

ON THE FARM IN THE SOUTH

**FARM BILL:
WHAT NOW?**

PREMIERE ISSUE

May 2002

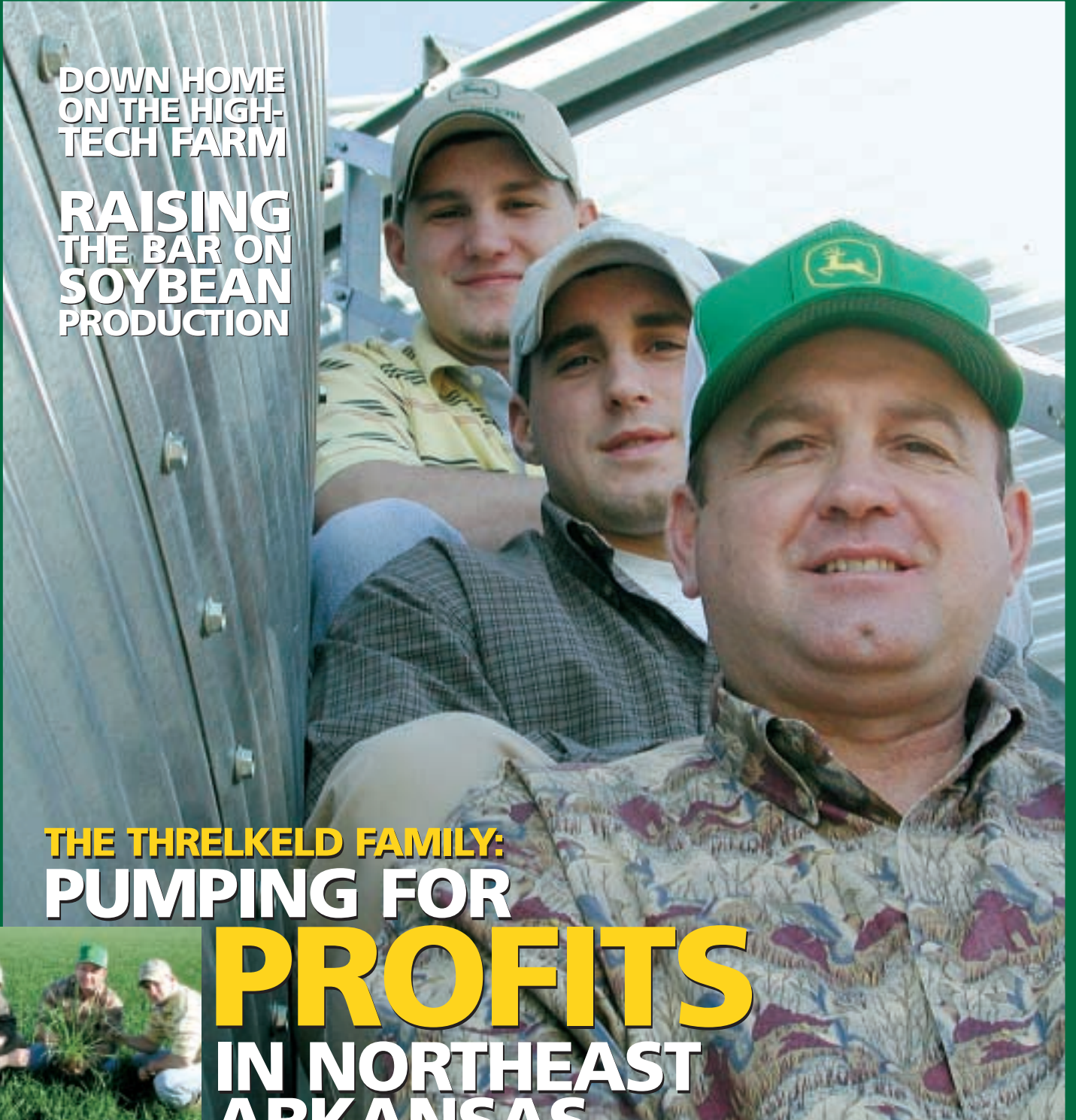
Volume 1, Issue 1

**DOWN HOME
ON THE HIGH-
TECH FARM**

**RAISING
THE BAR ON
SOYBEAN
PRODUCTION**

**THE THRELKELD FAMILY:
PUMPING FOR**

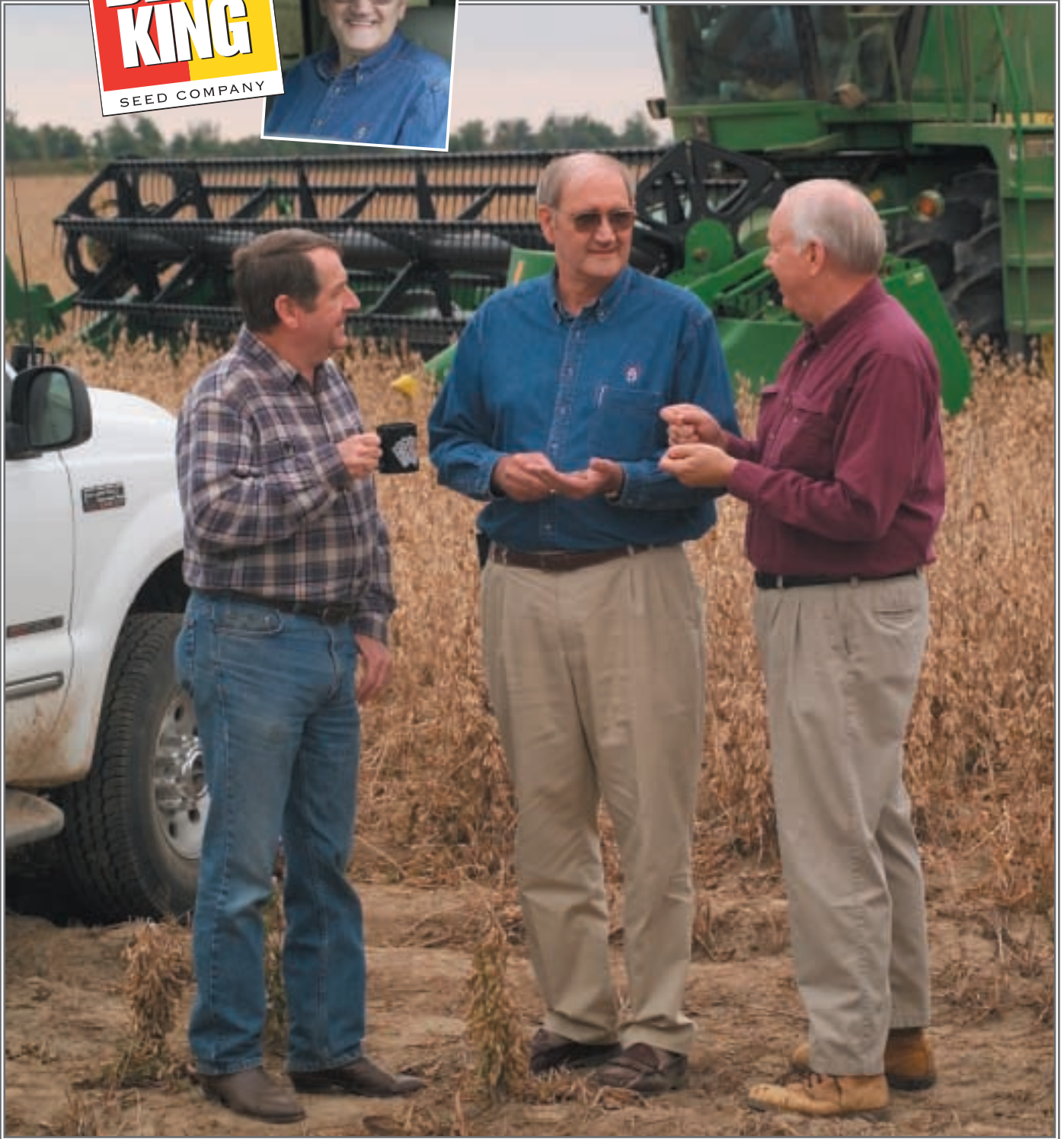
**PROFITS
IN NORTHEAST
ARKANSAS**





Nobody Knows Seed Like Noal.

Noal Lawhon, Owner Delta King Seed Company



PUBLISHER/EDITOR
Dana D. Kelley

MANAGING EDITOR
Amy Rothenbuhler

ADVERTISING SALES
Chris Barré

CREATIVE ART DIRECTOR
Mark O. McNabb

CONTRIBUTING WRITER/PHOTOGRAPHER
Tim Rand

e-mail questions/comments to
onthefarm@mkbmarketing.com

For Advertising, Profile, Distribution, or Reorder
Information call 870-935-9544.

On The Farm in the South is published six times per year. Editorial, advertising and general business information can be obtained by phoning 870-935-9544, faxing to 870-935-4329, writing to Post Office Box 9000, 301 West Washington, Jonesboro, Arkansas 72401, e-mail to onthefarm@mkbmarketing.com.

On The Farm in the South does not accept uninvited articles. Persons interested in contributing to *On The Farm in the South* must first contact the Editor and then submit an outline of the proposed feature.

Opinions expressed in articles or advertisements, unless otherwise noted, do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Publisher. Every effort has been made to ensure that all information presented in this issue is accurate and MKB Marketing and any of its staff, is not responsible for omissions or information that has been misrepresented to the magazine.

Copyright©2002 MKB Marketing. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording and any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the Publisher.

All pictorial material reproduced in this book has been accepted on the condition that it is reproduced with the knowledge and prior consent of the photographer concerned. As such, MKB Marketing is not responsible for any infringement of copyright or otherwise arising out of publication thereof.

Printing: Pinpoint Color, LLC.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEATURES COVER STORY:



THE THRELKELD FAMILY PUMPS FOR PROFITS IN NORTHEAST ARKANSAS
Story by Tim Rand 6

DOWN HOME ON THE HIGH-TECH FARM
Story by Tim Rand 14

COLUMNS

FARM BUSINESS PLANNING IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE FARM BILL.
James McJunkins 4

THE TRUE COST OF WEED CONTROL
Ford Baldwin 13

RAISING THE BAR FOR SOYBEAN YIELD
Lanny Ashlock 19

WHY SOIL TESTING?
Dr. Nathan Slaton 20

LESSONS LEARNED ON THE FARM
Warren Woodham 22

ON THE FARM: WELCOME

Dana Kelley, Publisher

We've broken new ground

