



CATHY WILSON/THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

The farm life is Barbara Stallings' life. Stallings grew up on a farm, married a farmer and has helped her husband raise crops on their 650-acre farm in the Belvidere area for 43 years.

For Belvidere's Stallings, farming is women's work

By CATHY WILSON
Staff Writer

When most women are sleeping in on Saturday mornings, Barbara Stallings is up before the sun, watching the 5 a.m. U.S. Farm Report.

As an integral part of her family's 650-acre Belvidere-area farm, Stallings listens intently to the news show that focuses on agriculture and agribusiness. After all, agriculture and agribusiness have been her life since she was born 65 years ago.

She grew up a farm girl in Gates County, then married a farmer, and helped him raise crops on their land for 43 years. Farming is her life, and Stallings has been and still is a hands-on woman in the business, from picking cotton by hand, to working the rows with a hoe in her younger years, to doing the book work today.

She's not the only woman working in a man's field in this area. Many of the farming wives or female landowners do much of the work that's needed to make the family farm a success. Most farming women are found on the larger farms, she noted.

"Some women actually

get out and drive the equipment, but I can't drive the modern day tractor," she admitted. "I know how to shift gears and push the clutch on the older tractors, but I don't know much about the new ones today. That's why I'm usually the

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Genetics arms farmers to battle weeds, insects

By CINDY BEAMON
Staff Writer

Weeds and worms have been the common enemy of farmers for centuries; it's only the methods of combat that have changed.

Today, genetics is helping farmers keep ahead of what one biotech scientist calls "an arms race" to fight off the crop-destroying pests.

The battlefield is constantly changing, say local agents with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service. With each new innovation in science, the weeds and insects find new ways to bypass the blockades. For farmers, genetics has become a weapon of choice.

With genetically modified seeds, farmers fend off insects, and increase their yields — all with environmentally friendly results, says Al Wood, an agriculture agent for the Extension Service in Pasquotank County. By using seeds with insect-fighting DNA, farmers spray less insecticide onto their fields — a cost savings to

Bt gene's benefits dramatic

Farmers who use corn seed with the Bt gene typically improve their crop yields by 9 to 10 bushels an acre. Using seed with the gene also produces better quality corn. Farmers have been using corn seed with the Bt gene about 13 years.

the farmer and the environment.

About 13 years ago, scientists introduced a new corn seed inserted with the Bt gene, naturally found in a soil bacteria. The technology is used broadly by farmers today, basically eliminating most crop damage by corn ear worms.

Wood said the benefits have been dramatic.

Farmers using seed with the Bt gene typically improve their yields by 9 to 10 bushels an acre. At the mid-February price for corn, about \$7 a bushel, the added return is \$70 per acre, said Wood.

Not only does the Bt gene result in high yields, it also produces better quality corn, said Shawboro farmer Owen Etheridge.

"The plant, instead of using all its energy fight-

ing off insects, is able to use that energy to develop an ear of corn," Etheridge said.

Genetics has helped farmers increase their yields and combat insects — but not without a price. The cost of seed has gone up with the cost for research.

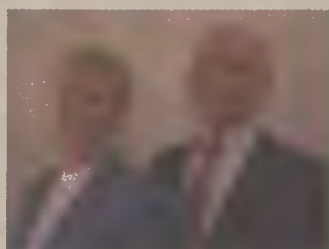
Twenty-five years ago, a bag of cotton seed would have cost about \$30 to \$40 for eight acres, says Perquimans Cooperative Extension Director Lewis Smith. That cost has increased tenfold. Now, farmers pay \$300 to \$400 for the same sized bag of seed.

The high-priced seeds are potent. Today's genetically modified seeds fight not only the corn ear worm but a variety of other insects. Genes are

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Where We're Going

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- Lighting Systems
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- Runway Strengthening
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- Stormwater Treatment Facility
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