ANDY WELDEN
HILLSDALE COUNTY, MI

SUSTAINABILITY STORIES: LOOKING OUT FOR LEGACY

Hillsdale County farmer Andy Welden has a throwback approach to operational sustainability.

"Take the farm next door, for instance — it was 80 acres, and sustainable because it supported the family that lived on it," Welden says. "That was its goal — to produce enough to support a husband, wife and two children. It was diversified in that they had 50 chickens, two cows and two pigs.

"A lot of those pre-chemical management practices still have a place in today's agriculture. If you want the land to take care of you, you need to take care of the land. That's the foundation of sustainable agronomics to me."

Welden pairs vintage philosophy with new-era ideas for good reason. The fourth-generation farm is getting ready to usher in a fifth generation of leadership. And Welden knows the importance of handing off not only a sound farming business, but sound principles to help it thrive into the future as well.

Welden is an example of a growing trend among Michigan soybean farmers, 32 percent of whom are involved in their local communities, a number far above that of nonfarmers. Welden is a county commissioner, and is also active in the Michigan Farm Bureau. Like most things he does, the "extra" roles are importantly purposeful.

"In my observance of other farms, particularly those that are sustainable, I've noticed that the patriarch needs to recognize and hand off those management sustainability-driven decisions, so that it makes the next generation want to stay or have ownership in the management of it," Welden explains. "So I do the other things because I think that contributes to agriculture as a whole and the sustainability of agriculture in the state of Michigan. It also sets a good example for the importance of involvement."

As he prepares to transfer his operation to his sons, Welden is paying careful attention to all facets of sustainability, working tirelessly to ensure the farm is not only agronomically and economically fit, but also socially sustainable as well.

"We live here, too, and I think it's important that we do our part to show it," Welden says. "Michigan is pretty unique in that for farmers in Iowa or South Dakota, most of your neighbors are farmers. Here, the majority of the population is not directly involved in farming. That makes being involved in the community and open to answering questions about what we're doing here from an environmental responsibility perspective quite important."

87%

Thanks to Michigan's optimal climate, which provides ample rainfall most years, and management techniques like no-till farming and cover crops, 87% of Michigan soybean acreage is non-irrigated.

More than half of Michigan soybean acres are grown under conservation tillage, which helps preserve soil nutrients, increase organic matter, reduce runoff and soil erosion and keep more water available for plants.

TECHNOLOGY

More than 70 percent of Michigan soybean growers use the technologies of Global Positioning System (GPS) and over 45 percent use variable-rate technology (VRT) for seed, fertilizer and pesticide applications. These technologies decrease fuel usage and associated emissions, field compaction and fertilizer/pesticide use by more accurately guiding equipment across fields to eliminate excessive applications and trips through the field.

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Michigan Soybean Promotion Committee
The Soybean Checkoff