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *On the Farm in the South*, a new, information-packed publication tailored to farming in the Mississippi Delta.

We'll publish six times a year and each time you'll find interesting feature stories and informational columns on

current events in agriculture and the latest trends in farming.

We invite your comments on this premier issue and your ideas for future editions. After all, we want this to be your magazine.

So, read on!



Photograph by Tim Rand

Farm business planning is as important as the Farm Bill.

All too often, we wait for the government to determine our fate. While the Farm Bill will affect our future farm economy, you should nevertheless give some serious consideration to the long-term business plans of your own individual farming operation. As has been said on many occasions, "Failing to plan is planning to fail."

Business planning is as important to farming as it is to any major corporation. All businesses have assorted risks inherent to that particular business. The difference in those that succeed and those that fail lies in the fact that management practices have been identified and put into place to offset potential risk. Every basketball team has to have 'plays' to run given variable situations.

Business plans should involve every aspect of the farming operation: production, marketing, finance and management. Evaluating each of these components will require assistance from experts in these areas. No major corporation is able to function or plan without consultants or advisors from every department. Not all of these advisors will agree. This is not all bad. The most difficult questions will require further research and possibly other opinions.

START WITH A
PLAN
OF ACTION

SWOT ANALYSIS

One of the first things to do is to do a SWOT analysis. What are the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats to your operation? Make sure you solicit feedback from others in this process to ensure you have a clear picture without bias. Properly identifying these strategic areas will be the foundation of your plan. Many times difficult questions must be asked and researched in this process such as:

- What are the risks in my operation and how can I offset them?
- How can I improve production and reduce costs?
- How can I reduce production risks?
- How can I improve my marketing?

- Is my business properly structured for liability, retirement or estate planning?
- How can I diversify my operation to produce other crops?
- Is it difficult for me to change what I do and how I do it?
- Is my financial statement properly structured?
- What will I do if the government reduces or eliminates its support for my crop?

