

Kit Walker is a farmer and rancher who lives in Ashland. He was 41 years old at the time of the interview and has three children with his wife, Melissa.

Kit: About noon, I was eating lunch at the Country Store and heard the fire whistles go off. That was probably our first knowledge that there was a fire somewhere.

Diana: What was your immediate reaction?

Kit: "Oh, crap." You know, because the wind was blowing really strong and we were super dry. Immediately, we went and started getting all our equipment ready, just in case. We didn't know where it was at the time, but we later found out that it was getting pretty close to home.

Diana: So, it started over at Englewood, or south, in Oklahoma. Do you have any land over that way?

Kit: No, we do not, but we knew the wind was out of the southwest at the time, and that any fire that was southwest of us (which we did find out it was in that area), that 40 mph winds or whatever they were at, that it was going to be on top of Ashland sooner rather than later.

We've got friends and folks to the southwest of us, so we prepared to load up our tankers and our spray rigs and head toward the southwest. It was our initial thought.

Diana: You say you have a tanker and you have a spray rig. How much water can you carry?

Kit: I don't know what that tanker holds. I'd say... it will hold 25 tons of fertilizer, so it's several thousand gallons. It's a semi tanker. Then our spray rig holds 300 gallons. It's not a whole lot, but whatever we could do to help, that was our idea.

Diana: Did you get a chance to go help anyone?

Kit: We got loaded up and headed... we went into town to fill up with water and started to head southwest when we received a phone call that we had a fire on us up towards Minneola. So we quickly turned around and headed back north to see if we could help with the fire up on the north end.

Diana: Was someone with you?

Kit: Yes, I had Corey McCann with me and then Brock Lane was driving our semi truck. We were all staying together. I picked up Russ Hensley. He wanted to go help drive or do whatever. So that was our crew.

Diana: Did you first see smoke or fire when you went north?

Kit: We saw the smoke as we were going up the hill to what we called the "rock house". We could see the smoke rolling up there, but the wind was still out of the south-west. We could see the smoke being pushed off away. We really weren't too concerned about that fire at the time. It was just going to clip the north end of our ranch. We didn't have any livestock in the area, so our focus was still kind of on the fire to the southwest. Once we got up there and saw where that fire was at... it was headed for a wheat field, so we thought maybe we needed to head back south of town and help folks down there.

We were told by the fire department (the Minneola Fire Department was up there when we got there, we filled a couple of their trucks up) that the wind was... they weren't anticipating a wind shift out of the north until that evening. That was probably around 3:00 or somewhere in there. So we kind of loaded up our stuff and started heading south again.

Diana: So when did you have fire hit your land again?

Kit: Well, that fire never officially went out. We turned around and headed back toward Ashland, as a matter of fact, I swung by the ranch headquarters and went ahead and hosed our house (the house I grew up in). We soaked it really good with water.

I got a tractor on a disk and had David plowing around the house, just in case, and then we headed on south into Ashland. I left my step-father back with a tractor and said, "If the wind shifts, holler at us, and we'll come back and see what we can do to help here." So he said, "Okay, go south." At that time, I think Ashland was being evacuated. So my wife and family were a little nervous, so I wanted to go back to town and tell them everything was going to be okay.

Diana: Did they evacuate?

Kit: Yes, they left.

Diana: Where did they go?

Kit: They went to Coldwater.

Diana: So did they evacuate pretty close to the time when they were asked to evacuate?

Kit: No, Melissa waited. She was probably an hour or an hour and a half behind. She called me right after she heard, and I said to just sit tight for a minute. I wanted to see them before they left, I was going have them leave anyway. But at the time, I'll be honest with you, I didn't

think it was necessary. We were going to get it knocked down, or we were going to get it put out. So we weren't in super-panic mode on our end.

Diana: So did she have to drive through any smoke on her way?

Kit: By the time she left, it was getting pretty hazy around here. I mean, it was like a fog.

Diana: Did they plan to stay gone for a while?

Kit: She had no idea. What's funny is, right before I'd gone there, I'd gone by the house. I went in and said, "Look, there's really strong winds and there's some fires supposedly started down south. There's an outside chance that they might ask people to evacuate or something. I just don't want you to panic."

