

RICE FARMERS OF THE YEAR

Will Hunter and Laura Hunter Collins, brother and sister, Bell City, Missouri have been named the 2019 Rice Farmers of the Year at the 22nd Annual National Cotton & Rice Conference, Southern Corn & Soybean Conference, Southern Precision Ag Conference and the Delta States Irrigation Conference.

Willow & Co. farmed 6,025 acres and managed 860 in 2018. Rice acres were 2,390; cotton 1,460 and soybeans totaled 2,175 acres. Will and Laura combine their expertise and

Mississippi State educations; Will, ag econ degree and Laura, ag business degree to operate Willow and Company. Will brings an Ag Econ degree from Mississippi State. He is married to Tara and has two children, Max Henry and Ann Ellis. Laura earned an Ag Business degree from Mississippi State. She is married to Ryan and has two daughters, Hunter and Maggie.

Willow & Co. can trace their love of farming to their grandfather, William Pinnell Hunter. Their father, Sam, later managed the family farm. In

2003, Willow & Co. was formed. By 2013 Willow & Co. became the sole owners of the family land.

Their willingness to try new things and adopt technology and conservation practices will serve them well as they continue growing their operation in the Bootheel. They have been able to reduce their water use and their carbon footprint while maintaining or increasing their rice yields.

Will and Laura do their own tests on management practices to improve profitability and land stewardship.

This has led them to increase their percentage of row irrigated rice over the past two years. Transitioning to a row rice rotation where possible has saved on tillage trips across fields. Will, Laura and Wendell Minson, their consultant, tested for possible water savings row rice offers over conventional flooded rice by using well monitoring and soil moisture sensors. During planting and harvest, Laura is constantly monitoring progress on her iPad and is able to look at live yield maps being generated from multiple combines at another location. They have never shied away from hosting a field day or a group discussion on row rice, allowing area farmers to learn from combined experiences.

Will member of: Board of Directors, Southeast Cooperative Service Company; National Cotton Council; Missouri Soybean Association; Missouri Corn Growers, Cotton Producers of Missouri and Missouri Rice Producers. Will was named 2009 Missouri Outstanding Young Farmer.

Laura member of: Sikeston Regional Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors; SEMO Regional Water District Board of Directors; Southeast Missouri Agribusiness Leaders Advisory Committee; Missouri Corn Growers; Missouri Soybean Association; Cotton Producers of Missouri and Missouri Rice Producers. Laura was 2012 Farm Woman of the Year Award- Sikeston Regional Chamber of Commerce and Class of 2017 Missouri Corn Growers Corn-Roots Leadership Academy.

The 2017 New Madrid County SWCD Farmer of the Year Award went to Willow & Co. Δ