Many of these questions may be difficult but should not be avoided.

SET GOALS

After you have completed the SWOT analysis, goals must be set and action plans put into place. Make sure these goals are measurable and obtainable.

FOLLOW-UP

Review your plans frequently and constantly measure your accomplishments. Good records are absolutely necessary to identify successes and potential areas for improvement.

We should avoid getting in the position of letting government or creditors determine our fate.

The first step of recognizing the necessity of a business plan is the most difficult. Once one recognizes this invaluable tool there are numerous resources available to assist you through this process. If you would like more information on building your business plan, please contact your Cooperative Extension Service, Small Business Administration, lender or accountant to get the process started.



“Everything to do with farming comes from FCS!”

So says longtime Farm Credit Services' customer Robert May. And he knows a thing or two about farming—after all, he's been at it in Lee County, Arkansas for more than 40 years now. Through it all the Mays have depended on Farm Credit Services for solid assistance with the financial details, like purchasing equipment, land, chemicals and seed so they can get down to business. The business of farming, that is. And, we can do the same for you.

But don't take our word for it, or Robert's for that matter. Give us a call and see for yourself.



Robert May & sons, Danny and Roger



FARM CREDIT MIDSOUTH
At the heart of a growing AmericaSM

1-800-444-FARM
www.farmcreditmidsouth.com

CORNING870-857-3541
FORREST CITY870-633-2052
HELENA870-338-3474

JONESBORO870-932-2817
MARIANNA870-295-5267
MARION870-739-6275

OSCEOLA870-563-2676
PARAGOULD870-236-8525
WYNNE870-238-2211

“The Farm Credit Professionals understand the changing climate of farming better than a bank ever could....In fact, I can't see being a farmer and using a bank for agricultural financing.”

—Robert May, Lee County, AR



THE THRELKELD FAMILY:

Justin, Douglas and Barkley Threlkeld on the family farm in late March with this year's wheat crop.

PUMPING FOR PROFITS IN NORTHEAST ARKANSAS

By Tim Rand

Just west of the Missouri boot heel we found a fellow focused on farming. This modest 50-year-old has an insight for success and a passion for his profession.

Douglas Threlkeld responds to questions about his success like the winner on an awards show. While downplaying “success,” he rattles off a list of people and organizations who have helped him in his career including teachers, family, old-timers, landlords, chemical companies, seed companies, Farm

Bureau, Extension Service, employees, lending institutions, and other Greene County farmers.

“I’d say by far what has kept farmers in Northeast Arkansas in business is irrigation,” Threlkeld said. He couples that with precision land leveling. And he knows all too well the problems associated with the lack of irrigation. “The drought of 1980 put a lot of farmers who didn’t have irrigation five to 10 years behind financially. It took all of us five to 10 years to catch up on back debts.”

He had two wells in 1980, just one more than when he started farming on his own in 1975. Today he has 20, irrigating 75 to 80 percent of the 2250 acres he works. Of that, he owns 550 acres.

“I’ve been fortunate enough to have really good landlords that I rented land from. They could see that by putting down that irrigation well and by raising rice and generating some income—then eventually coming in there seeing the importance of that irrigation and doing that dirt work so we could irrigate soybeans down the middles, seeing

the importance of the drainage—then they started leveling the ground. And as one landlord would do it and as the other one could do it, they'd do it," Doug said.

Yield statistics for Greene County from the Arkansas Agricultural Statistics Service confirm his beliefs about irrigation. In the last three years, the differences are clear comparing bushel yields of irrigated versus non-irrigated beans: 2001-40 vs. 21; 2000-38 vs. 18; and 1999-33 vs. 13.

SIX GENERATIONS

Farming goes back for at least six generations in the Threlkeld family. His Dad, the late Carl Threlkeld, row cropped and raised registered Polled Herefords after being released from the Boston Red Sox farm club with a shoulder injury. Douglas and his wife Kathy have two sons, Justin and Barkley. Both have been very involved with the family farming operation. Justin is now a senior at Arkansas State University majoring in Agriculture Business. Douglas doesn't know if he'll come back to the farm or take a job in the Ag industry.

Younger son Barkley graduated from high school and went directly into farming with his dad. He shared two goals with his dad while early in high school: to be President of the Greene County Tech Future Farmers of America and to be Star State Farmer. He was FFA President his senior year. As far as the Star State Farmer, his proud father said, "He was fortunate to have some real good Ag teachers and they encouraged him and they kept him busy. They kept pushing and pushing. And ole mom and dad at home would push and big brother would push."

Barkley was one of six finalists at the state convention last June. "My wife and I decided to ease down and see what would take place. It was a big surprise for us. Of course, we were tickled to death," Doug said about Barkley being presented the Star State Farmer of Arkansas Award. Justin had been a finalist his senior year in high school but didn't win. The pride in his two

sons was apparent when Doug mentioned he had applied for the award when he was in high school but was never a finalist. Both sons also won first place in FFA for Diversified Crop Production.

Justin owns a tractor and disk. Barkley, a John Deere 9610 combine.



IRRIGATION IS THE KEY

"If you have a good variety planted at a good time, and if you have your soil pH and soil fertility in good shape, good weed control and a good stand of soybeans with good drainage—in my opinion, the difference between half of a bean crop and a good bean crop is what you do from that point on. And that's irrigation. That's the key," said Threlkeld. "Start irrigating early in the season, like June or July, and irrigate late. Here (*Greene County*) we have to be irrigating Group 5 soybeans in September."

Threlkeld uses polypipe and irrigates down the middles for soybeans and uses straight levies for rice.



THE CREW

Two other people are key to the day-to-day operation of the Threlkeld farm. Keith Weatherford went to work in 1988 and has been there ever since. Jerry Smith worked on the farm for 13 years beginning in 1980 and returned last year to the team. "I feel like since I have farmed I have been real, real fortunate to have good employees and these two guys right here are extremely good employees . . . responsible, honest, and good guys," Doug boasts.

His crew knows what he expects. "If you're not going to do it 100 percent right, then I don't want you to do it at all. The guys know that I like everything to be done as near perfect or as near right as it can be. Take pride in everything that you do. No matter what it is you do, you take pride in what you do and you try to do everything right. That seems to please landlords. It pleases me," he adds.

