



Plain View

Challenging the High and Dry Plains



Left: Wes Phillips, his wife, Esther, and son-in-law, Marv Buescher at their farm in southwest Kimball County, Nebraska. Their 1600 acres of dryland farmland produces wheat, sunflowers, and hay millet. Approximately 1500 acres is available for grazing and other livestock operations, which focus mainly on cow-calf pairs.

By Dave Christian, University of Nebraska, Panhandle Research & Extension Center.

Wes Phillips and his family run a farm in southwest Kimball County, Nebraska, and participate in the USDA-ARS Areawide Pest Management

rangeland. Accordingly, Wes has earned several conservation awards over the years for planting trees and shelter belts, water and soil conservation projects such as terracing, and for using farming practices that limit wind erosion, water erosion, and runoff.

The operation also engages in agronomic practices designed to prevent erosion, conserve soil moisture, and combat pests. The traditional wheat-fallow strip rotational system is supplemented with sunflowers and hay millet to take advantage of soil moisture and help deal with weed problems. Sunflowers are usually planted into wheat stubble. These are followed by hay millet only if there is enough precipitation, as sunflowers deplete soil moisture throughout the profile. Broadleaf and spring crops help disrupt the growth cycles of tough weeds like rye.

Research and extension educators have helped the Phillips operation in several areas over the years. Wes cites rust resistant wheat varieties as a major leap forward. Many livestock health problems have also been improved or eliminated through research on nutrition and supplements.

Wes and Marv also spend time walking the fields, pulling rye to limit the weed seed bank. Over the past two seasons, they have controlled weeds and volunteer wheat with chem-fallow and limited tillage. Wes says that their biggest weed problems come from feral rye, jointed goat grass, burr ragweed, and bindweed.

Marv says high prices for inputs are their biggest challenge. "Farmers buy everything retail," says Marv, "but sell everything wholesale." However, Wes and Marv continue to look for ways to save on production costs.

In addition to farming, Wes has helped others and served on many committees and in community organizations including County Planning, Ag, and Zoning Committees, and Hospital, Farm Bureau, Museum, and Church Boards.

To read more about the Phillips operation, please visit our web site.

for wheat Project. Much of the farm has been in the family for almost 100 years, going back to when Wes' grandfather and great uncle came to the area to homestead and raise sheep. Although first started as a sheep operation, forage and other crops were added. Wes grew up on the farm tending the sheep and the crops. His only time away from the farm came when he served his country in the army during and just after World War II.

Wes entered into a partnership with his father in 1949, just before his marriage to Esther. He has been the farm manager ever since. The Phillips have tried to keep it all in the family, as Wes and his wife Esther have been joined on the farm by their daughter Rhonda and son-in-law Marv Buescher.

The farm has gone through a fair amount of change through the years. Cattle were added to the operation, as were the right pieces of farmland when they came up for sale. Each piece of land on the farm is connected to another piece owned by the farm, with the headquarters and farm houses located near the middle. This is the most efficient setup for moving livestock, equipment, and wheat farming on many acres. "It's taken 93 years to put this together, it's just natural for me is all" says Wes about his contributions to the development of the farm and his life as a farmer.

The 5100 foot elevation presents a special challenge to their operation. It limits some varietal choices and sometimes makes the growing season more erratic. Although Wes has tried other promising varieties from time to time, he has found a variety that is well suited to the farm and grows his own seed. "We've grown Lancer for so long, now it's native," says Wes, "but it grazes well, yields very well, and has some rust resistance."

Special attention is paid to conservation on the farm and



Wes says what he likes best about his operation is "wheat in the bin and calves ready to load."

We are *Areawide Pest Management for Wheat*, a five-year project developed by the USDA Agricultural Research Service, to demonstrate pest management practices for the Russian wheat aphid and greenbug. Our main goal is to collaborate with wheat producers in evaluating and demonstrating non-chemical pest management techniques, with particular emphasis on the management of the Russian wheat aphid and the greenbug. The elements of our program include:

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

Family farm a lifetime of effort...

Wes Phillips and his family farm in southwest Kimball County, Nebraska. "I've never had a real job. I've spent all of my time out here on the farm." says Wes jokingly, although he has worked hard on the Phillips farm since he was 5 years old when he first began tending the sheep. Wes' granddaughter Crystal McDonough has written a history of his life and the farm as a college project. It is entitled *Outstanding in the Field*, and was a great resource for the preparation of this article. — Dave Christian



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