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Interview with Pat Feeney, Part 2

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Benjamin Halpern questions and comments in italics.

Interview with: Pat Feeney

Date of Interview: 4/07/2016

Location of Interview: Rural Piatt County, IL

Transcribed by: Jessica Craig

Date of Transcription: 11/4/2016

Length of Interview: 0:09:49

BH: Pat, can you tell me a little bit about how you go about solving a major challenge on the farm now?

PF: Well I guess I like to joke that we are a lot better at reacting than planning. To cite an instance, a lot of our fields and farms need tile. So just a year ago, I bought a tile plow and a tile stringer, and we were working with some neighbors and friends, and their tractor and their GPS system to help put the tile in. So we having trouble getting tiling equipment and tilers to come out and do the work for us, we waited years and years and couldn't get them to come. So that's been our biggest challenge lately, and it is a huge learning curve. But we did tile our first 80 acres this winter. We worked with our friends and neighbors to do another 40 acres. We are getting more confident with it. So I guess that is one of our latest challenges. It's been a lot of fun, it's been fun for the younger guys working for us too, a good challenge for them, and that's what they need.

BH: Sure, Are you interested in history?

PF: I do enjoy history, in fact most the books I read are history or current events.

BH: How have past decisions that you've made, relied on tradition or personal experience, from the past?

PF: A good thing is marketing, marketing our grain and our products. We try and look back in history and look at the mistakes we have made. I suppose history on buying equipment and the decisions made about buying equipment relates to the service we are going to get than the equipment itself. A lot of the equipment is pretty similar, so I suppose that decision is based on history because we've had a good history of service with people we deal with.

BH: What do you believe will help you in the future to continue making informed decisions?

PF: Well I hope to keep an open mind. Like I said, learn from our successes, and more than that, learn from our mistakes.

BH: Sure, I think it takes both. Learn from the mistakes, but keep positive from the successes and move forward. What are some of the things that really concerns you? What keeps you up at night?

PF: Probably right now, the environment that we are in right now. The prices are low, the prices for our products are low, we've seen a little bit of a decrease in our input cross, but not much. So

probably my main concern is trying to keep your chin up and not give up, and hope things get better. That's not much of a business plan, to hope things get better, but it is our business. There's so much out of our control, the value of the dollar- we have no control over that and the effect on us is huge. So that is the biggest challenge right now, trying to stay optimistic and excited about our business. It's easy to be excited about it, but to not worry about what can happen or what will happen, because it's really out of our control.

BH: What do you see that offers the greatest potential for farmers or farm businesses today? What can really determine success?

PF: I suppose on a macroeconomic level, on a huge level, would be I really hope that our government continues to push renewable fuels, both soy-diesel and ethanol, because as farmers we have a vested interest in that, and we benefit from that. I really think they are good things, they are renewable, they are sustainable, and they are things that we can do. Plus it is a bit of diversification for us also.

BH: What advice would you give to new farmers coming into the field, whether they are coming in from the outside in a new venture, or whether they are youngsters growing up in a farm family, what advice would you give to them?

PF: I think it is real important to be passionate about what you are doing, if you aren't passionate about what you're doing, it makes a long week. That being said, you still have to be realistic. You still have to be realistic in your expectations. Farming right now, we are looking at some tough times, so to look at farming right now and buy equipment, land, and build houses, that's not realistic. We need to tailor our expectations.

BH: What do you consider to be the most fulfilling part of your job?

PF: Oh boy, I don't think I could say. My job is pretty much everything I do, so I can't give one thing that I find most fulfilling. I suppose I enjoy most sitting on the planter, driving the planter, planting corn and soybeans. That's probably the most fun, but it is all important. If I don't do the planning, the budgeting, and pay the bills, then I can't go out and sit on the planter.

BH: Is there anything else that you would like to comment on?

PF: I truly believe in family farms, and I look at my role as to try to setup some entity that in some fashion, my family and my sons can be involved in farming as much as they can. I have three boys, and none of them can be farming full time. Two of them probably won't be farming at all. That's my goal right now, to set something up so that I can pass something on to someone in my family can be involved in some fashion. I know that's fuzzy, but that's what it is.

BH: No, that's great. Thank you very much for the time you spent. I really enjoyed listening to you, and I would like to say that I've really enjoyed yours and Marilyn's and your family's friendship over the years. Now I just have to let you know a couple of things here. The process of transcribing the interview may take a while. Dr. Reid will send you a copy of the transcription in the mail with directions on how to make changes. We look forward to sharing the information

that you are willing to share with the general public via Eastern Illinois University's The Keep. The Keep is their digital archives, and is linked to PastTracker, the digital archives of Illinois primary documents. We also look forward to sharing progress about this documentary project as it develops and as we produce additional websites and documentaries about the evidence we find. Thank you very much for being a part of this project.

PF: You're welcome.