

# Changing Lines

The Switch To Hybrid Rice Pays Off At The Rost & Rost Farm

BETTY VALLE GEGG-NAEGER  
MidAmerica Farmer Grower

NEW MADRID, MO.

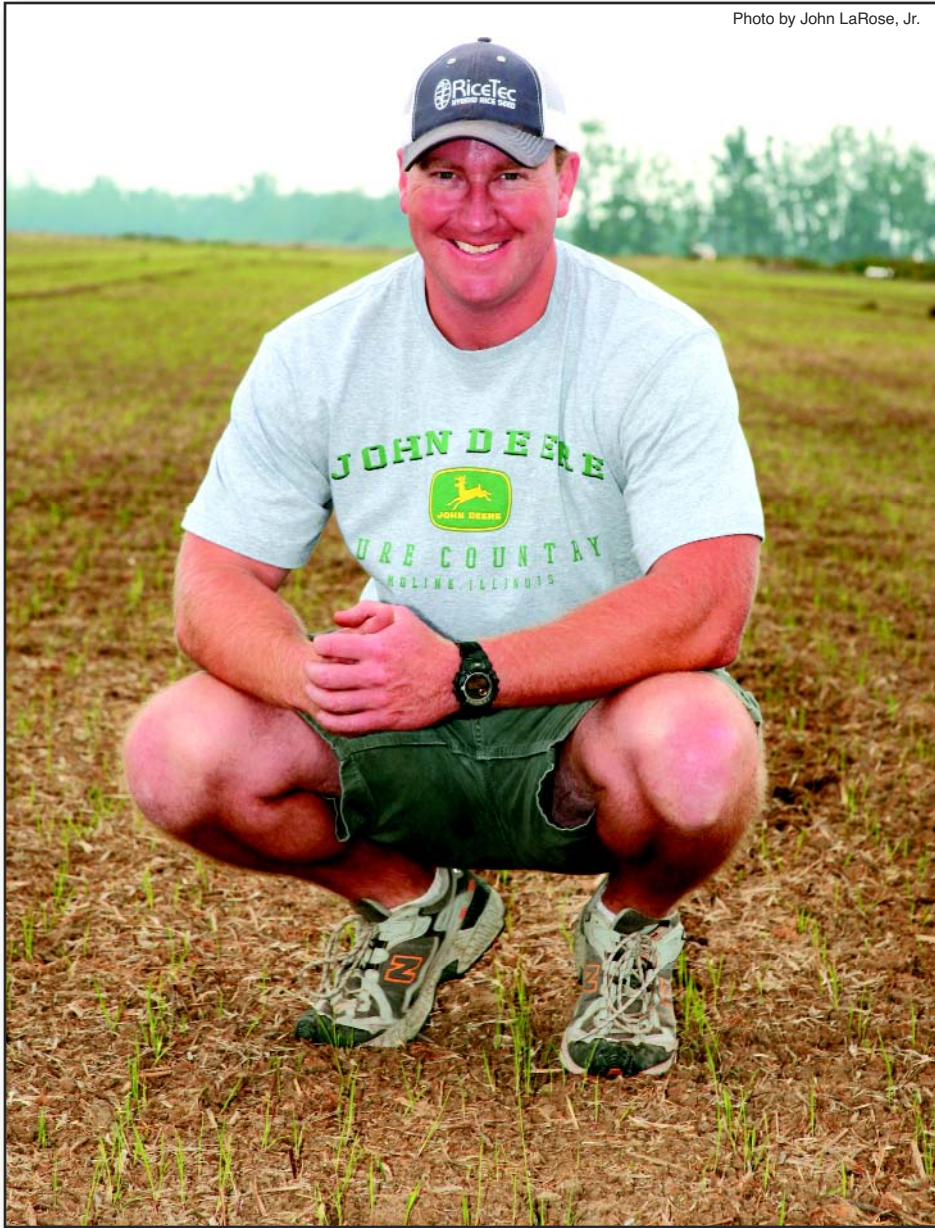
Rice is a staple crop at the Rost & Rost Farm in New Madrid, Mo., ever since Peter Rost Jr. returned from college in 1999. Pete, as he is called, graduated from New Madrid High School in 1995, then attended the University of Missouri-Columbia, earning a degree in agriculture there that December. Before that, Pete spent weekends and

Clearfield hybrids. We were noticing a significant increase in yields, from 140 to 150 to 170, 180, 190. It's hard not to like that."

Their first rice crop back in 1999 averaged 140 dry rice, which wasn't bad. Sometimes the yield would reach 150, but never over that. Once the conventional Wells came out, the yields did reach 170-180.

