

# Young farm couple earns national honor

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By Ms. Linda M. Breazeale

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WEST POINT, Miss. -- Mississippi's agricultural future is safe in the hands of some of the nation's best farmers. Brad and Molly Judson of Clay County have the award to prove it.

Charlie Stokes, area agronomy agent with the Mississippi State University Extension Service, nominated the winning couple for the National Outstanding Young Farmers award. The National Association of County Agricultural Agents sponsors the recognition program.

"The award recognizes their progress in an agricultural career, their soil and water conservation practices, and contributions to the well-being of the community, state and nation," Stokes said.

The Judsons were one of four winning couples chosen from 10 national semifinalists for the award. One unique aspect for them is that they did not inherit their farming operation.

"Brad's dad farmed until the 1980s, so they had some family land, but mostly, they expanded by leasing area land," Stokes said. "MSU has worked closely with him and vice versa. We have conducted corn and soybean variety trials and corn fungicide research on their farm in past years. We've advised Brad as he made irrigation decisions in an effort for the process to be more efficient and provide the best return on investment."

Brad Judson said surrounding his farm with good people has been a key element in his success.

"Farmers should not be loners; they need to network. This experience with the national award process has driven that home," he said. "We enjoyed meeting all the other nominees and learning what we have in common, even if from very different farms."

Brad Judson said several of the other young farmers faced challenges with keeping good employees.

"We have been very fortunate to find great employees that we can trust," he said. "They are reliable and have a great work ethic."

Stokes said east Mississippi farmers deserve recognition for their efforts and accomplishments.

"We have some of the best farmers in the country in east Mississippi. They overcome challenges from smaller fields and more travel requirements," he said. "They need to be recognized for doing a good job and also being very involved in their communities."

In addition to the Judsons, east Mississippi is also home to state's 2016 Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year, Paul Good of Noxubee County.

"The criteria for the young farmer of the year required the nominees be less than 40 years old," Stokes said. "That really limits the options. Luckily, the Judsons would be great nominees regardless of the age limits. They are always trying to make their farm better and be more efficient."

Stokes said successful farming depends on smart decisions.

"They produce better yields on the same amount of acreage with effective irrigation," he said. "The Judsons invested in a baler picker, which eliminated some equipment needs and reduced labor costs."

Both the Judsons are graduates of MSU. Brad Judson earned his degree in agribusiness. Molly Judson holds a degree in elementary education. Currently, she works full time for the family farm with an emphasis on their children, Hamp and Howie.

The Judsons serve their community in a variety of ways on agricultural boards and in church service, local philanthropy and schools. He is a member of the Soil and Water Conservation District Board and the Clay County Farm Bureau Board. She is active in the Garden Club and Parent Teacher Association. Their farm has contributed to fundraisers such as rodeos, 5K runs and fire departments.