

# The Diverse Duo

by Charles Long

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Brothers Chet and Charlie Edinger's grain farm in South Dakota stretches across 36-odd miles, mainly west of Mitchell towards White Lake. Over this area, soil types vary from silt loam to what their father, Wayne, calls clay hardpan. As part of the 'prairie pothole' region that was originally on the western edge of the tall-grass prairie, it requires some special management at times. Edingers seem to have the skill set for that management.

Each of the Edinger brothers brings specific aptitudes and talents to the farm enterprise. Chet explains it this way: "It was a family rule. You can't come home to farm until you get an education, and then use that education to work for somebody else for at least two years." So, the first managerial lesson we might take from Edingers is this: Acquire a broad knowledge base from diverse experiences.

Chet went to Iowa State University for two years, then attended a vocational school at Pipestone, MN, for its ag banking program. He soon embarked on a banking career in Minnesota, initially making consumer loans, and later taking a position at a bank in a different town making loans to farmers and small business. After seven years, he returned to the farm.

Charlie earned a degree in agronomy at South Dakota State University and then worked within the agronomy program of CHS for two-and-a-half years near Ogallala, Nebraska. By that time, Charlie was chomping at the bit to come back to the farm, and Chet asked him to do so to provide the needed agronomy help.

With their different educations and work backgrounds, Chet and Charlie's skills complement each other nicely. Chet is the numbers man and handles chores related to that aspect of the business, and tends to be the 'spokesperson' for the farm in dealing with landlords and so forth. Charlie is the science guy and handles the cropping and agronomy part of the farm. Chet says, "Whenever you have a partnership, every partner has to bring something valuable to the table, and have their own area that they are responsible for. That way everybody feels like they have an integral part of what's going on." Without this splitting of duties, too much of their efforts and knowledge would be redundant. This might be Lesson #2 that we can learn from Edingers: Don't try to do everything yourself, unless you like crushing workloads and mediocre results.

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## The Basics

When Chet returned to the farm in 1993, it was primarily a wheat >>summerfallow operation, with an occasional crop of sunflowers or milo. Wayne had learned the wheat >>fallow method from Kansas farmers as a kid on a custom-harvesting run back in the 1950s. (All sorts of bad habits derive from Kansas.)

Discussing why the farm is now no-till, Chet says, "Knowing that you have half of your land out of production every year—not producing income but producing expenses only—I got to looking at the [fallow] system, thinking, 'Well, that was a good system in its day, but I would like to get a crop every year. That way you can improve your financial status and can look forward to doing more things and you can have a good division of labor.' That was what I liked about no-till right off the bat was that you could spread your risks out. You could use different seeding tools that are out there at different times of the year to break crops up and produce more income—growth income—than you could in the old wheat >>fallow rotation that wasn't so intensive."



Photo by Chet Edinger.

Another good sunflower crop for Edingers.