

The Annual Northeast Research Station Field Day Set For June 17

ST. JOSEPH, LA.

Northeast Louisiana's economy depends on the LSU AgCenter's Northeast Research Station near St. Joseph in Tensas Parish. That's because agriculture is the backbone of the regional economy, contributing about \$1 billion.

"The LSU AgCenter and the Northeast Research Station are our lifeblood," said Billy Guthrie, general manager of the Balmoral Farming Partnership in Tensas Parish. "They have good scientists, and we want to continue that. We need the AgCenter to survive."

The 12,000-acre Balmoral operation for many

Ernest Clawson conducts research on soybeans.



years has been one of the state's largest cotton producers. It is one of the area farms that allows the LSU AgCenter to conduct off-station field studies on its land, Guthrie said.

Bob Hutchinson, director of the LSU AgCenter's Northeast Region, said agriculture in the region served by the Northeast Station and the Macon Ridge Research Station in neighboring Franklin Parish is more extensive and diversified than any other region of the state. Of Louisiana's total agriculture output, farmers in northeast Louisiana produced about 80 percent of the state's cotton and corn, 60 percent of the soybeans, 36 percent of the grain sorghum, 20 percent of the rice, and 13 percent of the cattle.

"The greatest strength of the Northeast Research Station lies in its faculty and staff,"

Photo on Right: Donnie Miller coordinates research at the Northeast Station and works to develop more effective and economical weed control systems for cotton, soybean and sweet potatoes.

Photo Below: Rick Mascagni at the Northeast Station is studying the use of double-row corn. (Photos by Linda Benedict)

Hutchinson said. "Without exception, the faculty is professional, conscientious and productive. Their research projects are well-focused to serve the most pressing needs of the crop producers in Northeast Louisiana."

The public can get a firsthand look at the Northeast Station's research during the annual Field Day on June 17, starting at 7:30 a.m. and ending with a lunch. Researchers will give briefings about their work on agronomic and pest management research with cotton, soybean, corn and rice on Sharkey clay and silt loam soils.

"The Northeast Research Station conducts just about every kind of research to solve problems involving all the agronomic crops, including forage," Hutchinson said. "Because of the environment in North Louisiana, we have as many pests that reduce yields as any part of the country."

New Crop Varieties

Hutchinson said state and federal agencies and the private sector work cooperatively with the station, and various grants provide more than a third of the station's budget.

"We are able to determine which varieties are better suited for our soils and environment," Hutchinson said. "Variety development is extremely important because what is productive in many areas may not grow as well here. Variety selection sets the stage for the entire growing season. Choosing the wrong variety cripples a producer for the rest of the year."

Hutchinson said research on irrigation, conservation tillage, precision agriculture and fertilization are all important for farming, "but also to protect our soil and water resources."

Research helps farmers use the right amount of water and chemicals, he said, and that saves money. "We want to make sure we increase profitability of our producers. Our precision agricultural research is developing new technologies to strategically apply pesticides and other inputs to increase net returns only where needed. This also has important environmental benefits."

Research, Outreach Focus Areas

The station is well-known for its research on conservation tillage, said Donnie Miller, associate professor and research coordinator.

"A lot of the recommendations we use today are based on the research conducted here over the past 20 to 25 years," Miller said.

The station's expertise reaches into all the parishes of Northeast Louisiana, Miller said, but requests for help also come from farmers and consultants in Mississippi and Arkansas.

Miller said current research and outreach programs at the station focus on crop and pest management with newer transgenic technologies, biology and competitive potential of crop pests, use of precision agriculture in pest management strategies, and pest resistance monitoring and management. Additionally, Northeast Research Station faculty supervise the research of graduate students from LSU AgCenter departments on the Baton Rouge campus.

Paul Coreil, LSU AgCenter vice chancellor for extension, said the Northeast Station Field Day provides the opportunity to show producers what is being done to help their farming operations.

"The demonstration and delivery of new research-based information through AgCenter research stations and parish extension service programs is vital to the strong agricultural-based economy of Northeast Louisiana," Coreil said.

Ray Young of Franklin, a corn and cotton farmer and as a crop consultant, said the station is valuable to agriculture. "They figure out solutions. They do an excellent job, and they go a long way to keep us in business up here."

New Product Evaluation

Crop consultant Pat Mabry of Tensas Parish said the station helps him with new chemicals introduced every year. "And I seem to have a new set of weeds every year."

The station's proximity is important, he said. "They're right here in our backyard doing the work in our dirt. They don't like to toot their own horn, but we toot it for them," Mabry said.



Crop consultant Cecil Parker of Vidalia said the station helps him with farmers in Louisiana and Mississippi. Parker said he gets help from the station with herbicide drift complaints, varieties, planting dates, insect control and weeds.

"Fairly often I call them and ask their opinion," he said. "I think they're real valuable."

Keith Collins, LSU AgCenter county agent based in Richland Parish, said having a research facility only a few miles away is a huge asset. He said the work at the Northeast Station and the Macon Ridge Station enable scientists to study agronomics and pest control on the area's two different soils.

"We're getting research on the soils where our crops are grown," he said. "It's all right there at our fingertips."

David Boethel, LSU AgCenter vice chancellor for research, said the Northeast and the Macon Ridge stations have conducted dynamic, timely research programs that have resulted in new knowledge and technologies for enabling the sustainability of the agricultural enterprises in northeast Louisiana and other areas of the state.

"These research stations have been among the leading institutions in development of conservation tillage, management of insects and weeds," Boethel said. "The scientists at these research stations have also established a reputation for collaboration with fellow researchers in other states and federal agencies, private pest management consultants and agricultural producers. They work closely with county agents to extend results of their research." △