On a typical day, Doug keeps in contact with his crew by radio as they work rice, soybeans, winter wheat, and (some years) corn and milo. He also uses a cell phone to stay in touch with seed companies, landlords, crop dusters, equipment dealers, fertilizer distributors, his banker and his marketing man.

While he makes all his marketing decisions himself, he and some of his neighbors have hired a consultant for marketing recommendations. Plus he subscribes to DTN Farm Dayta, gets faxes from Bunge Corp and receives the Doanes Agriculture Report.

Grain is stored in six 36-foot bins each holding 20,000 bushels and eight 30-foot bins with 10,000-bushel capacity each. Crops are taken from the field to the bins and then to market in two eighteen-wheelers. John Deere accounts for 99.9 percent of the family's in-field equipment.

GOODBYE TO CATTLE

Even though he received a degree in Animal Science in 1974 from the University of Arkansas, he gave up the cattle business in 1979. It took too much time away when he needed to be in the field. He hasn't ever regretted that decision.

EXTENSION SERVICE

“The Extension Service is more important than breathing to me,” Doug said with conviction. “There’s no doubt that the Extension Service—I’m talking about the University of Arkansas research and experiment stations that develop and come up with all this information—they trickle it right down to the county agent and then right on down to the farmer. And I have tried my best to never miss a meeting that the Extension Service has because when I go I know I’m going to learn something.”

ONE SEED TO MANY

Seed grain is grown on the Threlkeld farm, including rice and soybeans, for Cullum Seeds. The soil types are mainly Silt Loam and Clay Loam.

A DAD’S DELIGHT

What has given him the most pleasure in farming? “Watching my two sons grow up and teaching them and watching them drive a tractor for the first time. Or, watching them drive a combine for the first time. And watching them grow up on the farm doing the farm work, especially when they were young and would do things for the first time. To me it was just really a pleasure.”



“THE EXTENSION SERVICE IS BREATHING TO ME,” DOUG



Dropping grain into an 18-wheeler for transport to the grain bins.

Barkley harvests wheat in his own combine.



**MORE IMPORTANT THAN
SAYS WITH CONVICTION.**



The Threlkeld's service their equipment continuously.



Barkley, Keith Weatherford, Justin and Douglas take time out in front of their tractors.

FARM BUREAU

Threlkeld has strong feelings for the Farm Bureau. This is his third year as President of the Greene County Farm Bureau after serving as Vice President for more than a dozen years.

“Farm Bureau does more for the Arkansas farmer by far than any other organization like it. I’m out here on the farm trying to move that rice out of the grain bin. Trying to get my equipment ready to go. Trying to plant my crop, water my crop, and harvest my crop. And I can lay down at night and not have to worry because I’ve got Farm Bureau and they’re down in Little Rock when the legislators meet looking out for what we put in the policy book.”

While modest about any success he may have had, Douglas Threlkeld is proud of the crops and the kids he has raised on the farm outside Paragould. And he has tried to do it as near perfect or as near right as he could. ❖



TOP: One of the Threlkeld’s two 18-wheelers parked in front of the farm’s grain bins.



LEFT: Taking a break with the 1941 John Deere tractor rebuilt by Barkley as a FFA project.

BELOW: Equipment on the Threlkeld farm, parked and ready to move.



The true cost of Weed Control.

Times are the toughest in agriculture that I have seen in my career. However, you have made the decision to farm again this year, so how do you survive? I know that a weed scientist cannot totally determine your future. However, weeds are the number one yield limiting factor in rice, and weed control represents one of the highest input costs.

Weeds must be controlled in order to make optimum crop yields. If you chose to plant the crop, you must simply make the commitment to control the weeds. I see typical herbicide input costs each year in rice that range from \$25 to \$75 per acre. The constant thing I hear this year is, "I have to make a cheap crop." One key to that is getting the herbicide costs under \$40 per acre. The difference between the \$25 to \$40 per acre programs and the \$50 to \$75 per acre weed control programs is getting things done correctly the first time.

Grass control must be your primary focus. While it is important to get a reasonable level of control

**IF YOU
PLANT THE
CROP—COMMIT
TO CONTROL
THE WEEDS**

of the sedge, aquatic and broadleaf weeds, you will not "lose a crop" to these. You can lose a crop to grass and it is failure to control grass early that costs growers the most money in a weed control program. Fields should be scouted carefully starting at rice emergence. Has any

preemergence herbicide that was used been activated and is it working? If not, flush it immediately if it is dry. Then scout (or have someone scout) carefully for emerging weeds. The goal should be to treat any escaped grasses before they are beyond the 3-leaf stage. That means begin trying to get the postemergence treatment out at the 2-leaf stage of the grass. The primary treatment used at this stage will be a propanil product, Ricestar, or a Ricestar + Whip combination. The choice should be made on the weeds present and surrounding crop situations. If you have a residual herbicide applied, this treatment should get you to flooding. If you did not use a residual herbicide, then repeat this process when the next flush of grass is 2- to 3- leaf.

Add a broadleaf or sedge component if needed. However, focus on grass control.

You can tolerate certain situations, like scattered broadleaf signalgrass that is just breaking through a preemergence treatment at flooding. In general, however, if you are finding any grass prior to flooding it should be controlled. A common comment I receive on salvage calls is, "I only had a little grass when I flooded."

The biggest difference in weed control costs occur when growers wind up making \$20 to \$30 per acre salvage treatments in an attempt to control grass that was either not sprayed at all, or (more commonly) was sprayed too late the first time. While most herbicides will kill some big grass sometimes, the key is spraying 2- to 3-leaf grass and having good soil moisture at application.



Armor is head and shoulders below the rest.

No games. Just performance.

“Overall the Armor line-up gives you top-end yield with the best disease protection on the market.”
— Brent Howton, Palestine, Arkansas





DOWN-TO-EARTH KNOW-HOW

When it comes to seed, we're proud to say that we keep our heads buried in the soil. After all, that's where the seeds go.

So our agribusiness experts dive head-first into individual farming concerns, offering field-tested, experience-proven analysis and advice. We believe in getting to know your farming operation from the bottom up. You can't be successful in farming if you're not successful in the field. And buying the right seed is critical to that success. At Armor, we know our stuff—and our customers' needs.

