

SUCCESS STORY

Emile Guedon Jr., Natchez, MS

Adams County

Farms 14,000 acres (soybeans, corn, cotton)

Guedon practices soil health on varied farmland

By Kathy Dougan, MSWCC

Guedon Farms, some of the land which was first farmed by the Guedon family in 1861, has practiced soil health on the farm's 14,000 acres for about nine years now, Emile Guedon Jr. said. The farm is not contiguous, and is spread out over 60 miles, with the land varying from flood plain to some hills. The varied terrain requires implementation of different conservation methods.

The acreage planted fluctuates year to year, and Guedon typically plants soybeans, corn and cotton. This year Guedon planted 14,000 acres. "We rotate crops as much as we can. Some ground, around Fayette, is flood prone because it is near the Mississippi River. We plant soybeans there."

The cover crop on Guedon Farms changes based on price, and where they think they can plant it, Guedon said. "We use natural vegetation as a cover crop. After harvest of a corn field, some (corn) comes back up and will act as a cover crop." They also plant cereal rye and wheat, and graze cattle on it. "Anything you can do less of and maintain yields or improve yields is a win."

Guedon uses cover crop to prevent runoff and also as a remedy for some compaction issues. "We don't have to till much when we use cover crops. Wherever sun can get to the ground, seed can come up." Since implementing soil health practices, Guedon said his costs have increased some, however, the advantages gained are well worth it.

He implements mild tillage and doesn't burn crop residue unless he has to. "We are big advocates of chicken litter; we spread as much as we can."

Not only has the water quality improved on the farm land, but also there isn't as much runoff after a big rain, which Guedon said is significant. He has installed drainage control structures to prevent deep erosion, and employs precision techniques to create more gentle slopes on the land.

The biggest challenge in employing soil health practices on his farm is having to change the way he views some things, Guedon said. "Different tools, different methods. And adjusting soil fertility, too."

"Soil is a living organism. You have to do everything you can to cultivate it to be a better ecosystem in the soil. Everything that happens in soil translates to everything you do; better soil equals better crop," he said.