She was like, "Should I start packing stuff?" I told her no, that it wasn't going to get that bad. Then later when we were hosing off the house and stuff, my mom was at the house. She said, "Should I start getting pictures and stuff out of the house?" And I said, "No, Mom, we're going to get it stopped before it hits the house and before it hits Ashland. It's not that bad. We'll get it stopped." Little did I know what it was going to turn into.

Diana: Were you out at the house when the fire hit there?

Kit: We had come from up north, hosed the houses and the barns off, left Dave on the tractor and headed back into town and were going to go to the fire station and see where they needed water or where they needed our spray rigs. We got to town, pulled into the fire station, and my phone rang. I'm not sure the exact time it was, but my phone rang and it was David. He said, "The wind has shifted up here. I can already see embers blowing." Where we were, here in town, the wind was still out of the southwest. I'm sitting there looking at the flag going, "How's the wind blowing out of the..." So it happened pretty quickly, so at that point in time, I could hear a little bit of panic in his voice. He said, "Get back out here."

We had dumped our tanker when we filled the fire department up, we had run off maybe 1,000 gallons onto them, so I thought, "We've got a little bit of time, let's go top off our truck and the spray rig again before we head out there."

So we went to the fill-up station and started filling our tanker. At that point in time, I got another phone call from Dave, and he said, "It's on top of me, I can't see. I don't know where..." So we panicked and headed that way. We hit the smoke wall just about three or four miles north of town.

Diana: What color was it?

Kit: Black. It was just a wall of black. Russ Hensley was sitting in with me, and at this point in time, we had two tankers, the water wagon (which holds 3,000 gallons) and then whatever the tanker holds and the spray rig. It was probably three miles, almost to Randal Spare's house when it hit us. I'll never forget; I could barely see Russ in the cab with me. He just looked at me and said, "This might be it. We're in a world of trouble here."

We kind of flipped a U and got into a position where we felt safe and let the smoke wall pass.

Diana: How close did the fire come to you, sitting there?

Kit: I don't know. I couldn't see it with the smoke. We had wheat fields on both sides of us, so I knew we should be safe there, but the stuff in the ditches... We literally couldn't see a thing. I panicked and was trying to turn around in the middle of the road with a trailer on. We had two tankers coming up behind me, and I knew they couldn't see. So I didn't know if I was getting ready to get hit by them because you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. But it didn't last very long.

Diana: How did you breathe?

Kit: I don't even know, I can't recall what we did. I don't recall pulling my shirt over my face or anything like that. I think I was so panicked.

Diana: And you were busy driving?

Kit: Yeah, I was too busy driving and thinking, "I'm going to get hit!" Like I said, it moved so fast, that smoke wall. I don't know how long it lasted, but it couldn't have been more than a minute or two. Then it was clear. I mean, it was moving that fast out of the north, when it hit us. So my thought was, the last thing I'd heard from Dave was, "I don't know where I'm at. It's on top of me." I was thinking, "Oh gosh, he might not be alive. I need to get out there, he might be in really serious trouble! I've got to get out there."

As soon as we could kind of see again, we started to proceed on north and then he called and said, "I'm fine. The house is fine." He said, "I don't know how. The barns are on fire, the hay lot's on fire, but just get out here and let's put these barns out." So we proceeded on. One of my biggest mistakes was we drove around the curve, and I could see the house sitting there. I could see no flames on it, and I could see the barns were on fire and Dave was yelling at me on the phone, "Let's get these barns put out!"

All I would have had to have done was to swing by the house, and I would have seen that it was on fire on the back side. Instead, we all kept going, and I had a fire truck with me at the time. I'm trying to think who it was that was with me.

Diana: Was it Adam Elliott?

Kit: Adam Elliott was one of them; Dan Pearce was with us. So we drove right by the house and started hosing off the barns. We weren't doing any good; everything was pretty well cooked.

Diana: Was it still windy?

Kit: Yes. Stuff was blowing in your face. There wasn't any smoke though. The wind was blowing so strong, that there wasn't... the ground was... the fire had already moved through. It was like an explosion.

Diana: Did you have any ash?

