

CONSERVATION SHOWCASE



Young Mississippi Farmer Saw Benefits in EQIP, Now Trying CSP

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Former supervisory district conservationist Justin Norris and Hopson farmer Mason Dunn examines the progress of soybean plants on Dunn's 900-acre farm located along the Sunflower River. Dunn has participated in NRCS' EQIP program and is now signing up for CSP.

Soybean farmer Mason Dunn uses an irrigation system that recycles leftover water in an effort to conserve water, a precious commodity in the Delta region.

Dunn's 900-acre farm along the Sunflower River in Hopson employs numerous methods to conserve water and limit the impact on the environment. The Natural Resources Conservation Services helped him pay for it.

"I'm glad I did it," Dunn said.

Programs like the NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program helped Dunn update his farm to make it more efficient and lower its environmental impact. And now he has signed up for the Conservation Stewardship Program.

"I would encourage people to talk to their district conservationist or the other district officials about opportunities available," State Conservationist Al Garner said. "Then we can look in our toolbox of programs."

In the Delta, many of the programs focus on water quantity and quality. About 20 years ago, some farmers realized their wells were drying up, and environmentalists began to offer solutions, Garner said.

One way to save water is tailwater recovery, a measure Dunn uses on his Coahoma

County farm. Runoff water from irrigated fields is captured, stored and then reused, rather than letting it flow into nearby streams and rivers.

Also used on Dunn's farm is a stabilization structure that removes sediment from the water before it's flushed into streams and rivers. Sediment not only clogs waterways, but it often infuses high levels of nutrients in the water.

"Everything that we do to keep soil on the land and nutrients out of the stream, we need to do," Garner said.

Large amounts of nutrients in the water fertilize algae growth. When an algae bloom dies, it causes hypoxia, which deplete oxygen from the water and create dead zones. Dead zones are a problem near the barrier islands.

Environmental programs aren't cheap, and Dunn said he's grateful for the help from NRCS. A tailwater system, like the one on Dunn's farm, cost about \$50,000. Dunn, a 28-year-old farmer, was able to receive ample assistance because he is a beginner farmer. Assistance was in the form of a cost-share programs, which split the cost of the tailwater recovery system and the stabilization structure installed on his farm.

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