



# Plain View

## Integration provides flexible solutions



Todd Wickstrom, left, and his family operate an integrated beef, winter wheat and rotational crop farm. Although one of his biggest challenges has been drought, he works with his brother to find solutions. He spoke with Bruce about varieties, drought, and overcoming challenges.

By D. Bruce Bosley, Colorado Cooperative Extension Educator

**T**odd Wickstrom and his family operate an integrated beef, winter wheat, and rotational crop farm. Their farm began when their great grandfather, Peter Wickstrom, homesteaded.

Todd and his brother, Cary, divided the farm management so each has primary responsibility for different enterprises and work operations. Todd manages the dryland crop management, and Cary manages the beef operation. They meet regularly to assure the parts of the farm function together and support one another. They also plan changes, possible new enterprises, and adopting new marketing strategies.

The Wickstrom family farm consists of Todd and Cary, their retired parents Don and Pat, and Cary's wife, Patty. They also have two permanent workers who have worked for the farm for the past 10 years. They also receive help from cooperative extension.

They have a good working relationship with Colorado State University. They host a Wheat Variety Test Plot on their farm.

"We benefit from university information, and our local Extension Agent has helped them through many production issues and crop challenges. He's always seen as a helping hand," Todd said.

In addition to the farm, Todd spends a little time each year at nearby Jackson Reservoir and goes to the mountains once or twice a winter. He spends a lot of time with his 8-year-old son. As a Colorado State graduate (1988 Ag Business), Todd always takes time to attend the CSU Ag Alumni weekend and football game.

He also serves on the Weldon Telephone Board, the Fort Morgan Young Farmers, and has served on the Colorado Conservation Tillage Association Board for two terms.

Winter wheat is the basis for their dryland crop rotational farming system. They also produce dryland rotational crops like proso millet, corn, and hay millet. Their production follows a wheat and spring crop rotation system of two crops in three years. Todd has experimented with other dryland crops, including sunflower, barley, oats, grain and forage sorghum.

However, he bypassed these rotational options during the drought years.

The Wickstrom Farm integrates crops with grazing yearling steers and heifers on native rangeland and a finish feeding livestock operation. Todd said this integration gives the farm flexibility with the crop options according to livestock feeding needs and the yearling numbers based upon the rain-fed range production capacity for that season. Similarly, Todd and his family increase or decrease the numbers of cattle in their feedlot based on cattle futures prices.

To minimize Russian wheat aphid problems, Todd has planted Colorado resistant wheat varieties. The Wickstroms also market the wheat varieties through the Rocky Mountain Milling cooperative, which pays a premium for Prowers 99 and Akron wheat varieties.

Todd said the farm's major challenge has been the drought that has persisted over the past four years. Their wheat crops have been reduced by moisture stress and the freezes accompanying droughty weather.

Regardless, Todd remains optimistic that, together with his family, they can find ways to "tough out" the hard times, and through their cropping systems and integrated livestock enterprise, they can gain during more favorable weather.

Todd said what he likes best is "having grown on a farm, the lifestyle, and facing challenges and new opportunities." His upbringing has "tended to make him optimistic and to try new ideas and to figure out ways to overcome obstacles."

Family helps. Todd said he gains personal strength through his "interactions between family members on overcoming challenges and changing with the time. Even grandfather wasn't afraid to try something new."

To read more about the Wickstroms, please see our Web site.



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- *Crop Diversification*
  - *Variety Selection*
    - *Field Monitoring and biocontrol*
    - *Best Management practices for Wheat*

## **Diversity overcoming adversity...**

**Their summer crops have been hurt even more significantly by the lack of in-season rainfall and fall and winter storage moisture. They have also had to reduce yearling numbers due to the lack of range production. Together with Cary, he said they value “diversifying our operations and are thinking about producing organic wheat and even grass fed or organic beef. This summer we are testing out the skip row planting system on dryland corn.” To read more about the Wickstroms, please see our Web site.**



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