Kit: No, it was all gone. The smoke wall wasn't necessarily just smoke. It was all the ash and soot that was burning and the wind was picking that stuff up and blowing it so hard and so fast that there wasn't hardly any ash or anything.

Diana: So were you able to save most of the barns?

Kit: No. We were sitting there hosing off a tractor tire when we saw some flames coming off of Dave and my mom's house. We quickly loaded back up and headed to the house, but by the time we got over to it, it was all engulfed. The fire department, Dan and Adam were sitting there trying to fight it. But it was just a matter of minutes and it was gone.

Diana: Was your mom still there?

Kit: No, she had left. We passed her as the smoke wall was coming, just 20 or 30 minutes before and told her to just get the heck out of there. They didn't get anything out of the house. Not a thing. Doug the Dog made it. Thank goodness, I think that's what everybody's concern was, did Doug make it out!

Diana: So, that fire up there, after you couldn't do anything and it had pretty much burned everything, did you go elsewhere? Did you have cattle up that way?

Kit: We had cows all to the north of us. As a matter of fact, while the house was being consumed, we started hearing gunshots. Dave had gone out in the pasture right just north of their house, where we were doing all of our calving. All our cows were calving at that time and it got them all. I think we ended up with four or five orphan calves. The rest were either burned or we shot them.

Diana: Did you shoot most of them on that day?

Kit: It was the next morning. We had people come out and help. Larry Konrade and Hayden Henderson, John Kellenberger... There were several people who showed up the next day to help us put them down.

Diana: What did you do with all of them?

Kit: We put them in piles and documented it, took pictures and all that. Then we had an excavator come in and dig a hole and push them into the hole and cover them up.

Diana: How long did that take?

Kit: It didn't take them very long, maybe three or four days. We had four or five big piles. I want to say that three or four days and that part of it was over with.

Diana: So Monday, were you out all night?

Kit: Yes. Russ Hensley and I came back after Dave's house was burned. We still had half a tanker and half a spray rig. The wind had slowed down quite a bit, but there was a canyon to the south of us and a grass pasture that led up to Dr. Spare's house. It looked like the fire was headed that way and there was just zero fire department around, other than Dan and Adam. I mean, everybody was just scattered everywhere. We didn't know if anybody had been over to Randal Spare's house, and Dave said that whatever we did, to make sure his house was not burned. So we loaded up our stuff and went to his house and started hosing it down and doing everything we could. Randal was out there, and thank goodness the fire didn't come up around there. I think Mike Harden had made it out there with his tractor and disked around it a little bit to slow it down a little bit. We went there and then the CRP field to the east of that was on fire, so we sat there and kind of watched it.

Diana: Was it dark?

Kit: It was dark and the wind had shifted. All the fire was back-burning a little bit. There wasn't anything really significant going on; we sat there and watched that fire and Randall's house. We put out some little spark-ups around his house.

Diana: Had the temperature dropped?

Kit: Yes. It was cold by this time.

Diana: Significantly?

Kit: Yes, it was super-cold. I don't know if that's what it was or not. We sat there until about 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. I sent Brock and Corey on home. Russ Hensley was still with me, and I said, "I think we're probably out of the woods."

You could see fires all around town, I mean on the outskirts.

Diana: Were you high enough to kind of see town?

Kit: No, we could see the lights of town and the outline of town. We could see, but we weren't that much higher than the elevation here. We never did go up on the hill. But when we came in, I dropped Russ back off at the fire station where his pickup was and said, "Go home and get some sleep."

It was so eerie when we pulled into town. There was nobody here. At the firehouse, there was two or three people in there, and everybody else was gone. I dropped Russ off and we went in for a minute, then I went home and I started thinking, "My gosh, there's fires all around town, and there is nobody around. If the wind picks up or it gets into a tree row by the football field or something like that." After I sat there for about 30 minutes, I thought, I can't sleep. So I got back in my pickup; I still had the spray rig on, and I started driving back up here north of town to go watch that fire. And low and behold, behind me there were these flashing lights! It was Russ. He said, "Well, I went home and I couldn't sleep. I was afraid one of these fires was going to start up again."

So he and I went a sat about two miles north of town and just kind of watched fires. We never did go to bed.

