

Leading Edge

The Journal of No-Till Agriculture

March 2006 • Volume 5 • Number 1



Rising to the Challenge

by Andy Holzwarth

Today, in driving through the Gettysburg, SD area, you would have to drive a long time to find a field that is left uncovered with crop residue. However, back in the Eighties, burying residue was the norm. What pushed a couple of counties in north-central S. Dakota to 80 or 90% no-till? —some creative farm operators taking things into their own hands, challenging each other's minds, and, of course, competing for land.

One of those well-managed farms is owned by Mike & Monte Cronin, whose good business sense opened the way for the flourishing of the



skills of Dan Forgey, manager of Cronin Farms west of Gettysburg, SD. Thirty years ago, Forgey was 'merely' a hired man on the grain and cattle operation run by Mike & Monte's dad, who at that time also owned a feed mill / grain elevator in Gettysburg. Profits from these eventually gave rise to investments in John Deere dealerships in the early '90s. As you can imagine, Mike and Monte had their hands full with the various business activities vying for their attention, so they decided to reallocate personnel and appointed Forgey as their farm manager. Dan is charged with seeing to it that the

farm is a profitable enterprise, and he gets paid a portion of the profits, so he really pays attention!

The last 15 years have been a whirlwind of change for Forgey. They went from being 25% summerfallow to having none. And from using 4 people and 3 tractors (totaling 525 hp) to farm about 5,600 acres, to needing only 2 people and one 250-hp tractor to crop over 8,600 acres (and adding another 600 for '06). While cropped acres shot up, labor and capital being used were shrinking, and field operations were becoming much more precise. The



Photo by Dan Forgey.

Dan Forgey raves about field peas in his rotation.

Contents

- Rising to the Challenge* 273
- Roots: The Foundation*..... 279
- Disturbance Favors Weeds* 287
- Field Ecosystems* 288
- Skip-Row Concerns*..... 296
- An Inquisitive Nature*..... 298