

TRANSCRIPT: JIM MCADAMS INTERVIEW

Jim McAdams · COO of the Spade Ranch

TRANSCRIPT

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Could you please introduce yourself and tell us a little about your career?

I'm Jim McAdams. I'm class of 1972, Texas A&M. I graduated with a Bachelor's in Agricultural Economics. I was raised in Walker and Madison County. Family were ranchers there between Huntsville and Madisonville. Upon graduation, I went back to the family ranch. We're a cow-calf ranch, and I was the manager of that ranch. And after about 15 years, I borrowed enough money and my family financed the rest to where I bought the cattle and leased the ranch. Then in 1992, I had the opportunity to become general manager of Spade Ranch, which is a large ranch out in West Texas and eastern New Mexico. So, we leased our family ranch to several local ranchers, neighbors, and other family members, and I moved to West Texas. I spent 10 years in West Texas as the manager of the Spade Ranch. And it was really enjoyable because we were involved not only in, in the cow-calf portion of the cattle business, but we also had a feedlot. We had a four-breed rotational cross breeding program and we raised about 75% of our own bulls using four different pure breeds. So, I've got to see that end of it. It had an extensive horse program. So, we felt like we were a gate to plate ranch, had a Wildlife Program and had a long term four pasture, three heard, rotational grazing program. After 10 years, my parents' health was failing, and I needed to get closer to home where I could help out again with the family ranch. So, moved back, I currently live in Seguin and ranch on my own and then manage the family ranch that is in Walker and Madison County. Also been blessed with a wife and two wonderful sons, Will, who's 32, and a 10-year-old son, John Kohl.

Could you tell us a little about your experiences at Texas A&M?

My four years at Texas A&M were probably the happiest time of my life, outside of my family. I was here from 1968 to 1972. It was a tumultuous time. Earl Rudder was president. They were just starting to admit women into Texas A&M. The senior class that graduated right before I entered was the first class that didn't have to be in the Corps. So, still predominant male and predominantly cades, but by the time I left, the enrollment had gone from 9,000 to 12,000. By the time my brother graduated three years later, it was up to 20,000 and half of them were females. So, there was a lot of change going on. I loved being in the Corps, and I love being a Texas Aggie. I loved being an ag major. I rodeoed some. I was heavily involved in the Corps. I was heavily involved in Bonfire. I loved that. To this day, the best friends I have were the friends I made at A&M, and then those that I have become acquainted with and associated with through Texas A&M. So, I owe a great deal to A&M.

Can you describe your early career?

Well, as I said, upon graduation in 1972, I went back to the, to the family ranch. It's 45 miles directly east of the campus here. And I had a lot to learn although I'd grown up on that ranch, to – to meld the academic education with the practical education and all these things that swirled around in my head that I wanted to do. When I graduated to A&M, the concern was, at the time, that we were going to have global starvation, that we would not be able to feed the world. And, we were encouraged to produced and to plant from fence row to fence row, and – and everything was about maximizing production. And we did that in our cattle operation as

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well. But 1974, we had a beef price freeze. In 1973 and when they released it in 1974, it was the worst cattle market crash probably ever. I spent the next 15 years trying to get over that crash, my family and I. I – I learned a lot during that time because we – from the time I graduate till 1974, we had doubled our cow herd and we had started doing a lot of modern practices. We started fertilizer more, intensive grazing, round bales that come into being. We started getting into all sorts of animal health issues. Parasites, we'd never really had problems with internal parasites. We started getting into other respiratory diseases and things that we didn't have any experience with, but we'd also started crossbreeding, which started using continental breeds. So, there was a lot of – it was an exciting time because there was a lot of innovation going on. Plus, the feeding industry was really, really growing and becoming dominant, and we fed cattle. So, I learned a lot in my early career. I made a lot of mistakes, and I learned a lot more from things I did wrong and those few things I did right, but it made me a better rancher and better businessman, and I hope a better person on down the line.

How were you able to manage time for family, work and other priorities throughout your career?

