

## CASE STUDY

## DELTA FARMERS ADVOCATING RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

## CATEGORY

Water Quality  
Water Conservation

## LOCATION

Yazoo River Basin, Mississippi

## CONTACT

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## SYNOPSIS

Delta Farmers Advocating Resource Management (Delta F.A.R.M.) began in 1998 through the combined efforts of producers, sponsors, and partner agencies, to assist farmers and landowners in the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) in the Northwest Mississippi Delta region. The program aims to conserve water and reduce nonpoint source pollution from agriculture and to conserve, restore, and enhance the environment of the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta. Delta F.A.R.M. provides its members with technical information on conservation practices and promotes the members' current conservation efforts.

## SITUATION

Conventional agricultural practices negatively impact the surrounding environment and the health of people. Soil, air, and water quality, water conservation, waste disposal, and wildlife management are all issues that need to be addressed. Growers and landowners can utilize many different conservation measures, or BMPs, to improve the environmental health of their area and to improve their product in the long term. However, most farmers need education and new knowledge before they are able to implement new conservation measures. The complex challenge is to enhance the existing stewardship level of farmers and landowners without reducing their productivity or profitability.

## PROJECT APPROACH

The Delta F.A.R.M. program began its first year using a pilot program to test its operating procedures and data collection systems, through which 161,000 acres were evaluated. Membership and services to Delta F.A.R.M. are free to any landowner, farm operator, or land manager. The main goal of the program is to elevate the existing environmental stewardship level of the landowners and farm operators by implementing additional conservation practices, which will conserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources of the region without reducing productivity or profitability. It also aims to improve the existing conservation practices and environmental health of the region, as well as educate the producers on production systems and the public on the conservation efforts of the producers to elevate the image of agriculture.

Farmers and agency personnel developed a list of 46 specific BMPs that are both environmentally and economically sound for all types of agricultural systems in the Mississippi Delta. They fall into the general categories of soil conservation, water quality and conservation, pesticide, fertilizer, IPM, and petroleum stewardship, hazardous and solid waste disposal, and wildlife habitat enhancement and management. The list was used to create the Program Manual and the Annual Evaluation, which is conducted after the close of the growing season. Each year members are required to submit a questionnaire and site inspection, from which the data is analyzed to develop the annual stewardship report. The evaluation documents non-regulatory conservation information on each member's property and gives the farmers credit for their efforts in implementing BMPs. It also identifies areas on the land that can be improved with additional conservation measures. The data produces statistics that represent the percentage of farmers in the program that use a particular BMP or the acreage affected by the use of BMPs.



## RESULTS/ IMPACTS

The 2003 report showed that the Overall Stewardship Level of members was 82.31% voluntary compliance to conserve, restore and enhance the environment in the region, an improvement over the 1998 baseline level of 81.47 percent. The original goal of 400,000 acres was exceeded with the enrollment of 633,123 acres of land (24.3% of the total cropland in the region), all of which were evaluated annually. The organization believes that growers who are not members are also utilizing BMPs. The program provides growers with technical assistance to implement new BMPs, along with information on Federal Conservation Programs, cost sharing opportunities, and regulatory laws. Farmers also receive education through participation in demonstration farm field days and tours. Tours for the farmers focus on the application, installation, and economics of BMPs, while the tours for the public, agencies, and conservation organizations emphasize the environmental benefits of BMPs being used. Program members also receive the Program Manual and newsletter. They can request the services of Delta F.A.R.M. at any time throughout the year, whether it is information based or implementation oriented. By establishing a respected environmental organization, the producers of Northwest Mississippi have a voice when environmental issues are being discussed at the state and national level. Delta F.A.R.M. serves as the conduit between the farmers and governmental agencies.

## PARTNERS

Delta F.A.R.M. partners include Careful By Nature, Delta Council, Delta Wildlife, MS Association of Conservation Districts, MS Department of Agriculture and Commerce, MS Department of Environmental Quality, MS Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, MS Farm Bureau Federation, MS State Chemical Laboratory, MS Health Department, Mississippi State University, National Farm-A-Syst Program, USDA-ARS-NRCS-FSA, US Environmental Protection Agency, and the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta Joint Water Management District.

## FUNDING

Funders include Syngenta, Delta & Pine Land Co., FMC Corporation, Farmers Grain Terminal, Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and EPA Region 4.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

The fundamental feature of Delta FARM is that it is an organization run by farmers for farmers. Because the executive committee is comprised of local farmers and landowners, the leaders are directly linked with the program members and the issues and challenges they face. Information gathering and knowledge sharing, as well as free membership, are great benefits to farmers who are attempting to apply new measures in their agricultural practice. The annual report shows that some areas are still weak and require more focus in the future in order to reach the goal of 100% compliance. While additional practices are implemented, the organization needs to continue working to improve and expand existing conservation practices. Education is key, although not only education of the members but also of the general public, natural resource agencies, conservation organizations, and the media as well, through participation in tours, presentations, and the organization's website. Perhaps the greatest key to success is simply to encourage farmers as much as possible to continue to practice conservation BMPs.

## SOURCES

- Association of Delta Farmers Advocating Resource Management <http://www.deltafarm.net/>
- *The Delta Farmers Advocating Resource Management Project*, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, <http://www.epa.gov/region4/water/nps/projects/ms00-1a.pdf>
- 2003 *Delta FARM Environmental Stewardship Report*, BF Smith Foundation, Delta FARM <http://www.deltafarm.net/2003%20Env%20Stew%20Report.pdf>