

Getting to know Board Member: Chad Johnson

District 7

Q: Tell us about your farming operation.

A: My family homesteaded in 1894 on land near Groton where I farm today. The barn that was built that same year is still on our place.

For as long as I can remember, we've been pretty diversified. We raise corn, soybeans, wheat, a cow/calf herd and, until 1998, we had a dairy herd.

Farming has always been the career for me. From the time that I rode with my dad on the floor of the tractor (back then they didn't have the nice buddy seats they have today), I have always loved it.

I still do - from the ability to bring a new calf into the world to planting a seed and watching corn, wheat and soybeans grow each growing season. Even though every year is different and comes with its own set of challenges, I am like most farmers and still try to shoot the moon every year.

In 1996 we formed a family corporation, Four J Farms Inc, with my dad, Glenn, my uncle James, and my mom, Alvina.

I also appreciate the fact that my wife, Michelle, and I can raise our children, Brenna, 14, and Porter, 10, on the farm.

Q: 1894, that's quite a heritage! What has held things together through all the challenges?

A: I'd have to say that it's our passion for farming. My folks and uncle never took a vacation. The farm always came first.

Farming is what we all love to do. We get out of bed every morning to feed the world.

The farm has gone through some tough times - the 1930s and the 1980s. Since I started farming, the farm has seen good years, but now, this growing season we are seeing some tough times with the prices.

Q: Tell us about your involvement in Farmers Union.

A: My grandpa helped start the local Ferney co-op, Farmers Union Oil Company of Ferney, in 1943. The farmers were having a tough time getting inputs into the community so they formed their own cooperative. He was one of the founding members.

Right after I graduated from high school, I was asked to serve on the board.

Then, one year I was asked to go on a Farmers Union Fly-In. I was impressed by the process and the opportunity it gave me and other farmers to tell our story.

I still feel that if you can go to Washington D.C. with dirt under your fingernails and tell a story, it means much more to our policy makers than having a lobbyist try to tell our story for us.

Q: Any current issues you're watching closely?

A: COOL is a big deal to me as a livestock producer and consumer of meat. I strongly believe that our food products should be labeled because U.S. farmers and our cattle industry is held to such a high standard compared to other countries.

It costs us more to raise our product, and in the end, consumers receive a quality product that is much safer.

I'm also a promoter of E-30 and the ethanol industry in general. Ethanol is a renewable resource that provides us with cleaner energy.

Right now I'm concerned about rail issues. Through Farmers Union, I recently had the opportunity to meet with executives of Burlington Northern Railroad to discuss the current issues.

Like so many, this is an issue Farmers Union is fighting for farmers' rights.