

Saluting Our Area Farmers



Rice Harvest Summer 1982

It has been our pleasure to work with our area farmers throughout the year. Now, at this time of harvest, as they begin to reap the fruits of their labors, we wish them continued success.

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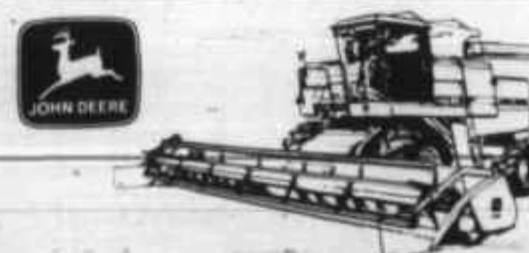
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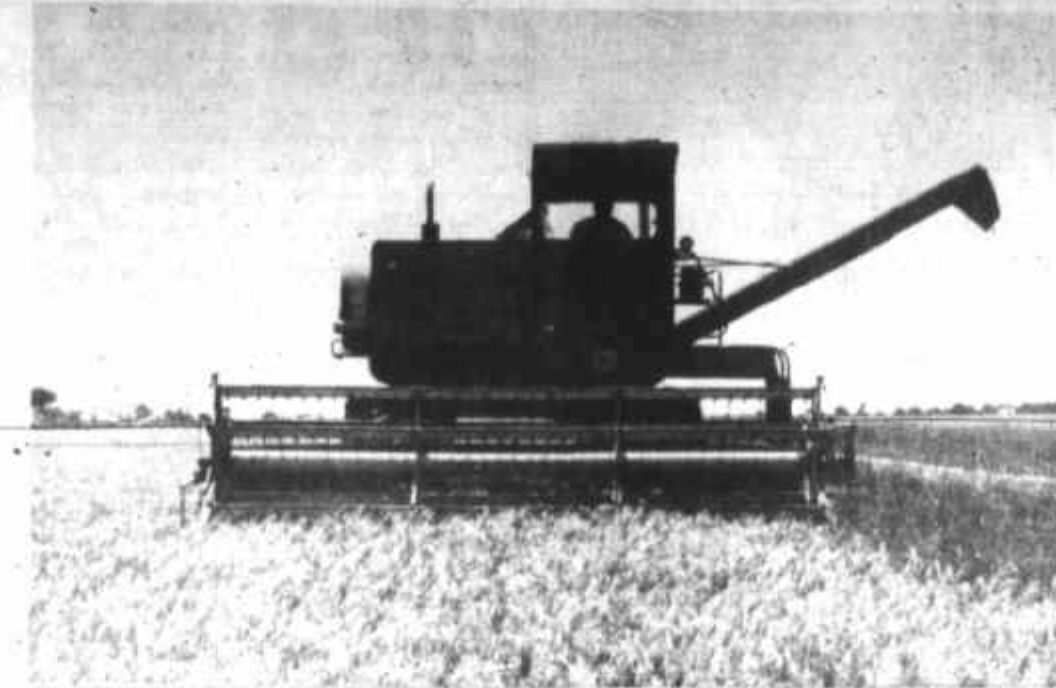
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Features



Rice harvest underway

By VINI CARBONA

Regardless of whom you may ask, invariably the answer is that harvest itself is one of the simplest procedures in farming. The challenge lies in the preparation of the soil and in upkeep.

"You have to keep working the soil during the winter to keep the grass down until the spring," says Henry Sunderman.

In the early part of spring the ground is broken up and plowed, called crosswork plowing. Levees then are built; the mounds control water flow. If one side of the field has a more pronounced tilt, the levees prevent the water from overflowing to lower land.

The ground is worked on, over the levees, until it is time to plant, and then the levees are rebuilt.

"Once you are ready to plant, you have to make certain of your fertilizer, and other checks, in the first part of March," said Sunderman. "This crop

was planted on the 11th of March. It takes about one week to come up. After the rice is a month to six weeks old, the fields are flooded until harvest. It's approximately one hundred days before it's ready for harvest. Of course, it all depends on the weather; if it's hot it's quicker, and if it's cold it takes a bit longer."

The hard part to judge, according to Sunderman, is when it is ready to harvest when the farmer begins to drain the fields.

"To judge," said Sunderman with a smile, "it has to be moist on the lower half of the head and dry on the upper." To demonstrate, he pulled up a head and squeezed one of the lower grains. "See the milky substance? That shows you the moistness. If it's too moist you're too early."

