

Sunderman Farm Management Co. is celebrating its 50th Anniversary

Owner Brian Larson and employees Brent Larson and Mark Thompson are members of the Chamber's Ag Committee. At the January 6, 2011 meeting, they gave us a very interesting presentation on how the company has evolved since its inception in 1961. The company was started by Roger Sunderman and his wife, Lyda. Brian Larson began working with them in 1969. Brian said the biggest changes in these past years came not so much in farm management, but in actual farming practices.

For example:

Then: Farmers tilled their fields 5 to 8 times per year.

Now: Most farmers till their fields 1 to 3 times per year.

Then: Fall and spring tillage left the fields smooth and black

Now: More crop residue is left in the fields, which greatly reduces erosion. Some farmers use conservation/strip tillage or no-till practices.

Then: Corn was harvested on the cob and stored in corn cribs. It was shelled off the cob the following summer.

Now: Corn is picked and shelled with a combine, then a semi hauls it to a local elevator, an ethanol plant, or a farmer's grain bin.

Then: Combines harvested 2-4 rows

Now: Combines harvest 6-16 rows

Then: Corn yields were 100-125 bushels per acre

Now: Corn yields are 175-200 bushels per acre

Then: Corn sold for 80 cents per bushel

Now: Corn sells for over \$5.00 per bushel

Then: Soybean yields were 30-40 bushels per acre

Now: Soybean yields are 45-60 bushels per acre

Then: Soybeans sold for \$2.00 per bushel

Now: Soybeans sell for \$13.00 per bushel

Brian Larson said many of their clients do a crop share lease program. They have over 80 farms in Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota. The absentee landowners who are their clients live all across the United States and abroad. They also mentioned that NEW Cooperative was the first merged co-op formed in this area when the Badger and Vincent cooperative elevators combined. "NEW" is an acronym for "NorthEast Webster."

Brian pointed out that land is the only investment that can go to a zero value, and you can still live and survive on it. What other investment can that be said about?

Then: There were no government farm programs

Now: Their farm management service devotes considerable time and effort to today's multiple government farm programs for their clients

Then: Farmers were busy laying drainage tiles throughout their fields to drain wet areas. The government shared some of the cost.

Now: The government gives incentives for farmers to return their land to wetlands and stop using the drainage tile.

Then: Crops were sold to smaller private and cooperative elevators or used to feed the farmer's livestock.

Now: Crops are sold to larger merged cooperatives, feed mills, and ethanol plants.

Then: Farmers' wagons could carry approximately 100 bushels of corn

Now: Farmers' wagons can hold 650-750 bushels, and many farmers also own semi's, which hold 900-1000 bushels of corn

Then: Land value was about \$600 per acre

Now: Land value is between \$5,000 and \$9,000 per acre.

Then: Farmers drove tractors without cabs manually.

Now: Farmers navigate tractors via GPS steering from climate-controlled cabs.