

Feature Story



Young farmer fills big shoes

As the millennial generation continues to age, more and more are entering the workforce, and the ag industry is no exception. One millennial who is already filling the shoes of the growers before him is James Wray of Jonesboro, Arkansas.

Wray graduated from Arkansas State University in 2014, and he is already receiving recognition for breaking the soybean yield record in his home state. A track record of success appears to run in his family — his parents have been previously recognized for achieving 100 bushel yields. Wray claims the secret to his success is listening.

“What I have learned is listen to the older fellas who have been farming around because they’re still farming for a reason, and they’ve been doing this a lot longer than I have,” said Wray. “I try to listen more than I talk – I’m not always the best at that practice, but I try to be.”

As a fifth-generation grower, Wray has both his father and grandfather to turn to for guidance and advice. The family manages a nearly 5,000 acre farm and they plant a mixture of cotton, rice, corn and soybeans. While Wray would like to expand the operation, he says his father has taught him that maximizing current acres comes first.

“He really tries to stress the fact that attention to detail is much more important than size. You can be a lot more profitable on a smaller number of acres than you can on a big scale if you can’t farm the bigger acres efficiently.”

This attention to detail has led the family to see success in the fields, but that isn’t their only strategy. Wray and his family also conduct extensive on-farm research. By setting aside 30 to 40 acres as test plots for each crop, the family can conduct different seed variety and seeding rate tests to see how it reacts to their soil and management practices. They also evaluate fungicides, foliar feeds and insecticides in their test plots.

Wray says these test plots create a lot of data to sort through, but they allow for easy decision making later in the season. It also allows Wray to be as profitable as possible.

“If you’re not profitable, you’re not going to stay in business with commodity prices being as low as they are.”

This young grower refuses to let his age hold him back. Instead, he’s taking the time to learn from mentors and is proactively looking for the most profitable practices. To learn more about James Wray and his farming methods, listen to his interview on BASF’s Grow Smart podcast available on iTunes or PodBean.

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