

FORTY CHANCES

I am currently reading a book by Howard G. Buffet called Forty Chances. The author is actually the son of Warren Buffet and believe it or not he is a farmer. This book was recommended to me by Dr. David Franzen, our NDSU Extension Soil and Fertility Specialist. It is predicated on the notion that the average farmer gets forty crops or forty chances to make changes. Make no mistake, this is a book about change and if you are not comfortable with change this is not the book for you. This a book about world hunger, soil health and trying to create the next brown revolution. We have already had the green revolution with the new crop technology this book talks about improving our soil's health and making the soil and resources we have do more. It has inspiring stories of the third world farmer's plight in fighting warlords, genocide and all the ills that accompany mismanaged economies and total lack of respect for food production. This book has produced a rollercoaster of emotions from joy to extreme disbelief and sadness but most of all it gives me hope, it is a dire warning of what happens when the food and farmers go away.

Now let's talk about how the concept of forty chances applies to Walsh County farmers. If we follow this concept each producer is given approximately forty chances to change their operation or not. The easy changes are adopting the new high yielding varieties and the latest technology and equipment. The hard changes are trying to make changes in your operation that are not the accepted norm and carry social and maybe economic risks while you figure out your new paradigms. The soil health movement that I have been attracted to over the past ten years falls into this category. We have figured out a lot of things in this movement that is led by farmers. I have found that the really profound changes I have seen have always occurred when farmers and consumers work together in a common cause. We must stop the fighting and those that would take away the tools we need to farm. If we work together I believe we can overcome this, but we also must change and change is hard. I was once told the only ones who like change are babies with soiled diapers.

I try to be the change I would like to see in the world and I am part of a core group of people looking at soil health and how making changes that stabilize and improve the productivity of our soils does not have to come with an economic cost or a very low one. The "Save the Five" program seeks to return to productivity of the five acres that exist in most quarters in Walsh County. Think of the increased food production we could gain if we got just these acres back into production and instead of them being a loss generator and turn them into profit producing acres. We are rapidly running out of herbicide options on the tough to control weeds. We have initiated a program that looks at using strip till to suppress some of the early growth of these weeds and protect our fragile beet seedlings. We are looking at conservation beets and trying to gain knowledge on how to keep more cover on our ground, stop the wind erosion, increase soil health while improving the productivity our land and doing it in a way that makes economic sense. We have been doing cover crops for a long time in Western Walsh County and have used them as a way to put on cheap gain when traditionally our cattle are going backwards. I have found it does have to rain to make this happen and it can't be 30 inches! These are what I have been doing with my 40 chances. I am now at year 39 so how many chances do I have remaining to make a positive impact in Walsh County Agriculture? The answer is not many.

What will you do with your forty chances? What innovations would you like to try on your farm to increase the productivity of your land and in return increase your profit margins and fight weeds? It does not have to be big or earth shaking, just start! If you would like to learn more about some of the things I have done with my forty chances and how you might adapt some of it to your operation I would love to talk to you 701-284-6624. The "Save the Five" program might be an easy way to start down the road to your forty chances.



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