



Farmer-to-farmer case studies showcase resilient farms

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Among the many excellent farmers in this region are some who are at the forefront of trying new farming practices. By adapting their tillage, residue management, crop rotations, soil organic amendments, and resource use efficiency, these farmers have been able to thrive when faced with risk. They have developed farming operations that achieve their economic and environmental goals within the constraints of their specific locations, as well as constraints that are universal to wheat-based farming throughout the region.

IMPACT

Case studies enrich farmer-to-farmer learning and provide all stakeholders with information about how farmers at the forefront of the industry are thinking about the future and dealing with risk. They can thereby enhance the resiliency of cereal-based farmers in the inland Pacific Northwest.

To help farmers and other stakeholders in the region learn from these innovative dryland and irrigated producers, we have featured these inland Pacific Northwest ce-

real farmers in a series of case studies. Four case studies (Figure 1), begun in 2013, will be published soon. Three new case studies are in progress, and three additional ones are planned for 2015.

The case studies aim to inspire other farmers and provide them with details that could inform their decisions regarding adoption of new strategies on their farms. Andy Juris, who farms with his father, Ron, in Bickleton, WA, summarizes this rationale well when he talks about how important information from other farmers has been to his operation:

When you talk about resources that have helped us transition to new practices, an equipment salesman or the results from a research experiment are always really nice. But when you hear

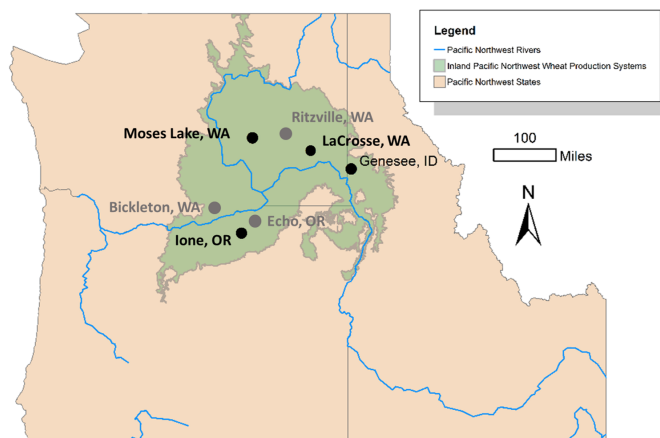


Figure 1. Locations of 2013 case studies (black) and 2014 case studies (gray); additional case studies are planned for 2015. Map courtesy of Erich Seamon.

a farmer say, “This is what we saw when we tried it,” . . . or see the results or have a guy send you pictures and say, “Here’s what it looks like,” [it] is really worth a lot.

We hope others working in the sector, including crop advisors, agricultural industry personnel, and researchers, will also find the case studies useful. Building an understanding of farm-level resilience can contribute to an understanding of adaptive capacity overall, and of what is needed to support ongoing adaptation to meet future challenges.

Final case studies include an extension publication and a short video. As they become available, materials will be posted at www.casestudies.reacchpna.org. The first four case studies—of Eric Odberg, Dale Gies, Steve and Becky Camp, and Bill Jepsen—are summarized below.

Mustard cover cropping

Dale Gies, Moses Lake, WA

Dale Gies has developed an intensive irrigated rotation of wheat, followed by mustard cover crop in the first year and potatoes in the second year. Despite its intensity, this rotation successfully suppresses soilborne diseases and nematodes, allowing him to intensify his rotation and cut fumigation costs while improving soil health. Dale also grows vegetable and cover crop seed crops, and consults with farmers around the world about improving disease control through rotations and cover cropping. Photo by Sylvia Kantor.

“We’re able to produce good yields, good quality, and improve the soil while we’re doing it.”



Enhancing crop diversity

Steve and Becky Camp, LaCrosse, WA

Steve and Becky Camp are growing oilseeds and peas in an area that traditionally grows just winter wheat, spring wheat, and spring barley. They also make their own biodiesel from camelina. Steve and Becky's experimentation is guided by holistic management, with goals of building soil quality and reducing long-term risk. Photo by Sylvia Kantor.

"If each of those rotations has a direct advantage to the soil health, then I'm going to leave this farm in much better shape."



Flex cropping

Bill Jepsen, Lone, OR

Farmers in the part of northeastern OR where Bill Jepsen farms traditionally use a winter wheat–summer fallow rotation to cope with dry conditions and shallow soils. Bill has developed a flex cropping system that lets him replace fallow with a crop when moisture allows. Photo by Sylvia Kantor.

"Our goal is to make the most amount of profit, over the long haul . . . and the flexible rotation allows us to sneak in an annual crop when we would have nothing growing. . . . At the same time, we can control weeds and . . . improve our soils."



Precision nitrogen application

Eric Odberg, Genesee, ID

Eric Odberg was an early adopter of variable-rate nitrogen application in the annual dryland production region of the Pacific Northwest. Eric sees variable-rate applications as just one strategy in his ongoing efforts to keep his operation profitable and provide good stewardship for his land. Photo by Guy Swanson.

"It's a win as far as cost savings for me as a producer. And it's a win for the planet and general populace of less nitrogen going into our environment, whether it's in the atmosphere or our waterways."