

Learning By Doing

Young Farmer Finds Experience Paves Way For His Entry Into Agriculture

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From high school to the farm is the route that Terry Hall took to manage a 4,700-acre operation in the lush area of Lake City, Ark. He was raised on this farm where his father, Russell, spent his life, supplementing his income by trucking.

"When I got out of high school in 1992, I started farming full time," Terry explained. "We had about 400 acres then and we have roughly about 4,700 now. Farming was all I knew, along with basketball and I got too fat to play ball."

At that time the farm focused on rice, cotton and soybeans but the Halls dropped cotton from the rotation in 1994. Since then the crops have been rice and beans in a 50-50 rotation. Today his father lives a quarter mile away in the house where his grandfather once lived.



Terry Hall, left, and D.J. Shipman, RiceTec Representative, stand before a field of the XL723 and discuss the harvest that was showing lots of promise as the season wound down.

"We got out of cotton because the market was too volatile," Terry said. "One year we would

This is the fifth year Hall has grown RiceTec, having begun about 2003. He planted 45 pounds of XL8 last year also.

"I liked that," he said. "I would like to increase the seeding rate though. We got some good yields out of it and RiceTec puts on a big head. Any good rice lays down if you get a good stand. But the hybrids from RiceTec do not lay flat like the old varieties. They might lean on one another, but they are not going to lay flat."

In his early experience the RiceTec hybrids did lay flat, but he's having no problem with that now. He also finds the milling has improved.

"If we put it in a grain tank, we put it in our bins, dry it down and haul it out in January, February, the following winter, our milling yields draw a premium on probably 85 percent to 90 percent of it," he said. "The milling is excellent. We have a lot of 70-71-72s. We are just tickled to death with it."

His expected yield average last fall held true when his rice yielded a 181 bushel average.

Terry noted that RiceTec hybrids work well on ground that has been leveled.

"Conventional varieties don't grow well on cut ground," he said. "It doesn't seem to bother the RiceTec varieties. You can tell the difference when you hit a cut ridge that has been cut deep, or gets cold water up next to a well, but while the RiceTec will fall off a third, conventional varieties will fall off three fourths. That is one reason we went to the RiceTec. We like the RiceTec because of the yield and, second, because we can get help. Anytime we have any trouble we call their reps and they are right here. DJ is always just a phone call away."

His soybeans are grown on 38-inch beds, shooting for a 55-pound seeding rate. The row spacing is 10 inches and planting is done solid across the beds, even in the low spots, the middles.

To keep the flood from killing some beans, he tries to wait until beans are 18 to 20 inches tall before watering.

"With that much fall to the land, we can get the water out in 24 hours," he said. With the



Russell, left, and Terry Hall look at a bean plant that has a lot of pods that hold four beans. Four beans are pretty unusual for this area. Hall estimated that 10 percent of his crop has four beans in it, with the rest having three. He expected a yield of 60 bushels to the acre average, citing the genetics and his watering techniques for the high yield.

Photos by John LaRose

make big yields and the next year we wouldn't, and rice chemicals and cotton chemicals don't mix. It was just a lot easier to have one set of equipment, whereas before we had to have two totally separate systems."

The farm had some irrigation when Terry stepped in, however today it's 100 percent irrigated. Located on the east side of Crowley Ridge, irrigation was a simple thing. Most of the wells are drilled at 160 feet, with pump settings on 70 to 75. They have 34 3,000-gallon-plus-a-minute wells.

The rice is flood irrigated, while beans are watered down the middles.

"We are 95 percent precision leveled," Terry said. "We furrow irrigate all soybeans with poly pipe, then we knock down the ridges when going back to rice."

The farm is all conventional tillage. All of the beans are planted in rows and they are hard to till.

"We bed them up with a 38-inch bedder roller and we grain drill down those beds," he said. Going back into rice they break down those ridges, disk the field then pull a cultivator through the field. "Then we will come in and pull land planes or floats to knock down the ridges."

They use this method because it's too difficult to flood the soybeans.

"The yields are better by throwing them up on a bed," Terry said. "All of our ground is leveled anywhere from three quarters of a tenth to a tenth fall and on 40 acres we were having four to five levees. When you take a 7.5 foot levee out four or five times across the field, that is a lot of ground that is wasted. We noticed our bean yields came up four or five bushel an acre when we started furrow irrigating. I don't think the beans are all that much better, but we used more ground per field. That is one reason we went to leveling ground."

That much work every year is the only complaint he has with his system. The average hours on a tractor are probably about 600-650 hours, quite a bit for a grain farmer.

He tries to prepare the rice land for beans in the fall after the rice comes off, letting it rest stale seed bed over the winter. But that effort takes a back seat to preparing the ground for rice the next year.

"First we concentrate on the rice ground for next year, as opposed to the bean ground," he said.

"We have worked with Chad Duckworth, DJ Shipman, RiceTec representatives, and Chris Tilley, sales representative, but what we like to do is come in there and disk it during the fall, right after the combine," Terry said.

