

TRANSCRIPT: STEVE AMOSSON INTERVIEW

Steve Amosson · Professor and extension economist, TAMU AgriLife Extension Service

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An interview with Dr. Steve Amosson, a retired professor and extension economist at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Amosson is a Class of 1981 Agricultural Economics graduate from Texas A&M and an inducted member of the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry.

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Please introduce yourself and tell us about your career.

Well, I'm Dr. Steve Amosson. I'm a management economist in Amarillo, Texas, on extension for about 33 Years, and then I spent 8 years working on research, and getting my PhD here at A&M, earlier. So, in total I have about 41 years with A&M.

What do you value most about your experiences at Texas A&M?

Well I think it's just the people, you know, and whether you're dealing with students, or whether you're dealing with alumni, it's just such a valuable, valuable experience that you never can live that down.

What impact has your degree from Texas A&M had on your professional career?

What it does, I think, gives you immediate credibility, with extension in particular, you know I deal with operations, or multi-million dollar operations, you know, crop farmers that sometimes could be anywhere from five to fifty thousand acres, but when they realized that you were from A&M, that you were an A&M graduate, you gain immediate credibility with them and that's not something you can just throw aside. And, you know, when I'm dealing with professional organizations, it's the same thing, "Oh you're from A&M? Alright, alright."

What has been the biggest challenge in your career, and how have you faced it?

Well, anytime you're working in extension, or research, obviously funding is a challenge. When I'm talking about funding, I'm talking about grant funding. Getting enough money to be able to conduct the programs and the research that's needed. But, you know, I think one of the things that's really played out, of course, is the teamwork involved. You know, partnering with other people to make it happen, and I've been very successful with grants both as a participant and as leader. Over my career, that's 50 different grants and it's those partnerships, and being able to work what they want to know to answer that question. Once you do that and you are successful, it just continues to make grants of that type easier to get.

What is your proudest accomplishment within your career?

Well that's a tough one, that's a tough one - I've got several that I'm really pleased with. I worked on a mobile computer travel project, being the first economist to work on Russian Wheat Aphids, getting disaster payments, but I think probably the proudest is still the master marketer program. I came up with that idea, and I remember floating it to the project group, and they said, "It was like a thud." And Ross Smith came up to me afterwards, he was our project leader, and he said, "You need to pursue that idea a little bit more." And then Marc Waller came on board, and without him, of course, the program would not have happened, and from there we had Stan beavers, and we had Jackie Smith, and they became an integral part of what is widely recognized as the best intensive marketing educational program in the country for producers.

Besides hard work, what does it take to be a successful professional?

Vision. You know, you've got to be able to recognize what the needs are. Got to be that, sometimes I call it that little boy plugging the dike, to be able to come in there, and figure out what is wrong, and then come up with a solution and how to solve. And especially in extension, when these holes exist you got to figure out a way give them the information that's palatable and will lead them down the road to success.

What kind of goals do you continue to set? How do these help you to grow?

Well that, it's nice being retired but, you know, as they say around the office, every time I walk in they say, "You're retired!" You know... no I continue to work, you know, and I continue to, you know, expand my horizons. I'm working a lot of irrigation economics, and I have several other opportunities, so it's... now I'm trying to find that balance between not working all the time and, you know, to be working 75% of the time. I thought it was very interesting... I was talking to one guy, he says, "You know, I cut from, you

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know, full-time down to half time, and I don't get much done!", and the realization that a lot of times you enjoy your job, you're working a lot more than 100%, you know, the 40 hours a week. So, trying to cut down to 20, you don't get as much done, so... you know.

How do you balance your career with your family life?

Well, for me, I'm probably not the best experience with that. You know, I used to play a lot of sports like racquetball, now even golf up until we had a daughter. And then I came home one day, and my wife said, " You're done with that. You're not gonna be gone five hours and leave me with this kid". So, it is... what I probably did to balance is I gave up a lot of what I call my entertainment type of stuff, softball, racquetball, this type of thing, and substitute it with kids sports to try to keep the balance. Cause you know, as you know, extension research, you're gonna be doing, you're spending more than 40 hours a week to make that happen.

What advice do you have for Agricultural Economics students who are about to graduate and start their careers?

Find something you love—that's the first thing. Always. Find what you love so it is not a job, it's an enjoyment. And then, you know, then figure out how to make a good living out of it. I always like to go back and, you probably cut this, I heard that, actually, from Kathie Lee Gifford one time. She was talking about that, find what you love and then figure out how to make a good living out of it. That's the key, find love. Find it so you love it, and then you'll succeed.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Just, you remember, you know, especially like when you're dealing with extension, to always remember that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. You know, I came up with some pretty crazy ideas over the years but yet I had partners like Mark Waller, like Stan Bevers, Jackie Smith, and then even going on to the research side and, you know, working together, so you've got to be able to work as a team to make it a success. And that's, that's the key, and that's where the enjoyment is.

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