

TRANSCRIPT: **STEVE COOPER** **INTERVIEW**

Mr. Steve Cooper · Founder of 3M Grass Farms

TRANSCRIPT

An interview with Mr. Steve Cooper, Founder of 3M Grass Farms. Cooper is a 1978 graduate from Texas A&M and an inducted member of the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry.

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Tyurus R. Timm Honor Registry | Department of Agricultural Economics | Texas A&M University

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

My name is Stephen F. Cooper. I'm from El Campo, Texas, grew up in Deutschburg, west of Palacios, Texas, and I'm basically a, I don't know what you call—basically I'm a agricultural entrepreneur. I do a lot of different things: farming, ranching, turf...the turf industry, real estate development. Little bit of everything.

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

Well, growing up at A&M, I spent a lot of time playing inter-mural sports when I was here, but most of the time I started... I started my career early. I was actually working and farming at home close to Palacios, Texas, so didn't get to participate in a lot of those, but did have a lot of fun at school. So mainly, just the different things—Muster was really of course always special and learning all the different traditions—we weren't, back when I was in school, back when they were just knocking corners off the wheel. They gave us a gr—great start, but today of this even—the students today are getting an even better education as traditions ... just learning the traditions and participating in activities they could in college. Great time, made a lot of great friends, had a lot of fun, and learned a little, here and there.

Can you describe your early career?

My early career... well, I started—I had my first job when I was 9 years old, baling hay with a friend of my family, and then would, of course, work cattle to help my dad and other folks. I started farming with some friends that were aggies that kinda, I guess kinda promoted and pushed me towards A&M, but I've been in farming and agriculture and been around it my whole life so it just made sense to me to go into the College of Ag, Agricultural Economics, ag business.

What advice do you have for students of Agricultural Economics?

Today we're—you're helping, you're mentoring, and actually I think they're mentoring me—the...Dr. Rister's Ag 425 Entrepreneurship Program, and I think the tools that he's given the kids today, we didn't, we didn't have such a program. In fact, it's a... I think that there, that you've got a unique opportunity to learn, to actually decide, and be able to work, and know how to crunch numbers, and analyze business as part of the ... he'll have it and determine whether it works or not. If it didn't work on paper, than it won't work. So, I think the real key is take advantage of these opportunities because this, this day and age, everybody seems to be in a hurry, and you shouldn't always be in a hurry. Don't be in a hurry, don't—look before you leap, and do your homework. Learn it before you do it. It's a whole lot cheaper and easier. I can tell you from not having to learn from the school of hard knocks.

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

Well, first of all, I'm very blessed to have a family. I've got a wife, Kimberley, who has been with me, some 30 years, and I had to find somebody who would put up with my work ethic first, and she does that. She never questioned, she knows my drive and desire to work, and with work I hope—I work hard and hope that success follows and the other things follow, too. My daughters, I have two daughters, Alexis and Shelby, both class of '12 and '13, and my oldest, Alexis, is graduating again this Friday at A&M Nursing School with another degree. And, Shelby, my youngest, is getting a Master's in real estate—estate at May's Business School, so they have always been very supportive and understanding. I've tried as I've gotten older through my career and gotten a little more secure and not miss anything as they grew up, but I had to miss a lot of things because of my travels and all the different interests that I took on, but they were always very supportive, they were never complaining about me not being able to make it. So having a great, loving family and someone that understands, I guess, someone like me who likes to work and is driven to succeed and not that, not that all people aren't, it's just.... I'm blessed, there are a lot of people like me, but a lot of people don't have a family like I have that are very, very supportive

In your opinion, what does it take to achieve success?

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Well, I tell my kids that luck is a derivative of hard work. Success has to deal with being able to roll up your sleeves and go to work, go to work as hard as you can. I don't believe it lies in 40 hour work week. You have to do what it takes to, you know, look at the clock, just go at it as long and hard as you can. If you want to be successful than it's just all... it's all about how much your willing to put into it, but I think here, especially in the College of Ag and Agricultural Economics, I think the things that are being taught here will be just such great, great assets. It creates a toolbox that the young people can use to, again, help circumvent the hard knocks in life. You can get a chance to have an opportunity to analyze it before you actually do it and knowing how to do that is just, it's just... it is a real, real key sec—secret to success, but there's nothing, there is no substitute in this world for hard work. You have to be willing to go at it, and if you want it, you've done your homework, and you know its achievable, then, you know, there's lots of people like Bill Gates of Microsoft— he slept in his office. You know, depends on how successful you want to be. What level you want to attain is what it boils down to. How much time are you willing to spend? What sacrifice are you willing to make?

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

My first thoughts are, "I think they got the wrong Stephen Cooper," but in all sincerity... looking at the list of people that have come before me and will come after me, I'm sure, and being included in the list is very... it's a very humbling experience. I think that... I don't really know how to put it in words other than the fact I'm, again, I'm very honored. It's... it's something that I never expected. It's... I guess when I started going through the body work that I've done in my career, through my lifetime, my career paths, and all the different entrepreneurial steps and businesses that I have had, or had been in, or now have, I didn't know that there was a weighting system, and I guess that this is part of the... part of the ultimate goal in working, and I feel very honored to be able to become a Tyrus Timm honor...honoree.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Well, I think that the world seems to be... to go by faster and faster every day. Everybody's in a hurry to get it done, and I think that, again, you have to step back. Even though I've said hard work and all the other things are... are the key to get, to me, how to get there, I still think you should take time and really recognize and pay homage to those that have helped you get there.

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Transcribed by
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