

cultivating the desert

Colorado River Enables Successful Desert Farming

By Sarah Ludwig Rausch

In this age of corporate farm expansion, the Baldenegro clan proves that not only can a family-run farm do well, it can flourish. Located on the west-central border of Arizona in the Colorado River Indian Reservation, the Baldenegros have been living in Parker, Ariz., and farming in Poston and Bouse, Ariz., since 1967. Farming is in their blood, says Mike Baldenegro: the family has been farming since the early 1900s.

Baldenegro began farming with his father, Fernando, in 1994 with 154 acres. His brother Armando worked with the two as well until this year, when Baldenegro's other brother, Sonny, took Armando's place. Thirteen years later, the trio now runs around 8,800 acres of land, leased from the Mojave, Navajo, Hopi and Chemehuevi tribes that make up the reservation. "They're good people to work with. They listen to the problems that we have and they work with us," Baldenegro says.

Truly a family business, Baldenegro's sister, Eliza, runs the farm's busy office, and his two oldest sons help on the farm, running the heavy equipment and putting in 16- to 18-hour days

when needed. Also involved in behind-the-scenes work are Baldenegro's mother, MaryLou, and his wife, Kelly, who manages the household, scheduling and kids — five boys and a baby girl. Armando still helps out occasionally on the farm as well.

The Baldenegros' primary business is hay, with alfalfa mostly going to dairy markets in neighboring states and sudangrass, which goes overseas to Japan. They also grow cotton and oats, which are ready to be planted when the haying is finished. Because of the temperate winter weather, there isn't much downtime between hay cuttings. "Our last cutting will be in December and we'll be starting back up by the 20th of February," says Baldenegro. The farm's prime location near the Colorado River, with its fertile sandy loam and mild temperatures, makes good quality hay.

The family started using Massey Ferguson® tractors for raking and baling back in 1994 and have been loyal customers ever since. They recently purchased three 9635 Hesston® Series windrowers and have been quite impressed with the performance. "They're very strong machines, so we can run them on less rpms and we get the same cutting strength as the older machines, plus reduce the fuel cost," Baldenegro says. The farm has seven 4233 tractors, four 4690 balers and an 8260 tractor. Three 2170 Hesston balers are on order as well.

The weather conditions in Arizona can be quite different from those of the Midwest and "sometimes what works there doesn't work here," says Baldenegro. He has been pleased with Massey Ferguson's attention to the area's special needs. "People from the factory come out here and listen to our problems, and they work with us to try to make things easier for us here in the desert," he says. Baldenegro is equally appreciative of his dealership, Dekens Implement, located in Blythe, Calif. "They're there to help us out 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They're great to work with."

THE POWER OF HESSTON

The Hesston series of self-propelled windrowers has three models, giving you the power to select the features you need. Choose between a standard or deluxe cab — either way, you'll have ergonomic controls for smooth performance. Optional features include a performance monitor and a rotary screen, which helps to keep the engine cool. Standard on all models is the hydraulic header flotation, a tilting hood and planetary drives. Headers are easily installed on all models and Hesston carries a powerful selection of disc, auger and draper headers.

The Massey Ferguson Hesston Series 2100 large square balers also include three models. The 2150 makes 3 X 3 bales, the 2170 bundles 3 X 4 bales and the 2190 boasts a 4 X 4 bale. Features include a double knotter system for secure bales; the notorious low-profile Hesston design, which is now even lower; a cutter option to pre-cut the hay to a 1.9" length; a color GTA monitor; and kits to customize your machine.