Once it is determined that the rice is at the right time, the fields are drained for approximately a week until the moisture level is about 20 percent. It tends

to drop at a rate of one percent per day, and one must calculate the time carefully. "If you drain too soon, the rice will drop from lack of moisture and deteriorate."

When the moisture level is at the right point (20%), the rice is then ready to harvest. The combines do most of the work that was once the hardest part of farming. The combine cuts the rice plant just below the head, thrashes it, leaving the hull on the grain and stores it in its bin. Combine bins hold about 8,000 pounds of rice. After a pass on the field, the combine pours its contents onto auger-carts which then transport the grain to the dryers.

(The top soil is four to six inches deep, and below that is a bed of clay, a hard layer that prevents seepage. That hard part isn't naturally there; it gets packed in time, after years of working the soil. After harvest, about 75 days later, the rice plant comes

back and produces 20 to 25 percent again.)

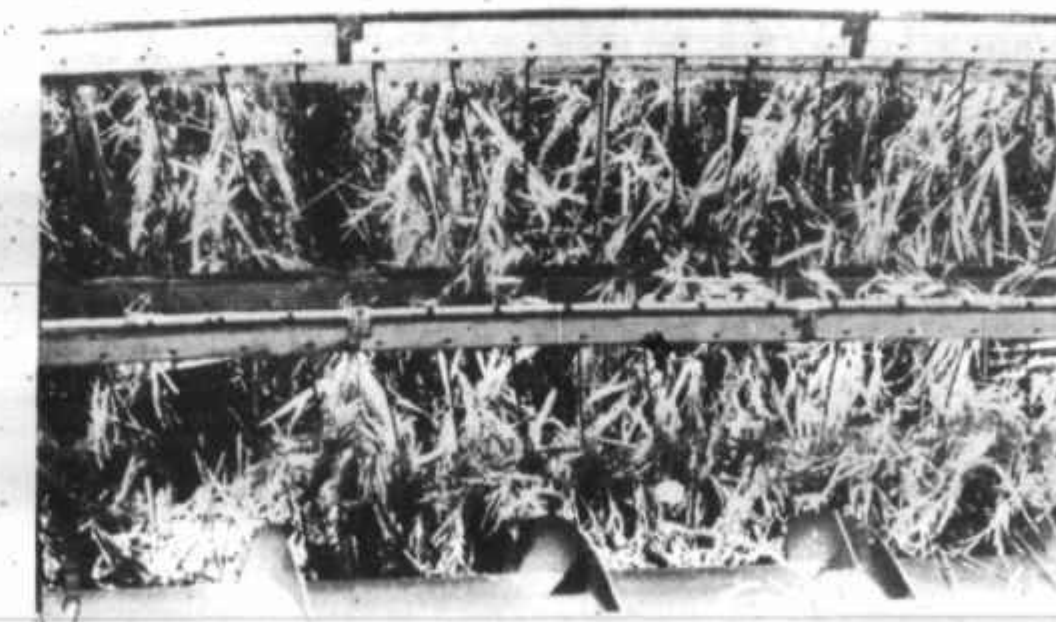
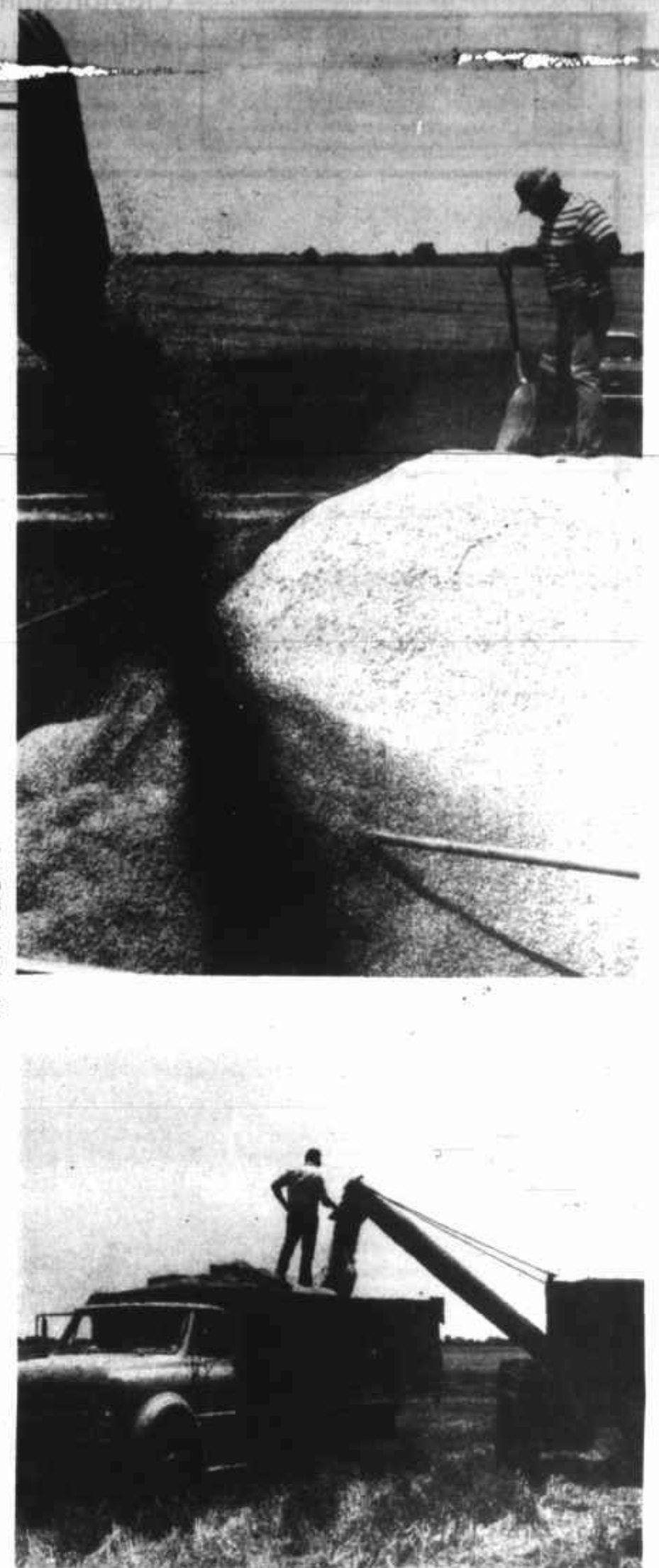
Harvesting "is not very hard work, you just have to be aware," said Glen Sunderman as he steered the combine up and down the field, over levees and back to the truck. He was careful to avoid the white birds that follow the combines; the birds catch insects and reptiles that scamper in the machine's wake. "I try to be careful not to catch the birds... they are real bold." His father, Henry, noted that when he first began farming the land, 42 years ago, the white birds weren't around. "I had problems with my ears because I used to have to shoot black birds all day. Those birds ate the rice grain... these white ones came with a storm some years back but they are more help than anything else. Of course," he said smiling, "they are so bold that sometimes you catch one with the combine."