The Rost farm does have a red rice problem, which is believed to have come in with the seed. "Some fields are worse than others, but with

Photo by John LaRose, Jr.



**Peter says that today they use anywhere from 1,000<sup>th</sup> to 1,500 acres for rice, depending on the weather and a lot of variables**

evenings on the farm with his father, Peter Rost Sr.

"If I wasn't in school I was out there working weekends," Pete said. "We actually had hogs when I was growing up." Livestock, corn and soybeans rounded out the operation then.

Today the Rost farm is a combination of three different entities.

"My father farms on his own, I farm on my own, then we're partners under Rost & Rost," he explained. "But we work together, treat it all the same, basically it all goes into the same pot you might say."

It was only after Pete came home to farm that the operation included rice in the mix. He didn't learn about rice at the university, but from other successful farmers who shared what they had learned.

"A lot of friends grew rice and they were really doing well," he said. "I talked to some other farmers and they seemed like they were doing well. We thought we had a lot of ground suitable for rice that just needed precision grading, so we started grading and started growing rice."

Some of the farmland was already graded, but not precision graded. It was stake graded to grow corn and soybeans. Pete started grading the gumbo and put his first rice crop out on graded land. Eventually they contacted Jarret Lawfield of Lawfield and Lawfield Land Grading to do the work.

"We started out with about 125 acres of rice and actually those two fields were freshly graded," he said. "The next year we jumped to about 500 and then it was probably our third or fourth year we really started growing more rice."

The results spurred them on and the acreage grew from there.

"Today we use anywhere from 1,000 to 1,500 acres for rice, depending on the weather and a lot of variables; but we try to have 1,000 acres of rice, and a little more if we can," Pete said.

For those early crops they used Cypress, Cocodrie, Drew, then started cycling out of those a little. Next they tried the Clearfields, CL161 and CL131. Then they planted Wells, and by that time the hybrids started coming out.

"We went to those and really liked the yields," he said.

They tried the hybrids about 2006, using RiceTec XL8 the first year.

"It did as good as any and better than some," Pete recalled. "It was above average compared to the varieties, most definitely. It was definitely above average for that year and we just started easing into it; the next year we grew a little bit more. We went to the 729 and the 730 and then the 745."

Last year they grew 745, 729 and 730, then this year they are growing 729, 745 and 723.

"We've got enough seed purchased for probably 1,200 acres and we'll get it out one way or another," Pete promised. The weather will determine whether it will be drilled or water seeded.

"We try to drill all our slope fields on one-tenth fall and the zero grade; if it keeps raining to where we can't get in there then we will usually spray them, pump them up and water seed," he said.

The hybrids have another appeal to them. The disease packages of RiceTec hybrids eliminate a lot of worry.

"That is one of my big selling points, why we're growing the hybrid," he explained. "As far as the sheath blight and the blast, every now and then you'll get a little sheath blight but with RiceTec hybrids it won't travel up the stalk to the flag leaf, so that's really not a problem; and we have not seen any blast. To me that is just peace of mind when you can drive by the field and not have to worry about it. All of the RiceTec hybrids have a real good disease package and that's priceless to me."

Rost finds fertility rates are much the same for both the hybrids and varieties. The only difference is the mid-season treatment is applied at boot stage instead of at internode movement.

"You put your mid-season on a lot later than you do your conventional varieties," he said.

Seed rates, however, are definitely less with hybrids.

"We're drilling 30 pounds and I really like that because before we were drilling probably 90 pounds with our conventional varieties and at one-third the rate, you can get across more ground a lot more efficiently. You don't have to stop and fill the drill up."

Planting by air is a lot simpler too at the lower rate.

The Rosts grow corn, soybeans and rice on their farm, and if Pete has a favorite, it would have to be rice.

"It's just definitely more of a challenge and actually I like fooling with it," he said. "There's a lot to it. It's something that needs to be looked at every day. And it kind of just keeps you going I guess."

He hires Delbert Glooly as a rice scout. He's been helping them since they started raising rice.

On the corn ridge ground, the crop of choice has been good after corn, rotating to beans as it fits their plans before going back to corn.

"Corn fits our rotation because it gives us time to get started harvesting the end of August and get that out of the way; then we have rice, and rice and beans usually come off about the same time, so that lets us get at least a good 1,000 acres out of the way before harvesting rice, then we go to the beans. That's how we try to do it," he explained.

He finds the rice yields definitely better with the hybrids.

"On the rice, especially on the conventional Clearfields, we could not get a good yield," he said. "The crop would look great, you thought 'hey, we're going to hit a licker,' but 140 and 150 was tops with the conventional Clearfields and that's kind of what pushed me over to the

Clearfield program we're able to maintain it and keep it clean," Pete said.