With an Armor purchase, you get a lot more than a bag of seed (although we price that at a bargain). Our Armor staff is knowledgeable (we've got agronomists available for your questions), friendly, and most importantly, at your beck and call.

All told, it's a total package: seed with out-of-this-world performance, delivered with down-to-earth know-how.



www.armorseed.com

For the best customer service in the field, dial toll-free **1-877-822-SEED**.

P.O. Box 178 • Fisher, Arkansas 72429 • Phone 870-328-7222



DOWN HOME THE HIGH FAMILY FARM

ON TECH

By Tim Rand

Long on equipment, lean on labor, and utilizing space age technology, these southeast Arkansas farmers cut beans 50 percent above the county average over the last 13 years.

John Ellington and his son Kim, along with farm hand Preston Sandlin, farm 1320 acres two miles north of Jerome, population 46.

“If you’d have told me in 1970 that we’d cut some beans as good as we’ve cut, I’d want to know what you were drinking,” 64-year-old John Ellington said. “We think that given the information we have, the technology, the fertility—we feel like anything below a 50-bushel bean is almost crop failure.”

The Ellingtons averaged right at 50 bushels an acre in 2001 on land straddling the Drew/Chicot county line. The Drew County average for irrigated beans was 34 bushels with Chicot farmers averaging 37, according to the Arkansas Agricultural Statistics Service.

Most of the farmland is Perry Clay. The rest is Hebert Silt Loam and Portland Clay. Concrete and gravel permeate the land as this farm sits on the site of one of the ten Japanese-American relocation camps during World War II. The camp’s population swelled to 8000 at its peak. You’ll see signs of the former camp as you drive Highway 165. A smokestack still stands. There are water storage and wastewater tanks. And, a historical marker has been

Kim and John Ellington pictured on the farm with their Case IH 2388 Combine.

dedicated to "...those persons of Japanese ancestry who suffered the indignity of being incarcerated because of their ethnic background..."

Even today, equipment-damaging blocks are still occasionally rooted from the ground. Last year they hit seven. But the site does have some advantages. Three of the four sheds are built on original slabs from the camp. Only the slab for the 60' X 60' insulated maintenance shed had to be poured.



killed me because we got planted in time to catch two big rains and planted three times," said the elder Ellington.

In addition to the tractors, the farm has a full complement of equipment under sheds and along the perimeter of the property. There's the 20-year-old Case IH equipped with steel wheels for running drain furrows. Harvesting is done with a Case IH 2388 combine. Most of the planting is done with a 30-foot foldout International drill with 900 planter unit bottoms on it. Last year they added a belt metering system to singulate the seed. A 20-foot no till Sunflower drill is also used for rice and beans. And, the Ellingtons have their own laser for shooting levies.

Five or six years ago they erected six 20,000-bushel grain bins. John believes they paid for themselves in the first three years. However, last year's rice crop is still sitting in them. For this reason, they have decided to reduce the rice acreage this year from 475 to 135 acres.

"It does not make good sense, in my economics, to plant a crop when you are looking at a crop in the bin," John says with a smile.

This year those acres will be planted in beans for a total of 1185 bean acres unless they get a break on the rain. They'd also like to put in 300 acres of milo.

LEFT: Monument designating a Japanese internment camp located on the north entrance of the Ellington's family farm.

CHANGING CROPS

Through the years, economic conditions have dictated the need for change in the crops grown on the Ellington farm. When John's dad started farming in the 1930s he grew cotton, corn and hay for the horses. The family started growing rice in 1946. They quit growing cotton in 1949, raising only rice until soybeans were added in the late 1950s. The time has come for more diversification.

BIG CHANGES, FRESH IDEAS

New this year is a 35-acre sod farm about three miles to the north. They'll be putting in ten acres of Bermuda, ten acres of Zoysia, and 7.5 acres each of Centipede and St. Augustine. The grass



Kim rides the tractor from which he operates Global Positioning Technology.



View from the interior of the GPS fitted tractor.



Spray Controller mounted inside the Ellington's tractor for use in conjunction with the global positioning technology.

EQUIPMENT

Case IH equipment dominates the eleven tractors.

"We're kind of a joke among some of our neighbors," John says. "We're long on tractors and equipment, but I've managed to keep them paid for. And they last because when we hook the drill up we won't unhook it until we're through. And when we hook the bean planter we won't unhook until we get through. We have enough other tractors you just step off of one and step on the other one. They kind of laugh at us about it but it has worked for us."

"One year our efficiency nearly

FARMING BY SATELLITE

Global Positioning technology allows you to know exactly where you are on the farm, or on earth for that matter, at any given time. You can spray precisely with your next swath equidistant from the last. This allows spraying at night when the wind is not as great. And, it eliminates the need for foam markers improving accuracy.

The Ellingtons use this technology to maximize profits in their fertilizing and weed control. Kim uses the GPS receiver to do his own grid sampling. “I take it about every five acres on most fields. Send it off, get it back, make application maps then variable rate the fertilizer the way I want it. I don’t have to pay anybody else to do any of that. On the computer program you can set up what size you want your samples to be and it plots the points for you. I normally go stick a flag up at each point and then come back and take the sample.”

Weed control is also easier with the unit. Kim can mark four different items each as many times as he wants. This allows marking the various problem weeds at harvest. Back in the office, he pulls up the yield map on his desktop computer then overlays another map on which he draws the locations of the weeds. This becomes his weed map, which he downloads to his handheld computer. Using this map on his tractor, he selectively sprays where the weeds are a problem.

business offers a niche market. Currently people have to go to Little Rock, Texarkana or Louisiana for sod. Kim hopes to serve a 75 to 100-mile radius of the farm and can do it without hiring additional labor.

Nothing comes without a cost, however. The projected expenditure is a \$175,000 to \$190,000 investment not counting land costs. A sprigger, fork lift, mower and a sod harvester will be needed along with pumps and a pivot. Plus, they do not expect to be harvesting this first season.

Extra income from leasing duck hunting land was also new this year. This generated dollars during a normally unproductive time of the year.

EDUCATION

Both Ellingtons are college educated. John holds both a BSE degree in Mathematics and a MSE in Counseling from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro. He taught for 18 years before coming back to the family farm and surveyed commercially for 20 years beginning in 1974. Kim has been on the farm all his life.