Diana: Did you talk to your wife anytime after she evacuated?

Kit: I talked to her after Dave's house was gone and we had hosed down Randall Spare's house. I called her and explained to her what the situation was. They were hunkering down for the night at the Ashland High School. I told her to get some sleep and not to worry. The town was going to be fine and that we'd see them the next day.

Diana: So when did they return?

Kit: She was here bright and early the next morning. I don't know what time it was. I saw Dr. Spare pulling up to the vet clinic, early. So he and John and I got to talking, and they automatically went into their "vet mode" and those two guys just started organizing everything and getting everybody lined up. Mark Spare, Randal's boy, had drove down that night and was there. The sun was just barely peeking over the horizon, and everybody was just loading

bullets.

Diana: Could you still see fire?

Kit: You could still see smoke and fire off to the south and east.

Diana: So what about your pastures down in the southeast part of the county?

Kit: At that point in time, I had driven out there and where we have some grass and some cattle in that area... there were some burned spots here and there, but it wasn't all consumed. There still some fires, but there was zero wind that morning. That's where I probably made a mistake, again, "Well, I'm going to unhook the spray rig and go take care of cattle. That stuff's going to get put out because there's no wind." Well, you go out, and you start seeing cattle on the roads and start shooting cattle. Before you know it, you don't even realize it, but the wind's blowing again, and all those fires are up and going again. So, we did kind of the cattle thing until about noon, and then I hooked back on to the spray rig and got the tanker again. Then we headed down to the south end of the ranch to help out down there.

Diana: So did you lose all your pasture?

Kit: Yes, every acre.

Diana: Did you lose all your cattle?

Kit: All the cows and babies.

Diana: Did you lose much equipment?

Kit: We lost most of our equipment.

Diana: And all your barns?

Kit: We lost all the barns but two. We lost three barns and saved two.

Diana: And fencing?

Kit: All the fences. You know, we were pretty fortunate, all the fences burned, but in the past several years, we've done a pretty decent job of rebuilding fences. So most of our fences were new fences, and a lot of them, the posts burned, but the creosote posts didn't burn completely up. About every other one or every third one, or the corners would be burned out. Other than that, those fences were in good shape. Now the fences that we hadn't gotten to yet, that were



older fences, they were pretty well destroyed. I mean they were 100% tear out and start over.

Diana: So like, Tuesday night into Wednesday, how were you feeling?

Kit: I was numb. I didn't feel anything for several days. I mean, there was just so much to do. We had cattle on wheat pasture. We lost all of our cow/calf herd, but we still had yearlings out on wheat. A lot of those wheat pastures are up against grass, so those fences burned. So we had cattle scattered everywhere. So we needed to load four-wheelers and we needed to start finding cattle. So half of us went south and were gathering cattle and trying to find them and get them somewhere.

Diana: Did you have other people helping you besides your employees?

Kit: There was a bunch of volunteers the morning after the fire. Guys that showed up with four-wheelers and horses. People willing to go help shoot cattle, people helping to go gather strays. It was almost overwhelming, you had to almost be with them though, because you couldn't explain to them, "Hey, this pasture here still has a good fence, or this wheat field here, we can drive them to that." You had to be with them.

There were so many people, that we took three or four volunteers with us and they helped. Alex Stapleton and his boys came down. They do a lot of our well-service for us. They came down to help start dragging deads into a pile. Toby Scott from Bucklin was down here that morning helping get electricity to wells so we could put whatever cattle were still alive...

Diana: Did you lose solar panels?

Kit: Yes, we lost the solar panels as well.

Diana: Plus the wiring.

Kit: Plus the wiring.

Diana: So you didn't have any water for your cattle?

Kit: Well, a lot of our stuff, thank goodness, most of our cattle were on wheat pasture and there's actual windmills in the wheat pastures. So, the majority of our cattle, other than the cows and the babies, were on wheat fields with windmills. The cattle that were on grass, you know, there's no grass there and there's no cattle left alive, so we really didn't have to panic about getting water to them right away. There was nothing there.

Diana: So you hadn't started moving cattle off wheat?

Kit: No. As a matter of fact, the following week, we were going to be getting really geared up and getting things moved around for graze-out and kind of jockeying stuff around. Luckily for us, we had wheat pasture, or it would have been a lot worse.

