



Nationwide CEO Kirt Walker with his favorite vehicle (his dad's farm truck).

New Nationwide CEO has farming in his blood

It's 6 a.m. on a crisp autumn morning as a young Kirt Walker finishes the last of his chores, tending to a barnful of livestock before breakfast, then school. Growing up on his family's Century Farm in Iowa instilled the values of hard work and responsibility that Walker carries forth today in his new role as CEO of Nationwide.

"I wouldn't be here if it weren't for farming," Walker said. "Ag runs deep in my family, through farming and other related professions for more than 100 years."

As an active youth member of 4-H and the National FFA organization, followed by the Block and Bridle Club at Iowa State University, Walker honed valuable leadership and business skills, along with a focus on personal growth and development.

"My brother and I were officers in 4-H and FFA, and my dad was a 4-H leader for more than 20 years," Walker shared. "Those experiences helped me understand that leadership is ultimately about serving others."

As he accepts responsibility for the reins guiding Nationwide, Walker said, "Nationwide will evolve for the future, but our relationship with the

Ohio Farm Bureau and the agricultural community will remain a vital part of our foundation. Organizations like the Ohio Farm Bureau helped build Nationwide into the company we are today."

Nationwide's earliest roots were established in 1926 by the Ohio Farm Bureau when it founded the Farm Bureau Mutual Automobile Insurance Co. that eventually became Nationwide. "We were started by farmers to support rural communities, and we'll always honor that heritage," he said. Nationwide's first salespeople and customers were farmers who believed in the cooperative spirit of the company and that more could be accomplished together than alone.

Walker said that belief still drives the company, but its much broader product offerings allow it to offer even more protection today. "Nationwide protects people, businesses and futures, and something that makes us special is the extraordinary care we bring to that mission."

Walker points to Nationwide's commitment to farm safety. The company established Grain Bin Safety Week in 2014 to raise awareness about the dan-

gers of grain bins. Since that time, Nationwide has provided lifesaving grain rescue tubes and training to 111 fire departments across 26 states, including Ohio. "It's important to give back to rural communities by helping people protect what matters most. Nothing is more important than people," he said.

Nationwide is the largest insurer of farms and ranches in the U.S., but Walker sees an opportunity to do even more for the agricultural community by innovating and offering new solutions. "We'd like to be the No. 1 financial services provider for farmers and ranchers across America," he said. "Too often, retirement planning and farm succession planning take a back seat to the day-to-day realities of managing a farm." Nationwide is working to change that through programs like Land As Your Legacy and Your Ag Financial Legacy.

"At the end of the day, farming is a part of who we are as a company," he said. "Our relationships with Farm Bureaus across the country are among the most important partnerships we have. That will never change." ●