Director Candidates: Region 2 – Wis. (4-year term), Candidate 2 of 2

Evan Hillan
35 years old
N3127 Ambrose Rd., Ladysmith, Wis.
Farm Credit Member since: 2013

Family: Parents, Eric and Carol

Brief description of agricultural operation and employment/business experience for the past five years:
I'm a fourth-generation dairy farmer and farm in partnership with my parents. We currently milk 500 cows and crop 1,600 acres.

Boards or committees you currently serve on and boards or committees you have served on in the past 5 years (please include the principal business of any board listed, e.g., "local school board" or "agricultural supply co-op" etc.): I have served on the Land O'Lakes board of directors for three years. Previously, I served on the National Dairy Board and Dairy Management Inc. board of directors.

I currently serve as chair of the Rusk County Dairy and Beef Promoters and vice chair of the Flambeau Valley Watershed.

Community involvement/government service: I am a member of Ladysmith Church of Christ. I also serve with two local organizations: our county's Dairy and Beef Promoters and our local watershed group.

Education:
Bachelor's degree in entrepreneurial management, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 2011

Master of Business Administration, Indiana University Bloomington, 2017

What is your vision for the future of agriculture? Agriculture has never simply been about growing crops or raising livestock — it has always been about carrying forward a legacy. The future of agriculture rests on the shoulders of the generations that came before us. Through their efforts and sacrifices, we have the opportunity to continue what they started.

I envision a future where each generation can pass the torch to the next — not only in land and livelihood, but also in the values that define farming: hard work, grit and determination in the face of setbacks.

Predicting the future is, at best, an educated guess. I could talk about robotics and artificial intelligence improving yields or easing labor challenges on farms. While technology will certainly shape agriculture, the values we live by today will define our future most. Adaptability in the face of change, cooperation among farmers and an unwavering work ethic will determine the future we build together.

When I think about the future of agriculture, I see people who share the same core values as the generations before them, even as their methods evolve over time. Our tools may change, but the spirit of farming — resilience, community and dedication — will remain.

The future of agriculture will not be defined by the tools we use, but by the character of the people who carry the torch forward.

What do you believe are the primary issues facing agriculture and Compeer Financial Agriculture will always face ongoing challenges such as commodity cycles, weather events and shifts in government policy. However, every generation also experiences structural changes that redefine the industry. Over the next decade, I see three major forces shaping agriculture and institutions like Compeer: the retirement of the baby boomer generation, the rise of artificial intelligence and structural changes in global grain markets.

First, agriculture and agriculture-adjacent industries will undergo a major generational shift as baby boomers begin retiring in earnest. As they leave the workforce, significant institutional knowledge will leave with them. This will create gaps in many organizations that will be difficult to fill quickly.

On the farm side, the next generation will face a different financial landscape. Younger producers often have thinner asset bases than the previous generation and will likely require new and more flexible financing structures to establish and expand their operations.

Second, agriculture now faces two forms of "AI": the one many of us learned about in animal science classes — artificial insemination — and the newer wave of artificial intelligence. This new AI has the potential to be even more transformative than the first.

Artificial intelligence will allow farms and small businesses to analyze data in ways that only large corporations could a few years ago. Farmers have generated data for decades. We have always been data-rich but insight-poor. Artificial intelligence now provides tools to turn that data into actionable insights.

For example, some dairy farms are already using AI to adjust feed rations daily based on weather forecasts and production data. AI may also automate routine administrative tasks such as paperwork and compliance reporting. As with any emerging technology, the benefits may appear quickly, but it is important to adopt it thoughtfully and remain aware of potential drawbacks.

Finally, one of the most significant structural changes may come from global grain markets. Brazil is increasingly becoming the lowest-cost producer of major grain commodities, particularly corn and soybeans. At the same time, China's economy appears to be slowing, which could reduce demand growth from what has historically been one of our largest export customers.

Together, these shifts will force American farmers to adapt how they compete in global markets. To remain profitable, producers may need to focus more on efficiency, differentiation and risk management.

In this environment, lenders such as Compeer Financial will play a critical role — not only by providing capital, but also by serving as strategic partners who help producers navigate changing market conditions.

Over the coming decade, agriculture will face both disruption and opportunity. Organizations like Compeer will need to understand these shifts and partner with members to best position them for future success.

Why do you want to serve on the Board of Directors at Compeer Financial? When I first returned to the farm, a piece of land came up for sale. I went to several local banks looking for a loan to purchase that land. Compeer was the only institution that gave time and respect to a young farmer trying to start a career.
From that point on, I considered Compeer not only my bank, but also a partner in the success of my farm. With that same sense of respect and partnership, I want to give back to the cooperative that helped launch my farming career.