Reese L. Morris – Essay

I am blessed to be a part of a family farm that has been in Oldham County for over 100 years. Good stewardship of the land and its natural resources have been a part of my family's business practices for four generations. I can remember at the age of 7 when I first started driving a tractor for my dad. I realized good farming practices were essential to limit wind and water erosion and that good stewardship of the earth is what will produce a long term sustainable income for my family and our farming operation.

A step that we are taking on our family farm in order to positively impact our natural resources is the implementation of strip till/no till farming practices through closely working with the Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS). Strip till/no till is a practice that eliminates plowing the soil except in the strips which are on 30 inch spacings. These spacings match our planter spacings. This allows for only a 6 inch wide band to be cultivated and in this strip is where the seed is planted. All of the rest of the soil is not disturbed thereby conserving the moisture in the soil and leaving crop residues. (This is extremely important on a dry land farm in West Texas to conserve moisture). We also fertilize as we strip till by placing the fertilizer in the strip in the precise area of the plant that will be utilizing the fertilizer. This also means less overall use of fertilizer which reduces risk of fertilizer runoff into wetland areas and causing any potential harm to wildlife. We only strip till a portion of our summer crops. The rest of our farmland is no tilled and the way we control weeds is through spraying. This leaves our ground totally undisturbed with a residue from the last harvested crop standing, which dramatically reduces wind and water erosion. Using global positioning satellite guidance systems (GPS) on our equipment is another way to reduce the footprint of machinery thereby limiting

compaction of the soil. Less compaction of the soil reduces risk of water runoff. GPS also eliminates the overlap of chemicals as it allows precision application, while spraying and fertilizing. This includes an upgrade on our tractor's computer software called swath control that automatically shuts off spray booms when crossing into areas already sprayed.

In addition, I am involved in the practical application of initiatives being implemented through suggestions made from a third party on-farm environmental study, by a company called Validus. We have hired them to evaluate our environmental issues such as wind and water erosion, fuel storage, grain storage, water storage and pumping, pesticide storage and application and fertilizer storage and application. To further progress our environmental progress we are also researching the idea of having a third party energy audit completed on our farm. This will allow us to find more efficient ways in fuel and electrical consumption. Another way we are advancing stewardship on our farm is hiring a crop consultant to advise us on a prescribed amount of fertilizer for our crops. Our crop consultant will monitor soil moisture by probing the ground. He also will be pulling soil samples that will tell us of our soils' fertility and acidity. The fertility test will tell us how many nutrients are in the soil and how readily available they are to our growing plants. Sometimes, even though nutrients are present in the soil, plants cannot utilize them because they are bound to the clay particles of the soil, and not available to the growing plants. Through the guidance of our crop consultant we are accomplishing many things. Most importantly, we will not short our crops on the amount of fertilizer needed nor will we over fertilizer our crops.

I plan on attending either Texas Tech University or West Texas A&M University next fall and majoring in Agricultural Education. Upon graduating from college, I plan on returning to

the family farm to help my family grow our farming and ranching business. I will continue to apply good stewardship practices that my father is implementing today. I am well aware that technological advances will be forth coming. I am sure these advances will help aid me and future generations in even greater stewardship practices. My hope is that I will be able to instill in my children a strong sense of stewardship of the land and its natural resources as my ancestors have passed down from generation to generation for the last 100 years.