

Mark Chapman - The business aspect

Ginny Willoughby: What other perceptions do you think they have about, maybe equipment, or what you do as a farmer?

Mark Chapman: Well, I think there's something that we've sold pretty well through the years or communicated pretty well, and that is, and this is still true, farm life is long hours and hard work. I think the public in general kind of gets that, and kind of has that. I don't think they really comprehend how much is involved in the business. How many different hats you need to wear, how much money it takes to operate our size operation, or even a smaller operation, a 300-to-500-acre farm, how much money it takes to operate that. And so, generating that kind of cash flow, and getting that kind of working capital, whether it's through financing or whatever. And then there's a huge risk with it. There are not guarantees, you know, I don't have- I can forward sell, but I don't have a guarantee that I've hit the best price of the year when I do that. I don't have a guarantee that I'm going to make a profit. So, something that most people wouldn't understand is how do you live on a budget that, one year, your income is extremely low, and another year it's extremely high, and it's unpredictable. And kind of the norm of farm life. Now, there would be some sectors of the farm economy that are more predictable, but that's more the norm for our operation. So, I think another thing that the public does not understand well, at all, and maybe we haven't communicated it well, is how much farmers love the land, how much they love nature. You know, I'm continually in awe with the productivity and the capabilities of this piece of ground that I have for a season of history, you know, I'm just a caretaker for a season. But whether you want to pass it on to future generations, which many farms, most farms do, not every generation wants to stay on the farm. I think the public doesn't understand how important it is that we take care of what we have. And so, the farm community as a whole, not that there aren't some bad apples in every occupation, but the farm community as a whole are very environmentally conscious. And there's two reasons for that, one is just the sheer love for what we do and wanting to improve what we have to pass on. The other one is, it's gonna hit you in the pocketbook, if you're reckless with how you treat your animals, or your land. And I think something that's frustrating as a farmer is to watch, quote, people who are called "environmentalist," how they treat the things that we love. And, I won't chase all the rabbits down that road, but I think that's something that as far as people really understanding farm life, has not been communicated, either not communicated well, or has been hidden. And the more- you know, it used to be when I was a kid there was a significant number of people from this community, that even if they didn't farm, they grew up on a farm. And now, there's very few and so as that distance has gotten farther, just some of the basic understanding of what's involved is lost. And I think there's a tendency for, especially since the internet's been out, there's a tendency for

people to believe in, and I could say “young people,” but I know adults my age that are in the same boat, so I think it's just people, in general. There's a tendency for us to believe that we know something about something because we've read it on the internet, or we've seen something on a video and, and honestly we probably don't know squat [laugh]. Because we don't have a context and the thing that goes beyond that is, I don't know what I don't know.