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## Guiding Principles: Stan Reiss

By [Tanner Ehmke](#)

Having started his career as a physical education teacher, cultivating people has been Stan Reiss's passion even in farming. Today with his wife, Cheri, sons Clint and Brett, and four full-time employees with six seasonal employees, Stan acts as CEO of [Southwest Family Farms](#) in Plains, Kansas, consisting of 17,000 acres of corn, soybeans, wheat and milo and 23,000 acres of custom-farmed ground. Stan and his family grew the farm from 1,000 acres after deciding to farm full-time in the late 1990s while managing the family-owned John Deere dealership. Stan points to eight principles that have guided the family operation on a path of success.

**Respect others:** "It doesn't matter if someone's family, an employee or landowner. With anyone we come in contact with, we have respect for them and we meet their needs and goals as best we can. We're very loyal to our partners and to the people we do business with."

**Embrace emotion:** "Decision-making isn't always just about facts and figures. Emotion can help us with decisions. The most critical thing in life is how you handle people and how they respond back to you. We try to treat every body as family and how we want to be treated."

**See the world:** "When you go to college, it gets you away from home to meet different people with different lifestyles. We've been very fortunate with our kids. They've come back and still hold their values high, but they'll always sit and listen to others' values and points of view."

**Be a steward:** "We really try to take care of all the land, including the rented land. Not just what we own. A lot of land owners do not ever come out here, so we send them an annual calendar that has a few pictures of their farm. They need to see the difference and know how people take care of their land."

**Follow through:** "Once you tell somebody you're going to do something, you do it. No matter how painful it is. You develop a relationship with people with a history of doing the right thing."

**Put it in writing:** "Everything's in writing. Everybody has a transition plan. We have a business plan that we go over every year. We have an employee handbook and standard operating procedures. It's our farm bible. Everyone knows what the rules are and what to expect. It gives them the freedom to make choices on their own."

**Listen:** "There are three sides to every story: Your side, my side, and the truth. I learned at our John Deere Dealership that if you have a customer that's upset, let them talk. Then work with them for a win-win solution."

**Put family first:** "It's not always about dollars and cents. It's how you help your family and employees better their lives and how much time you spend with your family. There are so many times farming takes priority, so we create a family-type atmosphere where employees know we care about them."