Diana: So what is your most vivid memory of the fire?

Kit: Probably two things. On the negative side, we were sitting there watching the house I grew up in burn and there was nothing I could do. You know, I was sitting there with a spray rig and hosing it and just watching it go.

Diana: The wind was blowing too fast?

Kit: Yes. I can remember stepping away before it was completely engulfed and just sitting down for a minute. I was just a little bit overwhelmed for a minute. You know, you look up and, like I said, we were calving to the north of us and sitting there and looking up and seeing those cows and babies that were still alive. They just looked like statues. They were burned and they were just standing there. They were alive, but they weren't going to make it. They were going to die, and they were just standing there suffering. That made me sick.

Then on the flip side of that, within a day a guy by the name of Ben Winkler. I don't know him from sic 'em, but he came from Iowa. He heard about it on Facebook and drove down the following day after the fire. He was here on Wednesday afternoon. He just showed up. He was a good hand.

Diana: What kind of things did he do for you?

Kit: Everything, from shooting cattle to dragging deads to helping me put up a fence to hold whatever we did have. It didn't matter.

Diana: How long did he stay?

Kit: He was here for three or four days. It was nice just having somebody with you.

Diana: Did you get some of the hay?

Kit: Oh yeah. I know they had a drop zone here, and Jeff Kay was busy trying to keep all that organized. He started sending loads toward us. I'm trying to think what day that was, it hadn't rained yet. It might have been six or seven days after the fire. But we were trying to get a fence. We had to get a fence put up right there around Dave's house quickly for some cattle

that I'd bought prior to the fire. They were coming in and I had to put them somewhere. It was early that morning, and I look up the road, and it was just... If there were two trucks, there were 20 trucks, just lined up with hay. People from Michigan and all over. That made you feel really good.

Diana: Did you get a lot of volunteers to come help you?

Kit: Through the course of the weeks afterward, we did. We had a few groups come in from Wisconsin or Iowa, I believe, who helped start tearing out fence and stuff. So it seemed like every weekend, there was somebody here.

Kind of after awhile, I was almost like, "I kind of wish volunteers would stop showing up on weekends because I kind of want a day off myself!"

Diana: So did you go down and eat at the camp or at the school when the volunteers were all there?

Kit: I never did go down there and eat. I felt like they probably had enough folks that they were feeding that they didn't need to feed me. I did take advantage of the high school lunchroom whenever they had that going on. You know, one of the things the day after the fire, all of our shops were completely destroyed. But there was some stuff that was salvageable, like benches and stuff like that that we could repaint and fix. I don't know if it was the day after two days after that I had probably the best volunteers show up. I don't know if they got anything done or not. They were all guys that had played basketball for me. That was...

Diana: High school teams?

Kit: Giles Fox, C.J. Luerman, Andrew Reimer, Nathan Reimer, you name it, they were all out there. I mean there were several of them, I can't... I know I'm leaving a lot of them out, but that was pretty cool to see. They could have sat out there and played catch with a ball and it would have sent chills up my spine. But they helped drag stuff out of our shops and do stuff like that. That sent chills down my spine.

Diana: Was it still burning out there?

Kit: No, it looked like a desert out there. There wasn't even any ash; the wind had blown so hard it looked like the sand dunes at Waynoka. It was just barren country. And it was the same way with volunteers that wanted to come in a help tear out fence. We could go show them a strip of land or something and say, "Tear this out." But they needed a tractor to pull posts with... So I would sic them on rolling up wire and stuff, but a lot of them were young kids, too. You feel kind of responsible for them. What if they fall in a hole or get bit by a snake or

something. At the time, there probably wasn't anything alive anyway, but... So it was kind of hard to take complete advantage of the volunteers because you couldn't be in 20 different places at one time. So that made it kind of more difficult. We did take advantage of several of them that showed up, and thank goodness they did.

Diana: Who were some of the people or the agencies that proved most helpful during the fire?

Kit: I think all of them played a significant role. As far as the FSA being really on the ball to help recoup some of that loss... The Christian church with the food or the Red Cross or whoever did that at the high school.

