



Gary Greenlee

In the world of agriculture, diversified means many things. You can grow various species of crops. You can raise many different kinds of animals. You can even have several locations where you grow and raise these crops and animals. For Gary Greenlee, of Caledonia, diversified means growing different crops in different states 1,700 miles apart.

Being a 7th generation farmer who wasn't quite sure of his place on the home farm after college, Greenlee took a job in town with Elco, an industrial supply company, Field Fastener Supply Company, for almost eight years. He came back to the farm for a while but ended up taking a job with Elco again and then began working for his father in law. Eventually, Greenlee came back to the farm for good and was able to take over the operation completely, as both a farmer and a sourcing and purchasing manager. He worked as both a farmer and a distribution center employee for 27 years.

Upon retirement, Greenlee took on a unique project that has become one of his biggest passions. Greenlee raises 200 acres of row crops, corn and soybeans, here in Illinois. He also raises 1,000 acres of Kentucky blue grass and white wheat in North Central Idaho.



Picture provided by Gary Greenlee: prairie in Idaho growing yellow field is canola near Greenlee's farm.

“The Idaho land came up after traveling there a lot,” said Greenlee. “An opportunity presented itself and we walked into a real-estate office and bought some mountain land that was for sale.”

After purchasing the land in the early 90s and vacationing out west, Greenlee and his wife, Jane, took advantage of the opportunity of farms turning up for sale in their new area.

“We bought one farm, then two, then three,” said Greenlee. “We now own around 1,000 acres of land in Idaho that we farm.”

He compared Idaho's white wheat to Illinois' corn. (It is pretty common.) The Kentucky blue grass that he raises in Idaho is grown for seed. Thus, if you wanted to seed your lawn or business, you would be

planting the seeds similar to what Greenlee harvests. An Idahoan friend of Greenlee's grows a particular type of blue grass seed that is planted at Soldier Field in Chicago. It takes 1.4 million blue grass seeds to make one pound. Although those seeds are small, just like there are many varieties of corn and beans, there are many varieties of blue grass. A large portion of what he grows in Idaho is exported to be used worldwide.

Surprisingly, similar planting, growing, and harvesting methods that are utilized here in Illinois, are also used in Idaho on the specific crops Greenlee grows. However, the growing cycles differ slightly. This makes it easy for him to harvest both crops in Illinois and Idaho efficiently. He harvests the grass in July, the wheat in August, and makes it home to Illinois to harvest his corn and soybeans in the fall.

His desire to travel and revel in the beauty of the area were Greenlee's initial attractions to Idaho. Now, after spending time there in production agriculture, he is intrigued by the diversity and ability to produce such a great variety of crops. Since he has been farming he has grown mustard, green peas, black peas, garbanzos, lentils, canola, oats, white wheat, and red wheat. He is also interested in the local wildlife which differs greatly from Illinois'. He shares the heavily forested environment bears, cougars, elk, and gray wolves. His new found interests have led him and his wife to build a home in that area. For the Greenlees, there are many possibilities in Idaho.

So, even though Greenlee isn't growing Idaho potatoes, being a western farmer has been a whole new experience for him. When it comes down to it, we, as consumers, need food. We also need those who are willing to grow our food. We are thankful for farmers like Gary Greenlee who make such sacrifices to meet that demand. (Published October 13, 2017)