

MISSOURI NEWS SCENE

From field to mill, rice

Show-Me Southeast

By MINDY WARD

MARK Rinehart has a simple recipe for increasing the U.S. rice market: “Drink more beer, eat more rice, or both.”

Mark is a second-generation rice farmer from the small town of Baker, in southeast Missouri. He farms alongside the now third generation: his son, Eric. Rinehart Family Farms started with Mark’s father, Max, in the late 1960s. Today, the family farms 3,300 acres of rice, soybeans and wheat.

The Stoddard County diversified crop farm was one stop on this summer’s Missouri Young Farmer and Young Wives Tour. At that time, the rice was still in the fields and the family was working on machinery, preparing for harvest.

Missouri is set to harvest about 159,000 acres of rice in 2014. Roughly half of the rice production is at Butler County, which ranks among the top 22 of the estimated 110 rice-producing counties or parishes in the U.S., according to



FOR THE LOVE OF RICE: Three generations of rice producers opened their farm to the Missouri Young Farmers and Young Farm Wives Tour this summer. Mark Rinehart (left) and his dad, Max, explain rice production on their southeast Missouri farm as the third generation, Mark’s son, Eric (center back), looks on.

the USA Rice Federation.

Missouri produces both long-grain and medium-grain rice, though 99% of the production is long-grain rice.

But finding a market for the rice can be complicated. “Marketing rice is different than soybeans or corn,” Mark explains. “We go directly to the buyer. We have to develop relationships with our buyers.”

The family works with customers from California to Central America. He says the overseas market is driven by politics, but the domestic market is based solely on consumption.

“In the U.S., the markets are to resta-

rants and cereal companies,” Mark explains, “but our No. 1 customer is the beer brewer.” So the family works hard to produce a high-yielding, high-quality product.

Raising rice

There are many different methods of rice production in southeast Missouri. One popular choice is furrow irrigation, but the Rineharts practice zero-grade rice production.

With a zero-grade, or flatbed, system, farmers are able to maintain a uniform flood on the field. The fields are capable of remaining in continuous rice; however, the Rineharts like to rotate crops. “Typically, we like to do two years rice, one year beans,” Mark says.

Yields in this system average 165 to 175 bushels per acre. However, Mark says coffee-shop talk has yields reaching well over 200 bushels per acre. “It is possible with certain hybrids.”

Hard harvest

Rice is a very abrasive crop. “If you walk from one end of a rice field to the other, your blue jeans will have holes in them,” Mark says. That roughness wreaks havoc on machinery as well.

Combines last just two years in the Rinehart operation. “The kernel is like sandpaper on the inside of the machine,” he explains. Stripper headers are used to reduce combine wear as they take the seed heads off



MUST-HAVES: Tracks are a necessity for the Rinehart family. In an effort not to disturb the soil, they rely heavily on tracks on their farm equipment.

