Pulling double duty

- Mont. farmer also runs two-state pulse crop company

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GREAT FALLS and HIGHWOOD, Mont. Justin Flaten works the phones in his fashionable office in downtown Great Falls, Mont. He seems confident and comfortable as he deals with customers.

Two hours later and 30 miles to the east, he works the gears of an aging stick-shift pickup as it bounces along a potholed country road near Highwood, Mont. He seems at ease and at home as he surveys his crops.

Flaten (pronounced with a long a in the middle) has carved out an unusual role in Upper Midwest agriculture. He’s president of JM Grain, which has locations in Great Falls and Garrison, N.D., and which buys and sells chickpeas, lentils, feed peas, green peas, yellow peas and seed. The company name reflects the first names of Justin and his father, Marvin, the company’s Garrison-based vice president.

Justin Flaten also farms in Highwood—an accomplishment made more notable because he started farming from scratch, without help from a family member. Almost everyone familiar with modern production agriculture agrees that getting started in farming is extremely difficult without help.

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- Justin Flaten, who farms near Highwood, Mont., has always had a passion for farming.