

Poultry grower advises, inspires next generation



By Kaitlyn Byrne
MSU Ag Communications

MCCOMB -- With 12 chicken houses and 10 years of experience in the poultry business, Delean Robertson of McComb knows the important role women play in agriculture.

When Robertson's husband, Donald, suggested starting a chicken farm in 2004 so he could quit his off-shore job and be home more often, Robertson said everything seemed to fall into place as if it were meant to be. The loan for Straight Arrow Farm was approved quickly. An auditor assistant, she transferred from Citizens Bank in Columbia to a closer branch in Magnolia.

"God seemed to be lining everything up for us," she said. "Little did we know that my husband's crew off-shore would be the ones that were killed when Deepwater Horizon blew up. God protected us by letting the plan for the farm work out before that happened."

Robertson grew up on a dairy farm, so she was no new-comer to the agriculture industry. When they first started their poultry farm, Robertson helped with everything from cleaning chicken houses to setting up the houses for baby chicks and driving tractors. Being diagnosed with fibromyalgia in 2009 put an end to her intense physical labor in the farming venture. But she still handles the bookwork, runs farm errands and helps out if an emergency arises.

"I helped with all of it -- bookkeeping, running errands, driving tractors, cleaning the chicken houses, setting up the houses for baby chicks," she said. "The physical part of the business became too difficult for me once I was diagnosed, though."

Robertson and her husband expanded the farm from six houses to 12 in 2012, making their farm the largest square footage, single-owner farm in the McComb division of Sanderson Farms. They raise more than 2 million pounds of chicken every three months.

"The realization that we feed millions of people every year is the most rewarding experience," she said. "Growing up on a farm, I learned a lot of valuable lessons for life. It is a heritage that has been given to me by my parents, and I hope I will be able to give the same to my children and grandchildren."

When Robertson got involved with Mississippi Women for Agriculture in 2008, she gained practical tips for running a farm and found camaraderie with other women working in the agriculture industry. Robertson was on the first Mississippi Women for Agriculture board and has a lifetime membership.

"I believe for an ag business to be successful, it requires the owners to know all that they possibly can know about their industry," she said. "Women are often the behind-the-scenes support on the farm. Educating the younger generations seems to be a big role that women have in the ag industry. The children of today will be leaders of tomorrow, so it's essential they understand the importance of agriculture."



Delean Robertson holds one of her chickens at her poultry farm, Straight Arrow Farm in McComb. Robertson is a member of Mississippi Women for Agriculture and strives to educate others about women's important role in the agriculture industry. (Photo by MSU Ag Communications/Kat Lawrence)

Sylvia Clark, Mississippi State University Extension Service agent for family and consumer sciences, served on the Mississippi Women for Agriculture board with Robertson and said her leadership has been appreciated in the poultry industry.

“Delean is a go-getter and has been a real leader in the poultry industry for years,” Clark said. “Her extensive experience in all aspects of being a poultry grower can give others practical insight into making their businesses successful. She’s mentoring the next generation of business women involved in poultry farming.”

For more information about Robertson or Straight Arrow Farm, visit <http://www.straightarrowfarm.com>.

-30-

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