

Southwest company offers valuable service

As many farmers and ranchers know, competing in today's market presents many challenges. Producers must be abreast of ever-changing policy issues, futures markets, and there are always plenty of state and federal bureaucracy issues that must be handled. Many producers enjoy farming and ranching and would probably enjoy it a lot more if there were less paperwork and red tape to sort through and more days outdoors, working with their animals and crops.

An innovative new company, Scythe and Spade, now offers a myriad of ways for producers to spend more time doing the chores they enjoy and less time hassling with the unpleasant necessities.

"In essence, we do whatever it is that our ag clients do not want to do," said owner, Brett MacNeil. "They determine how involved they would like to be and we pick up the pieces."

"We have an entire array of different producers, vendors and investors as our

clientele," added Kyle Conway, who is responsible for real estate acquisition and farm and ranch management in the southwest region.

Scythe and Spade is one of the largest privately owned farm management companies in the western U.S. Under its management are more than 90,000 acres of farmland and approximately 500,000 acres of ranch land representing three different client types of agriculture entities. The first group is comprised of farmers, ranchers,

dairy and feedlot owners. The second group is investors, of which they serve both individual and institutional investors. The third group is vendors such as chemical and seed distributors, equipment and irrigation companies, and even agriculture based banks.

"All of the companies we represent are very focused and very ingrained in agriculture," said MacNeil.

He explains that Scythe and Spade is simply trying to build a different company than your mainstream farm management company. For example, all of the employees at Scythe and Spade are full-time salaried employees.

MacNeil admits that the company incurs more overhead, but they are also able to develop long-term relationships with their clients by avoiding the revolving door of independent commissioned contractors. By becoming intimately involved in their clients' businesses and success, they are able to provide greater benefit in the areas of farm management, real estate, crop insurance, Farm Service Agency and water consulting, and finance and accounting services.

"We do this to provide a

consistent high quality service to our clients," he said.

In addition, Scythe and Spade has developed some of the most advanced technology available in the industry. They use a proprietary program called FARMBASE which allows them to closely track the farms they represent together with all of the resources and activities thereon. Also, they have a Customer Relations Management (CRM) tool, a database that tracks all communications. MacNeil explains that it tracks every contact, contract, farm plan, and marketing campaign and, ultimately, improves communication effectiveness and efficiency. CRM is also connected to FARMBASE so that employees can look up client information from any land based or wireless Internet location.

Scythe and Spade is always looking for new ways to serve the agriculture community. Just recently, they opened offices in Boise, ID, to serve clients in the Pacific Northwest region.

MacNeil explains that many of their customers were the result of an initial inquiry for a single service or solution. Some people simply call

Scythe and Spade for assistance with relation to one single problem. However, they soon realize there are many things the company can do to not only help improve their bottom line, but also help to lessen the everyday workload as well by cross referencing common denominators in the business.

"We do a good job for our clients and we do it at an affordable price," said MacNeil. "We do a lot of problem solving and many producers realize there is a great benefit in outsourcing to Scythe and Spade. There are just some things we can do better."

As with all companies, Scythe and Spade is always looking for new clients and new producers in the industry to offer their assistance and services.

"We enjoy helping our current ag clients," said MacNeil, "but with the systems and processes we have designed and implemented, we are also searching for alliances, mergers, and acquisition opportunities as well to help extend our services and grow our business." More information is available on their Web site, www.wagmanagement.com. **RaelMarie Gordon, WJ Editor**