It was a struggle controlling the red rice until the Clearfield came along. One idea they had was to back off on the rice. Rotating out of rice does help, but it takes a good four or five years to get it under control.

"The weeds, too, weren't much of a problem until the Clearfield come out and I used to get on a four-wheeler and rogue," he said. "If the field just had a little in it, that's fine; but when it gets really bad, you're spinning your tires."

The roguing he did himself, becoming burned out on it one summer. It was more than he could do.

Rost feels he has a pretty good combination now with RiceTec and the Clearfield technology, although the costs are well up there. He estimated it costs \$400 an acre roughly to put out an acre of rice.

"By the time you get your fuel, this seed is \$140 an acre by itself," he said. The \$400 an acre takes everything into consideration, including the pilot and airplane, chemicals, fuel, seed cost, nitrogen. It does not include land cost and depreciation of machinery.

Rost follows RiceTec's recommendations on nitrogen.

"I go by the book," he said. "I'm to want to say we want to end up probably 150 to 170 pounds total pounds of nitrogen; you know by the time it's all said and done."

Chemical inputs include Newpath and Beyond which are used in the Clearfield system. Beyond just doesn't have the residual like Newpath.

"I use a lot of Stam, a lot of Duet, Command," he said. "Yes we definitely use our fair share of chemicals."

The different chemicals are unique to take care of unique problems.

"Yes sir, they each got their special targets; we'll walk the fields and look at the plants, my scout, RiceTec's tech rep, Brian Otis, we all look at them, then we'll get our heads together and figure out what we're going to spray."

After three years of working with RiceTec, Rost calls the company support "top shelf!"

"It's good, it's really helpful, everything I do I consult them and we've had real good luck doing that. I'm very pleased," he said. He gave Otis a special pat on the back. "He is very smart and he's up to date on all the newest chemicals. That's Dr. Brian, or Dr. O, I should call him; he's the best!"

The Rosts have a big John Deere air drill, a 1990 CCS, 42 row with 7 1/2-inch spacing. That takes care of the entire seeding, other than times when they use an airplane. The drill also doubles for planting soybeans, with the same spacing. The corn is seeded with a planter on 30-inch rows. Rice fields span anywhere from 40 acres to 80 acres, the majority of which have straight levees.

"They're a lot more efficient than the crooked levees as far as watering," Rost added. Being precision leveled, it's easier to maintain straight levees.

Rost will land plane the fields every couple of years, but with the proper care they'll last a long time without having to get the full land graders back. Still they may land plane them every couple of years.

"The other big thing that helps is we went to a track combine and the tracks in the rice field I can't say enough about," he said. "That's the way to go. It just doesn't tear the fields up and then you can just let them dry and burn them instead of trying to roll them down with a snake killer. The tracks are a great thing for the rice fields."

Several wells on the farm are drilled 100 feet deep or better. One well can serve about 100 acres. The water supply is plentiful.

The Rost farm has storage for their own rice, but they haul the corn and beans out of the field.

"Some years we'll store just a little bit if the basis is real out of whack, but the rice we almost have to store because it's just hard to haul it out of the field," he said. "They charge us a 30-cent drying charge and then they charge us shrink which is roughly 60 cents a bushel just to haul it out of the field. They call that green rice. Our own bins pay for themselves real fast."

This farm can store 220,000 bushels of grain now, and plans are to add a few more bins every couple of years.

"At the same time we've got to pay for them, so we have to get them paid down, then put a couple more up and we like to be able to hold every bushel of rice," Rost said.

"Another thing that's crucial and the reason we have the bins is they don't take rice straight from the field except for maybe 20 loads a day; and if you have a lot of acres you just can't get much work done hauling."

Harvesting is controlled by the availability of the trucks, and the Rost farm has four 18-wheelers of their own.

"At least at our bins we can get unloaded," Pete Jr. said. "If we haul to Riceland then sometimes they don't even take green rice; they'll shut down or they close at 2. In this day and time, it's more important to get it in fast, get it out fast, before the weather variables start hitting you."

The Rost farm is run by a staff of three, Pete Jr., Peter Rost Sr. and one full-time employee, Darrin Martin. During harvest they will pick up an extra truck driver or two.

Spraying is done in house with a spray coupe with an 80-foot boom; however in wet weather they sometimes hire an airplane.

Harvest is done with a Cat 595 R combine on tracks. The tracks stay on all year.

"We use a 36-foot MacDon draper to cut the beans and rice," Pete Jr. said. "We cut both with that, it works out real well." Δ

BETTY VALLE GEGG-NAEGER: Senior Staff Writer, MidAmerica Farmer Grower.