

Rice *Makes*

Farming Efficient

Hybrids Have Changed The Face Of Rice Farming

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Rice is the crop of choice for young farmer Darren Brown of Sikeston, who does admit to some crop rotation with soybeans and corn. One benefit is the energy and time savings.

"It's the most profitable for me on a lot of the ground we farm," he explains. "You've got to have a little more management on it and, for me, that works my brain a little more than just corn, wheat and beans. With rice there's more to do, but you do a little more, you gain a little more. You try a little something different; there's more room there to increase your yield, your profitability, than there is in corn, wheat and beans."

Raised in New Madrid, Brown went to school at Rolla and got a civil engineering degree before coming home and starting farming with his father-in-law Dempsey Gardner. That has been 12 years ago, and now he finds he's very successful, enjoys the challenge and is very happy with his life. He lets the corn, wheat and beans to Gardner, who finds the mud that goes with rice a little too much.

There have been changes in raising rice in the last 12 years with hybrids and Clearfield rice hitting the market.

"Also, just going from where we thought 150, 160 bushel was really good rice to now we're over 200 bushel rice. I mean that's the biggest change I've seen," he related.

When hybrids came along, he tried half the acres at first.

"The first year I went half and half and I learned some things because with varieties like XL8 the earliest varieties had a lot of shatter issues," Brown said. "If you didn't get there in time a strong wind would knock the seed out of the head and I had to change my operation. I had to go in there, and when my rice was ready I had to drop my corn header and leave; but as they've come along the hybrids have changed a lot. The rice stays in the head a lot better, it'll take more weather and things like that."

Planting the hybrid requires more management but it's worth the effort.

"It's easier for me because you're only drilling 25 pounds an acre and you put 100 bushel in the tank and you're going for a long time," he explained. "It cuts down on cost right there. Otherwise, you have to have a man running all the time every 50 acres, and with the size of drills, 40 foot drills we run now, you're doing 250 acres a day. You know that's five tank fulls versus a tank and a half with hybrids, and I can do it all myself. I can run to the shop, I can bring a full load out in the mornings and that runs me all day and I don't have a man sitting there; I'm not stopping to fill up all the time."

Brown and Gardner farm 2,800 acres for all crops, allocating about 800 acres for rice.

"We rotate religiously, because I feel that's a big thing on yield," he said. "Rice behind rice is like corn behind corn. A little diversity in the weather and you're going to lack on yield; plus, you can't keep your ground in shape with rice as good unless you do rotate it out, take the time to land plane and work it the right way.

"I do have ground where I go corn behind rice which they always said you couldn't do, but I'm successful with it, and that gives us another whole chemical program to help deter a lot of weeds, some that you really can't control in beans behind rice," he said.

The weather hasn't been so bad that they have had to go to air seeding. Also, Brown has great hopes for the future of rice.

"I hope it is wide open, I really do," he said. "I had a man comment to me a while back; he said in his lifetime, which he's a 55-year-old man,



Darren Brown, a farmer from Sikeston, Missouri, explains rice is his crop of choice and is the most profitable on a lot of the ground they farm.

Photo by John LaRose, Jr.

that he expects to see 300 bushel rice. Now we'll wait and see, but I am just happy to break the 200 bushel mark; and do that consistently."

RiceTec hybrids have made that possible. Brown likes 745 the most because it holds the rice in the head.

"It doesn't shatter near as bad as the other varieties for us," he added.

Brown and his wife Faith, who is a stay-at-home mom and does the farm books, have a daughter, five-year-old Laynie, and an 11-year-old son, Noah. Noah is showing some interest in farming.

"If he wants to, that's great; if he doesn't, you know your heart has to be in it to be successful at farming," he said. "You have to love it, because nobody makes you get up out of bed every morning and work till you're finished. Right now he's into bull riding. He's into calves and he wants to be a bull rider; I hope I can deter him from that."

While this isn't a big farm, Brown feels the work is efficient over the acres they farm.

"We treat every farm the same; it all gets the same attention, with none of the acres lacking because of time." △

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