

Matching & Mentoring the Next Generation – 1 Landowner, 1 Producer & 1 Farm at a time



By Steve Bohr & Mike Downey, Next Generation Ag Advocates

Many of us have stories and memories of our Dad or Grandpa's Farmall M they began their farming careers with which are now their old Farmall M's. Our grandfathers' generation had an opportunity that many of us may never – the ability to start and build a family farming business from the ground up. Granted, this took a lot of faith, perseverance, and weathering through some very difficult times. However, for the most part they had the opportunity to do this on their farm's own merit and without subsidization from off-the-farm jobs or other income sources.

Matching the Next Generation

Fast forward to modern day agriculture and the capital and resources required to start a new farming operation make it

virtually impossible. This is one of the fundamental reasons why we developed our ***Century Match program*** to match young or existing producers to retiring farmers and landowners that do not have a successor. According to the 2014 Iowa Rural Life Poll, 68% of farmers do not have children that farm and 51% have not identified a successor. For every farmer under the age of 35 years, there are 6 over the age of 65 years old.

At Next Gen Ag, we utilize a selection process to match landowners and producers based on the respective goals and criteria for their family's farm. We have modeled this process based on our own Glen Moeller's experiences when he searched and selected a producer to take over his farming operation after retiring from 40 years of farming. This not only included his family's personal acres but also the rental relationships he had with several non-operating landowners. As this program has gained awareness other farmers and landowners are reaching out who wish to use a similar process and give a young producer an opportunity to carry on a farming operation while farming local, living local, and supporting the local community.

Mentoring the Next Generation

We are excited to announce our new mentoring program which will complement the above Century Match program. In this program we will match a young aspiring farmer – perhaps a recent graduate from an agricultural college or technical program – to a mentoring farmer for a 3 to 5 year mentorship. We have also identified participating landowners who will lease their farmland to this young aspiring farmer under reasonable rental terms during this mentorship period. The young producer will have access to the mentoring farmer's equipment to operate this 300 to 500 acres of leased land in exchange for labor for the mentoring farmer's operation. The aspiring farmer will have their own line of credit and will learn hands on the daily

duties, responsibilities, and management decisions required to operate a farming business during this mentorship period. At the end of this period we hope to extend this young producer an opportunity for a future farming career by matching them to a retiring farmer or landowner through our Century Match program. Or, this young producer will now have capital to return home and buy into their existing family operation but wished to gain experience away from the family farm first.

We best compare this farm program to a baseball program where young aspiring athletes put in their dues and hard work in the minor leagues with the desire to have a shot in making it to the big leagues one day. We are excited to coordinate this through Next Gen Ag and encouraged by the other willing participants, mentoring farmers, landowners, lenders, seed companies, crop input suppliers, crop insurance agents, and accountants who all wish to support these mentoring and matching programs.

For the young aspiring farmers out there who don't have an existing family operation to go home to, this may be the closest opportunity we can extend in our current agricultural landscape that resembles the opportunities generations before us had.

If you aware of any farmers or landowners without a successor, prospective producers looking to expand, or young aspiring farmers that may be interested in learning more about our current opportunities and programs, please share this with them and our contact information below. You can also learn more about us on our website at www.nextgenag.us.

Our mission at **Next Generation Ag Advocates** is to better connect the next generation of landowners to the next generation of producers – all in an effort to preserve the integrity of the family farm and the future of American Agriculture. 1 Landowner, 1 Producer and 1 Farm at a time.

This story was written by Steve Bohr and Mike Downey, associates of Farm Financial Strategies and co-owners of Next Generation Ag Advocates. They and their team at Next Gen Ag have over 80 years of experience from the Ag industry. They can be reached at bohr@farmestate.com or downey@farmestate.com.