



## SUCCESS STORY

Dr. Robert and Mimi Mehrle, Lambert, MS

Quitman County

Operates the 32-acre pecan orchard

Leases out the 1,250-family farm cropland (soybeans, corn, cotton)

## Mehrles grow pecans, practice soil health on family farm

BY KATHY DOUGAN, MSWCC

Robert Mehrle and his wife, Mary Elizabeth “Mimi” (Anderson) Mehrle, live on what was once her parents’ 1,250-acre farm. For 20 years, Mehrle farmed the land that Mimi’s father, Edward Henry “E.H.” Anderson bought in 1927; Anderson farmed the land until his death in 1992. The Mehrles continue to operate a 32-acre pecan grove on the farm, however, they now lease the fertile Delta cropland to a farmer.

In order to ensure that the land is suitable for farming, Mehrle implements irrigation practices and soil health. “Irrigation is the preeminent factor for land management,” he said. “Without proper irrigation, the water on the fields cannot be regulated. And without proper irrigation on the fields, a farmer won’t want to rent the land. As a landowner, it is pretty important to us if we want to pass land on to children to appreciate it like we do.” Irrigation increases the longevity of the farm. “All of our land now is irrigated except for one area, which will be done in next few

years,” said Mehrle, who went back to college and earned his Ph.D. in Ag-Econ at Mississippi State in 1994.

He has divided the farm into blocks, and recently improved a 235-acre block of land. In addition to grading and irrigating, he planted trees, created a songbird sanctuary, and installed one riparian buffer. These improvements help reduce erosion, which Mehrle said is not much of an issue on the farm anymore. “There are occasional problems with wind erosion, when it is really dry and the wind picks up in the summertime.”

Mehrle makes sure the cropland is soil tested every three years, and the farmer leasing the land applies appropriate lime and nutrients to maintain soil health. Zone sampling is implemented and nutrients are applied according to agricultural recommendations, utilizing precision ag techniques.

Yields have increased over the past few years on the cropland. Mehrle said the irrigation is a contributing factor, however, he said the yield increase could also be attributed to improved plant and seed varieties. The farmer leasing the land mostly plants soybeans, and rotates with corn and cotton, depending on the market price.

“We don’t dictate to them what they do, they (farmers leasing the land) have their own way. But I do wish we could entice them to plant cover crop, such as radishes and perennial ryes, to break up the soil.” Mehrle, however, acknowledges it is a “matter of their (the farmer’s) expenses.” Regarding soil health, “the only limitations are what our renters are willing to do,” he said.

“They (the farmer) does ridge till and hip up on the old beds from the previous year. If they have a bad fall with a lot of rain, they might end up tearing up some land by harvesting. This year they primarily are hipping everything up around the old beds,” Mehrle said. The Delta farmland is flat, with a very limited slope. Mehrle has installed and uses surge valves for irrigation on the fields, and flip-flops the water for better penetration. The farmer who leases Mehrle’s cropland makes decisions on the day-to-day operations of the land.

As for his own pecan crop, Mehrle said, “This year is a horrible crop (for pecans).”