



Gin Managers Cotton To Training Classes

DAVID NANCE (K7799-2)

See-through panels on the micro-gin allow students to observe the ginning process—all the way from crude cotton to finished product emerging here.

Lloyd (Mike) Inlow of Hickory Valley, Tennessee, made a decision 5 years ago that helped make a big difference in the operation of Hickory Valley Cotton Gin Company, where he is gin manager. Inlow went to cotton ginning school to improve his ability and add to his already 7 years' experience in cotton ginning.

Ginners' schools are sponsored by the Agricultural Research Service, National Cotton Ginners Association, and the Cooperative Extension System. They are thought to transfer ginning technology at the user level far better than any other method in use today.

"Cotton ginners can go there to learn the latest information on how to preserve lint quality and increase gin

efficiency," says ARS agricultural engineer W. Stanley Anthony, who heads research at the Stoneville (Mississippi) Cotton Ginning Laboratory. The lab's mission is to develop new technologies and substantiate older ones.

In terms of efficiency, Inlow says, "We've nearly doubled our baling capacity in the last 4 years. We've gone from ginning 8 bales an hour to 14." He says that like students in law school, they learn at ginning school how to find information so they'll know where to look when a problem comes up.

Inlow credits technical knowledge gained at the ginning school with helping him make changes in the gin operation and its machinery. "We

didn't buy new equipment but instead modified and made adjustments to existing machines," he says.

Stacey Harrell, a computer systems analyst for the Dumas Cotton Gin in Dumas, Arkansas, says, "Even though I had observed the ginning operation while growing up and had some experience, I really didn't know the details until I attended the school. I learned exactly what each machine does and how it affects the cotton quality."

Harrell took Level I instruction in 1996 and this summer plans to take Level II. He hopes to be certified in the years to come.

"I definitely think the schooling and certification help our business. Farmers ask questions about the

various grades of cotton, and how I answer them gives them a higher confidence in our company," says Harrell.

In the past, ginners had to learn by the hard road of experience. The school, now in its 12th year, offers a systematic method for learning how to improve cotton fiber. In 1992, the school began offering optional certification to ginners.

"Certification means competency. And competency attracts more cotton farmers to place their cotton in our gin," says Bobby Greene, President of Servico in Courtland, Alabama.

Located in the northwest part of Alabama, Servico has 30 full-time employees. Greene says, "Two of our employees—Kenneth Montgomery and Willie Cross—became master ginners in 1996. I believe that their status as master ginners instills a higher degree of confidence in our customers."

Greene was so pleased with their achievement and the improved efficiency of his business he gave 10 percent pay raises to Montgomery and Cross.

"Over the years, I've sent at least 10 employees to take one or more levels of the training," says Greene. "Every year, there's something new to learn at the school."

These individuals aren't the only ginners who are receiving benefits from the intensive 3-day training sessions held in Stoneville and at other locations. About 3,000 ginners representing cotton gins in 15 states have passed through the Stoneville gin school, according to Anthony, who is one of the instructors and co-developers of the curriculum at Stoneville.

One of the school's original founders was Bill Mayfield. Stationed in Memphis, Tennessee, he is the national program leader for cotton ginning in USDA's Coopera-

tive State Research, Education, and Extension Service. Mayfield came up with the idea of certification and believes that cotton gin operators, like automobile mechanics, should have some way of proving their competency on the job.

The first school for cotton ginners was held at the ARS Cotton Ginning Research Unit in Stoneville in 1985. Similar schools are held at the other ARS ginning research units in Lubbock, Texas, and Las Cruces, New Mexico. An additional 1,700

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Students scrutinize the full-sized gin facility's work area and machinery for safety violations and afterwards discuss the various problems noted.

ginners have attended at those two training sites.

And ARS researchers helped launch the first ginning school in Australia in 1993. Now training sessions are run there by the Australian cotton industry every year.

Cotton ginners from 15 states have attended at least one level or more of training, reports Anthony.

- Level I—covers proper maintenance of gin equipment, air use and drying, electrical systems, and gin safety.

- Level II—offers advanced training in these areas and adds the study of pneumatics, waste collection, and gin management tips.

- Level III—reviews the ginning system and provides information on gin air systems, drying and moisture restoration systems, bale presses, hydraulic systems, and cottonseed handling systems.

Special emphasis is placed on safety in the cotton gin and common hazards that can occur in the operation of machinery. A Red Cross course is also part of the curriculum, and successful completion is required for certification.

"Students have the opportunity to meet with other ginners from other states, and find out what problems they have and how to solve them," says Anthony.

Enrollees in the school should have at least 3 years' experience of working in a gin. Fees of \$90 to attend Levels I and II and \$120 for Level III are charged to help offset the school's operating costs. The NCGA handles all monetary and administrative matters for the schools. Cooperators from the ginning industry help instruct classes at all levels.

"The Stoneville lab is unique in that we have a mini-gin and other machines with Plexiglas sides, so the students can watch the cotton go in and through the ginning process from beginning to end," says Anthony.—By **Linda Cooke**, ARS.

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