



# GENERATION *to* GENERATION

Newby Family Known for Strong Work Ethic, Humility

*From left to right are Newby family members James, John, Jimmy, Elizabeth and Jerry Allen.*

**F**or the Newby family of Athens, Ala., farming runs deep in their blood. Seven generations deep, to be exact.

Back in the 1800s, one of their ancestors purchased a piece of land near Athens and farmed and raised livestock there to support his family. Today, his descendants grow cotton on that same land, which is now a part of Newby Farms, a large three-generation family operation that farms in Limestone and Madison counties in Alabama, as well as in Giles County, Tenn.

Two of those descendants, brothers Jerry and Jimmy Newby, credit their father and grandfather, James M. Newby and James H. Newby, with being the cornerstones of the family business. Through the years, these two men were never afraid to try their hands at various types of farming. They tried row crops, cattle and dairy, and even acquired a partnership in a

local gin. As the operation grew, James M. took on the book-keeping, while James H. worked in the fields and taught his grandsons how to farm.

## FARMING IS EVERYTHING

Jerry recalls that farming was all they knew growing up.

“It was our football and girlfriends and school. It was everything,” he says.

James H. also taught them frugality. Jimmy remembers him keeping bent nails in his jumper pocket so he could straighten them out to use again, while Jerry recalls that he always told them, “It’s not about what you make — it’s about what you keep.”

After their grandfather’s passing, James M., along with sons Jimmy and Jerry, formed James Newby and Sons. Together they continued to try new ventures and expand the farm.



Today, that company deals mostly in land and equipment, and as the family has grown, the farming operation has branched out under the name of Newby Farms. This partnership now includes Jimmy and his children, John and James, as well as Jerry's son, Jerry Allen, and daughter and son-in-law, Elizabeth and Justin Crow. Jimmy and Jerry also have a sister, Susan Ming, who lives in Athens and is married to property developer Bill Ming.

### LEAVING A FINE LEGACY

Although James M. passed away in 2012, his legacy is still very much in evidence at Newby Farms. Elizabeth was trained as the bookkeeper by her grandfather, who the family recalls was very particular with his books, even retaining old ledgers from the '70s, in which he recorded every item that entered or left the gin and farm. Jimmy says his father would spend an hour try-

ing to account for a missing penny and would always find it. Elizabeth recalls her grandfather's disdain for computers, when the family incorporated them into the business; he preferred to do the bookkeeping by hand.

James M.'s work ethic and views on life also carry on through the younger generations. They remember him teaching them just to pick themselves up and move on rather than dwell on the negatives, when something doesn't go their way or plans don't work out. He also taught them to remain humble and look for ways to help those in need.

Above all, he made sure they appreciated family. While his wife, Martha, was not involved in the farm work, the Newbys all talk of her important role in the family and how important she was to James. She made sure her sons were fed, no matter what time they got in from the fields, and that they always had clean work clothes to wear. They remember gathering for a family meal and James M. would ask, "Who is number



*James M. and Martha Newby*

one?" and they would respond, "Granny." In James M., they had a wonderful example and mentor, and today they try to apply his words of wisdom to their own lives.

### ADOPTING NEW TECHNOLOGY

Another thing the Newbys agree on is how much farming has changed over the course of the family business. Jimmy and Jerry remember planting and picking cotton by hand when they were younger. Now, Jimmy's son, James, who the family has deemed their "technology person," operates equipment that can plant up to 47 rows, 15 inches wide, at a time. Recalling that he and his father used to determine yields by measuring rows of corn with a tape measure and doing calculations by hand, Jimmy marvels at how far technology on the farm has come in just a few decades.

The Newbys say they can pinpoint a few factors that have been keys to their farming success over the years:

- They were one of the first farms in the area to incorporate an irrigation system, installing one as early as 1986.
- They learned to keep the soil in good shape through crop rotation and no-till practices.
- They also have been careful to diversify their crops, knowing that some years will be better for certain commodities than others.

The younger generation is quick to express appreciation for the sacrifices that their fathers, grandfather and great-grandfather made and their willingness to share their wisdom, so that their descendants could have it better.

### EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY

While farming has always been the focus of the Newby family, they have emphasized education and community involvement, as well. James M. met Martha at Athens State College in the 1940s. Since then, five family members have attended the college. Over the years, James M. served in World War II, was a tax assessor and probate judge, and also served on



the Limestone County Board of Education, the Limestone County Soil and Water Conservation District board and our own Federal Land Bank Association of North Alabama board. Along with these various obligations, he made his faith a priority, always serving at Sardis Spring Baptist Church, where he was a lifelong member.

Following in his footsteps, son Jerry served as president of the Alabama Farmers Federation and Alfa® Insurance from 1998 until 2012, and son Jimmy is chairman of the Alabama Farmers Cooperative board.

The grandsons, John, James and Jerry Allen, all remember their granddaddy's love for land and how he encouraged them to buy land and then sell it at a good price so they could buy more.

“Granddaddy always used to say that land was a good investment because they're not making any more of it,” recalls Jerry Allen. But while he always encouraged them to buy land, he was quick to add that they should only buy it if they could pay it back, Jimmy notes.

### **WORKING WITH AND FOR FARM CREDIT**

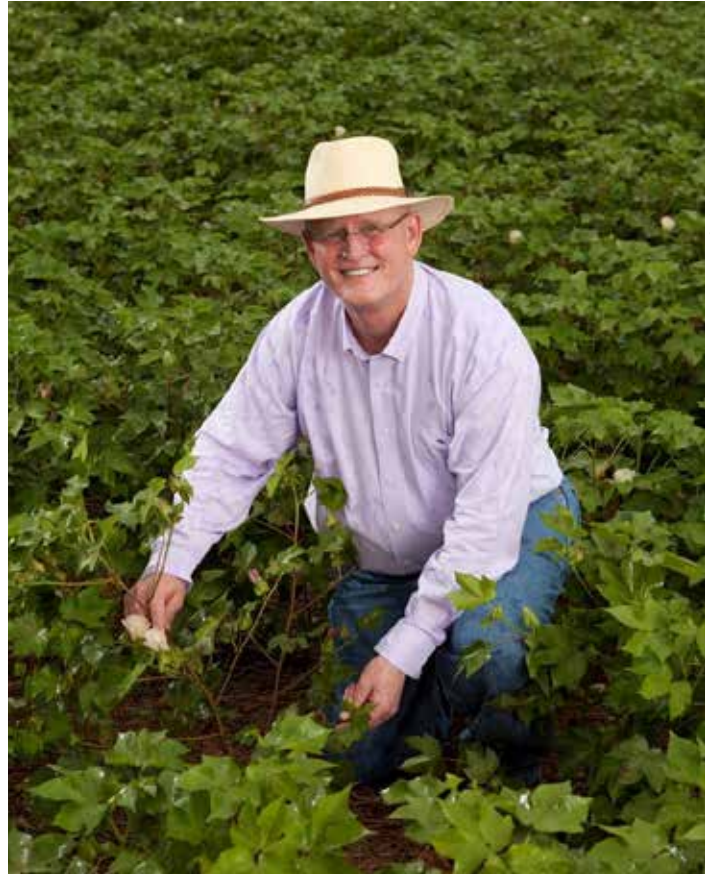
A loyal Farm Credit customer, James M. held Alabama Farm Credit in high regard and cherished the years he spent on the board, according to his offspring. He credited the association with helping the family business to expand, and he always appreciated the fact that Farm Credit helps people own land, so that farming can continue.

“We are happy that our association could play an important part in the great legacy that is Newby Farms,” says Jason Thomas, vice president and branch manager of Alabama Farm Credit's Athens branch.

### **IT'S ALL ABOUT FAMILY**

Between them, Jimmy and Jerry now have 10 grandchildren running around the farm, and the family is hopeful that some members of the youngest generation will develop a love for the land, so that the farming tradition might continue in the Newby family.

“We're just grateful for everything, and most of all for family,” says John, “because without family, this farm would not be here.”



Courtesy of Alabama Farmers Federation

*Jerry Newby on his farm*