It’s been over a century since the McNabb Family first homesteaded in southeast Idaho. Since those early days, a lot of things have changed, but the one thing that hasn’t changed is that McNabb Farms is family owned and operated. Today John McNabb and his three sons, John Jr, Bill and Mike operate the farm as well as McNabb Grain and McNabb Trucking together.

In the early years, conventional farming methods included rotations of oats, grain and clover hay. The oats were at one time sold to the local rodent bait plant and the grains have included several varieties of wheat and barley. Over the year’s rotations have included wheat, barley, alfalfa, safflower and mustard and then transitioned to spring wheat, alfalfa and grass hay.

McNabb entered the no-till scene in 1978 when a barley field was set back by frost.

“We had a good rain in August and started seeding behind an offset disk to capture moisture, but the drill was plugging where the
disk had cut the stubble loose. I noticed I could pull out in standing stubble and it wouldn’t plug and captured the moisture really well. The few rounds that were disked ahead of the drill dried out and didn’t get as good of stand,” said McNabb.

After experimenting with different drills and seeders, he purchased four 25-foot Yielder no-till drills and by 1981, McNabb and his sons were no-tilling nearly 40,000 acres.

It’s been 39 years since McNabb transitioned from conventional farming to no-till. Even in the driest years when conventional farmers yielded no crop, McNabb Farms has had a yield 13 bushels of wheat per acre.

When asked, what motivated him to continue farming even during tough times, McNabb said “it’s all I know” and “it’s a good way to raise a family”.

In addition to moisture retention in the soil, McNabb has also noticed other benefits over the years, including improved soil erosion control. This has allowed him to farm steeper slopes as well as reduce his fuel and herbicide costs.

Over the last decade, McNabb Farms has scaled back to 5,400 acres of cropland. The farm also runs 300 head of Black Angus Cattle and a band of sheep.

Mike McNabb in a warm season irrigated cover crop planting of Sorghum Sudan, Sunn Hemp, Forage Collards, Sunflower, and Turnips.

**Teaming Up with NRCS**

McNabb Farms started working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in 2014 to advance their soil health practices. This relationship continues to grow.

"The entire McNabb family has been outstanding to work with," said Nate Matlack, NRCS district conservationist for Pocatello/American Falls. "They have proven to be innovators and are open to trying just about anything once. I believe if there is something that they can do to improve soil health, improve profitability while reducing inputs, they will do it or try it. They are truly a model for Soil Health in South East Idaho."

McNabb Farms have been incorporating cover crops into their rotations. So far, the cover crops have produced good livestock feed and has improved soil health.

**Looking Toward the Future**

Their goal is to increase soil organic matter, reduce weed impacts, and improve crop diversity, thus reducing chemical and fertilizer costs. Other future plans include expanding their cover crop acreage and looking at companion crops & intercropping to further reduce chemical costs.

McNabb Farms have used cool season and warm season cover crops on both irrigated and on dryland. Cover crops used so far in rotation include: Triticale, BMR Grazing Corn, Sorghum Sudan, Hairy Vetch, Austrian Winter Peas, Lentils, Clover, Sun Hemp, Sunflower, Collards, and Brassicas including Radish and Turnips. All cover crop acres planted are intensively grazed with livestock to assist in the nutrient cycling process.

**A Host of Honors**

McNabb has served over 40 years as a board member for the Portneuf Soil & Water Conservation District and has served as a member of the Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association. McNabb has
An advantage of No-Till Drilling is more moisture retention, less soil erosion, reduced inputs, and improved soil health.

served as the Chairman and President of both groups respectively and has been recognized many times.

In 2001, McNabb Farms received a No-Till Innovator Award, sponsored by Syngenta and No-Till Farmer, at the National No-Till Conference.

In February 2005, McNabb received the Governor’s Award for Excellence in Agriculture at the Idaho Ag Summit. This award recognizes “commitment to maintaining and improving the quality of air, water or soil as a result of innovative practices, technologies or partnerships”.

He was also inducted into the Eastern Idaho Agricultural Hall of Fame several years ago, and he was recognized by the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts as a Pioneer of Conservation.

In January 2017, he was recognized during the National No-Till Conference as one of 25 North American No-Till Legends.