

Mississippi Farmer of the Year



TOM Robertson Jr., a farmer from Indianola, leased his first 800 acres near Lake Washington in 1967 and combined it into his father and uncle's operation located nearby.

The operation has swelled to more than 10,000 acres today and focuses on cotton, corn and soybeans.

"We are also involved in many other companies, all of which are related to the agriculture industry," Robertson says.

Cotton is grown on 6,000 acres and yields 1,000 pounds per acre, while 4,000 acres of corn produce 170

bushels to the acre.

There's also 100 head of Angus cattle; catfish ponds cover 1,500 acres, yielding more than 4 million pounds of catfish per year.

"I market all my grains myself through Delta Western and Farmers Grain Terminal," Robertson says. "We let Staplcotton handle the sales of all my cotton."

Robertson and his wife, Lois, have three grown children, including one son who is involved in the family farm.

Florida Farmer of the Year

AT the tender age of 12, Alto "Bud" Adams was introduced to the world of agriculture when he was given a calf and allowed to ride with the cattle crews on his father's farm.

When he was 21, his father made him a partner in the operation, and it quickly grew from 1,500 cows to more than 10,000 cows. Today, Adams' farm encompasses more than 65,000 acres, a significant jump from the 15,000 acres with which he started. The backbone of the operation is still cattle and includes more than 18,000 head.

Oranges and grapefruit are grown on 1,000 irrigated acres with a 400-box yield per acre, while there's more than 2,000 irrigated acres of sod.

"We sell the registered cattle at 28 annual sales and private treaty," Adams says. "We sell steer calves by satellite auction, and we also sell at the Okeechobee Livestock Market. The replacement heifers are sold private treaty. The citrus is sold on the tree to packers in the Indian River area."

Adams and his wife, Dorothy, have three grown sons who are actively involved in the farming operation.



Virginia Farmer of the Year



PERHAPS the best description of Steve Berryman's farm in Surry, Va., is small, efficient, pristine ... and sweet.

"It was during my last semester at Virginia Tech University in 1999 that I found myself looking into vegetables and fruits," Berryman says. "The following fall I carried out my plans and initiated a strawberry plan."

And the growth continued the following year with the addition of sweet corn and pumpkins.

Over the eight years Berryman has been farming, his operation has grown from 8 to 35 acres, two-thirds

of which is marketed on-farm.

"The majority of my crops [65%] are sold through my pick-your-own operation," Berryman says. "Another 20% are sold pre-picked at my farm stand, while 10% are sold at a local farmers market."

"The last 5% of my crops are sold wholesale to buyers with roadside stands," he says. "Plus, I still continue to help out on my family's farm whenever possible and especially during my farm's off season."

Berryman and his wife, Jordon, have one young son.

Spoils of the Farmer of the Year battle

AS finalists for the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year Award for 2007, which will be announced during the Sunbelt Expo in Moultrie, Ga., on Oct. 16, the 10 state finalists each receive a \$2,500 cash award and an expense-paid trip to the Sunbelt Expo from Swisher International of Jacksonville, Fla.

They also receive:

- a jacket and a \$200 gift certificate from the Williamson Dickie Co.
- a commemorative fireproof home safe from Misty Morn Safe Co.
- a \$500 gift certificate from Southern States

The state winner who is named Southeastern Farmer of the Year receives a \$14,000 cash award and the use of a Massey Ferguson tractor for a year from Massey Ferguson North America.

Swisher International, through its Swisher Sweets cigar brand, and the Sunbelt Expo are sponsoring the Southeastern Farmer of the Year Award for the 18th consecutive year. Swisher has contributed more than \$740,000 in cash awards and other honors since the award was initiated in 1990.

Cutting cotton support won't aid African farms

Commentary

By STEVE FORD

TWO recent reports include good news for cotton policy, yet no one seems to have acknowledged them publicly.

Economists at the University of Georgia recently published research on the economic impact of cotton farm program payments on their state's economy. Cotton farm income — and its associated economic activity as cotton inputs and outputs trickle through the economy — adds more than \$3.5 billion to Georgia's economy. That also includes \$880 million in labor income, almost 29,000 jobs, and more than \$305 million in federal, state and local tax revenue generated.

These results were calculated over 1.288 million cotton acres in Georgia. If we extrapolate that impact to total U.S. acres (a small economic leap of faith), the impact of all U.S. cotton acres to our economy is about \$28 billion.

The study's authors point out that the benefits of the cotton industry would not exist without commodity programs. Clearly, the entire U.S. economy gains by investing in cotton support. What is even more interesting, however, is that the study shows that every dollar of commodity support generates \$1.04 in tax revenue. Fifty-eight percent of the tax revenue is federal, so the net cost of cotton commodity support is only 40% of what appears in the federal budget.

In summary, if cotton subsidies paid to farmers are \$2 billion, \$1.2 billion is returned to the federal treasury through tax revenue from economic activity generated by cotton farms. Economic activity generated by a net investment of \$800 million grows the U.S. economy by \$28 billion, provides another \$800 million in state and local tax revenue, and generates a \$7 billion payroll and 230,000 jobs. This investment generates a 3,400% return.

Of course, this analysis assumes that all cotton production will disappear without government support, which is not the case. If, however, you assume a 50% decline in U.S. cotton acres due to removing commodity support, and farm incomes remain the same as when supported, then you can divide all of these numbers by two. The case still can be made for cotton support as an investment in our economy.

The World Trade Organization and foreign cotton producers continue to protest U.S. cotton programs, claiming that cotton support depresses world prices, harming poor farmers, especially those in West Africa. However, a World Bank economist writing for the CATO Institute recently concluded there will be only limited impact on the welfare of cotton producers in West Africa unless their state-owned cotton companies are privatized and cotton trade is liberalized. Essentially, they have to get their own house in order before any benefits of subsidy reductions will reach the farmers themselves.

The evidence provided in this CATO

publication is striking. Cotton yields in West Africa are stagnant; increases in production are coming from acreage expansion. There is no relationship between what the African farmer receives and the world price of cotton. There is no guarantee that increased world prices would result in increased prices received by African farmers. Also, African exchange rate policies do more to hurt these farmers than any estimated impact of cotton subsidization.

Critics of cotton support often argue that this support benefits only a few cotton producers and hurts many poor, foreign producers. However, the two studies discussed in this article show that our cotton program is a good investment in our economy and is not the primary cause of the problems faced by West African cotton producers.

Ford, who farms in north Alabama, earned a doctorate in ag and applied economics from the University of Minnesota.

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