Taking On The Business Of Farming

Barbara McBreen

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Even though he’s managing a farm two hours away from Ames while tackling a full class schedule, Andy Edson doesn’t see himself as an entrepreneur. He says it’s how you approach business that defines entrepreneur.

“Some people think that anyone who starts a business is an entrepreneur,” says Edson, a junior in agricultural business. “An entrepreneur is someone who is innovative and tries to do things differently.”

Edson, who is part of the fifth generation to grow up on his family farm, plans to partner with his dad and perhaps run the operation in the future. It’s a transition they have slowly begun. Edson started farming 14 acres three years ago on their farm near Nashua, Iowa. In 2009, a neighbor asked him to farm another 600 acres.

“Paying rent and writing bigger checks was a new experience, but that’s how I learn,” Edson says.

Variable rate planting, auto-steer and field mapping analysis are just a few of the technologies Edson hopes to set up on his family’s farm in the future.

“There’s a lot of room to grow with technology and that’s what I’m hoping to bring to the operation,” Edson says.

This year Edson attended the Beginning Farmer’s Conference where he learned about the Ag Decision Maker program. It offers numerous decision-making tools to help calculate cost, returns, markets, outlooks and prices. He says the conference is just one of many resources offered at Iowa State.

“It gives you the tools to evaluate the most profitable options,” Edson says.

Although he’s had to cut back on club activities, he’s continued to stay active in the National Agri-marketing Association. In April, the team attended the national competition in Kansas City and presented a marketing plan for a sub-clinical mastitis treatment. Edson says the product doesn’t contain antibiotics, so dairy producers wouldn’t have to dispose of milk after applying the product.

Edson also gained marketing experience during his summer internship at Insta-Pro International. The company sells oilseed processing and dry extruder equipment throughout the world.

“I collected data on existing markets and investigated possible ways they could expand their markets,” Edson says.

Edson’s story isn’t typical. Less than 15 percent of the college’s graduates plan to go into production farming. For students who want to farm, the Beginning Farmers Network student club offers resources and opportunities to meet with farmers and experts.

“There is a lot of interest in the student club,” says Mike Duffy, economics professor, director of the Beginning Farmer Center and club adviser.

More than 50 percent of Iowa’s farmers are over age 55. Duffy says resources like the Beginning Farmer Center and the student club are important because they can help retiring farmers connect with students like Edson and others who want to farm.