

# Family Farmers Adapt to Climate Change

In 1867, the Christensen family homesteaded their farm in Burt County, Neb.

Now in its fifth generation, Graham Christensen and his brother are dealing with the real world impacts of climate change. Extreme flooding and drought are taking a huge toll on farmers throughout the Midwest.

To combat weather-related events, they've started using regenerative practices to work with nature to reduce the impacts of climate change on the soil and help prevent worsening climate change.

Graham and his father sat down to remember where the farm came from, and where it's going...

## Transcript:

**Fred Christensen:** In the early days, we had livestock. That meant getting up, milking the cows. I don't know what it is about a baby calf that melts my heart, but it does. In the spring, you would prepare the soil for the seed, and then seeing the crops come out of the ground and the corn getting over your head in just a few weeks. It doesn't seem possible that anything can grow that fast. It was just magic.

**Graham Christensen:** One time I remember having a conversation with you. I was pretty young. You said, "What do you think you want to do when you get older?" And I said I wanted to farm. You said, "It's really hard to make it as an independent family farmer."

**Fred:** I still don't know if it's a good idea for you to farm. But we wanted to encourage you to do whatever you felt you wanted to do yourself.

**Graham:** You helped lay out a lot of the challenges that farmers had to deal with from a very early age—new weeds that come in due to the climate situation, new pests, bugs, but also the extreme weather.

Do you think since you were younger that the weather-related events have gotten more intense?

**Fred:** Our annual moisture is way above what it used to be. We're getting more rain. So if it keeps going then we'll have too much, and we'll be under water. And that's not good. There's a limit to what you can handle.

**Graham:** Farmers were in the red as far as profitability the past seven years in our area. In 2019, when we had the flooding, you could certainly see that the vibe across the state was that more farmers are beaten down. Never thought in Nebraska in the middle of the country, that we would be filling up with water.

It's not just economically that it's hard to recover, but the psychological impact of seeing that kind of destruction is tough. I think it would do a lot of things for a lot of people's mental health if we start to prioritize the more biodiverse systems.

There's still some hesitancy in some pockets to say the words "climate change."

**Fred:** Especially the older people. But it's slowly coming around.

**Graham:** What my hopes are, is that us as farmers are going to react as a whole to climate change. Regenerative farming starts with restoring and regenerating the land. It's a step beyond sustainable agriculture because it makes our land more resilient.

For you, Dad, what's the hardest part about passing on the farm?

**Fred:** While I'm still around, it's a little hard to see some of the changes. But through discussions and observation, everything seems to be working out so far. Mother and I are real proud of what you've done.

**Graham:** I just couldn't ask for a better family. And protecting the legacy of the farm is protecting this land for the next generation.