

Early Start, *Bright Future*



For a farmer who is now in his mid-20s, Josh Stutrud from Barton, North Dakota, already has an impressive farming resume. As a 13-year-old just out of seventh grade, Stutrud rented a quarter section of land and started running his own farm.

Stutrud grew up on farm operated by his father and grandfather, but in 2007, he had the chance to begin his own legacy.

“We had an out of state landlord who was more than excited about giving me the opportunity to get started,” Stutrud says. “It was a unique situation.”

In addition to growing up on a farm, Stutrud’s father was a vocational ag instructor in Willow City and a Future Farmers of America (FFA) advisor. That support and background provided the firm farming foundation Stutrud used to venture where few other teenagers went.

“As a 13-year-old, it was a great opportunity to learn production agriculture, both the labor portion and the management side, the deci-

sion-making,” Stutrud says.

Stutrud slowly grew his operation and is now a partner with his dad raising soybeans, hard red spring

wheat, canola and malting barley.

“It is odd talking to farmers of similar age and telling them I’ve farmed since 2007,” Stutrud adds.



Josh Stutrud (right) gets input from retired NDSGA Legislative Director Scott Rising during a visit with legislators in Bismarck.

“The experience has really improved my decision-making skills. I enjoy managing my business and working hard at becoming a better manager.”

Well Schooled

Not surprising based on his early foray into farm management, Stutrud says that he was truly interested in farming at an early age and knew farming was what he wanted to do. After high school, he attended North Dakota State University, earning a degree in crop and weed science with a minor in agribusiness, before returning to the family farm in 2014.

“I enjoy managing a business. The most exciting part is making smarter decisions and managing to be more efficient and healthier as a business,” Stutrud contends.

Because he’s been farming for more than a decade, Stutrud has experienced the highs and lows of commodity markets. He says that experience helped him become a better businessman.

“Part of starting out at an early

age is that I started before the big price boom. Commodity prices were lower when I started, so I had to learn to manage before the good times,” Stutrud explains.

Stutrud says that he knows about many cases where young farmers returned to the family operation during the good times and got accustomed to higher commodity prices. When prices fell again, some people weren’t prepared for the ramifications of an economic downturn. Going through challenging conditions early in his farming career was a learning experience.

“It made me better prepared to manage through the economic cycles that agriculture is prone to experience,” Stutrud says.

Forward Thinking

Stutrud, who is also a certified crop advisor, says that he likes to cultivate relationships in different business sectors which are tied to agriculture, including beer.

Summit Brewing in St. Paul, Minnesota, was founded and is operated

by a relative. Stutrud and his father raise all the malting barley used to brew Summit’s Dakota Soul beer.

“It’s a fun niche. I enjoy the technical side of brewing,” Stutrud says.

As a business manager working to improve his business, Stutrud is also immersed in technology. He is doing on-farm research trials with different prototype spray nozzles. He’s also using a combine mounted Near Infrared (NIR) grain analyzer that measures commodity components. The machine is utilized with soybeans, wheat, barley and canola in order to measure components such as oil, fiber and protein. Stutrud also incorporates variable rate technology for fertilizer application and seed placement.

“We use the technology to redefine nutrient zones and manage for quality,” Stutrud explains. “It helps our sustainability footprint.”

The technology and data analysis also help Stutrud make decisions.

“There’s not a lot of research into how oil and meal content impact soy growth. We’re looking at mechanical

practices to improve grain quality. We’ll gather data and try to find a pattern to see what’s better,” Stutrud says. “If farmers start being paid for quality components, we want to have a better idea of what works.”

Cultivating Leadership

Stutrud was selected as the 2018 North Dakota Corteva AgriScience American Soybean Association Young Leader. The Young Leader program enhances participants’ skills through leadership, communications and issues-based training. The program also builds a strong peer network which is designed to help participants increase their chances for success with their businesses and communities.

Stutrud says that he was aware of the program through former Young Leader and fellow farmer Logan Ferry. The Stutruds stopped raising livestock in 2017, giving him more freedom to participate in the leadership program.

“I was aware of the program and planned to get involved, so when the opportunity arose, I wanted to take it,” Stutrud says. “I thought the Young Leader program was intriguing.”

Stutrud says that he tries to take advantage of leadership opportunities because they help him to learn and to better represent his industry.

“I find it beneficial,” Stutrud explains. “As a grower, it’s good to stay active and involved in the industry.”

Despite his young age, Stutrud has gained a lot of practical knowledge and insight about agriculture. Even though economic conditions in farm country are challenging, he’s bullish on agriculture.

“Agriculture will always be a leading industry in North Dakota, and there are lots of opportunities, not just for farmers. There are opportunities in technology and different aspects of our industry,” Stutrud says.

—Story and photos by Daniel Lemke



Stutrud checks soybeans affected by October snowfall near his Barton, North Dakota farm.