"We have a disk in the same field and we will let it air for a few days then a lot of times we can just pull a level plane over it a couple of times," he added. "Then we will leave it until spring. That will get it just slick smooth on top and then we will come in the next spring in February, burn down with Roundup and Harmony and no till it into that."

"We use just a regular Great Plains 20-20 grain drill with planter spacing at 10 inches," he said.

All of his long grain rice is RiceTec. He prefers RiceTec, but also needs a medium grain rice which RiceTec does not provide.

"We have a market for medium grain," Terry said. "Some fields that is all they have ever had on them and that is all we plant on them. So we are about 75 percent long grain and 25 percent medium."

He uses RiceTec XL8, 729, 730 and 723, a conventional variety.

"Next year I hope I can get all the 729 I want," he said. "I like the 729. It has the Clearfield technology, we can put Newpath on it, and we really like that rice. It yields well, stands up well. It is clean in the grain tank and we can clean it up good."

Duckworth said he expects there will be a limited supply this year of 729.

"My second choice would be XL8 if they continue to offer it, and then the 730," Terry said. "We had some test plots this year that had 745 and 746. Those two just blew the top off. They yielded really well."

RiceTec's 745 and 746 are new varieties now in the pipeline.

"We like those," Terry said. "I am kind of old school, I like things to be out a couple of years before I plant them, and the 729 has been out a few years, and we really like it so I would just as soon stay with it. I would like to have the 729, XL8 and I would probably go with the 745." He plants 28 pounds per acre, the recommended seeding rate.

plants 18 to 19 inches tall, standing water for that short a time won't hurt it.

"You put them up on a bed and you have options," he explained. "You can do a lot of different things."

Hall and his father operate the farm with just two full time employees, year round.

"Then we have my uncle who comes in and helps in the fall and the spring as we plant, and we have a neighbor that comes in and helps us during planting and harvesting," Hall said.

Besides that, the four of them take care of the place.

"That is another reason we went with precision irrigated, precision leveled land," he explained. "One man can watch three times as much ground because you don't have loop levees and crooked levees and all of our fields are leveled with rows or pads around them."

Hall uses his own equipment and does his own leveling, using his regular tractors, GPS and lasers.

Generally the fields are square with long levees.

"We have a few that have point rows that butt up to the ditches, but most of them are grid sectioned.

Usually his crops are 50-50 on beans and rice, but the past year was an exception.

"We were probably 45-65 this year, with rice about 45 percent and about 60 percent beans," he explained. "We have some ground that is harder to hold water on even though we can pump the right amount, and diesel prices have backed off a little bit. However, the way they are coming on with these RiceTec varieties I will have to go back to 50-50 or 60-40 or something. If we can cut 200 bushel with \$4.50-\$5 expense, I can see as much a profit, or more, as I can with the price of beans right now."

Hall has found a system that is working for him.

"And with the leveled fields, and the reduced water that we have to pump on the level fields, and the RiceTec hybrids yielding as well as they are, we are seeing a profit in rice," he stated. "We are doing a lot of grid sampling on our fertility and using variable rate trucks to put out our fertilizer."

That is an outside service, provided through Helena Chemical and the Craighead Farmers Coop.

Terry grid tests on 300 by 300 squares every three years.

"It lasts for three years," he said. "We find that the cut places naturally need more than where you dumped the topsoil, so we learned we could use the same amount of fertilizer but put it in the places we needed it, and get our yields up. The grid sampling is kind of expensive, costing \$5.50 an acre to get just the sampling part of it and then the truck is more expensive. But we are using less fertilizer now than we did when we started it about 4.5-5 years ago."

"It costs a little bit on the front end to get started in the program, but on the back end I believe it is paying off," Terry said. "As far as insect pressure, this has been the least we have had in a long time."

What is there, he blames on the increase in corn acreage.

"The more corn that is planted here, the more trouble we are going to have with the boll worms," he said. "When corn started drying down this year, we had some problems with the soybeans and we had to spray the edges, as boll worms came in from other fields looking for the next green crop."

"We had trouble with grasshoppers," he pointed out. "As you can see there are still a lot of fence rows around this country and naturally that is where the grasshopper is going to be. We had some trouble with some grasshoppers but most of ours were just border treatments."

The land he farms has a history of red rice, and that is one reason he prefers RiceTec's 729 and the XL8. Newpath does an excellent job on keeping the red rice down while RiceTec hybrids hold up good.

"With the two shots of four ounces each of the Newpath we are just tickled to death," he said, "and we are not having any trouble with red rice. Used to be we would wick half to three fourths of our crop every year."

Hall continued to praise the Clearfield technology:

"I hope it lasts," he said. "Clearfield hybrids are working as good now as they did three to four years ago when we started actually getting the Clearfield out. I am not seeing any tolerance to it whatsoever, however, though we are still rotating. I think people need to keep that up." Δ