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News Column - University of Nebraska Lincoln Extension
Paul C Hay, Extension Educator
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FINAL NEWS COLUMN

I grew up on a small-diversified farm in Southwest Michigan near the town of Bangor, Michigan. My parents, uncle and three brothers raised corn, alfalfa, wheat, oats, pasture, apples, peaches, plums, quinces, tart cherries, milked a dozen milking shorthorn cows, sold cream, pigs, and steers by private treaty. We sold part of our produce at a farm stand and the rest to exchange markets in several area towns. Part of my skill level in helping people with Extension questions came from selling produce to the pupil and explaining farm production to Chicago people visiting the farm.

I went on the Michigan State University and graduated in 1973 with a degree in Crops and soils. Three of the professors I worked with were from this area in Nebraska. Maury Vitosh in Soils from Odell; Vernon Meints from Pickrell in Soils; and Milo Tesar from Western in Forages. My Department Chairman had worked on an overseas project in Columbia with Dr Dale Flowerday from Nebraska. He convinced me to call Dale an explore a teaching assistantship at the University of Nebraska. I did think about Extension and interviewed in Michigan. The position I looked at was a grant-funded position exploring cloud seeding in Central Michigan. I just could not quite see myself in “The Rainmaker” role even though I love Katherine Hepburn movies.

Getting my Master’s degree with Dale Flowerday really set my career path in Agronomy, in Nebraska and in the role of helping people Extension. My 42 years working for University of Nebraska Extension started in Frontier County a couple of days before the County Fair. I was green as grass. The farmers and people in Frontier embraced me only because I love to dig for answers and respond to people’s needs. One of my first calls was from a farmer to look at a wheat field a mile south of White, Nebraska. The town had long ago disappeared and it was his joke to call new “government workers” and invite them out. He enjoyed a laugh with his coffee buddies about this practice until I showed up. We looked at the wheat, and I shared a few tips.

Frontier County was a great place to start because the clients really appreciated everything I did for them. Unfortunately, they had not experienced that in past Extension Agents. Thirty years later an older art student at Peru State shared a humorist letter I wrote to a client in Curtis when he asked me to tell him why his tree was losing its leaves in October, fall leaf drop syndrome, of course!

The focus of my work in Gage County has been a strong 4-H program and Agronomy focus on dryland cropping systems. I feel I have had considerable influence in the 85% no-till farming adoption rate in Gage County. Key current efforts are soil health, management of small erosion spots in no-till, cover crops, irrigation scheduling, crop rotation (keeping wheat in the rotation), Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (manure management) and atrazine education in response to atrazine levels in surface water. It has been a blessings working with quality staff in my office like Jane Esau, Kay McKinzie, Larry Germer, Lindsey McKeever, Kim Witulski, Eleanor Rector, Sandee Bellows, Diane Swanson, Randy Pryor, Eric Stehlik and many many others. Also great workers at the FSA, NRCS and NRD offices.

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