

Mickey Diamond Shares His Tips for Progressive Farming



Author, E.B. White (of *Charlotte's Web* fame) once mused that, "The world is full of people who, since childhood, have never met an open doorway with an open mind." Well, White never met Joseph "Mickey" Diamond.

Diamond, who grows peanuts and cotton on his 1600-acre farm in Jay, Florida, is surely one of the most open-minded farmers you'll ever come across. That's especially true when it comes to tending to his operation, JM Diamond Farm, named for his dad, 82-year old John Marshall, who still works with his son every day. This third generation farmer is the very definition of progressive.

Early Adopter

"If you don't evolve you're going to get left behind," says the 52-year old. "If you don't keep up with what's going on in farming and in business in general, then you don't know what's out there that can help you make a profit."

Diamond has made it his business to keep up with the latest ag tools and technology. Back in 1995, Diamond was the first farmer in Santa Rosa County to plant BT cottonseed, an early contender in the genetically-modified category. He was also one of the first local growers to adopt on-farm peanut pod blasting, a method of determining peanut maturity.

Ever the early adopter, Diamond's interest in conservation led him and a neighbor to become the first farmers in the county to try strip-tilling.

"People told us we'd lost our minds," Diamond admits. "It worked great though and so we invested in more equipment the next year. We continue to farm that way today."

Today, strip-tilling is common in Jay and around Santa Rosa County. Once Diamond's neighbors saw how his soil held moisture during dry weather and helped prevent soil erosion and reduce costs, they were on board. So much so, that after he paved the way for other farmers, Santa Rosa boasted the most strip-tilled acres of any county in the state.

Diamond was also among the first to adopt the practice of planting cover crops to help enrich and protect the soil in both his peanut and cotton fields, and was one of the early users of precision agriculture techniques back in 1998. In the first year alone, he saved 29 tons of lime on a 56-acre field, and the next year, only had to apply lime to 40 out of 750 acres.

Naysayers took notice, and so did the local agricultural associations. Diamond's progressive farming practices led to



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several honors, including winning the [Florida Farm Bureau's This Farm CARES award](#) and being named [Northwest Florida Ag Innovator of the Year](#). But Diamond is quick to say he doesn't do any of it for the recognition.

“I'm not out there doing things to win an award,” he says, “but I don't mind being an influencer. I see lots of people that would like to try something but they want someone else to do it first. When they see it works, then they will go in that direction. Sometimes if you wait, you'll be that much further behind. Not every venture is perfect, but if you conform it to your operation, you can make it succeed.”

Diamond credits his dad with coaching him on “how to try things sensibly and in ways that protected me.”

“My dad was always conservative with farming techniques. I'm the progressive one... always wanting to try something new. But we both feel strongly about being good stewards of the land.”

Strong Financial Partner

Diamond says one thing that allows him to feel “someone always has his back” when he tries new farming practices is his long-running relationship with [Farm Credit of Northwest Florida](#).

“My dad was a Farm Credit customer as long as I can remember, so it made sense to me to go there when I needed a loan to buy my first piece of land,” recalls Diamond, who recently became a director for the Farm Credit of Northwest Florida board. “I was just a few years out of high school, but they were so supportive of me. I think they could see just how much farming was in my blood.”

Diamond has looked to Farm Credit for several [land loans](#) and [operating loans](#) over the years, as well as for [equipment loans](#), like the one he secured when he began experimenting with strip-tilling.

He says it's comforting to be able to work with a lending institution that understands the ups and downs farmers deal with year in and year out.

“The fact about farming...it's my livelihood. If we had a bad year, I've still got to find a way to keep going because that's my life, and Farm Credit knows and respects that...I keep going and they help me keep going.”

Planning for the Future

Diamond keeps it going not only for himself, but for his whole family...and for the future. Besides getting help from

his dad, Diamond's wife, Lisa, and daughter, Lauren, assist with bookkeeping and errands. He also employs two full-time farm hands and one part-time hand, plus several seasonal workers. His brother manages the family's timber operation.

“I would like my farm to continue for future generations,” Diamond muses, “but we haven't worked on a plan yet. We're all tied to the land by choice...we want to keep that tradition. That's where Farm Credit, and my lending officer, Jack Hittinger, help out a lot with their advice and guidance.”

Diamond and Hittinger have known each other for several years, ever since Hittinger joined the Farm Credit team.

“Jack really cares about his job and the people he works with. He wants to see you succeed and keep your dream going. He checks on me regularly,” says Diamond.

“Mickey is one of a kind,” describes Hittinger. “He's fearless in many ways, but also has his feet firmly planted on the ground. There's no place he would rather be than working his land and helping things grow. I consider it an honor to help make it even more possible for him to do that through the various loans we've worked on together.”

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“The thing about farming...anybody can't just say ‘I want to farm,’” Diamond explains. “It takes so much capital and resources. It takes mentors and a supportive family, and especially a lender like Farm Credit who speaks your language and understands your challenges. Now that I'm a board member, I get to see things from the other side. It makes me even more proud to be a customer.”

To find out more about how Farm Credit can help you achieve your operational goals, contact one of our experienced loan officers or visit our website at [GoRural.net](#) for answers to all of your financing needs. Because at Farm Credit of Northwest Florida we live up to our mission of “Helping Rural America Grow” and we are an AgVocator for everything that is important to you.



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