

## SUCCESS STORY

David & Martha Barton, Raymond, MS

Hinds County

Barton Farms LLC / Canaan Plantation

1,200 acres cropland (wheat, soybeans, corn, grain sorghum, cover crop, cotton)

# Barton Farms: Improving soil health for 30-plus years

By Kathy Dougan, MSWCC

David Barton hasn't tilled some of his fields in more than 30 years, and currently doesn't till any of his 1,200 acres of cropland. However, the health of the soil on his land just keeps getting better because of the soil health practices he began in the mid-1980's. He plants wheat, soybeans, corn, grain sorghum, and mostly cereal rye for cover crop. He rotates his crops, sometimes planting cotton on the fields of Canaan Plantation. Some of the land has been owned and farmed by the Barton family since 1937.

After talking to other farmers about soil health and the benefits of planting cover crop, Barton, who has been farming since 1970, decided to implement conservation practices at Canaan Plantation. "We started getting a lot of information about soil health, cover crop," he said. "Some (farmers) were successful with it for years. We tried it and it is working."

The fields on the Barton farm have a slight slope to them, which tends to cause some soil erosion from water. In order to reduce the erosion, Barton started planting cover crop in the mid-1980's. The soil on the farm is good now, and the land has less erosion, he said.

Barton started out by planting cover crop on some of the land, just to see how things went. He continued to plant cover crop on more of his land, and now he plants cover crop on all of his land. He also has gone 100 percent no-till. And the soil health continues to improve. "Hopefully we will continue to do well."

This year Canaan Plantation had the biggest soybean yield yet. In addition to improved yields, Barton has also noticed improvement in water quality, and a reduction of weeds in the fields. The cereal rye is especially effective in shading the soil, which blocks out sunlight and keeps the weeds, such as pig weed, from growing. The cover crop also effectively maintains moisture in the soil, and reduces erosion in the fields.

The EQIP program, or Environmental Quality Initiatives Program, aided with incentives for Barton to plant cover crop and install drainage structures. Barton installed riparian buffers, water-control structures, overfall pipes and levees, and has employed precision farming methods, all which helped reduce erosion and improve the soil health. "There's good soil out there; every acre I've got is in cover crop."

The biggest obstacle Barton has encountered since he adopted soil health practices is the perception others have about implementing the practices on their land.

"People are usually very traditional and don't want to experiment with new ideas," he said.

Canaan Plantation has fine-tuned soil health practices through trial and error, and Barton knows that only by employing conservation techniques can the land continue to maintain its health and be productive. "I've learned that if you don't take care of the land, it won't produce."

Barton and his wife, Martha, their son, David and daughter-in-law Roxie, and four grandchildren own and operate the farm, now in the family for five generations. Martha, manages the office for the farm.

Barton Farms has hosted no-till demonstrations, field days, school tours, teacher workshops and other conservation-related events on the family farm. Barton has served in leadership roles for the Hinds County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Mississippi Association of Conservation Districts.