

News Column

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DAD WASN'T DUMB

I spent the first 12 to 15 years of my life following my dad around everywhere he went, wanting to be just like him. Then I spent about 10 years thinking Dad didn't know anything. Like most teenagers, I was pretty smart for a while.

I didn't waste my whole life thinking Dad was an idiot though. I was in my early 20s when I decided he knew a lot that I didn't know and I'd better start asking questions. As simple as it might seem, I realized during my senior year in college – after I had made the decision to return to the farm – that I didn't even know when we started planting wheat.

I remember, prior to age five, playing in the dirt at the end of the field while waiting for Dad to stop to fill the drill. I got to grease the drill discs – or at least try to grease the discs. I probably squirted more grease on the ground and on myself than what I actually got in the discs.

Those were good times, but by the time I was college age, I couldn't have told you it was the month of September that I got to play in the dirt and get greasy. After age 5, I was always in school when wheat was planted.

Last week I found myself wishing I was more like my Dad. Over three different days I spent roughly 12 hours on a project that Dad would have completed in about three hours. That's easy math. I'm 25% as good as my dad was.

Dad was a professional sheep shearer. While it wasn't his full-time job, he was good at it and could shear about 100 head in a day. Never mind that the world record is over 800 head of

lambs sheared in a nine-hour day. Dad was still good.

When we were young, Dad would sometimes take all three boys along on Saturday shearing jobs. Most jobs were in April and May, so we only helped on the weekends. The oldest brother was big enough to catch the ewes and knock them down for Dad. The middle brother and I would tie the fleeces and bag the wool.

We only helped when the farmer was willing to pay us. Gary got 10 cents per head to catch. Steve and I shared five cents per head for tying and bagging. Dad was paid 35 cents per head for shearing. That was the late 1960s. Today's shearing rate is more like \$5 to \$6 per head.

I sheared 27 head over a seven day period recently, in three different installments. I sheared six to warm up, 12 on a Saturday morning three days later, and another nine the following Thursday. It's hard work for a guy who is old, out of shape, and not very good at it. However, I enjoyed the trip down memory lane as I thought of my dad many times while I was trying to stretch out the pain in my back.

After Dad retired from shearing we would talk about those days often. One thing that sticks in my mind was a comment he made when I mentioned that it was good money at the time, and shearing sheep was the reason we had food on the table.

He said something like, "Yes, but I should have been home getting my farming done. I probably would have made more money farming if I had gotten the farm work done on time instead of running all over the country shearing sheep."

Dad's point hasn't been lost on me. Timeliness is important. K-State Extension publications suggest that April 15 to May 10 is the optimum time to plant corn in Riley County. We have all seen successful early corn and we have seen successful June corn, but for now, April 15 to May 10 is the recommendation.

Agronomists keep recommending planting soybeans earlier and earlier, but it still looks like mid-May through about June 10 are acceptable soybean planting dates for our area. After June 10 we will often see about a half bushel per day yield loss due to later planting.

The expert agronomists also like to suggest early planting of grain sorghum, but it appears most of our growers consider about the first five days of June to be the “sweet spot” for planting milo. I’m comfortable with grain sorghum planting dates from late May through about June 20.

The weather, so far, has been favorable for getting spring planting done on time. Next, we just need timely rains through the summer,...and better prices.

If you have questions, you can reach me on my cell phone at 785/477-2494. Or, you can send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

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