"I expect the rice to be a

good quality this year, although it is still too soon to tell. There is always some good and some bad every year. Last year, a lot of people had a bad time, there was a lot of smut. I had a good year, quality-wise, but I think this year I'll have a bigger yield," said Henry Sunderman.

"It's a challenge to try and make a profit each year, you have to go out there and watch it. It takes a lot of experience, but it has never been as bad as it now is. There are no controls now, and Arkansas and other places can grow rice much cheaper. Here in Texas it is more expensive, you need more fertilizer, more soil preparation, water costs more."

"It's a hard life, you have to really enjoy the rewards. It makes me very proud to see a well kept field and a good harvest," said Sunderman.



Positive aspects overcome negative

The world of crime, prisons and probation officers conjure up mental pictures, among some, of negative people and impossible jobs to be performed. That is not always the case, points out Homer Koliba, Sr., of Columbus, volunteer parole officer with the Texas Department of Corrections. Recently, after writing a release letter to one probationer, he received a very rewarding reply:

"I was very glad to get my release slip the other day," the former probationer wrote, "but most of all thanks a million for the time you spent helping me understand myself."

Koliba brought a copy of the letter to The Headlight last week to share the information that there are positive aspects to many jobs, never seen by the public.

"I think you did what no other parole officer

would have done," he continued, "when I needed help, you were around to see that I got the help I needed. I mean this from the bottom of my heart."

Koliba worked with this person for two years, helping when called on. At the end of the probation period, he wrote:

"This is your release. You have served your time in TDC. I hope you will take my advice and

continue to do as you have. I know that while you were under my parole you had a lot of trouble adjusting, but you finally did adjust and have turned into a fine upstanding man. Any time I can be of help to you, please call on me."

The probationer's letter concluded: "We came through this together. Maybe sometime when you are not too busy, I could drop by and visit with you."

As I said before, not too many people would have devoted their time and help to see a person as I pull through.

"All I can say at this time is thanks, Mr. Koliba."

Koliba is former state representative for Colorado, Fayette and Bastrop counties, and now operates a museum from his home at 1124 Front St., Columbus.