“When I first went to work, grandpa and my uncle had it. I guess I started helping on the hay when I was big enough to mash the clutch on the tractor or a truck,” he said. Kim received his BS Degree in Agronomy Crop Science from Mississippi State University.

Preston Sandlin was born and raised on a farm and went to work with the Ellingtons in the fall of 1984.

CUTTING EDGE TECHNOLOGY

Technology is a big part of the Ellingtons’ overall success. Seven years ago they incorporated a Trimble GPS (Global Positioning System) receiver with their Ag Leader Yield Monitor. A Trimble Parallel Swathing Lightbar was added three or four years ago. These tools enable the farmer to see if the yields are doing what they anticipate.

“We had been doing some leveling and all. We had some cut spots that wouldn’t look too good. We had some fill spots that just looked tremendous.



Even though it looked better it was putting more in the stalk and less in the grain,” John said.

Kim compares the yield data to other data.

“I can look at pH maps and fertility maps to see if fertility or pH was a problem,” the 37-year old explained. “We had a couple of fields where we decided the grass wasn’t too bad. We were just going to live with it and when I went through it with the yield monitor it showed that we were right.”

“You know it looked bad. It looked terrible. But the yield monitor said there wasn’t any difference.”

The lightbar makes tracking a straight or curved line a breeze. It is accurate within six inches or less. You can set it to do manual increments or set it to automatically take you to your next pass when you turn.

SHORT ON SHEKELS

John cites the payoff as the thing he likes least about farming the last couple of years.

“The self-satisfaction of growing an outstanding crop will only go so far. You like to pay your bills and have a few shekels left over to hear ‘em jingle and jangle, you know.”

He went on to say, “Farming in a way now is more fun than it was years ago. Now it’s more challenging, but our tractors are better. We’re more comfortable. We have better stuff to work with.

Where you go back in the 40s and 50s and 60s and 70s, so much of it was

just grunt brut force. Most of your irrigation in a field was shovel. And it’s a whole lot more comfortable than in the early 50s when we cleared a bunch of this ground with a stump saw and then started disking it with a steel-wheel tractor.”

FAMILY

John’s wife, Linda, teaches school in Pulaski County. They have another son, David, a policeman in Pine Bluff. Kim’s wife Sharon helps him with office work. The couple has two children. Fourteen-year-old Christopher helps out on the farm and will be taking a more active role this season. Daughter Emily is eleven.

EMBARGOES

While the Ellingtons have a great deal of praise for the Arkansas Extension Service, they say the federal government is the biggest thorn in the farmer’s side. Using Cuba as just one of many examples, they point to markets that have been built up only to have the government embargo exports there.

“This year we sold them (Cuba) a little for the first time in 40 years,” John emphasized.

JUST A LITTLE BIGGER

Both men are in favor of farming more ground.

“We’re really too small,” John says. We could use another 500 or 600 acres close in. But I’m not going to go 15 or 20 miles up the road to get 500 acres. And I wouldn’t want it if you couldn’t irrigate it and you couldn’t drain it. Like we are now we can look at every field and almost know every stalk by name.”

Clearly it’s worked for the Ellingtons to this point. And, why mess with a good thing? ❖

TOP: Farm employee Preston Sandlin and John Ellington look over one of their wide-tired tractors.

BELOW: Cleaning irrigation gates with muratic acid extends their usage.



Raising the Bar for Soybean Yield

The 2002 soybean production year continues its inevitable progress forward, albeit delayed due to the wettest March this guy can remember. I remain enthused that the potential for improved mid-south soybean yield is better than ever. Even with the tremendous challenges we've experienced these past few years (droughts, floods, insect and diseases), the top growers continue their march toward improved "production efficiency."

These growers are either increasing soybean grain yield, decreasing production cost or accomplishing both simultaneously. For example, in 2000, the third toughest production environment in the last 50 years, Arkansas soybean production exceeded 25 Bu/A statewide. In 2001, many fields experienced either severe nematode pressure, insect (especially stinkbug) damage or grain deterioration of August maturing soybeans.

Even with these challenges most mid-south states obtained their second or third highest average yield ever in 2001. Although many of our growers experienced good yields, in retrospect we should have done pretty well because temperatures throughout July and August were not as severe as those experienced in 1998, 1999 and 2000.

As hard as our growers worked this year, I really felt that the 2001 growing season should have been better, resulting in a record soybean grain yield for the mid-south region (approaching the yield of 1994).

I've heard more than one of our growers say that in 2001 his marginal fields exceeded his expectations while

**IF YOU
ARE HIGH-
CENTERED
OR CAN'T
SEE THE BAR,
GET HELP.**

his better fields were disappointing due to one or more of the problems previously mentioned.

In many ways negatives are still present as we start the 2002 soybean production year. For example, commodity prices are still in the pits, farm programs are in debate, fuel costs continue to escalate and we've been watching stinkbugs all winter long. These are some of the reasons that growers have been both despondent and indecisive this winter. In many ways, the bar for improved production efficiency for the 2002 crop year has been raised even higher. I remain confident that if producers, the agriculture industry, university research, Extension workers and crop advisors all work together for the grower's good we can minimize the negatives and maximize the positives.

Some of the positives are: we recognize many of the pest problems that face us and we can deal with them; we go into this cropping season with a full soil moisture and full

reservoirs; the genetics associated with soybean production continue to improve for yield and in pest resistance (we've got to continue and even expedite this process); and we have increased knowledge and expertise in producing and marketing soybeans.

Now to the crux of the matter—are we ready to take on the challenges of the 2002 crop year? They will be many and varied. Growers should: select high-yielding, field specific varieties of differing maturity with the pest resistance packages that reduce exposure to yield limiting situations; discuss their production plans for the year; develop management strategies dealing with tillage, fertility, pests and water management; and have someone responsible for monitoring the crop.

If you are high-centered on the bar or can't see the bar, then get help. You may want to consider enrollment in the university's Soybean Research Verification programs or in the ARMOR Soybean Maximizing Agronomic Profit (MAP) crop management program. These programs are committed to regular crop monitoring and timely implementation of all management practices to improve the opportunity for profitable mid-south soybean production. All soybean producers should continue to take advantage of the technological advances and educational programs available. If I can be of service, please contact me at Cullum Seeds at 870-328-7222 or visit our website at www.armorseed.com.