Early in my career I did it very, very poorly. Frankly, for – got to think. Seven years after I graduated, I was single, and I worked hard, but I was also rodeoing, and I pretty well burned the candle on both ends. Once I got married, I settled down and I really focused more on, on the mental part of the job rather than just the hard work and trying to figure out: man, I've made a lot of mistakes and how can I do better? And I started doing a better job of being analytical in our business and up to that point, I didn't do a good job of thinking through things or of analyzing things. But, still, we had my oldest son, I still did not do a good job of work-life balance. And my idea of a great time and quality time with the family is have them come out and help me, like herd cattle or go ride around. And it cost me a marriage. In 1995, my wife left me. We had one son. I thought it was great that every weekend we'd go out and we'd ride colts together, starting colts, till one day, he told me he didn't enjoying riding colts as much as I did. From that point, we started do other things, fun things on the weekends, and things he enjoyed, we both enjoyed. And it was an experience, it was a great experience. So, in 2001 I remarried and made a commitment to do a better job of balancing my work life-family relationship. And that's why, in 2003, I decided I need to move back closer to my parents and the family business. And so, I hope I do a better job now of that balance between work and family and life. And I've been blessed with another son, who's 10 now, and I'm repeating some of the same mistakes, but I'm devoting more time to rectify them.

What advice do you have for students of Agricultural Economics?

It – it takes hard work and hard thinking. And it takes a clear, concise mind. So, it – I have made the mistake and many people make the mistake of needless, unnecessary work, almost like a rat on the – just running around in its cage. But you can also overthink things or underthink things. I have found that what has benefitted me the most is to do the right, have the right balance between thinking and acting and between analyzing and doing. But to me, the key to success is associating with the right people, and picking the right people to be associated with, and the right people work with. And if, if you can surround yourself with good

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people that both are stimulating to you and are good motivators for you and good influence on you, and that are, they're a good influence on you. That has been a key to when I have been associated with the right people, I found that I've been a lot happier and a lot more successful than when I have allowed myself to fall in with people I didn't enjoy or things that I didn't enjoy.

What advice do you have for students of Agricultural Economics?

First, get your degree. Second, I'm afraid that the world has changed enough that a Bachelor of Science is the equivalent of the high school diploma when I graduated. So, it's beneficial at some point to get an advanced degree. Sometime in there though, to really get the foundation and the start on your career that you want, whatever it might be, you need to have the practical experience too. So, that's a real challenge for young people today, to get both the academic expertise and the practical experience necessary to be successful. So, if you can do it with the internships or get the jobs, even if they're low paying jobs, entry-level jobs that'll – try to find those jobs that give you a breath of experience. That's, that's important, but then I'll go back to what I said before, you are who you associate with. So, try to pick the right people to, to associate with and then try to pick the right people to emulate. And the most important characteristic, I would say and I would advise in looking for people to try to emulate, is character ethics. Find the honest people with integrity, strong character that are honorable people.

What are your thoughts on being selected to the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry?

Oh, I'm – I can't, I can't describe how honored I am because of the people that are in this Registry and what, what they represent. And I know many of them. I knew Dr. Timm. He was the Department head when I was here. And to me, the members of that Honor Registry, of this Honor Registry represent the best of Texas A&M. And I go back to, I am very optimistic about the future. My biggest concern is that we might have – and one of the biggest changes I've seen in recent times in my mind, is we've had a shift in our value system. I can't really say how, why, what, but, but it appears to be. And, and those bedrock principles that A&M has always dispersed and taught – duty, honor of country, but, honesty, integrity, character, honor. I believe that we have created more inefficiencies through all the regulations and the, the poor business practices to make people where we're having to be sure that people do the right things has added enough of the inefficiencies. It has negated much of the efficiencies we picked up through technology and everything else. And the only way to rectify that is when those regulations and those laws that, the myriad things that we're having to deal with now are unnecessary and that's when people just do the right things, the right way all the time.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Well I think I've, I've pretty well covered it, other than: I want to encourage the students to look into people who are in this Registry and learn about them and learn about what made them successful and then try to think what is the commonality of these people. And I've done that since I was honored with this, with this Registry membership, and it made me think about what

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did they have in common. And what I found is everyone of them looked to me like they were people of high integrity. And that's why that has been the focus of what I've said in this interview.

Thanks for watching!

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