

# Make Do With What You Have

Attitudes Learned In Childhood Still Sway This Farmer's Choices

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Remember when weed control meant you walked through the field with a weed hook and pulled the weeds out of the ground? Or when you made do with old equipment that you remade in the shop? One Missouri farmer does.

Jerry Barker of Parma experienced it all. It was the way he was taught to make a living.

"We were so poor we didn't know any differ-

probably a good system set up today, because in 12 or 24 hours we can water a 40 with our 20-acre settings. All we do is switch a valve and it is set on each side."

All the wells turned out to be a blessing because it's a lot easier to water the land. The way his father set it up he was trying to keep the youngsters working. He didn't like to spend money either.

Barker uses AgVenture Seeds/Mayberry Seed Co. for the corn and soybeans. His three favorite corn varieties are AgVenture 8036R2CB

**Jerry Barker of Parma, Mo. reminisces about times past and his roguing days which are still fresh in his mind. (Photo inset on right) Today, Jerry relies on chemicals to do the weeding, giving him more time to "relax". Photos by John LaRose**



ent," the 62-year-old said. "We just survived, and even if we lost money we always seemed to find a way. I was raised that way."

He used to spend two months in the summer roguing.

"I'd get up in the morning and go out and weed all day until it got hot," Barker said. "Then I'd go back late in the evenings. Some days I would stay all day."

"I went out with my bare hands and a weed hook," he explained. "I pulled weeds in about 300 to 400 acres. We would take 12 rows, eight rows, and go through the field."

That was his life until just a few years ago when walking the fields got to be too big a chore. Also, the pre-emerge chemicals weren't working so well so Barker started using Roundup. Today Roundup is controlling all the weeds for him. But his roguing days are still fresh in his mind. Even after roguing two or three times, some weeds still would come through. That's the way a small farmer survived.

"In rice fields I never did get a build up of red because I would walk the fields and pull them out. I did the same with cockleburrs and wild cotton – but I got too old. I just couldn't do it and nobody else would, so we went to Roundup and started spraying and I kind of relaxed."

By "relaxing" he means he spends his spare time washing vehicles, cleaning equipment, and using his seed cleaning equipment to clean wheat for farmers, pack it in bulk bags and store it.

Farming has been a life-long career for him. He was born in the house he lives in today. His dad, Billy Joe Barker, moved a quarter mile down the road when Jerry was married and Jerry and his wife, Sue, moved into the family quarters.

"This is my life," he said. "I have been here all my life." A graduate of Bernie High School, he attended college one year and a half then came back to farm. He worked with his father for five years, then his father retired from farming to continue his seed cleaning business.

"Back then we cleaned lespedeza, black beans and lorada beans, rye, vetch and barley," Barker recalled. "We did clean some rice but over the years it was just mostly wheat, beans and rice."

Jerry took over the seed business about 1970. "I raised Missouri certified seed until just a few years ago, then when Roundup came in I quit it all," he said. "I used to work employees here, and now I just run the cleaner myself, mostly for neighbors and friends."

Billy Joe had 80 acres when Jerry was little, and he put in the seed cleaner to supplement his income. When Jerry joined the operation, the acreage had grown to 200 acres.

The first 15 years, Jerry raised 20 acres of cabbage, but he quit the cabbage when his father turned the operation over to him.

Every few years he would buy 40 acres and add to his property until today he owns 400 acres. His father, had 480 when he passed away. Jerry rents some of it from his mother. He also rents 280 acres from another landlord and 40 from a cousin for a total of 1,040 acres.

At one time, Billy Joe raised cotton, but quit that to stay in the seed business. He also raised beans, wheat and corn, rotating them just like Jerry does today.

"I started raising and selling seed rice in the '80s, but then we got out of all of it," Barker said. "Now all I do is custom. Today I have about 400 acres of corn and 200 acres of wheat and a couple hundred acres of rice, with the balance probably about 120 to 160 acres of early beans and beans behind the wheat," he explained.

Yields weren't a big issue back then, but he remembers the lowest corn yield ever of 13 bushels.

"There were bad years and then there were the good years when we would make like 50 bushels when I was a child in the '50s," he said.

His soybean yield totaled only eight bushels before the land was graded. "That is extreme," he said. But then his "make do" attitude was forced into play. Today his bean yields run 50-60 bushel, and corn yields are from 180 to 210.

In fact, in 1999 Barker came in third in the Missouri Soybean Yield Contest with 70.81 bushels an acre on irrigated land.

