

Joe Townsend

2009 Cotton Consultant of the Year



Cotton Farming

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remarkable career and is a true friend of the farmer.

Some people are born to be cotton consultants. Joe Townsend of Lula, Miss., is such a person. No matter how many career options he could've pursued growing up in Del Rio, Texas, he was destined to become a consultant. Why, you might ask? That's an easy question to answer. Townsend simply loves working with farmers and giving them advice on how to raise their crops. It's that simple.

Forget about working in an office all day or sitting in front of a computer or working in a corporate environment.

This Mississippi consultant has logged 38 years in a remarkable career and is a true friend of the farmer. For that reason, we at *Cotton Farming* magazine join Syngenta in congratulating Joe as the 2009 Cotton Consultant of the Year.

Is there a job that Joe could've enjoyed more than this one? Probably not. He relishes hitting the ground every morning at 5 to start checking fields. Weather has never stopped him – even if it's 100 degrees in the shade, freezing cold in the winter or if a hurricane is blowing through the Mississippi Delta.

The road to his current job in Mississippi was a long one, and there were plenty of hurdles he had to overcome along the way. In the end, his patience and perseverance paid off. Initially, he was a pre-law student at Texas Tech University, but that career changed dramatically one summer after he took a job checking fields in Pecos, Texas. He liked the job so much that he changed his major to entomology when he returned to classes in the fall.

Career Goals Are Finally Realized

Then the real journey began, and it would be a long and winding road before he wound up in Lula where he currently resides with wife Kim, daughter PJ and son Luke.

After receiving his bachelor's degree from Texas Tech, he went to work for a chemical company and moved to Corpus Christi, Texas, and later to Iowa. While enduring three winters in Iowa, he made this statement to family and friends: "This weather is too cold for a Southern boy." That's when he headed south to Mississippi State University. It was while attending graduate school there and working with Dr. Aubrey Harris that he discovered how much he admired the work of consultants.

"I worked with a lot of great consultants, and I liked what I saw," says Townsend. "In the summertime, I worked on weekends checking cotton fields, and I loved the entire experience."

He finished his master's degree and then headed toward Charleston, Miss., and befriended a couple of county agents. Immediately, he started knocking on doors trying to convince farmers to take him on as a consultant. It wasn't easy winning them over, but Joe wasn't easily discouraged. He had a goal and was determined to learn more about a farmer's field than anybody else – including the farmer.

Along the way, he also learned to adapt to a changing environment. Because of a crop mix that now includes corn, wheat, soybeans and cotton, today's consultant has to know more than he did just five years ago.

Through it all, Townsend has thrived and continues to maintain



a strong producer client base that encompasses nearly 30,000 acres in Mississippi.

"As everyone knows, it's a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week job," he says. "In the summertime, it's hard for me to sleep, and I do not own an alarm clock. I don't sleep past 5 a.m., and most of the time I'm sitting there in my truck at the field waiting for the sun to come up."

Still, the key to succeeding as a consultant, according to Townsend, lies in an ability to win the confidence of producers.

"This is what probably scares some young folks who want to become consultants," he says. "It never did bother me. I figured if the farmer didn't want to hire me, I could go bang on somebody else's door."

"Also, if you can't be honest with farmers when you make a mistake, you don't need to be working with them. I don't know if a farmer appreciates that, but it's just the way I am. I've never been any other way."

As for other questions that today's consultant might face, here's a sampling of Townsend's thoughts:

How important is a supportive family for a consultant?

"I can't say enough about my wife Kim and what she does for this business. She's a research ag economist from Australia and is the accounting and computer expert. She inputs all of the soil sampling data into the computer. I don't think I could do my job without her."

How about some advice for a young aspiring consultant?

"You need to make footprints in that field. Get out there and walk those turnrows. That's the only way you can help the farmer. You have to be willing to do that if you plan on surviving in this business."

How does it feel to be recognized by your fellow consultants in winning this award?

"It's easily one of the most special moments in my career. I didn't expect it, but I am extremely proud and grateful. When I think about the consultants who have received this award through the years, it's very humbling."

How has the job of a consultant changed through the years?

"I am responsible for so much more – like the fertilizer program, variety selections and soil sampling. That's totally different from the way it was 20 years ago."



Prior to harvest, Mississippi producer John McKee (left) examines cotton on his farm with Townsend.



Joe enjoys spending family time with daughter PJ, wife Kim, son Luke, his grown children Christi, Sally, Bo and seven grandkids.

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Cotton Consultant of the Year Award Recipients, 1981-2009

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| 1981 Bob Stanford, Flagstaff, Ariz. | 1991 Clyde Sartor, Vicksburg, Miss. | 2001 Harold Lambert, Innis, La. |
| 1982 Jep Gates, Memphis, Tenn. | 1992 John Christian, Raymondville, Texas | 2002 Lee Hutchins, Sinton, Texas |
| 1983 Dennis Bouchard, Minter City, Miss. | 1993 Billy McLawhorn, Cove City, N.C. | 2003 Danny Pierce, Princeton, N.C. |
| 1984 John Nickelsen, Shafter, Calif. | 1994 Dwain Reed, Courtland, Miss. | 2004 Tucker Miller, Drew, Miss. |
| 1985 Dwight Lincoln, Portland, Ark. | 1995 Barry Aycock, Parma, Mo. | 2005 John Hunter, Lubbock, Texas |
| 1986 Grady Coburn, Cheneyville, La. | 1996 Ray Young, Wisner, La. | 2006 Jack Royal, Leary, Ga. |
| 1987 Stanley Nemece, Snook, Texas | 1997 Lonnie Bull, Cameron, S.C. | 2007 Danny Moore, Marion, Ark. |
| 1988 Robert Moore, Hartsville, S.C. | 1998 Chuck Farr, Crawfordville, Ark. | 2008 Ray Young, Wisner, La. |
| 1989 Curtis Wilhelm, Harlingen, Texas | 1999 Bob Griffin, Jonesboro, Ark. | (Lifetime Achievement Award) |
| 1990 Mills Rogers, Cleveland, Miss. | 2000 Roger Carter, Clayton, La. | 2009 Joe Townsend, Coahoma, Miss. |