

Heart of a Tiger: How Alex Mitchek is building a legacy of resilience and innovation

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By Tisa Mason

HAYS, Kan. - Just three hours west of Hays, across the state line in the small town of Kit Carson, Colorado, everyone knows the name Mitchek. For more than one hundred years, the family has worked the High Plains, much like the farming families right here in Ellis County. Today, two twenty-one-year-old twins—including Fort Hays State's own Alex Mitchek—are making sure that name stays strong. Their story is one of great sadness, but also of the kind of hope, grit, and hard work that every Tiger can admire.

Life changed forever for the brothers during their senior year of high school in 2022. In September, their mother, Maria, passed away from cancer. Just four months later, in January, their father, Ervin, passed away from the same disease. In a single school year, Alex and Paul lost both of their parents.

It would have been easy to give up. They were only eighteen years old. But Alex shows us what resilience really means. Instead of walking away from the family farm, he leaned into his community and his future.

"Paul and I probably had seven lasagnas in the freezer," Alex remembers with a laugh. The tiny town of 250 people gathered around them, but one man, Devin Dickey, became a special mentor to Alex. When Alex's father passed away, Devin was there within ten minutes to hold him while he cried. Alex credits Devin with helping him stay grounded when his world was falling apart.

That bond remains strong today. Devin's son, Zach, is now Alex's roommate at FHSU. "I have some of the best roommates. I have some of the greatest community guys that I hang out with. We talk about how every year we are going to try to find a way to meet with our big group of guys after graduation."

At Fort Hays State, we talk a lot about being entrepreneurs—people who see a problem and build a creative solution. Alex and his twin brother Paul are living that mission every day.

Alex's journey to Hays wasn't direct. He spent a year playing college baseball at York University in Nebraska, but he felt the pull of the High Plains. He transferred to FHSU because it felt like home, it was exactly three hours from the farm, and it offered the hands-on education he needed.

Now a junior majoring in Agricultural Business with a certificate in Finance, Alex is gaining the tools to see the "big picture" and grow the family business. While his twin brother, Paul, manages the daily work on the farm, Alex is the "eyes and ears" out in the world, looking for new opportunities.

"I have the world's greatest brother. Paul gave me opportunities that most 21-year-olds don't get. I've been able to go to some of the coolest places and meet some of the coolest people." Alex says. "He stays home to farm, and I get to go out and see what I can bring back that would be valuable."

The brothers aren't just "doing things the old way." They are practicing stewardship, taking care of the land so it lasts for future generations. This requires an entrepreneurial spirit and a willingness to take risks.

On Mitchek Farms GP, they grow wheat, corn, and milo, but they also experiment with "regenerative" farming. They plant cover crops like rye and Sudan grass to keep the soil healthy and protect it from the harsh Colorado wind. Paul likes to say that their farm is "one big experiment."

Alex has also put his business training to work by helping launch the Day&Nite Cattle Co. The brothers manage a herd of nearly 300 cattle, raising breeds like Charolais and Angus. Alex picked the name as a clever nod to their initials (A.M. and P.M.), showing the creative thinking he brings to the partnership. Last December, Alex even became certified in artificial insemination through FHSU, a technical skill that adds direct value to their herd management.

Alex is also showing his entrepreneurial spirit through a professional internship at Farmland Auction and Realty. This work has opened his eyes to the challenges facing modern agriculture. He sees many older farmers retiring and selling their land to big tech companies or data centers.

This has made Alex even more determined. By investing "sweat equity" into the farm now, he wants to protect the Mitchek legacy. He plans to open his own appraisal and real estate business in his hometown after he graduates in 2027. His goal is to help other rural families keep their land in the family, just as he and Paul are doing.

While Paul is busy in the fields, Alex is a leader here in Hays. He is a young man with a big smile and a hearty laugh that makes it impossible to feel discouraged when he is around.

"If it wasn't for Hays, I'd be down about 20 friends," he says. Whether he is playing intramural softball, cheering at games, or taking classes, Alex is constantly building a network of "community guys" he plans to stay close with for life.

His growth at FHSU has been spiritual, too. Last Easter, Alex made the life-changing decision to be baptized at the Comeau Catholic Campus Center. He calls it the best decision of his life and credits Father Andy for helping him find a sense of peace and direction.

The Mitchek twins have faced harder times than most people twice their age. But Alex Mitchek is the definition of Tiger Strong. He carries a journal in every truck he drives, writing down one thing he learned every single day. This habit of constant growth is what sets him apart. "I fully believe that if you put your head toward something, you can create and do anything you want," Alex says.

When Alex graduates in the spring of 2027, he will head back to Kit Carson to team up with Paul full-time. Together, they will split everything 50/50, building a business based on great values and a love for the land. They aren't just growing crops; they are growing a future that would make Maria and Ervin Mitchek - and the entire FHSU community - incredibly proud.