Why Soil Testing?

The yield potential of the best cultivar may never be realized if the proper amounts and types of fertilizers are not applied or are applied at the wrong time. Soil testing is the backbone of any nutrient management program to diagnose the nutrients that may potentially limit crop yields.

Most public soil testing laboratories follow a 'fertilize the crop' philosophy rather than a 'fertilize the soil' philosophy. The 'fertilize the soil' philosophy generally recommends higher fertilizer rates to build and maintain soil test levels above the threshold where crop yields respond to fertilization. In contrast, specific fertilizer nutrients and rates are applied only when an economic crop yield response is expected for the 'fertilize the crop' philosophy.

Growers are often concerned with depleting the soil of the nutrients when this philosophy is followed, especially when high yields are produced. Some fertilizer recommendations account for this by recommending higher fertilizer rates when soil nutrient levels are considered low and/or by using yield expectations with soil test information for recommending the optimum fertilizer rates.

Fertilizer recommendations are calibrated with years of replicated field research to determine the relationship between soil nutrient levels and crop response to answer the question of how much, if any, fertilizer is needed to produce maximum yields.

This information must then be refined to determine how deficient a specific soil or 'field situation' is. For instance, different fertilizer rates are

**SOIL TESTING
IS THE
BACKBONE
OF ANY
NUTRIENT
PROGRAM**

usually required to maximize yields on different soil textures with similar soil test values.

Growers should realize that general fertilizer recommendations cannot adequately account for all the production variables represented within a given geographic area. Also, Mother Nature or 'special land use' considerations often complicate nutrient management decisions between the time that fertilizer recommendations are generated and crops are planted.

For example, fields that are managed for waterfowl habitat or are prone to periodic flooding may require special attention in regard to the nutrient rates and application methods. Periodic flooding may 'fix' soil and fertilizer P requiring P fertilizer to be applied at higher rates, with more efficient application methods (i.e. banding vs. broadcast), or both to prevent P availability from limiting yields.

Most laboratories that perform routine soil analysis have rigorous quality control programs that ensure the accuracy of soil test information.

As a general rule the fertilizer recommendations provided from soil analysis are only as representative as the sample itself. In Arkansas, the average soil sample from non-grid sampled agricultural fields represents more than 40 acres. Most fields contain enough variation in pH, drainage, soil texture, topography, or previous cropping history to warrant more site-specific sampling to help refine fertilizer and lime recommendations.

Multiple years of routine soil analysis information can be used to evaluate how crop yields and fertilization practices have affected soil nutrient concentrations. Also, the use of yield monitors is now used to identify field areas that are less productive.

Soil sampling can assist in determining whether soil fertility contributes to the lower yields or if another soil or management factor may be to blame.

Reviewing the history of crop yields, soil test reports, and fertility programs with a knowledgeable consultant or Extension Agent can help to increase net profits by making slight adjustments to your fertility program.



New Early-Maturing Hybrids with Yield, Milling and Standability



- Very Early Maturity
- Hybrid Yield
- Excellent Disease Package
- Average Standability Similar to Drew
- Milling Similar to Lagrue (52/69)

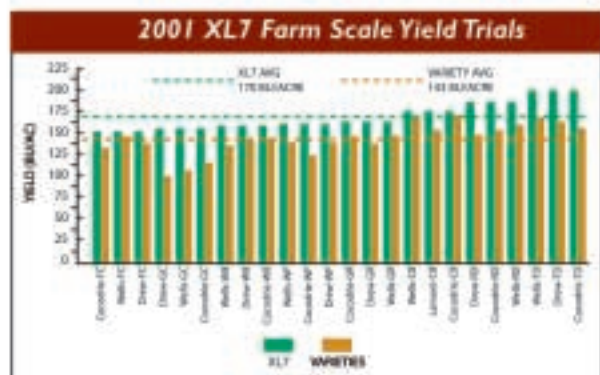
XL7 yields averaged **27 bushels** per acre above Wells, Cocodrie and Drew in 2001 "on farm" yield comparisons while maturing 5 to 7 days ahead of Cocodrie.



- Early Maturity
- Hybrid Yield
- Excellent Disease Package
- Excellent Standability Similar to Wells
- Milling Similar to Wells (55/68)

XL8 yields averaged **31 bushels** per acre above Wells, Cocodrie and Drew in 2001 "on farm" yield comparisons while maturing 1 day later than Cocodrie.

The Next Generation of Hybrid Rice



Supplies Are Limited For 2002!

For more information on Hybrid Rice Seed, please contact any of the more than 150 local RiceTec sales/service locations, or call RiceTec Customer Services at (877) 580-7423.

Refer to 2002 Hybrid Seed Sales Agreement for management requirements, terms and conditions of sales, standard seed treatments, limitation of warranty, remedy, saved seed warning, and restrictions.

Hybrid characteristics are determined from data collected from specific RiceTec, Inc. and/or University field trials and are not a guarantee of performance under all possible field conditions nor do they constitute a warranty of fitness for a particular use.



Lessons Learned On The Farm

The smell of diesel—that’s what I remember most about that morning.

I had just finished fueling the tractor I’d be driving that day. It was spring, and everyone else was already in the field. I must have been 11 years old—no more than 12—at the time, and I was anxious to be in the middle of the action.

So anxious that I didn’t notice how close I was to the 1000-gallon fuel tank we had brought in from the field the week before. As I rounded the corner of the shed, the disk I was pulling just nicked the corner of the fuel tank. I felt the jolt and my stomach sank.

Looking over my shoulder, I saw the inch-long gash I’d made. Diesel began to pour from the hole.

In that moment of panic (just as it should be when kids make mistakes), Dad drove up. And in the calm manner he always seemed to have, he found a stray stick and a shop rag to plug the hole—all the while assuring me that the world, in fact, was not about to come to an end.

Looking back, that’s one of those things I remember: the way Dad handled mistakes, although I didn’t always appreciate it at the time. If I had to put it into one word, I’d call it patience. I think it was Mark Twain that said, “When I was a teenager I couldn’t believe how little my father knew, but after visiting with him as an adult, I couldn’t believe how much he’d learned.”

