As a 5th generation farmer and father of three, working alongside his own father and brother, Justin Knopf recognizes the responsibility he has as a steward of the land for the next generation both on and off the farm. On the 4,000-acre farm in Central Kansas, the Knopf family grows hard red winter wheat, alfalfa, grain sorghum, soybeans, and corn on the same land the family originally homesteaded in the 1860’s. Justin is passionate about being involved in the industry and says outreach is an important part of agricultural sustainability. “What I do impacts consumers, so it’s important to take time and energy to be transparent with them and share the bigger story of what’s happening in our landscape,” he says. “I’ve been given a gift to be able to work with the land and that comes responsibility.”
Superior Soils

Soil type is what sets growing regions like the Midwest apart from the rest of the nation. Quality soils make high yielding crop, but abuse of these soils can quickly lead to nutrient loss, lower yields and erosion. High tillage farming practices led to the dust bowl in the 1920’s and since then, Midwestern farmers have fought hard to protect their most precious resource. The Knopf family has invested in soil health through cover crops, no-till farming and crop rotations. The changes have not only improved the soil health, but it also increased the soil moisture, contributed better crop fertility, higher yields and has helped them use less inputs like fertilizer and herbicides. But these added changes didn’t happen easily or overnight. Adding these new management practices required a financial investment, continued education and dedication from Justin and his family.

Cover Crops

Justin is always seeking to learn new farm management skills and how he can utilize the latest technology. After attending a conference on no-till farming, he learned that an evolving no-till system includes having a crop growing and living in the soil at all times, so he has been adding cover crops to his production to test out their success on his own farm. By adding cover crops, Justin has seen a boost in the soil’s biological diversity and has been able to reduce his herbicide use as the field with cover crops had less problems.

4,000 Acres of No-Till

The entire 4,000 acre Knopf family farm is all dryland and no-till crops, meaning that they don’t irrigate any of their acreage or till their soil. Since the family transitioned to no-till farming in the early 2000’s, Justin says he has seen a physical change in their soil. The soils are darker, richer and have more organic matter than before. These rejuvenated soils are filled with nutrients, making it easier to grow crops without added inputs or extra water, and are less likely to erode.

Beyond the Farm

Justin is also passionate about being involved in the industry and making sure both people involved in agriculture and consumers are aware of sustainability opportunities and farming practices. He says outreach is an important part of agricultural sustainability. “What I do impacts consumers,” he says. “So it’s important to take time and energy to be transparent with them and share the bigger story of what’s happening in our landscape.”