

Water Quality Innovations of a Mississippi Delta Farm

By Justin Fritscher, NRCS Mississippi

Preventing fertilizer from rushing into a nearby bayou is not rocket science, but it does take a dedicated farmer and Pete Hunter of Stovall Farms is one of those dedicated Mississippi farmers.

In April, Pete spoke with the Mississippi River/ Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force when they toured his farm in Coahoma County, telling them about the steps Stovall Farms has taken to lower its environmental footprint.

Stovall Farms uses a series of ditches and pipes to recirculate water. This keeps water containing fertilizers from washing into nearby Harris Bayou. It also allows the farm to reuse water, reducing their need to pull from underground water sources, which are declining in the Mississippi Delta where the farm is located. Water is collected in a man-made reservoir and then used to irrigate crops.



LEFT: Agriculture leaders gather at Stovall Farms to see how conservation practices are trapping nutrients.

Nutrients, like common fertilizers used on farms, can impair water bodies. Harris Bayou sends its waters to the Mississippi River, eventually flowing to the Gulf of Mexico. This Task Force is studying ways to prevent impairment of the Gulf.

A high level of nutrients such as phosphorous, nitrogen and sediments in water can cause a pocket of water to form that lacks oxygen. These areas are called hypoxic zones, and the Nation's largest is located off the coast of Louisiana. It is fueled by rich nutrients discharged from the Mississippi River.

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This Task Force met for a two-day meeting in Memphis and it included a visit to Stovall Farms, which has been described as an innovator in conservation. This rice, soybean and corn farm has worked with Federal, state and non-government organizations to get funding and advice for environmentally-friendly conservation practices on their farm.

Members of the Task Force had the chance to see how this farm is using Farm Bill and EPA 319 funding to ensure a cleaner operation. Funding for some of the conservation actions came from a Natural Resources Conservation Service program called Conservation Innovation Grants . Stovall Farms is a demonstration site for the grant and it helps steer the direction of future conservation practices.

Scientists with the U.S. Geological Survey and Mississippi State University are sampling water to measure the effectiveness of the different conservation actions/practices in use on the farm.

Additional partners include the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, Delta F.A.R.M., Delta Wildlife, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

For more information on Conservation Innovation Grants or other NRCS programs, visit www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov.

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