

One in a *Ver* Million Meet Sam Heikes

By David Lias

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Sam Heikes represents the fourth generation of his family that has been involved in agriculture. His grandfather moved to Vermillion after losing his farm near Dakota City, NE during the Great Depression. "He moved here and started over again before the war. By the time the war was done, he had four farms ... and my grandpa bought the farm I grew up on in 1946.

"When my dad passed away three-and-a-half years ago, we decided to come home," Sam said. "We moved back here about two-and-a-half years ago."

He and his brother inherited the farm; his brother decided to sell his share, and Sam decided to make Vermillion his home once again.

He is nearly wrapping up his first year in operating Heikes Family Farm, located just north of the Masaba Manufacturing plant north of Vermillion. You'll find no large tractors or combines, or hundred-acre cornfields on the Heikes farm.

Instead, he has worked this year to plant and till about a seven-acre patch of his CSA, or Community Supported Agriculture operation with the kind of stuff people enjoy at their dinner tables each day.

He also had a vision of how, in this era, to put his education at South

Dakota State University in agronomy and animal science, and his 36 years of experience as a production agronomist to good use on the family farm.

Last year, Sam raised some typical garden-variety vegetables on the farm. This year, however, represents his first season as a CSA operator.

"What we have there now is a working farm right on the city limits of Vermillion that is about 50 acres of land," he said. "I have about 10 acres of that in a wetlands CRP program, which is native grass and wildlife habitat, and the farmstead itself is about 12 acres of grove and trees and grass, and what I'm actually farming is about 15 acres of the richest ground that I rotate back and forth - I'll farm half of it this year, and I'll farm the other half next year."

The land will be covered with a cover crop and a layer of manure later this fall, to build the soil over the winter months in preparation for next spring's planting.

"I don't use any pesticides, but I've chosen not to be certified organic because of the costs of that," Heikes said.

His shareholders have indicated that they have no problem with his plan to not seek certified organic status.

"I asked all my shareholders, 'do you care?'" he said, "They replied that they don't care whether I'm certified

organic. They just want to know that my production is sustainable, natural and fresh. So, on that basis, I'm very diverse in my production system."

That diversity is reflected in what Sam already has planned for the 2013 growing season. Early season produce will include asparagus, lettuce and other leafy greens, radishes, and pea pods.

By mid-season, shareholders can expect to enjoy fresh herbs and spices, onions, garlic, peppers, and numerous varieties of tomatoes. There will also be a host of other bounty - potatoes, squash, cucumbers, zucchini, broccoli and brussel sprouts.

Late season offerings will include a variety of fruit, cantaloupe, watermelon, pumpkins, carrots and parsnips, sweet potatoes, and the yield from a second planting of broccoli, cabbage and brussel sprouts. Heikes also is planning three plantings of sweet corn so that it is available throughout the summer.

The extremely dry summer also means he will be drilling a well on his farm soon, with the hopes of being able to pump 80 gallons per minute to irrigate his seven-acre plot. "That will assure my production during a dry year," he said.

At one point in his career, Sam was responsible for selling seed to farmers who had thousands of acres of land to



plant each spring. Now that he's retired, he can concentrate on producing high value food crops.

"That's a key thing - it's not like farming a 1,000 acres of corn and a 1,000 acres of beans and trying to maximize your production," Heikes said.

"I'm only growing half of 15 acres, and I rotate it to keep the sustainability to the soil and to maximize my yield of high-values crops.

"And maybe most importantly, to share that abundant food supply of very high quality fresh produce with the community, which is totally different than what motivated me before," he said. "The heart of the farm is the soil, and in the beginning it's the seed. The motivation is not entirely profit driven, because of the relationship with the shareholders.

Community Supported Agriculture got its start

in the east of South Dakota in more populated areas, Heikes said, as a partnership between farmers, growers and consumers who purchase a share or membership prior to the growing season.

In return for their financial investment in the CSA, local consumers become shareholders in the farm operation, and receive a weekly 10 to 30 pound market basket of

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"STORAGE WARS" STORAGE AUCTION

Saturday, Sept. 22, 2012 - 10:30A.M.

ABC Security Storage

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Norfolk, NE

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NOTICE: Will sell one complete unit at a time. We will open doors and will allow time to look but you cannot enter the unit. The successful bidder is to pay for unit or units at sale time plus \$100 refundable deposit per unit. After contents are all removed and unit is swept out, deposit will be returned.

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****All Tillable****

75.68 Acres of Spirit Mound Township, Clay County, SD

at **Farmland Auction** **Friday, October 5th 9:30AM**

Located: 3 3/4 miles north of Vermillion, SD on the University Road. On the Corner of 313th St & 468th Ave.

Legal: N 1/2 NE 1/4, except tract 208.7' by 208.7' in the NE 1/4 of Sec 25-93-52, Clay County, SD. 75.68 Taxable acres. Taxes are \$1,680.46.

Clay County FSA office shows 75.6 acres of crop land with a corn base of 37.9 with a CC yield of 88bu, bean base 37.9 with a CC yield of 31bu. Predominate soil type is Wakonda-Wentworth-Whitewood with a productivity rating of 86% with a 0-2% slope. This is a very nice tract of land with a great location just 4 miles from Vermillion and is bordered on the east side by a county oil road and the north side by a county gravel road. Not only is this a great producing farm, but also has great potential as a future building site/sites. See website for photos and maps or call for a free, property information packet.

Terms: 10% non-refundable earnest money deposit the day of auction with the balance due on or before closing of November 5th, 2012. Possession after the 2012 crops are harvested. Title insurance and closing costs split 50/50 between buyer and seller. Clay County Title Company, closing agent. Seller to pay taxes through 12-31-2012. Auctioneers are acting as agents for the seller.

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