

## **Field Notes:**

**October 23, 2017**

### **The Focus Factor is critical.**

By: Ernie Flint, Ph.D., CCA, Regional Specialist – Agronomy  
Mississippi State University Extension Service

Through the years I have been guilty of selecting a certain issue or factor to be the most important one among many with regard to success in the business of agriculture. True enough there are a select few factors that come to the forefront in many discussions and I hope we have been able to identify some of them.

Regardless of how we may look at the problem the soil somehow always comes to the top of the list of physical factors. The soil is a product of all the natural processes that take place here on Earth. It is composed of both mineral and biological components, the two being so intimately joined that they have in fact become a living mass that provides the basis for the growth of the plants we depend upon for our existence.

All of this was true before the first human ever attempted anything like farming. And it could carry on very nicely without us very nicely I expect. The modifications we have made in the production of all kinds of crop plants, fruit, and domesticated animals have been accomplished within a fairly small part of the time we have been here as a species.

So where am I headed with this? The idea just struck me one day that the most important factor in the business of farming was not material or physical, but psychological. Hang on now, I have not lost my mind here, at least not yet. Think about it for a minute how we see so many people who enter the world of production agriculture and how they seem to move through their careers in so many different ways.

Farmers all have their own personal bad, good, better, and best years with regard to crops or the production of livestock and the feed for these animals. None of them seem to take the same path as they travel through the years. However, I believe there is a common denominator among all of them and it seems to be their ability to remain focused on the tasks at hand with the enthusiasm that can bring success.

When I visit a farm for the first time I can't prevent my mind from comparing it to the hundreds of farms I have visited through the years. Invariably the most successful operations are those where I see a few well maintained pieces of equipment and the people seem comfortable with the status of ongoing work. The dividing line seems to be that while too little equipment can lead to inefficiency too much can create a financial burden. A common sense balance is the right answer.

For animal based agriculture the issue may shift to the animal side of the system rather than the production of feed for them. When you talk to many livestock producers their favorite topics center around their best herd sire, or the latest genetic methods they are using rather than the nutrition of their animals. Their favorite activity is a visit to the weekly sale to see what their neighbors are doing with their herds. A balance of all these components is necessary.

Come to think of it, the problem of staying focused on the task at hand is required in any form of activity, without allowing the sparkle of some part of it to divert our attention from the ultimate goal of success. It's the same for life itself I suppose in that we have to remain focused on the ultimate goal of being the kind of people our Creator intended. Stay focused.

Thanks for your time.