

Taking the Plunge

By Mathew Meals

I was taught as a young boy that there's no sense in living if you can't "take the plunge." Jump in and get your feet wet is what my elders used to tell me. And I guess that's what you could say I did to begin my farming career.

My story is a little different than most farmers, but hopefully not for long. I am a first-generation farmer. I took the plunge into farming and haven't looked back.

I wasn't raised on a farm, although I was raised in an agricultural environment. My parents never farmed and, consequently, didn't have a farm to pass on to me. So, realizing it was now or never, I purchased 53 acres of land from the farm I worked on as a kid, got a loan, purchased equipment, rented 83 more acres, built a farm shop and hay storage building and — became a farmer.

Talk about getting your feet wet!

As all farmers and ranchers know, farming is not easy on any given day—but especially those first days when you are trying to get your feet grounded. For me, it took a period of three years, a lot of hard work and many sleepless nights to get my crop and hay storage operation up and going.

As the U.S. farming population is getting older and we are seeing the number of farms dwindle every year, it is my hope that farmers and ranchers can work together to entice people like me—someone who had an interest in farming but not a family farm—to get involved in agriculture and help shape the next generation of farming.

I became involved in Farm Bureau's Young Farmers and Ranchers program to help out fellow and potential producers. My own Farm Bureau journey started out with the nurturing of several important people, including my grandfather who had to sell his farm before I was born, as well as a local farmer in my area who encouraged and helped me along the way.

I have always respected the values my grandfather stood for and I want to carry on that heritage. At the same time, I realize farming has changed—it's not my grandfather's agriculture anymore. And to carry on his and so many others' agricultural legacies, we must reach out and encourage new people to get involved in farming.

Farmers and ranchers not only have the opportunity, but the responsibility, to help out other producers and shepherd along those who dream of becoming a farmer or rancher. It is up to each and every one of us to lend a helping hand and encourage others to take the plunge, getting their feet wet in an industry that has given opportunity to so many Americans.