



## Rural Portraits

**Farm family:** Robert, Ann Boettcher

**Hometown:** Big Sandy, Montana

**Farm Partners:** Son, Earl

**FarmFacts:** Certified organic for the last decade

It began with sunflower seeds one summer day nearly 25 years ago for this Big Sandy, Montana producer. And the rest, you might say, is organic history.

Robert and Ann Boettcher began rotating barley, summer fallow and sunflowers in 1978, because they wanted to move away from hazardous chemicals on their 1000 acre operation located just 60 miles south of the Alberta-Saskatchewan border.

The Boettcher's are proud the operation has been certified organic for the last decade, rotating wheats, barley, durum, sunflower, lentils, peas, buckwheat, flax, spelt, alfalfa, medics, and others. But the drought has made things difficult the last four years.

The farmstead has been in the family since Robert's father and mother began farming at the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929. In 1966, Robert and Ann took over the farm from his parents, and their son Earl officially joined the operation after his graduation from high school in 1986.

Businesses in Big Sandy, population 800, include the grocery store, plumbing store, a NAPA auto parts store, and lumber yard. They travel to Havre and Great Falls for major purchases, (50 miles and 72 miles respectively).

Ann points out they are fortunate to have a

hospital and extended care unit in Big Sandy, along with a local doctor and a full nursing staff.

Robert earned a Bachelor of Arts in Industrial Arts from University of California, Santa Barbara and a Master of Science in Agricultural Economics and Economics from Montana State University, Bozeman.

His credentials of service is long. He's served 7

years as a National Director for the National Farmers Organization, and as a board member for the Big Sandy/Havre Cenex. The elder Boettcher is a member of the Christ Lutheran Church council, and past member of the Northern Agriculture Research Center advisory board.

Over the years, the Rob-An farm has hosted

a number of international visitors, including two delegations from Taiwan in 1999 and 2000. For three years beginning in 1997 Robert traveled to Taiwan to promote Montana organic agriculture.

In July, the Montana ag leader was presented with an Honor Award from the Soil and Water Conservation Society at their annual meeting in Indianapolis.

The farm was recently featured in a bulletin from the Sustainable Agriculture Network in an article *Naturalize Your Farming System A Whole-Farm Approach to Managing Pests*.

And the Montana Department of Agriculture has just appointed Robert to the Organic Certification Advisory Council.

### Rob-An Family Farm

- ◆ 1000-acre operation
- ◆ Certified organic for the last decade
- ◆ Educated international delegations about organics at Rob-An

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