

TRANSCRIPT: JAMES “JIM” BRADBURY

Mr. James “Jim” Bradbury · Founder and Attorney at James D. Bradbury, PLLC

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An interview with Mr. Jim Bradbury, founder and attorney at James D. Bradbury, PLLC. Bradbury is a Class of 1988 Agricultural Economics graduate from Texas A&M and an inducted member of the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry.

This video was posted October 27, 2022, on the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry YouTube channel.

Mr. Jim Bradbury
Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry | Department of Agricultural Economics | Texas A&M University

Could you please introduce yourself and tell us a little about your career?

Howdy, I'm Jim Bradbury. I'm an attorney and practice law in both Austin and Fort Worth, and I practice agricultural law, water law. I do a lot of work for Texas Ag associations on policy issues and then represent private landowners and producers across the state. In addition to my practice, I teach as an adjunct faculty member at the Texas A&M law school and teach agriculture law, imminent domain, and natural resources.

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

It goes back a lot to the Agricultural Economics Department. When I showed up here as a freshman, I knew that I loved agriculture, but I wasn't entirely certain that I even really wanted to be in college, but I joined the department. The department was very welcoming to me, and I ended up working inside the Ag Econ department. So, very early on here at A&M I became close with professors who began to be mentors of mine -- and let me say that in agriculture it's not just about what I was going to take back from A&M that I learned, but being part of a system, being part of a community, and so that was really going back now over 30-some-odd years practicing law, I really remember that because those faculty members here at A&M kind of turned this on me that it's about what you can do for others as opposed to what you can do for yourself, and now that I'm out practicing I see that's, you know, that's the way I practice, and that's what we all really need to do, and I tie that back to A&M.

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

My degree here at A&M has a tremendous impact because probably -- well more than half of my practice is in agriculture law, and that goes back to, you know, the Ag Econ department certainly had agriculture, but that's where I learned business skills, and likewise, that's where I got my first taste of policy. And many -- almost all of my clients are businesses, so it helped me to begin to understand where they're coming from and solving their problems from a business perspective, but it really lit a fire for me and a love for policy, and I work on that for producers with associations in Austin and otherwise, and all those things were real seeds that I got back in the department where I got my degree.

What has been the biggest challenge in your career? How have you faced it?

Yeah, well when you're a lawyer there's plenty of challenges -- it's a daily thing -- but I'd say one of the biggest challenges I've had is watching Texas landowners, producers, realize they're in a system of laws and regulations that have been put in place by others who don't have any understanding of agriculture and realizing those are pressing on their economics, and watching their eyes realize that the system they're working within is not working for them ... that's been a big personal challenge to me because as a lawyer you want to solve clients' problems directly and realizing that this system of laws and regulations that are not producer-oriented -- you can't change those overnight. And so that's a real challenge to grapple with, to explain this to clients and people who work hard every day that it's going to take time, and it's going to take effort to work on those things. And that has been a big challenge and [I'm] still working on it.

What is your proudest accomplishment in your career?

A number of years ago, I was a young lawyer and was out of the blue appointed by a federal judge to represent someone who had been wrongfully convicted of a crime in federal court, and I'm not a criminal lawyer, and I wasn't at the time, and it was a real daunting but a real honor to be appointed by a federal judge to do that, so I spent the better part of a year researching, working with this fellow who had been wrongfully convicted and had already been in prison for seven years. And so we worked very hard, and had a trial, and the judge at the conclusion of that trial freed that man from prison right there at the end of the trial. And I've done a lot of other things, but if you ask me the biggest thing I've ever done it would be that.

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

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What I think is the real essence of success is the relationships that you make. I have a lot of young students that I talk to at the law school, and they're focused on -- they just want to get a job. So, they only want to know one employer that may hire them, and what I counsel them is you need to know as many people as you can. So, anybody that you're interested in, ask them if they'll take you to lunch. Go out, get to know them, and even after you get your first job and your second job, you need to continue to make sure you're building relationships with people whether they're hiring you or whether you're working with them or not. Get to know them. If you want to work in agriculture, get to know everybody that you can and become friends with them. It will make you successful but more importantly, it'll enrich your world as a professional. You're going to be happier if you like the people that you're dealing with.

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

Yeah, I bore easily so I stay involved in a lot of things and that's where I set my goals -- is I'm constantly looking for areas that I don't know enough about that I'm interested in, and I do set a goal to say, "Look, I want to begin helping clients in that area," or "I want to participate in the legislature in a certain area that I don't know about," and those are my goals. And, so, over time I'm constantly remixing the things that I do and involving myself with different groups and different people, and again that keeps your practice fresh, but it keeps you challenged because -- to be involved in an area you've got to read it, you've got to understand it, and you've got to master the concept, so it's just a good thing that I do to keep myself going.

How do you balance your career with your family life?

It's a very good question and a very important question. When I first started practicing, you know, when you're a young lawyer, you don't have a lot of choice in when and where you work. You really have to do what [needs to be] done, and it's very taxing, but as you realize you're getting older, and you're going to have a wife, a spouse, children, that balance is really important, and I do see a lot of young professionals really struggling with that. But that goes back to some advice I got from a mentor of mine who said, "You're going to have to draw your own lines in terms of a family." You can't expect your employer, or your boss, or otherwise, to say, "Oh you really need to go catch that soccer game." You have to do it yourself. If you're good, [and] you're talented, it's all going to work out. Nobody's gonna hold that against you, but you really do have to set those lines when your kids are small because as they get older and older, you don't want to miss out on those experiences. But I don't think it's a trade. It's not [between] whether you want to be successful, or you want to spend time with your family.

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

Obviously, you know, you're focused on getting a job, and that certainly is important, but aside from that is taking stock of several things. One, how broad the field in agriculture is. Even if you're headed in one direction, you need to understand all the different disciplines and the system that exists out there that is the agriculture industry. You do need to understand that and involve yourself in it. Don't get too narrow in your focus. And then secondly, understand what you've been given here at Texas A&M because if you do this right, Texas A&M is going to continue to be a meaningful part of your life as you go forward. The professors that you've had, they're going to be very interested in where you go, what you do -- that's why they do what they do. They want to see you go out there and succeed. So don't feel like you've got your diploma, you've got your job, you hop in the truck, and you take off. You're part of a family and a relationship here in Ag Economics.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

You know, today was a tremendous honor to look out across the room and the list of people who received this award, and I'm still very, you know, very flattered and and very humbled, frankly, to be on that list, but, you know, talking to people and old faculty that I took their classes, it's a very warm and rich feeling, and I realize all those years back at the Ag Econ Department set the seeds in the ground that grew into this really, really meaningful relationship. So, it's been a tremendous day for me, personally.

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Transcribed by
Isabella Garza
November 8, 2022