

We were very sorry to hear in late December that on Christmas day, former University of Illinois Extension agent Mike Plumer died of complications from health issues.

When we lost Mike, we lost a champion, a champion in innovative agriculture in the U.S., North America and other points of the world, primarily Africa.

Our history with Mike started when Nick Bowers and I went back to the Midwest in the mid-1990s and just by happenstance were referred to Mike. When Mike met with us with a number of growers in south-central Illinois, it was a turning point for a lot of us.

At the time, Mike and a lot of growers in that area were focused on no-till practices. The use of cover crops was in the incubation stage, if that. No-till was out there and the use of cover crops was even further out there. Mike, himself, wasn't quite ready to go there yet, so he sent us down to an experiment station in Dixon Springs, essentially putting us on probation for a couple of years. He likely wanted to see how committed we really were to significant research.

Once he saw what we were up to, however, and saw some of the merits to what we were doing, he started to pick up interest in the whole thing and it really started to flourish.

Also in those early stages, Oregon grass seed commissioners, such as Don Wirth, and many other growers, became interested in the project. Because of the agronomy side of it, it was the kind of a project that a commission could support and that growers really took to. It was farmer-to-farmer kind of talk.

The project also was an example of a project that none of us will see any time soon. To have the industry involved in something so unique and so innovative was an exceptional moment in our careers.

Another person who was instrumental in moving this project forward was former OSU Extension agent Mark Mellbye. He and Don Wirth worked well together, and Mark made a number of trips back to the Midwest. It was a nice bridge, in that Mark could talk about the agronomy of cover crops Extension agent to Extension agent with Mike. And other growers, as they became involved, joined with Mark in articulating to Mike what we do out here. I think we learned from the project, and in learning about us, I think Mike gained an appreciation of the sophistication of growers out here.

It was really a win-win, and it was very significant for everybody involved, because we were all making steps into uncharted waters and working at a very sophisticated level.

And it seemed like at every turn we kept building to a much higher purpose.

When we started, I looked at this project as an annual-ryegrass effort. But as things evolved, we started to recognize that with guys like Mike, you are never headed in a straight line. And that was true with this project. Things have now evolved beyond annual ryegrass to clover, radish, turnip and other seed crops. And to hear now about the importance this market has to growers is really encouraging. It has been great to see this project expand. Today it has a life of its own and I expect it to continue to develop.

In closing, I think it is important to recognize the importance of Mike Plumer in developing this unique and ever-expanding market. There are so many people in the Midwest, such as Dan Towery, who have helped us get to where we are today, but Mike was the one who really expanded the horizons. Mike's world was not just agronomy. Mike's world was commodity boards. Mike's world was state and Federal agencies, his world pretty much included anything that impacts Midwest agriculture. He worked

with some of the world's largest foundations, such as the Howard Buffett Foundation. His horizons seemed to have no boundaries.

To be a friend with Mike, a partner with Mike, it has just been an enjoyable journey that has brought some pretty great opportunities to Oregon agriculture, and I don't see the benefits stopping any time soon. When you look at regulations and water-quality issues, there are key synergies as well. I think it is clear that others will pick up and take over and do great things. But it was our work with Mike that was the spring water of this whole thing.

Mike will be missed.