"You see," he explained, "when I got out of high school in '62 we started moving dirt. None of this land was to grade and we started grading 20 acres at a time with old International 706 tractors. We did hire some help, but most of this land we did ourselves. It has been lasered since then."

While not all is zero grade now, it's all set up for furrow irrigation. The farm maintains 42 wells that run from 80 to 100 feet deep, pumping a water volume of 800 to 2,000 gallons a minute.

"My father he liked to see us busy," Barker explained. "So he would put a well in the middle of every 40 acres because he had 22-foot pipe and that way we could move pipe in the morning and evening. Every day we would move the pump and the pipe to another 40. We have

corn borer, AgVenture 8441R2CB corn borer, and AgVenture 8626R2CB Roundup Ready.

Larry Mayberry, AgVenture's owner and general manager, helps him determine which varieties to plant. Also, Tim Temples, seed manager and agronomist for AgVenture Seeds, visits, studies soil types and lists his farms.

"We go over everything together, and then he matches the corn variety with the type soil," Barker explained. The same procedure applies to his soybeans.

Barker has been using AgVenture seeds for at least 10 years, ever since his AgVenture dealer has been in business.

"I have been well satisfied with AgVenture," he said. "We are loading it out now and it all checks 60-61 test weight. It has been real good on corn." The corn has been in the bin since fall. The average bushel test weight is about 56-60.

His tillage practices have changed over the years. No longer does he break the ground with a breaking plow, disc, waller it around, then plant it on the flats.

"Most of the time now we just rehip the old rows, but on rice we start all over," Barker said. "We hip it up and knock it down. Then behind rice we put beans. That is my rotation. No matter how many acres of rice I have, it will all go back into early beans. We will plant beans, hip it up, thrash them, knock the beds back down, or rehip, run that same row, and then put corn there the next year."

The corn is on beds too.

"We can reuse the beds from the beans to the corn but from the corn back to the wheat we knock them down and then we subsoil a certain amount of acres, whatever we have time for," he said.

He double crops beans behind the wheat, but his rotation on rice is from rice to beans, to full season beans, then to corn, then back to rice again.

"On the rest of it, we will have wheat, beans, corn, wheat, beans, corn on our good mix land," he explained. "Then the tougher ground we will run it in rice, then beans, and then corn, then back to rice beans and corn."

His beds are probably 8-10 inches from the bottom to the top. He puts them up with 12 row hipers.

Barker isn't into hybrid rice, as he uses rotation to avoid red rice.

"I rotate if I have a red rice problem," he said. "I will stay out of rice for three years, and that is the way I have always done it. I will never raise rice two years in a row. Generally we are out three years and then back to rice."

"I had a farm I rented that had a real bad red rice problem, but we just started rotating and didn't plant rice two or three years," he said.

His favorite rice variety is Francis, one he has raised since it came out. Rice yields run from 140-170 now, but at first in the '80s his yields ran about 100.

"In some instances, it is just the season," he said. "I have made 200 bushel rice."

He finds rotating crops pays even when the crop itself loses money.

"I raised corn for three years there that I actually lost money, but I felt like I needed the corn so I could raise the wheat and the beans," he reasoned. "The yield was better than just continuous corn, or continuous wheat and beans. I always felt I got a better yield and less disease problems than if I just stayed with one crop. I have never had corn behind corn."

He plants corn at 30,000 to 32,000 seeds per acre, but never minds the population numbers on beans.

"I don't worry about that," he said. "I try to go one inch. I don't care if it takes 60 pounds or 30 pounds. I just go measure out one inch and try to get 12 beans to the foot."

He treats the soybean seed himself with Vitavax or Dividend Plus.

"The last three years I haven't had the extra money to spray fungicides for the molds," Barker said. "People around here did spray, but I just didn't feel I could afford it."

The seed business and farming has been a pretty good combination for him over the years. He manages all of it with just two full-time helpers.

The planter Barker is using now is a 12 row unit he built himself.

"We have a \$30,000 planter at a cost of about \$15,000," he said.

The 7100 planter was worn out when he bought it so he rebuilt it. The tool bar was junk so he bought a brand new 12-row tool bar and put the 12 units from the 7100 on it. He has been using it for about 8 years now.

"My daddy always told me that if you ever get enough money to buy a new combine go buy yourself 40 acres, and that is what I have done in the past," Barker said. "Now I can't afford the 40 or the combine. That's why I built my own planter, because if my daddy thought that I had gone out and paid as much for a planter as I did for 40 acres, he would have been very upset." Δ