

Blake Carter*
Black, A., Mallard, J., Parker, W., Powell, S.,
Sapp, J. P., Sapp, P., Tanner, R., Tanner, S.

Midville Agronomic Field Day: Growing Success in Southeast Georgia for Over a Decade

University of Georgia Cooperative
Extension Effingham County
601 N. Lural St.
Springfield, Georgia 31329



Abstract

The Southeast Georgia Research and Education Center's (SEREC) mission is to research agricultural practices on a management scale large enough to accurately assess costs and returns for various commodities that could be adapted to the local soils and dry climate of the upper Coastal Plain region. Today, the 720-acre facility has over 60 ongoing research projects. Using that research, the Midville Research Team have rallied together for over ten-years to deliver timely crop updates and display the research that is being conducted on farm. Extension Specialists, Agents, and State Leaders meet growers and show them production practices they can apply to improve their own operations and demonstrate how their commodity check-off dollars are being used to fund research that supports sustainable food production.

Introduction

As prices for the major row crops in Georgia have declined and government programs evolve, farmers need to make informed and sustainable decisions for their farm. The cost of producing row crops, particularly cotton and peanuts, is already high because of large investment in capital and the intense management of inputs from planting to harvest. Suppressed commodity prices due to large domestic and global supplies, in combination with reduced demand because of trade issues have led to very tight margins. The Midville Research Team used this knowledge to implement several research projects, across many crops, to help growers in Southeast Georgia continue to succeed.

Methodology

As with much Extension research, application to the targeted audience is key to making positive impacts in their management practices. Agricultural demonstrations represent a mode of instruction that provide farmers with observable use of farming methods and technologies that can be subsequently applied in their own practices to bring about positive changes on the farm¹. That is why the Midville Research Team took this approach for the trials at the Experiment Station. The plots are scaled to that of grower size fields, which allows the growers to see a better example of the impacts different management practices may have on their own farms.

To address the reductions in field sizes, increased urbanization, and smaller acreage available for farmers in SE GA, new practices and technologies must be utilized to maximize the profitability of their operations and overcome some of the challenges being faced. Their ability to gather timely and accurate data revolutionizes the way farmers manage their crops.



At the conclusion of the Field Day, attendees were fed a lunch and given the opportunity to mingle with the specialists and industry representatives. While formal learning was done earlier on, studies² have shown informal learning can provide better understanding of concepts due to the relaxed environment and opportunity to ask specific questions more openly.

The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service define themselves as "providing research and education through a network of committed specialists, agents and volunteers to help Georgians learn, grow and do more." Listed in their definition are two important components that the Midville Research Team achieves through the Midville Agronomic Field Day:

