

## **Getting to Know Board President: Doug Sombke**

### **Q: Tell us about your farming operation:**

**A:** I farm with my three sons: Brett, Bryan and Bryce. My sons are fifth-generation Brown County farmers.

We raise 3,000 acres of corn and soybeans. Along with farming, my sons operate three side businesses to supplement our farm income. Brett manages a soil sampling business, No Limits Soil Services, LLC; Brian manages a hunting lodge, Coteau View Lodge, LLC ; and Bryce manages a hunting dog breeding and training business, Coteau Hunt & Kennels.

Today our farming operation looks much different than it did when I started out in the early 1980s. I decided to farm full-time a few weeks into my freshman year of college. Every dollar I spent on books and tuition, I realized I could use to purchase livestock or land and that realization didn't sit well with me since farming was all I ever wanted to do.

So, I came home. I worked for my dad as free labor in exchange for using his equipment. I had 38 acres of land and a flock of 150-head registered Suffolk sheep that I started as a 4-H member.

It was a tough start. I tell people that when Mel and I got married, we were so broke we didn't even have an oven. We cooked on a hotplate. She worked as a lab tech and her salary paid for groceries and what the farm brought in paid for land.

Over time, I was able to lease and buy more land from retiring neighbors. I also expanded the livestock operation to include a 1,000-head feedlot operation. Interestingly enough, this is what led me to Farmers Union. A while back, we made the decision to manage our marginal acres for hunting purposes, and we now lease our cow/calf herd to a beginning farmer.

### **Q: All three of your sons farm with you. How do you make it work?**

**A:** It was always a goal of mine that if my sons wanted to farm full-time, they would have the opportunity. So I've helped my sons start the side businesses that supplement the farm income.

These side businesses mean our farm can support four families. They also mean that our sons are doing what they truly enjoy and are passionate about. Instead of them feeling like they have to run the farm exactly how I did.

Isn't that what living the American dream is all about? Being in the business you love.

**Q: Tell us how you were introduced to Farmers Union:**

**A:** Like I alluded to earlier, at one time I operated a cattle feedlot. When the packers began to consolidate and manipulate the market, it didn't take long to recognize the negative impact that had on my operation. This was about the same time that Sen. Johnson first introduced COOL.

I learned that Farmers Union was taking a stand for family farmers like me, so I started getting involved.

**Q: What about Farmers Union hooked you?**

**A:** With Farmers Union, it's not about politics, it's about policy.

I was captivated by the fact that Farmers Union provides family farmers with a voice. As an individual member, I have always been able to take a position, and with Farmers Union's backing, it carries weight.

This point struck home when I attended my first Fly-In and I saw firsthand the clout this organization carried in D.C.

**Q: What do you enjoy most about your role as President of Farmers Union?**

**A:** Really, it comes down to being able to help people. I also enjoy being a voice for South Dakota's family farmers and ranchers and helping rural communities succeed.