Diana: You mean the high school itself?

Kit: Yes. You have all this help, all these volunteers and people around you coming to help and they want something to eat. You know they're hungry and here's all this food for you. And it wasn't hot dogs, it was food. So the people who did that, whoever put those deals together, the high school opened their doors. I really don't have any complaints on any of them. I think they all did a spot-on job for what had happened.

Diana: So had you had any experiences with wildfires before? Or with controlled burns?

Kit: No.

Diana: Did you have any contact with the strike teams that came in? Or the helicopters?

Kit: No, I sure didn't. I saw the helicopters the day after the fire, you know, they showed up. But by that time, there wasn't anything smoldering out here. It was gone, so there was nothing for them to really do.

Diana: So they were mostly doing it to the south?

Kit: South and east. I know that like Garth Gardiner's house, and places like that, there was still some grass around. I know they were there. But no, I didn't have any experience with them. From what I hear, it was something to see them go to work, too.

Diana: I think so. What are the physical and financial effects of the fire? Are they still ongoing?

Kit: Oh yes, and will be for many years. It takes awhile to recover from something like that. Fortunately, for me, the Kansas Livestock Association, the Farm Service Agency, and other organizations have all been just great.

Diana: Did you apply to the Ashland Community Foundation?

Kit: Yes, and the community foundation. I don't want to leave them out, they were awesome. Stuff like that almost makes you feel...

Diana: What about the FSA and soil conservation that came in and did fencing and took care of burying the cattle and set up some of those programs. Then they paid for some of it. Did you feel like they did a good job and was it timely?

Kit: Yes. I was shocked, especially through the FSA deal and even the organization out of Amarillo. It was quick. The only thing we're still dealing with is the fencing stuff because we're still not done getting it put together.

Diana: Is your perimeter fencing done?

Kit: Yes, all our perimeter fence is put back, and all the north ranch is pretty well done. We've just got maybe a mile or two left of stuff way up north that we haven't gotten to yet. But yes, we're...

Diana: So how's your grass?

Kit: You know, we caught a lot of rains after the fire, but they were all hard rains and there was nothing there to hold the moisture. All our ponds are full now, a lot of that water ran off and then it got so hot there in July and August. The plant population is not the same as it was. The fire was so hot, it killed a lot of that plant population. So our grass is not anywhere near where it needs to be, so we'll have to manage that for the next several years and keep our numbers pulled back as to give that grass a chance to try to come back.

Diana: Have you done some restocking?

Kit: Yes. We restocked. Our theory, whether it's right or wrong, is to get cattle back on it as quickly as possible in really light numbers. They will help keep the weed pressure down and the different types of grasses that you really don't want. So we went ahead and stocked our pastures once they greened back up and just did it in a really light number. You go look at it now, and it's kind of rough looking right now.

Diana: Well, we got rain recently. Have you been able to drill wheat?

Kit: No, but we're going to start as soon as we're done recording, I hope.

Diana: So what can you do, or have you done, to prepare for a future fire or major disaster?

Kit: You know, one thing is to not let the grass get so out of control, I guess. We'd been in a drouth prior to the fire, a couple years before, and so our theory was to, "Save that grass as much as you can, because you're going to get dry again." We didn't graze as heavily as we should have. Try to keep tumbleweeds and stuff or weeds growing in the fence lines, down, or try to get those sprayed better. Those things, you know, set a tumbleweed on fire and a 60 mph wind catches it, and that thing's like a little missile going off. Two or three miles down the road, it is just setting fires and blazes all over the place. So we want to try to keep our fence lines cleaned out as much as possible, and just pray for rain.

Diana: So what about the community, or the county? What can they do? Do you think we're pretty prepared?

Kit: I don't think it matters. Nobody is prepared for something like that. Hopefully, I'll never see anything like that again. That was the absolute worst case scenario on top of a worst-case scenario. For what happened in a matter of a few hours, I thought our fire department, our police department, the schools... I thought everybody did what they should have done in that short amount of time.

A lot of people made smarter decisions than I would have, considering the pressure that they were put under.

Diana: Did you know that there were a lot of people who came to town to help coordinate the fire? Were you aware of the command center? Or just mainly the fire departments that came?

