



A West Tennessee family shares their farming experiences with the world.



Tim Roberts

The Hills are one of five families in three states to be featured in a video series that will be distributed nationally to all land-grant universities. (l-r): Karen, Jeff, his mother Sue (holding granddaughter Julie), patriarch Bobby Hill and grandson Robert, Scarlett, and Russell.

Bright lights and cameras rolled out to the Hill farm in Gates, Tennessee last summer in preparation for the taping of a nationally distributed video series on agriculture. For several days the cotton fields on the Hill farm were transformed into the set of a major production starring the Hills, real people with a true story.

The Hill family is one of five families in the southern region recently selected to participate in a multi-faceted video series. The six Hill family partners, including Bobby and Sue, their sons Jeff and Russell and their sons' wives Karen and Scarlett, raise cotton and soybeans on their 1,160-acre farm in the Forked Deer community.

A variety of farm types demonstrating themes in sustainability will be addressed in the series, with the majority of information presented by the Hills and families from the four other participating farms. Successes and failures experienced by the families in implementing sustainable practices on their farms will be documented in the videos.

Although the Hills have implemented several sustainable technologies on their farm, in the video series they will focus on changes they've made in estate planning and integrated pest management.

When Bobby and Sue Hill retire, sons Jeff and Russell and their families will take over the farming operation,

either in partnership or farming as separate entities. Bobby Hill, with the help of UT Extension, is developing an estate plan to make this transition as smooth as possible.

The video will address the Hills' goals for retirement and alternatives they considered in developing their estate plan. "I think estate planning is the main thing . . . because it can be a heavy tax burden on you if you're not planning it right," said Bobby Hill. "You can't wait until you get 60 or 65 to do something about it. You've got to do it before then, several years in advance."

Jeff and Russell Hill will address the family's revised approach to pest management. In the past, the Hills

sprayed on a fixed schedule. Now they scout the fields, and all their spraying is done on a need only basis.

"We were not as adamant about scouting," said Jeff Hill of the old approach. "If we found a few [pests] around we would spray and take care of it. The disadvantage of that was sometimes you would end up spraying when it was not necessary. That's not productive or economical. If we stayed with that approach, there would be a lot of years when we could have close to total losses because the insects can get out of hand in a very short time."

At the wrap, ending a long day of shooting at the Hill farm, while the lights were cooling off and the cords were being wound, Bobby Hill explained why his family decided to par-

ticipate in the video project, "I think we need to get the farming situation across to the people in town. We're getting into a generation in the cities that didn't come from the farm. Their grandparents came from the farm, but their parents didn't, and now the younger generation know nothing about it."

For such a complex project, spanning three states and involving over a hundred people, perhaps no simpler, more appropriate justification could be found.

Set for completion in early 1998, the videos will be distributed nationally to all land-grant universities. Farmers, members of the public, and school children throughout the United States will see the series.



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Scarlett Hill examines a cotton plant while scouting on the Hill farm to determine the stage of plant development and level of pest infestation. Scouting the fields is one integrated pest management technique the Hills use to assure that spraying is done on a "need only" basis.

Farmers Speak Out

A popular source of information for farmers is other farmers. The video series is designed to capitalize on this information network by featuring farmers as primary spokespersons. The following is a sample of comments from farm families featured in the video:

On the environment—

"We're going to have to clean up the environment. With as much large equipment as we use and as many cattle as we run, we're going to have to concentrate on both production *and* the environment."

—Gail Roberts, corn and cattle farmer, Wingo, KY

On family farms—

"I hope the farming industry doesn't run all the family farms out of business. When you do that, you hurt the communities and small towns because the grain elevators, feed mills, and stores can't stay in business."

—Bobby Hill, row-crop farmer, Gates, TN

On quality of life—

"Things are a lot more fun now. We play racquet ball and do different things and just hang out together a lot more. I feel a lot closer to him. I just wish he'd let me drive the tractor."

—Jonathan Mercer, 14-year old son of Dane Mercer, dairy farmer, Sweetwater, TN

On profitability—

"The ultimate goal is to sell it for more than it cost to make it. Some years, you're not going to hit the highest. But as long as you're not always selling the lowest, you'll come out okay."

—Tommy Coggin, corn, soybean, and cattle farmer, Nettleton, MS