farming hasn't followed a typical route. Sherlock, from Dazey, North Dakota, has been operating his farm for seven years, but years ago, the prospect that he'd become a farmer seemed unlikely.

Sherlock graduated from North Dakota State University (NDSU) with a degree in agriculture business. He went to Washington, D.C., where he interned with then Senator Kent Conrad. Following Sherlock's graduation from NDSU, farming wasn't in the cards.

"I always wanted to farm, but there just wasn't room for me," Sherlock says.

Sherlock explains that both sets of grandparents had farmed, but they left farming decades ago. Sherlock's father worked for a neighboring farmer and was eventually able to rent some land from the grower in 2000. That move got the Sherlock family

back into farming.

"Not many farm families who folded up their tents are able to get back into it again," Sherlock says. "Fortunately, Dad was able to get back into farming during some good economic times."

Because there wasn't room for him, Sherlock moved back to Washington, D.C., to work for the National Farmers Union.

In August 2012, Sherlock's father passed away in an accident. Sherlock left Washington, D.C., and moved back to North Dakota in order to take over the farming operation.

Leadership Roles

In addition to working as a farmer, in 2016, Sherlock was elected as the mayor of Dazey, a community of about 100 people.

"Small communities have a lot of the same issues as larger communities, just with fewer resources to fix them," Sherlock contends.



Dazey farmer Justin Sherlock (left center) converses with another young farmer during an American Soybean Association Corteva Agriscience Young Leader event.

Sherlock says that, during the good economic times, a number of young people came back to the community. He's determined to do his part in order to keep the rural community vibrant.

"I want to live here, so I hope to help make the community as good as we can. I want to maintain our community so that we can keep our small businesses, our local hospitals and our schools open," Sherlock explains.

Sherlock was selected by the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association (NDSGA) to represent the state as the American Soybean Association Corteva Agriscience Young Leader. The 36th Young Leader class began its leadership journey at the Corteva Agriscience Global Business Center in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The Indianapolis training session was the first phase of the program which is designed to identify future grower leaders within the agriculture community and to provide them with opportunities to enhance their skills while networking with other farmers. The second and final phase took place in San Antonio as part of the Commodity Classic.

Sherlock says that he had taken other leadership classes, but "this sounded like a good opportunity to refresh my skills and learn to better apply them."

Sherlock's experience working in Washington, D.C., and serving on the board for the Barnes County Farmers Union has given him a level of comfort when talking with members of Congress and the administration, but the additional training has been valuable.

"The best thing is the connections I've made," Sherlock says. "The Young Leader program is, by far, the best designed leadership program I've participated in over my career. There were phenomenal speakers, great discussions, and I really appreciate being able to connect with other soybean producers."

Young farmers from 19 states and Canada participated in Sherlock's class. He said that a lot of participants face the same challenges, including access to land and capital.

"It's been fun to learn what innovative things they're doing. That has led to a lot of in-depth conversations," Sherlock adds.

Being selected as a Young Leader also means that Sherlock serves on the NDSGA board for a year.

"I'm enjoying that, too," Sherlock says. "The level of knowledge and professionalism of the farmers on the board has been great."

—Story by Daniel Lemke,
photos courtesy of ASA



ASA President Bill Gordon (left) presents Sherlock (center) with a plaque recognizing his participation in the Young Leader program.