

# FARMING AS A DELTA FAMILY LEGACY

Cultivating hope for the next generation

BY VANESSA BEESON

**IN THE HEART OF THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA**, the **Bush family** embodies a legacy of farming that spans generations, deeply intertwined with Mississippi State University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs). **Wayne Bush**, at 89 years old, has cultivated not only crops but a family deeply embedded in the agricultural traditions of the Mississippi Delta.

Wayne, a '59 agricultural engineering alumnus, pioneered his family's path at MSU as the first in his family to obtain a degree from a four-year university. His journey began with a desire to advance farming technologies, as he faced the bleak agricultural prospects of his early days.

"Back then, after the war, I went into agricultural engineering because agriculture looked bad. We didn't have any labor. We didn't know if we'd be farming long or not but it got better," Wayne explained.

His family had 100 head of Black Angus cattle that they sold to help pay for his tuition. He also worked all four years, two in the engineering department and two in the cafeteria. He was also a part of MSU's livestock judging team, selling a prize bull one year that helped pay his tuition.

His foresight led him to focus on irrigation and land forming, which he adeptly applied to enhance his family's farming operations upon returning home.

Wayne's father, **Miller**, initially farmed in Carroll County before moving to the Delta, transforming their lives with modern amenities and expanded agricultural opportunities. From humble beginnings with mules and minimal machinery, the Bushes have grown their enterprise, named New Hope Farms, to encompass

12,000 acres, cultivating cotton, corn, and soybeans.

Wayne and his wife, Celeste, have three sons—**John, David, and Chris**—all CALs alumni who continued the legacy. Now their grandson, **Jacob**, an agribusiness alumnus, has embraced their heritage and contributed to the family's farming success. While **Alex**, another grandson, didn't go to work directly for the family farm, the 2013 agricultural science alumnus has remained in the agricultural field.

John, an 1982 agriculture engineering technology and business alumnus, always envisioned a future intertwined with the family farm.

"I always knew I wanted to go to MSU and major in some form of agriculture. Agriculture is in my blood," he said, reflecting on his natural progression from childhood farm work to obtaining his degree and helping manage land deals to sustain and expand the family's operations.

John remembers his time at MSU fondly.

"My freshmen year I joined Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) fraternity with three of my childhood friends, and it was perfect timing for me. I was a young, green 17-year-old, and I got to know some older guys who were leaders, and they had a huge influence on me. I was the youngest, smallest guy in the fraternity, and my big brother was the biggest, oldest guy. We're still friends today," he said.

John began MSU in 1978 as the first computers made their way onto campus and into the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. During a senior survey with **Dr. Bill Fox**, who would go on to become the CALs dean, John recommended a dedicated computer lab for

agricultural students, which was put in place and still exists today. At the time, he had no idea the impact technology would have on farming.

"I think in the last 20 years agriculture has advanced more than in the previous 100 years," he said. "Every improvement technology has made has cost us money, but it has made our job easier."

David and Chris followed in similar footsteps, with their educational pursuits at MSU reinforcing their commitment to agriculture.

David, also an SAE and an '83 agriculture engineering technology and business graduate, emphasized the importance of the connections made at MSU, which have supported his farming career.

"I didn't know there was another job. I was coming back to the farm, period," he said. "We had small classes in the major. All of us started as freshmen together and all graduated together, so we got to be good friends. I'm still in contact with them now," he said.

David loves working outside.

"That's my favorite thing. I'm outside and not stuck in a cubicle in an office," said David, who also enjoys the fabrication side of the business, recently customizing a work truck with a high-capacity sprayer to better address weed control several fields at a time.

Chris also loves working outdoors. Perhaps his favorite aspect of the work is the research. The '94 agronomy major has always been interested in the nuances of crop fertility.

"I love test plots," said Chris, who conducted on-farm trials with **Dr. Jac Varco**, an MSU Professor Emeritus. "We worked

The Bush family (L to R): Jacob, Alex, David, Wayne, John, and Chris.  
(Photo by Dominique Belcher)



with Dr. Varco on fertility because I've always wanted to figure out the variable nitrogen rate on cotton. We used a sensor on a tractor that would read 25 feet in each direction to sense cotton growth. After that, Dr. Varco would write a prescription for nitrogen based on what the machine picked up," he said.

Chris said he's always conducting seed variety test plots, and the farm has participated in tests plots for Delta Pine and the MAFES Official Variety Trials in the past. He also grows test plots for NexGen cotton. He looks forward to conducting more research in the future.

"Oftentimes, we get so busy, and we must do things so fast, we don't have the time to conduct research or try out new technology. That's something I want to do more of in the future," he said.

Alex, David's son, worked as a crop insurance claims manager for a few years out of college and is now a crop insurance agent with First South Farm Credit.

"I try to do the best I can to help farmers manage their risk for day-to-day farm

operations. I'm very pro-farmer, so I'll do anything I can to help a farmer in my line of work whether that's helping them save money or educating them on any benefits they may not know about," he said.

Jacob, Chris's son, the youngest farming Bush, graduated summa cum laude in agribusiness in 2024. While he completed an internship with Helena in Tennessee the summer of 2023 to see the corporate side of the ag industry, he chose to embrace farming full-time, a passion nurtured from childhood. His deep appreciation for his family's history and his role in its future underscores the enduring bond between the Bush family and their land.

"Watching my grandfather, dad, and uncles work hard together made me appreciate what's around us and the opportunity we have," Jacob said.

John echoes Jacob's sentiment.

"I feel blessed our grandfather and father had vision. They weren't afraid to buy land. Many people back then thought land was too expensive. Had they been

timid, we wouldn't have what we have now. We have a good spread that keeps us all busy. While we may have different ideas of how we're going to accomplish something, we all want the same result. We work well together and now we have a nephew on board, and he's been training since he was eight years old, so he'll be a big asset," he said.

For Wayne, it's about keeping the family together.

"That's what is so great about working with my children and grandchildren. That was my father's goal. He wanted to keep the family together. I've done my best in that, and I'm proud they all work together well," he said.

The Bush family legacy is about more than agricultural success; it's about how a family can grow together, bound by shared values and a deep love for the land, underpinned by an educational foundation provided by Mississippi State University. As the Bushes plant for the next harvest, it's clear that the Maroon and White roots in this Delta farming family run deep. 🐾