



Past Success: Future Challenge

Helping on the family farm started as early as six years old, school was adjourned at noon and children of all ages would go home and pick cotton for the remainder of the day. Dan Taylor, a young boy during the 50s spent his days picking cotton and daydreaming of machinery that could harvest and gin cotton in the field.

Nearly 60 years later, engineers are designing round bale cotton strippers and genetically modified crops. We may not be ginning cotton in the field, but it could be the next step. Technology is constantly changing in the agricultural industry, and Dan Taylor has seen it all. From handpicking cotton, to a 24-row planter, he has seen agriculture become more efficient.

"I've been part of the generation that has seen everything from the most basic to modern," Taylor said.

As a retired cotton farmer, cotton ginner, and agricultural science teacher, Taylor has been involved in many aspects of the agriculture industry. 50 years of agricultural experience teaches you a lot about the industry; however, it also gives you unique insight into the future. Dr. Steve Frazee, Chairman of the Department of Agricultural Education and Communications, considers Taylor a successful alumnus and an innovative thinker.

"He went from running an old gin, to a state-of-the-art gin that brought people from all over the world to look at what he had done as an innovator and being innovative in his decisions for moving ahead," Frazee said.

Though times are changing, Taylor has an optimistic view for the future of agriculture. After conversing with Taylor it is clear education, embracing new technology, and having the top managers and producers are the tools we need to utilize to create an efficient future for agriculture.

West Texas farming is hindered by the lack of water. Taylor said the technology for creating more advanced genetically modified crops is going to change farming practices and help combat this issue.

Taylor believes genetics to further improve crops is out there and waiting to be found. The U.S. is looked upon to feed the world; Taylor sees genetically modified crops as a key to feeding our growing population.

In Taylor's eyes, high school agriscience programs are a key piece for the future of agriculture. FFA enrollment and the number of students enrolled in agriculture science classes are increasing.

"There is not a subject in school that teaches leadership like the FFA," Taylor said.

Taylor says the changes being made by the board of education are creating a stronger agriscience

curriculum. Animal science and speech are two examples of classes that will soon become dual credit classes.

Another future change for agriculturists is the farm bill. The upcoming election will decide the fate of many farmers; Taylor is not quite sure the outcome will be positive.

“The only bright side of the farm bill is supplemental insurance; you can insure at a higher level without it costing excessively,” Taylor said.

Taylor fears the new farm bill is going to make it difficult for new farmers to enter the industry. Losing direct payments and target price are going to make borrowing money more difficult, Taylor said. With the high cost of equipment farmers need to borrow, with no direct payments or average yield, banks have no equity to base loans on, Taylor explained.

“A person who wants to farm bad enough, if he doesn’t have the family backing, will have to have a job and grow into it like I did,” Taylor said.

Taylor believes there are still people out there who are willing to help and guide young farmers. So many people think of help as lending money, Taylor said, but there are so many other ways people are willing to help.

“My advice to young farmers is, watch your pennies, don’t try to outlive the Jones, you don’t have to have the


newest all the time. Your debt load is important and it can make or break you,” Taylor said.

What is the true definition of a family farm? Taylor said the definition has changed so much over the years that it is a hard concept to define. Farms continue to grow larger and larger as efficiency improves. Taylor owns and rents land farmed by ten

different families 30 years ago. He said the decreasing number of farmers is the saddest part of the growing agriculture industry.

“It’s not the farmer’s desire to be the biggest in the area,” Taylor said. “We have been forced to.”

As farming technology becomes more efficient and fewer farmers are needed, Taylor says his goal is to keep up with the changing technology and continue to be as efficient as possible.

“I’m still optimistic. People have to eat and we’re one of the main providers,” Taylor said. “It’s going to take the top managers and producers and perseverance.” 

"There is a bright future for the young men and women who want to enter a career in agriculture."

Chancy Price
Looking, Thinking

