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A Champion Spirit

by Matt Hagny

Sometimes the difference between winning and losing is simply picking yourself up off the ground *one more time*. Dusty Albright claims to have learned most of his lessons the hard way, and after hearing a few of his tales, you might be inclined to agree. Yet Dusty is undaunted, still eager to challenge the conventional wisdom and to make some extra money along the way.



Dusty (his given name) has been bucking the trend for much of his life, and often proving the cynics wrong. Dusty has been farming for over a decade south of Anthony, KS—just across the Oklahoma border—although he was born and raised north of Topeka. Albright immigrated to Anthony in '96 after marrying Erin, daughter of Innis & Susan Croft, who farmed and ran stockers on an operation there.

In those days, Dusty worked full-time at the local Co-op, yet managed to rent a bunch of cropland outside the Croft land, obtained government-backed financing, and put out the crops using equipment owned by his late father-in-law. Dusty later both worked for and rented from the Croft family, still running his own cropping and cattle enterprise as a separate entity. These bootstrapped ventures paid off for Dusty, although the ride has been anything but smooth.

Today the Albright and Croft operations are quite lean on both labor and machinery, and Dusty is always thinking about ways of streamlining further. Of course, he's a no-tiller. The mindset of no-till was in place already on the farm where Dusty grew up, and Innis pulled the plug on tillage on his operation in '97, for reasons that

are a bit of a mystery to Dusty. Innis just made up his mind that he was going to be all no-till in one fell swoop, so he parked the tillage machinery. Dusty comments: "We really didn't use it—we had to use a chainsaw to cut trees out of that equipment years later when we sold it." A couple of extra 4WD tractors, a pair of 14-bottom plows, and sundry other tillage implements were pared. Dusty points to a stack of owner's manuals: "This is it. About a third of what it once was!"

Try and Try Again

Innis first undertook no-till in '96, on 80 acres of cotton. Dusty says, "His first try at no-till was a disaster—a big weed patch!" That didn't deter Innis in the least, not for no-till and not for cotton either.

Yet at that time the vast majority of Innis' operation was still continuous wheat, and Dusty explains, "We used a lot of Maverick [herbicide to control 'cheatgrass'] in those years." Meanwhile, Dusty's rented cropland had considerably more cotton and soybeans, with mixed results: "The second year I had land rented, I had hundreds of acres of soybeans that flopped—12 bu/a." By 2000 and 2001, Dusty and Innis were very heavy into cotton, including

Milo? "I'd rather grow something the cattle can harvest. You plant 'feed' [sorghum-sudan] and you don't have to worry so much about keeping weeds out with high-dollar herbicide."



Dusty's wheat in soybean stubble. Nice!

much of the cropland in another venture in Oklahoma (this land is no longer in the Croft or Albright operations). They hit a dry year and had a big wreck, so cotton was scaled back considerably, to only about 10% of their cropland in recent years. "I'll probably take a break from cotton in '08. It takes too much time to harvest [with a solitary Allis 880