



Andrea Hazzard

Andrea Hazzard’s family arrived here, in Northern Illinois, in 1847. The family farm has changed a lot since then. Hazzard remembers the farm as much more diverse when she was a kid. From dairy and beef cattle to hay and row crops, Hazzard’s family stayed very busy.

“Things have changed a lot,” said Hazzard. “The pressures in agriculture have resulted in the same prices today that they had in the 80s and early 90s.”

Hazzard experienced these difficulties and if she wanted to stay on the farm, she had to come up with her own solution to stay profitable. She went off on her own and started vegetable farming and facilitated a Community Supported Agriculture program (CSA). When a generational transition occurred in the main operation, Hazzard’s father then had the time to join her and together they started producing grain. They began with wheat their first year in 2012, and since have added oats, corn, and barley. By 2015, her grain production had grown so much that she decided to specialize and back away from vegetables.

“Hazzard Free Farm” is now a one woman operation. Therefore, she has the opportunity to experiment and make changes as she pleases. For example, she plans to better her farming practices and investigate with no-till farming in the future. Hazzard produces 20 acres of grain, many varieties of each. Many of the crops she grows have a limited availability of seed. Therefore, she grows and saves her own seed as well. This operation strategy takes time, but according to Hazzard, she is rewarded for that time in her price.



“A lot of people that get into this are drawn to it because they have a deep seeded desire that this is what they need to do,” said Hazzard.

It is clear that she shares this passion with her peers in the industry. Hazzard moved from a small vegetable CSA to selling grain wholesale in downtown Chicago. She realizes the lack in availability of local grain, so she decided to pursue a market she saw a need in. She specializes in heirloom (pre 1930), unique products that are hard to find in other places. When it comes to carving a market for herself, Hazzard knows to produce what her customers seek. She services several restaurants in the city.

“I think of them as an artist and they need a pallet to work with and that pallet needs to change constantly,” said Hazzard. “In Chicago, people want variety, and something new, so the more I can offer them in terms of flavor, color, and grist, the happier they are.”

Hazzard is impressed by her consumers’ knowledge of the products they desire. “You realize when you get into it how educated your clientele is,” said Hazzard. “They know what they want, they know all about the issues in agriculture, they know all about the chemicals, they do their research. They are active and aware and they realize what they are willing to pay for it.” On the flip side, Hazzard has an open gate policy with those she sells grain to. She sees the importance of allowing her consumers the opportunity to see the farm first hand. Education goes both ways, as producers you can expect others to do their research, but you also have to be willing to show them what it is you are doing to provide them with the products they desire.

Sitting with Hazzard and learning about her business made me proud to be a woman in agriculture. It is stories like hers that are continuing to change the face of the agriculture industry. Hazzard’s motivation, knowledge, and drive to make an impact in her own niche market are exactly what we, at the Winnebago-Boone Farm Bureau, picture when we think of a proactive farmer. We are thankful for all of our farm women, like Hazzard, who are making such strides within the industry. (March 9, 2018)