

Shoal, Piney, and Swan Creek Watersheds of Alabama

FARM #16

Stan Usery has farmed in Limestone County, Alabama, since he was 15 years old, when he planted 23 acres of cotton. In the years following, he continued to farm part-time and increased his acreage throughout college. Now, Stan and his father farm 950 acres, which include the original 23 from 1997.

On their farm, the father-son duo grow cotton, corn, wheat and soybeans. They also own nine poultry houses, which produce more than 5.5 million pounds of meat annually.

“Cotton is our major crop, because it provides the most consistent performance under our climate and environmental conditions,” Stan said. He rotates cotton with wheat, corn and soybeans.

The operation has been 100 percent no-till since 1998. The practice, according to Stan, uses less fuel and labor, maintains better soil structure, and improves organic matter.

Stan has been using cover crops for many years on various crops and acres; however, the practice is still adapting for him. “Cover crop usage has kind of been an evolving practice on our farm, and it’s still evolving today. I haven’t figured out exactly,” he said. “I believe in them and I know that they work. But it’s a matter of learning how to best implement them on my farm.” Currently, he is trying to learn more about multi-species covers and how to implement them behind their cotton-grain rotation.

With his bachelor’s degree in agronomy and soils and master’s degree in plant pathology, both from Auburn University, Stan believes he has a greater understanding of what these practices are doing to his soils. “You’re just creating soil structure,” he said. That improved soil structure comes with more organic matter and microbes, which boosts soil health. “There’s a complex ecosystem underneath the soil, and anything we do to promote that ecosystem pays dividends,” said Stan. “I need to keep something living in that soil 365 days a year to keep feeding all the micro-flora and whatever is in the soil, including earthworms, because they’re turning the organic matter into usable nutrients.”



For Stan, there’s no doubt that these practices are worth it. “Conservation tillage and a general soil health plan is worth every penny that I’ve put into it. I feel like I get a return on investment - monetarily and from an environmental impact aspect.”

View Stan’s interview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNOa6g61O5E>

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