**ALL THE WHILE
ASSURING ME
THAT THE
WORLD
WAS NOT ABOUT
TO COME TO
AN END**

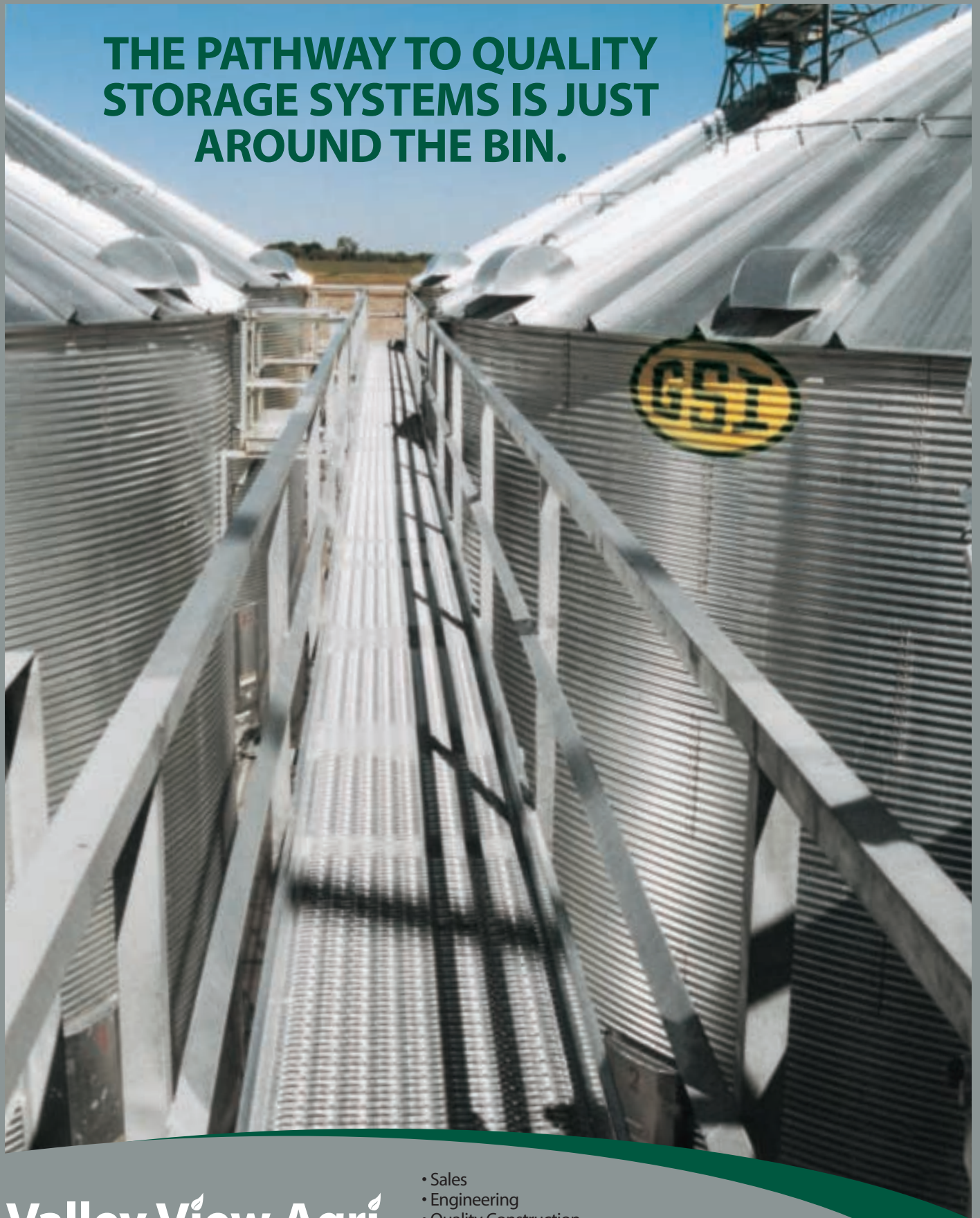
I guess that’s just part of life. It wasn’t so much what he said, but what he didn’t say. He didn’t yell, turn red, or fly off the handle. There was this calm about him that said, “As long as you’re okay, we can fix anything you’ve broken, unstick anything you’ve stuck, and clean up anything you’ve spilled.” When I think about how he approached a problem three principles come to mind:

- Always remember that people are more important than things;
- Gather the facts; and
- Mistakes are almost always easier to fix than they first appear.

I’m an adult now with children of my own, and I’m glad they get to see in a granddad what I saw in a dad: the patience of a father. I know they’ll see it in him; and I hope they see it in me, because that’s one of the things I remember most about growing up on the farm.



**THE PATHWAY TO QUALITY
STORAGE SYSTEMS IS JUST
AROUND THE BIN.**



Valley View Agri
RICE DRYING & STORAGE SYSTEMS
Simmons-Belk Division

- Sales
- Engineering
- Quality Construction
- Large Inventory of Parts & Equipment
- Service Crews
- On-Farm & Commercial
- Leasing Programs Available



870-932-6440 • Contact Fred Cathcart, Pete Simmons or Steve Graddy
Highway 49 South • Jonesboro, Arkansas • www.valleyviewagri.com

Up, up and away.



CALL IT PERFORMANCE PLUS

Ultimately, your agribusiness is all about performance. So is ours.

That's why it's an understatement to say that our customers have been carried away with Armor. And we're not just talking about the seed, although there's a lot to say about that (just ask any of our customers).

Seed performance is a must, of course, but it's the "plus" that sets Armor apart. That's why every Armor Seed purchase comes with field-tested, experience-proven advice tailored to your individual farming concerns. With 50-plus years of combined expertise, we deliver superior service, superior seed and just plain superior performance.

That's a track record that can tip the scales in your favor.

No games. Just performance.

"I made the best yields I have ever made with Armor Soybeans. The beans didn't lodge and are very responsive to watering. No disease problems." — Alex Palmer, Aubrey, Arkansas



www.armorseed.com
For the best customer service in the field,
dial toll-free **1-877-822-SEED**.
P.O. Box 178 • Fisher, Arkansas 72429 • Phone 870-328-7222