

Sonny and Ryan Kirby - Belcher, Louisiana

Secret to Success Attention to Details



"I want to feed the world by utilizing the resources we have—"

Sonny and Ryan Kirby farm 2,500 acres of cotton, corn, soybeans, and wheat along the Red River in Caddo Parish, Louisiana. This father and son team are 3rd and 4th generation farmers, and when you talk to them about farming, you don't hear as much about tractors and plows as you hear about precision agriculture, yield data maps, computer programs, soil electroconductivity, and technology testing.

In January 2010, Ryan Kirby was recognized as the **2011 Tomorrow's Top Producer Sustainability Award** winner by Bayer CropScience and Top Producer Magazine. This award recognizes young producers who excel in business and environmental sustainability. Ryan was recognized because he shows a passion for agriculture and for growing his crops in the most sustainable way through water-conserving irrigation systems, precision application of fertilizer and inputs, and diversified crop rotations to manage risk.

"I want to feed the world by utilizing the resources we have—and at the same time not undermine the earth," said Ryan. His goal is to provide a good farm income for his family while conserving the natural resources of his farm.

Sonny Kirby,
NRCS District
Conservationist
Brian Baiamonte,
and Ryan Kirby

Sonny Kirby says, **"Farming is a business.** We study soils maps, nutrient usage, and yield data to determine where to apply the fertilizer, how much seed to plant and where to plant it, and how much irrigation water is needed by each row of our crops." Always looking for a more productive way



to farm and build sustainability, the Kirbys are currently conducting a pilot test with Louisiana State University to determine the effectiveness of Agrotain in controlling nitrogen loss.

Sonny Kirby

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What is PHAUCET?

The Kirbys utilize the PHAUCET Irrigation Efficiency Program. This computer program was designed to calculate existing irrigation system performance and define alternatives for improving irrigation efficiency. PHAUCET helps farmers determine the sizes of the holes in the polypipe that best distribute the available water.

"Irrigation is the best form of crop insurance."

Sonny Kirby

To find out more about PHAUCET, EQIP, or conservation planning, contact your nearest NRCS office or soil and water conservation district. Contact information is included on the back page of this [Conservation Update](#).



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Ryan Kirby

Ryan Kirby believes the secret to their farm's success is attention to details.

"There is a wealth of information available to farmers today to help them apply fertilizer at variable rates to match the needs of the soil, control the amount of water used to irrigate each row according to row length, and determine the seeding rate according to soil type," said Ryan. "You can't afford to ignore the data."

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service works with the Kirbys through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to help implement cutting edge conservation technology on the farm.

"EQIP helped to pay for a lot of the new technology that we use on the farm today," said Sonny Kirby. "We started working with EQIP in 2000, and through the years, it has provided incentive payments to help purchase equipment and install conservation practices that help with water and nutrient management."

Paying attention to details means the Kirbys save money on fertilizer, fuel, and irrigation costs while increasing crop yields. It also means the Kirbys are conserving and enhancing the natural resources of their farm—ensuring future generations have an opportunity to farm along the Red River in Caddo Parish.

What is precision agriculture?

Precision agriculture is a management system that is information and technology based. It is site specific and uses one or more of the following sources of data: soils, crops, nutrients, pests, moisture, or yield, for optimum profitability, sustainability, and protection of the environment.

For more information on precision agriculture, visit:
www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/energy/precision.html



Ryan Kirby Conservationists