Technology Saves Crop

Auto Steer Allowed An Early Harvest Before Gustav Struck

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Among the latest of technologies, it's the auto steer feature that has "wowed" Louisiana farmer Vendall Fairchild the most.

"In this black clay dirt that we farm, after you make one pass across it's hard to tell where you've been sometimes especially at night," he said. "With this GPS auto steer, we're able to run at night and stay just as straight as we do in the daytime. We don't have to worry about dust and not being able to see where you've been. We run it on all our tractors and we run it on our combine. We cut rice and cut soybeans with auto steer and it takes a lot of fatigue off of the operator."

He related one specific incident in recent memory:

"In 2008 when Gustav was coming we fired up on a Sunday morning about 8 a.m. and we turned the combine off at 2:30 on Monday afternoon with windshield wipers running," he said. "There's no way we could have cut that much corn and stayed on the machine that many hours had we not had auto steer; and with our own bins we were able to cut all night and dump corn all night. If we would have been going to commercial bins, everybody would have had another 100-150 acres of corn in the field that we wouldn't have had out before Gustav hit."

He often recalls early days when he started farming in East and West Carroll where he grew up. He had a two row cotton picker; and the first combine he owned had a 13 foot header.

"Times have changed so much," he said. "Back 35 years ago a 400 or 500 acre farm was a large farm around here; and now if you don't have 2,500 or 3,000 acres, it just about won't work."

Today the norm is a six-row cotton picker and 30-foot headers on combines.

"We have found out in the rice business we have to have our own bins," Fairchild said. "We built bins and bought bins till we got where we could store our rice crop and part of our corn crop. It is my goal to one day to be able to store everything we use on this farm in our own storage and that way you have more control over it and more control over the price."

The new technology has made all the difference in farming. However, more is expected from technology as the future approaches.

"You know, this variable rate technology on fertilizer and variable rate seeding rates, it is going to have to happen to improve our yields," Fairchild stated. "With the cost of production skyrocketing, we've got to increase yields to be able to maintain the profitability level and make it sustainable."

Maintaining yield and getting water on and off the soybean crop quickly are two of his goals as he raises wide-row soybeans. He uses a roller buster to pull up a 76-inch seedbed, then plants four rows on top of that bed. He has used this system for the past five years.

"It's a matter of getting the water on and off the crop quickly and maintaining a high yield," Fairchild said.

However, it's not all work and no play for this

Louisiana farmer, Vendall Fairchild, tells how the technology of the auto steer feature is a valuable asset to his farming operation.

Photo by John LaRose, Jr.

farmer who Vendall has been farming for 37 years in a family operation that includes his wife, Janet; son, Ken; and daughter, Nikki.

"One hobby is deer hunting in Kansas, I love it," he said. "The most important interest is the youngins'. I spoil them and send them back home to their mama and daddy.

"We show 4H livestock, my kids showed livestock and now we're involved with the grand youngins'. With the livestock and hunting, it's just a joy to be able to spend time with your kids and your grandkids and that's one thing that farm life has offered that people in the city don't realize how much their missing."

Vendall raises a few Angus and shorthorn cattle and is the 2007 Louisiana State Farmer of the Year and the 2005 Northeast Louisiana Agri-Business Outstanding Producer. He also has served as Justice of the Peace for 21 years. Δ

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