

MISSOURI NEWS SCENE

Hubbard book honors Master Farmer

By DUANE DAILEY

MARTHA Jean Hubbard Stewart knows firsthand about Master Farmers. The moment she heard the awards program was starting up again in Missouri she contacted my office. The Bootheel farm owner is writing a book about her parents and the Century Farm they developed near Lilbourn. Her dad, Ralph Hubbard, received Master Farmer honors in 1942 from *Missouri Ruralist*. At the time, the *Ruralist* reported that at age 31, he was the youngest ever honored.

Martha Jean, nicknamed "Jeanie," is now retired in Columbia. She moved from Poplar Bluff with her husband, Bill Stewart, to be nearer to grandchildren, but she keeps an active hand in overseeing the family farm, Heath-Hubbard Farms Inc. Her book is based on farm accounts and stacks of letters written by her parents.

Family history

Ralph Hubbard was one of five sons of a dairy farming family from Urbana, Ill. All five graduated from the University of Illinois. The older brother took on the family dairy farm and delivered milk in the university town. Ralph, the third son, was sent to oversee a section of land their father bought in 1908 in "swamp east Missouri." The farm, oper-

Key Points

- A 1942 Master Farmer from the Bootheel is now the subject of a book.
- Farmer's daughter based her book on journal entries and family letters.
- Ralph Hubbard kept meticulous records and ledgers.

ated by tenants, was not doing well.

Ralph became known as their "hip boot farmer." At that time, new ditches in the Little River Drainage drained the farm, but not very well. Ralph soon learned about farming gumbo, clay so sticky it pulled his boots off. He fenced the land for livestock, as many of the waterlogged fields grew grass better than crops. It became a diversified farm with crop rotations, including legumes to improve the soil and timothy to feed the mules. Herds of polled Hereford cows and Duroc sows converted all grain to meat.

"Dad got an extra 10 cents a bushel for his corn by feeding it to livestock," Jeanie says.

One of four daughters, Jeanie recalls running to watch loads of ear corn, shucked by hand, hauled to a corncrib that still stands near the farmhouse. Loaded wagons from the fields were weighed, and then the mule team was hitched to a turntable to power an ele-



STORY TELLER: Martha Jean Hubbard Stewart, daughter of 1942 Master Farmer Ralph Hubbard of Lilbourn, is writing a book on her family farm, based on detailed farm records kept by her father.

vator. The wagons were reweighed to go back to the fields for another load. Hired hands were paid for shucking on load weight. Ralph kept detailed notebooks, recording corn harvest, load by load.

He believed girls' work was in the house and garden. Farm work was for the hands. Jeanie recalls being allowed only once to help by driving a tractor. Earlier,

her dad asked her to sack soybeans on the combine. When a burlap bag filled, she flipped a spout to fill another bag while she sewed the top on the one just filled. At the end of the row, bags were dropped to be picked up later.

Ralph enrolled in University of Missouri Balanced Farming and hosted tours on his farm to show others recommended practices. When it came to cropping, Jeanie says, the MU Delta Center, just nine miles from her family farm, "had all of the answers for Dad."

Ralph kept meticulous records, ledgers and inventories. A three-ring binder holds his farm journal. The college graduate summed up his lessons annually, noting reports from agricultural experiment stations not only in Missouri, but in other states, as well.

In his account books, he pasted clippings of stories. One by John Case, editor of the *Missouri Ruralist*, told of profits from beef on lespedeza. (Read more on Page 12.)

Story to be shared

The records, particularly the journal, and letters provide material for the book Jeanie is writing. During the Great Depression, her mother, Alma, started a round-robin letter with 10 farmwives. This trove of farming lore will be published by Southeast Missouri State University.

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