

Learning Fast In Brazil

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series from Iowan Tyler Bruch whose family farms 10,500 acres in Bahia, Brazil.

In 1844 my great, great, great, grandfather Sebastian Bruch packed up his family and boarded a ship for the land of opportunity – the United States. That bold move 162 years ago has spawned four generations of farmers in the Bruch family.

Fast forward and south to my office in Luis Eduardo Magalhaes (LEM), Bahia, Brazil, where I'm writing this first column. I, too, made a bold move three years ago when I graduated from Iowa State University (ISU) and moved to Brazil. Many questioned why I'd leave our family's fairly large corn and soybean operation in Emmetsburg, IA, to try and start another operation 5,000 miles away. Maybe it was the curiosity of adventure or the skyrocketing land prices in Iowa.

My journey to Brazil included a sharp learning curve. I'd originally planned to study at an ag school in Recife, in northeast Brazil. But I quit school there after I saw horses in the hallways of the agronomy building. I boarded a bus for LEM where I knew some Americans were farming.

When I arrived all I could talk about was how you can find farms and opportunities that you couldn't find in Iowa. Land sold for \$300-400/acre – and a lot of it. This was the place that I had hoped to find.

I'd been in-country three months and we'd already made an offer on a farm in Bahia. It turned out not to

be what we thought.

Buying land in a foreign country is a whole different ball game. You have to keep your guard up at all times, and not overlook any due diligence practices.

The first three farms we tried to buy fell through. We finally found the perfect fit in August 2003 on the Cerrado, or virgin land, that needed to be cleared before farming.

Once the documents checked out, we finally took possession on Sept. 25. We worked 24/7 clearing land, picking up roots and working lime into the red soil.

We also had to build housing for our workers, a place to store and work on equipment and even a water tower. We spent the first month transporting people back and forth

on motorcycles from a neighbor's farm 5 miles away. Our shop for the first month was under our fuel tank.

I'm glad those days are long gone.

Our goal was to be planting by Nov. 1, and we made it. We planted rice on about 65% of our acres the first year. Since rice is a staple in Brazilian diets, we thought it would be easy to market and sell, right?

We harvested nearly 50 sacks of dryland rice per hectare, a high yield without irrigation. Then we basically gave it away. Marketing rice was the hardest thing I've ever tried to do. It wasn't like hauling corn, soybeans or even oats to your local Ag Partners in town and getting a check the next day. It was more an effort of trying to barter or beg someone to take it.

The steep learning curve here can cost you a lot of money very quickly. Unfortunately, we found that out through personal experience.

We've since expanded our operation by renting more land. And, I started an investment company called Global Ag Investments to offer investors an opportunity to invest in American-managed agriculture.

We're currently planning to plant about 10,500 acres of soybeans, cotton and popcorn.

After spending the last three years learning Portuguese and adapting to a new business and social culture, I can relate to the travails of my forefather Sebastian so many years ago. ■



Brazil's red soil (now in winter) has drawn fourth-generation Emmetsburg, IA, farmer Tyler Bruch 5,000 miles South.