

WHITAKER FARMS • McGEHEE, AR

CASE STUDY



SPENDING LESS TIME IN THE OFFICE



Whitaker Farms

LOCATION **McGehee, AR**
OPERATION **Broad acre cropping**
CROPS **Rice, cotton,
corn, soybeans**
SPECIAL FOCUS **Soil health**

"For those growers, like myself, that prefer to spend time in the field instead of in the office, I would recommend using Agworld."

Jim Whitaker
Whitaker Farms, McGehee, AR

CHALLENGE

Whitaker Farms were utilizing a legacy farm information management system that they weren't able to use in the field, forcing Jim Whitaker to spend more time in the office than necessary.

SOLUTION

Advisory and accounting firm KCoe Isom advised the Whitakers to adopt Agworld as it would help them create more accurate field records. When they found out about Agworld's mobile capabilities, they decided to adopt Agworld in 2019.

RESULT

Because they now use Agworld to create work orders for both people inside as well as outside their organization, they are able to create field records whenever they need, wherever they are. This has resulted in an increase of efficiency throughout their farming operation.



Fifth generation farmers in Arkansas

The Whitaker family originally moved to the McGehee, AR, area in 1834 and took up farming. Brothers Jim and Sam Whitaker are fifth generation farmers, and currently at the helm of the farming operation. The family grows a rotation of cotton, corn, rice and soybeans, with continuous rice their speciality says Jim: “Our rice is all zero grade, which means it’s continuous rice. We’re growing rice year after year, and so we’ve designed our fields to be perfectly flat with perimeter roads, which gives us a great opportunity for waterfowl habitat.”



The rice growing practices adopted by the Whitakers and their 30+ staff are centred around sustainability and quality, allowing them to grow more quantity of rice while using less land and other resources. The resulting product gets shipped as a bulk commodity to local elevators, while a third of the rice gets produced exclusively for Ben's Original. Jim explains: “We grow a special variety for Ben's Original, but two years ago we also started to grow rice for our own brand, SmartRice. It’s our first foray into becoming a vertically integrated farming operation, and our rice is already available via Amazon and other channels.”

When growing other row crops, soil health and the environment is front-of-mind for the Whitakers as well. Jim: “With all of our row crops, our corn, cotton, and soybeans, we have cover crops and we’ve been doing a lot of mixing of cover crops. So we try to think that we’re covering every acre during the winter, with either a cover crop, which is a green biomass, or we’re covering it with water for a waterfowl habitat. Either way, we’re covering the soil, have less soil erosion and greater soil health.”

Digitizing farming operations

The Whitakers work with agricultural advisory and accounting firm KCoe Isom, who advised them to start utilizing Agworld back in 2019 to allow Jim to perform more managerial tasks while out in the field instead of having to spend more time in the office. Jim: “It’s hard to make me sit down for very long, I like to be on the move and spend time out on the farm instead of in the office. As soon as I had Agworld on an iPad and worked out how to send work orders and create farm maps, I was hooked.”

Jim continues: “To me the value in Agworld lies in the ability to use it whenever I need it, wherever I may be at that time. I can just pull over on the side of the road, and 30 seconds later I have a work order out and gone. With an operation the size of ours there are so many people and acres to manage, that I really can’t wait to create work orders until I happen to be back in the office. Everyone needs to know exactly what to do and every acre needs to be farmed as efficiently as possible, and Agworld helps us make that happen.”

In order to digitize their farm operations even further, Kyle Lassiter recently joined the team, who focuses on anything digital / data related for Whitaker Farms. Kyle has worked at the Mississippi State University research station after obtaining his Masters degree in plant science, after which he worked for a local John Deere dealership in the South, focusing on all their data tech work. With these 5 years of work experience, Kyle is ideally equipped for his role at Whitaker farms, he says. “At Whitaker Farms I’m going to do all of the ag data management and help with every aspect of digital record keeping.”

“I’m also going to get involved in the consulting side, as well as irrigation management. Basically, whenever our specialized crop scouts need somebody to step in and really knock out a project, I can be that person. Same for anything to do with technology on tractors, I have all that knowledge and look forward to sharing that with everyone else here, so I know I will be able to add value to the business.”

Jim adds: “Kyle’s task is to be in charge of all digital systems such as Agworld and MyJohnDeere, and ensure that we are maximizing their capabilities. Once we have the data collection and record keeping aspects organized, I look forward to us getting more into the analytical side of things. Being able to analyze the data we’ve created in past seasons in Agworld to help guide us in future seasons will be the next step forward for our organization.”

Creating work orders

While use of Agworld started with creating work orders for Whitaker Farms, Jim says that with Kyle as part of the team they will now incorporate Agworld in more of the workflow: “We want all our in-field operations in Agworld to go from work order to actual, while also adding costs, budgets, and everything else we can. Everything still starts for us with creating a work order, but our whole team is used to this process now, so it’s time to take the next step.”

“Nothing happens on our farm without a work order, so it’s a great way for us



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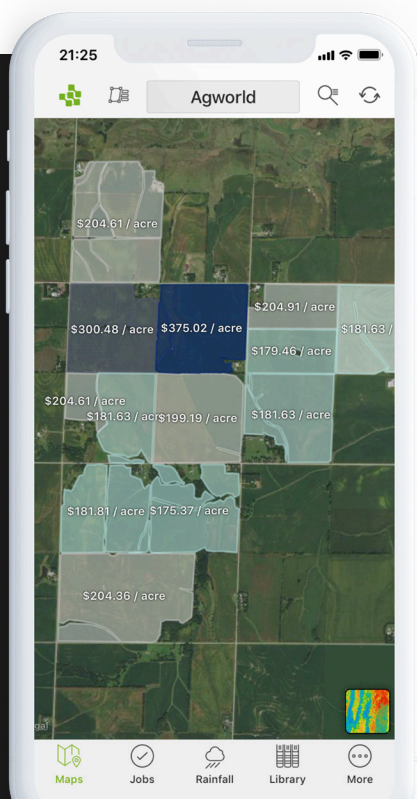
Jim Whitaker

Whitaker Farms, McGehee, AR



to keep track of jobs coming up as well as having an audit trail of what we've done. Now that Kyle will focus on making sure that we create a data set that is as complete as possible, the digital work orders make it easy for him to ensure that not a single operation gets missed in that process."

Jim concludes with: "Having Agworld available to me wherever I am, helps make so many things easier for us as a team. Creating and sending work orders is just one thing, but being able to pull up maps, using the measure tool, viewing NDVI imagery, and many other aspects - it's all those 'little things' that make life easy for me. For those growers that, like myself, prefer to spend time in the field instead of in the office, I would recommend using Agworld as well."



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