Kit: I did not see, other than Minneola's fire department, and then Dan and Adam. At the time, I never questioned, "Why aren't there more fire trucks here?" I knew the fire to the southwest was way bigger, and I never questioned at all... These people have some serious trouble on their hands.

To be honest with you, I was petrified. I didn't know whether to turn right or left or upside down. What I tell everybody is, everything I shouldn't have done is what I did. Everything I shouldn't have done is what I ended up doing. So those people that do that for volunteer or for a living, I've got a lot of respect for them.

Diana: So have you had a chance to kind of deal with your own emotional response to the fire and kind of get your own feelings about it talked out?

Kit: I haven't ever... It's one of those things. I was brought to, you know, get this job done and then sit back. When it's time to drill wheat, you drill wheat. When it's time to cut wheat,

you cut wheat. Or move cattle. You don't do anything else until that's taken care of, and you go at it non-stop until it is taken care of. Then you think about it.

Well, with the fire, the fire was done and then you had the initial part of putting the pieces back together. It's still not done. We've still got shops we're putting up and equipment we're still going through and fences here and there along with all the other farm and ranch duties. You still have this other stuff. I don't know that I've set back and had a chance to talk it out or have a good cry about it.

I still see all this stuff we've got to finish first. We're getting closer, and I think whenever everything's finally caught up, then I'll be able to sit down and take it all in.

Diana? Do you think it's going to take a while to get everything taken care of?

Kit: Yes, it's going to take folks a long time. I feel really blessed and fortunate where we're at and the help we received and that our recovery is going to be quick. I feel for people that don't have the help or don't have the resources.

So, I feel like we're getting close to being back to somewhat normal. But you look around and see other folks, and until they're up and going too... Are we really back to where we need to be? No. Not until everybody else is right there with you. That's what's been great about living here in Ashland, everybody kind of has that same mentality. I promise you, you wouldn't see that anywhere else. It's really neat to see.

Diana: So do you have any other thoughts or things you would like to say about this experience?

Kit: No, just that for everybody that's put in time and effort, or just a hug or a pat on the back. I can't thank those folks enough. I don't... I can't thank the volunteers, I can't thank the members of this community, people on the foundation and their time in putting that all together and working through that. Those gals that cooked and volunteered. I can't put it into words. I can't say thank you; I mean I can, but I kind of feel like I'm undercutting all those folks. Kendall Kay... I mean everybody that helped in one way or another, I can't say thank you enough. I can't. It's not enough. I almost feel, like I tried to say earlier, I almost feel inadequate. I can't explain it, but you don't feel like you're worthy.

Diana: What did you think of the outpouring from agricultural America and the social media?

Kit: Initially, right after it happened, when I was sitting there out in the front yard as the house was finishing burning up, I had seen the cattle and everything else. I honestly was done. The ag business is tough enough as it is with markets and drought. I mean, it seems like it's one

thing after another and then this happened. Then you're sitting there and you're looking at it. My initial response, right then and there, was, "As soon as this is over with and everything is kind of grounded, I'm out of agriculture. I don't want any part of it."

While that was a knee-jerk reaction, there was some validity to it. But as all those volunteers and all the people started showing up and people sent money, that were all ag-related folks from Wisconsin to Jetmore, Kansas. Farmers and ranchers. After a day or two, you kind of sit there and think, now wait a minute. Yes, it is tough doing this, but look at the people who have your back and people doing the same thing you are every day. They're with you, the whole way. It's almost like you're part of a big family, a nation-wide family of farmers and ranchers. At that point in time, you almost do a complete 180. Instead of being, "I'm done with farming and ranching." It was, "Well, this is the best occupation there is." Look at all these folks; their values are along the same core as yours. They mean what they say. It completely changed my perspective on agriculture and anybody that's involved in it. It has been eye-opening. So I'm proud to be in ag because of those folks showing me. Just knowing that those folks are out there and they're in ag too, it makes me want to be like them. I want to be able to help them. I want to be able to go donate heifers or donate cows to somebody else that's been through a tragedy. It makes we want to be a better person and a better person in ag. So, I'll be a farmer until God tells me I'm doing something else. I'm thankful for all the wonderful people around here.