

Retirement Nears

Bruce Beck, A Delta Center Fixture For 25 Years, Will Retire Dec. 31

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After 18 years of planning the Missouri Rice Farm Field Day, Bruce Beck is retiring on Dec. 31. Beck is the agronomy specialist for rice and horticulture serving Butler County and the Southeast region.

Beck has been with Missouri Extension since 1976 when he took a position in Steeleville. After seven years in the hill country, he relocated to Poplar Bluff and has been serving there for 25 years.

"The work I do now includes a lot of garden stuff in Poplar Bluff, but it covers forage questions in the hill counties as well, particularly in Reynolds and Carter counties," he said.

"Of course everything gets better every year, a little bit more professional and a lot more to talk about and always something new," he said. "We have a speaker from Louisiana talking about panicle rice mite and talking about tadpole shrimp, a potential pest."

While panicle rice mite is not an issue here, it's something to look out for. Natalee Hummell from Louisiana gave that presentation.

"Rice varieties are the number one concern for farmers and we're doing better and getting closer to a Missouri variety, but we test the other varieties too," Beck said. "For something new, we have a test in the hybrid rice and we have a lot of hybrid rice in Missouri and it's growing rapidly."

How soon a new line will be out is uncertain.

Donn Beighley is getting closer all the time.

"He's been here a few years, but it takes a while to develop those and then, meanwhile, we're able to test all the other states' varieties and that gives us some to recommend to farmers," he said.

Presentations on fertility were on the agenda, and chicken litter was one thing considered a high priced fertilizer.

"That's a pretty neat economic presentation," Beck said.

Stoddard County is dotted with chicken houses so chicken litter is readily available to farmers of this area. Chicken farmers used to deal with Hudson, now they deal with Tyson. Farms in the region use the chicken litter as fertilizer.

"Of course, the precaution is it's not a nitrogen fertilizer, it's mostly phosphorus; and if you're not careful you can overbuild your phosphorus," Beck warned. Therefore a soil test is a necessity.

Another issue, the center pivot irrigation has potential but it has a whole new set of problem. "We'll do more research on that before we make recommendations," he added.

Who will be replacing Beck is still uncertain.

"David Guethle is the other extension rice agronomist, and they're still trying to find a state rice research agronomist for the Delta Center," Beck said.

The Delta Center has lost personnel in several positions: Andy Kendig in weed research and rice specialist Brian Ottis as well as some regional specialists including agronomists and one general horticulturalist that went to Monsanto.

"Then there's still a question we always talk about, staffing patterns changing; and we have fewer farmers and more consumers so we'll have more horticultural specialists in the future," Beck said. "I hope so." Δ



Bruce Beck has confidence the Missouri Rice Farm Field Day he has planned for the last 18 years will go on as usual. "Everyone knows what to do," said Beck.

Photo by John LaRose

Beck hails from Wisconsin and his wife is from Alabama, so he's always considered Missouri a compromise state. He plans to remain in Poplar Bluff, but with an only grandchild in Virginia, the couple plans to have more time for visiting.

Beck has confidence the field day will go on as usual. "Everyone knows what to do," he said.

He made several comments about his final field day at Glennonville.