

William E. (Gene) Woodall, Little Rock



Gene Woodall's impact on cotton farmers in Arkansas can be measured more easily in millions of pounds of yield increase rather than dollars and cents, which is simply incalculable. As the creator and driving force behind the Cotton Research Verification Trials, Woodall delivered meaningful benefits to cotton farmers through efficient and profitable production methods. He helped revive cotton as a profitable crop for Arkansas farmers, who had seen cotton acreage drop by more than 75 percent between the 1950s and late 70s due to low productivity and profitability challenges.

Woodall, a native of Woodville, Ala., earned an undergraduate degree from Auburn in 1949 and a master's degree from the University of Arkansas in 1966. He felt strongly that the low yields were partly due to imprecise and uncoordinated application of recommended technology and he challenged the assertions that economical yields could not be attained in Arkansas.

He served in the U.S. Army from 1942-45, drawing assignments in North Africa, France and Germany. After attending college, he went to work as assistant county extension agent in 1949, first in Pulaski County and later in Yell and Monroe counties. In 1956, he was appointed Cotton Specialist at the state headquarters and stayed in that role through his retirement in 1985, capping a 26-year career with the Extension Service.

His Cotton Research Verification Trials contributed significantly to the improvement of production in Arkansas and the Extension Service expanded the verification programs to every major field crop.

These trials confirmed recommended practices were sound and contributed to higher yields, increasing from an average of 480 pounds per acre when he started as cotton specialist to more than 620 pounds per acre by the time he retired. The momentum in yield increase continues today, where average yield is over 1,000 pounds per acre.

Woodall's career encompassed one of the most interesting periods of cotton production in Arkansas, including the early development of weed control products, insecticides, the mechanical cotton picker, the infestation of the Boll Weevil and the early use of irrigation.