

MISSISSIPPI FARMER OF THE YEAR

CALS Alumnus establishes legacy of leadership

BY VANESSA BEESON

AN MSU COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND Life Sciences alumnus was recently selected as the 2014 Mississippi Farmer of the Year.

Danny Murphy, who graduated from MSU with a bachelor's degree in agronomy in 1974, represented Mississippi at the 25th Annual Southeastern Farmer of the Year Awards, sponsored by Swisher International, through its Swisher Sweets cigar brand, and the Sunbelt Expo. While Murphy has been busy tending crops of his own, he also makes it a mission to be a voice within the farming community.

LEADERSHIP ROOTS STEM FROM MSU

"I studied agronomy; which prepared me for farming," Murphy said. "Beyond that, however, my time at MSU gave me the opportunity to be a leader and take an active role in several agricultural organizations."

Murphy was an active participant in the agronomy club; Alpha Zeta, an agricultural honor society; and Farmhouse Fraternity.

When Murphy graduated from MSU and returned home to Canton, Mississippi, to help run the family farm, he carried on the tradition of leadership. He has since devoted countless hours to the broader community, farming, and beyond.

Murphy has been a farmer for 41 years. In 2014, his non-irrigated land included 840 acres of soybeans and 760 acres of corn. His yields were 46 bushels of soybeans per acre and 155 bushels of corn per acre. He has practiced no-till farming for several years.

His role as a leader for the American Soybean Association, or ASA, is what led him to adopt no-till farming practices.

"I have been on the ASA board of directors for several years and have experienced firsthand the global push to adopt agricultural practices that promote sustainability," Murphy said. "I was part of the task force that recommended ways for the United States soybean industry to increase sustainability practices. I saw no-till farming



Danny Murphy on his farm in Canton, Mississippi. Photo by Kevin Hudson.

Danny Murphy has practiced no-till farming for several years. Photo by Kevin Hudson.



as a way to reduce soil erosion and help the environment while reducing the cost of labor and equipment. I felt if I were going to advocate the concept, I should practice it.”

A PILLAR OF THE COMMUNITY

At a local level, Murphy has held leadership roles in organizations such as the Canton Lions Club, Thornton Chapel United Methodist Church, the Madison County USDA Farm Service Agency, the Madison County Library Board, the Madison County Cooperative, and Canton Academy.

At the state level, he has been a longstanding member of the Mississippi Soybean Association, and has served on the Mississippi Soybean Promotion Board, and the Mississippi Corn Promotion Board, serving in a leadership capacity within all organizations at various times.

On a national level, he has served extensively with the American Soybean Association. He has been an ASA director since 2005, serving in various leadership roles including as a member of the organization's Farm Bill Task Force from 2010 to 2014. Nationally, he has also been a director of the United States Soybean Export Council and on the USDA's Agricultural Trade Advisory Committee.

A RECENT WIN

Murphy considers the 2014 Farm Bill, passed by Congress and signed by the President this past February, as an instance when his work helped drive policy changes to positively impact farmers.

“This bill was delayed, extended, failed in the House, lapsed, and finally passed. It was about a three year process, so I was vice-president, president and then chairman of

the ASA by the time it was signed,” Murphy said.

Initially, the ASA supported the Senate (ARC or Agricultural Risk Coverage) proposals for the Farm Bill. The House Bill (PLC or Price Loss Coverage) recoupled payments and planted acres.

“This would have reversed Farm Bill policy that has been in place since the early 90's, and would have reduced planting flexibility for growers. It could also lead to a violation of our World Trade Organization, or WTO, commitments,” Murphy said. “Basing price support on planted acres would reduce planting flexibility because growers could have based their planting decision on which crop provided the most government support, not on market conditions. Distorting planting decisions because of government payments would then put U.S. growers and the U.S. farm program at greater risk of being challenged by other countries under the WTO.”

As ASA became more familiar with the proposals, they saw the value in giving growers a choice of farm programs (ARC or PLC), but felt payments in both programs should use a base acre approach instead of the proposed planted acres in the House bill. The ASA worked closely with Senator Stabenow, chair of Senate Agriculture Committee and Senator Cochran, who had become ranking member on the Senate Agriculture Committee to express their concern on this point during the conference committee. Ultimately, the conference report did offer growers a choice of ARC or PLC, basing any possible payments on an average of the past five years' planting history.

“We think this is a win for growers, giving them a choice in farm programs that best

fit their situation, using an updated base acre history that won't reduce planting flexibility, and shouldn't be in violation of our WTO commitments,” Murphy said. “This is especially important to soybean growers since almost 60 percent of our U.S. crop and nearly 90 percent of our Mississippi crop is exported. Our success is based on our access to world markets.”

Murphy said planting flexibility is also critical for Mississippi, since the climate gives growers a wide choice of crops to plant including soybeans, corn, cotton, rice, wheat, grain sorghum, and peanuts.

INSPIRING OTHERS

After spending a number of years contributing to several community-based organizations, Murphy considers farmers taking an active role in their communities and commodity organizations as critical to improving the agricultural industry as a whole.

“It is vital for growers to realize we do make a difference; that our voices do count, and we have a responsibility to speak up about the policies being developed in Washington,” Murphy said. “We need to understand how policy is going to affect us and what it is going to do for us. I encourage all producers, whatever commodity they are growing, to take an active role in their organizations and really let policymakers know how policy impacts the farm.”

Murphy says the best thing about farming is being able to plant a crop, see it grow, nurture it along the way, and know that your harvest will feed many.

Murphy's actions within the farming community have done just that; future generations of farmers will reap the benefits of his legacy of leadership for years to come.