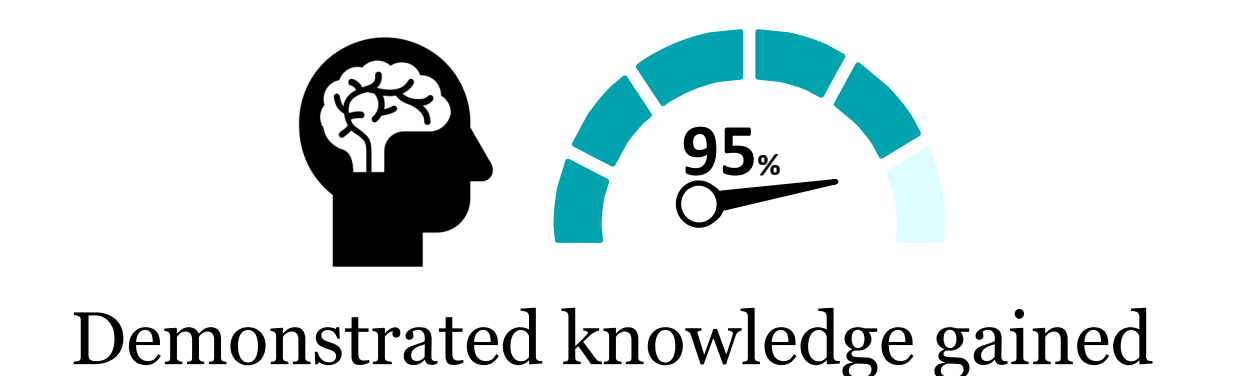
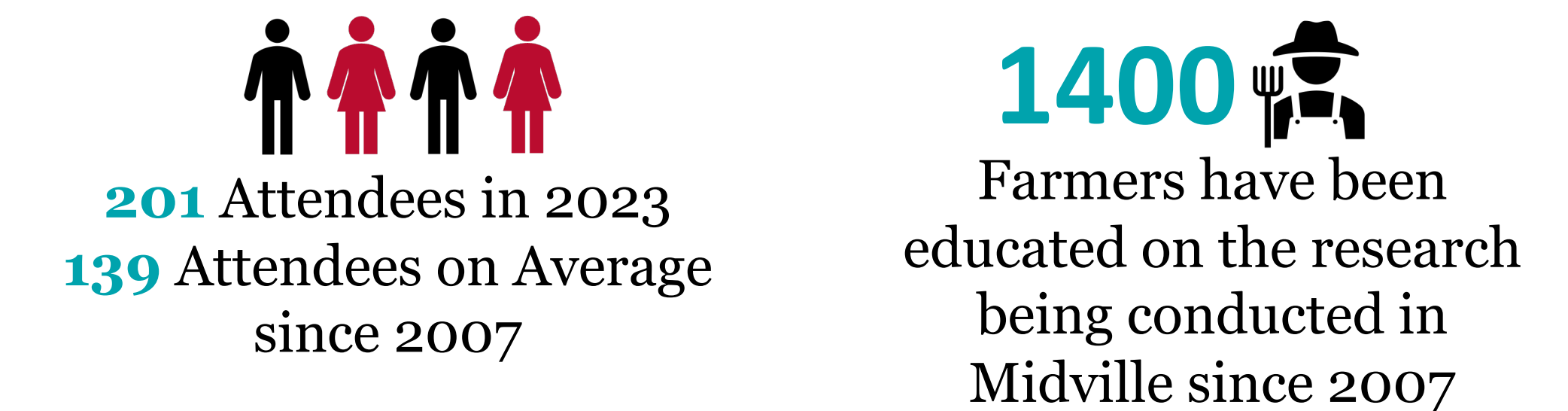


Effective pest management ensures optimal yields, reduces economic risks for farmers, and promotes sustainable agriculture by minimizing environmental impact. It also helps maintain crop quality, prevents the development of resistant pest populations, and complies with regulatory Standards.

Different crop varieties are suited for different soil types and growing conditions, produce higher yields under certain conditions, mature at different times and have different disease and pest resistance genetics. Selecting the right variety ensures the maximum yield potential for the grower.

Results and Impact

The Midville Field Day has been providing growers and industry representatives an opportunity to connect and learn about the research that the team has been conducting at the SEREC. Since its inception, over 1,400 farmers have come to Midville to learn about the new practices and research projects. In 2023 alone, 201 people attended the Field Day. **95% of attendees** demonstrated a knowledge gain in 2023. This was determined through a Qualtrics survey utilizing a Likert scale to determine perceived impact from the Field Day. The biggest impact can be seen by **98% of farmers** finding the research presented during the 2023 Midville Field Day applicable to their farms, which was one of the main objectives. **85% of attendees** stating that that the Field Day better prepared themselves/their businesses to be successful, and of that **93%** plan on implementing at least one thing learned in their own operation. A follow-up survey has been planned for 2024 to assess the change in practices due to knowledge gained in 2023.



Collaboration/Sponsorship from more than **15 specialists** and over **30 industry representatives**, businesses and organizations annually



Findings

98% of farmers found the research presented during the 2023 Midville Field Day applicable to their farms.

85% Stated that the Field Day better prepared themselves/their businesses to be successful.

93% Plan on implementing at least one thing learned in their own operation.

Testimonials

An Emmanuel County farmer stated, "I have been attending the Midville Field Day for over seven years. It is an excellent way for us as growers to see what our local agents are collaborating on, as well as have some face-to-face conversations with state specialists."

Shawn Butler, a regional agronomist for a cotton seed company said, "Midville is always on the cutting edge with the research and what is presented to us in the industry, and the growers that we both serve. This past year with the drones and the emphasis on precision agriculture really hit home how UGA Extension is continuing to showcase the diffusion of innovation that they do so well."



Large on-farm cotton research trial being shown to attendees by specialists and agents.

¹Anda Adamsone-Fiskovica & Mikelis Grivins (2022). Knowledge production and communication in on-farm demonstrations: putting farmer participatory research and extension into practice, The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension, 28:4, 479-502, DOI: 10.1080/1389224X.2021.1953551

²Decius, J., Dannowsky, J., & Schaper, N. (2022). The casual within the formal: A model and measure of informal learning in higher education. Active Learning in Higher Education, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14697874221087427>

