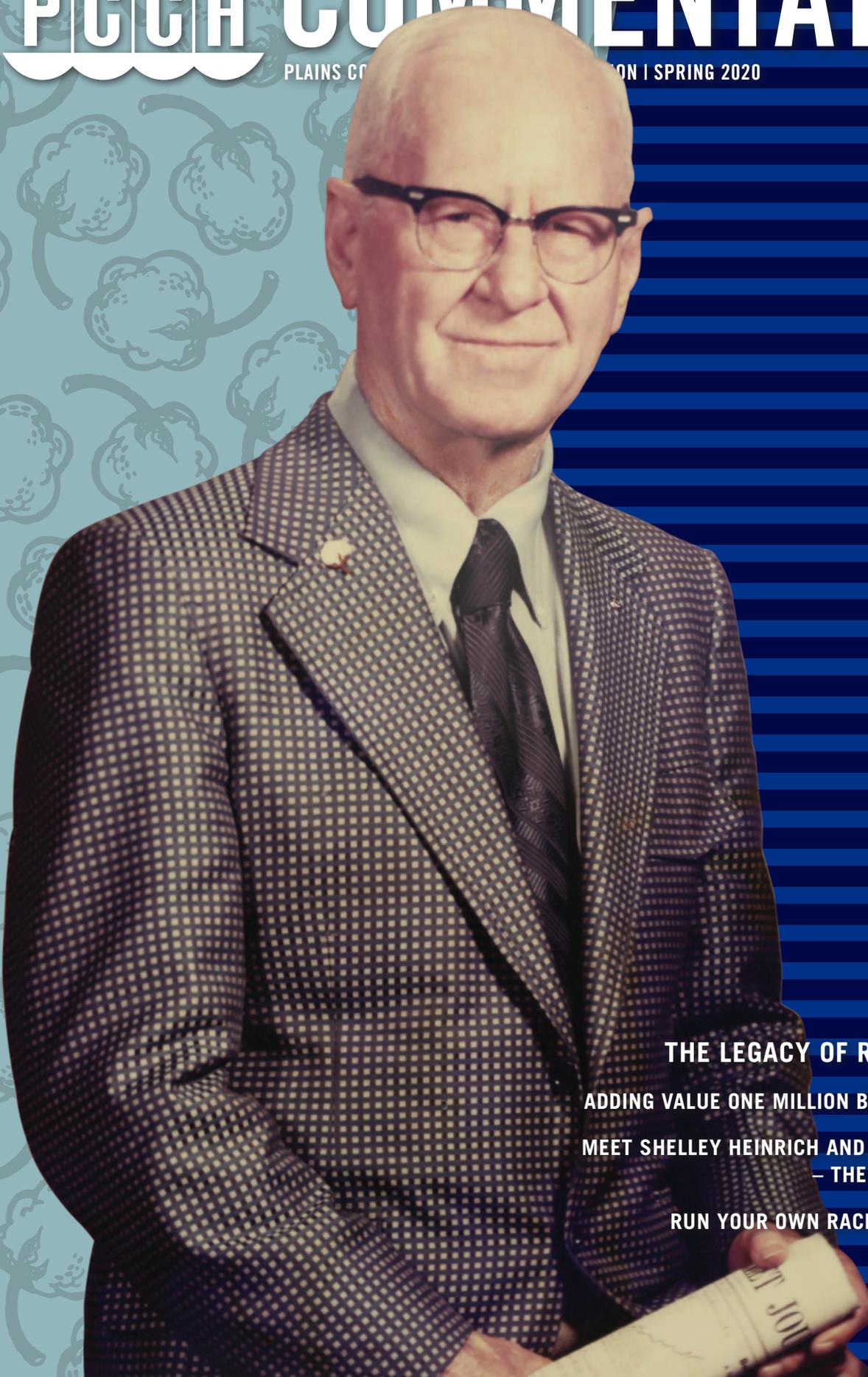


# PCCA COMMENTATOR

PLAINS COTTON ASSOCIATION | SPRING 2020



**THE LEGACY OF ROY B. DAVIS**

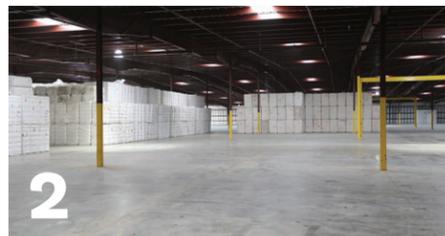
**ADDING VALUE ONE MILLION BALES AT A TIME**

**MEET SHELLEY HEINRICH AND CHRISTI SHORT  
— THE COTTON BOARD**

**RUN YOUR OWN RACE — CIERA WARE**

# COMMENTATOR

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Roy B. Davis was a true pioneer that forever improved the lives of those he influenced and inspired to achieve more by working together. Read more about his legacy in his story on page 12.

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## Letter from the President



Kevin Brinkley

This is one of the most challenging moments in history. It is the beginning of spring and yet the world seems to be in the darkest time of winter. As we all witness the effects of the COVID-19 virus on human health and the global economy, it is apparent that this event will mark the beginning of changes to all of our lives and changes to agriculture.

For the last several years, agriculture has been working to find its voice when communicating about the importance of food and fiber to the national security of the United States. The disruptions to supply and demand brought on by COVID-19 are illustrating vulnerabilities in the systems we rely on to deliver agricultural products to consumers around the world. Thankfully, American farmers haven't lost a step during this crisis. Even now farmers are getting ready to plant in the midst of tremendous uncertainty, and we thank them for their courage.

If there is an upside to this crisis, many consumers are learning that food and fiber do not "come from the store." It comes from farms and ranches that work year-round to produce and deliver it to processors and manufacturers that transform it into retail-ready products vital to daily life. These same entities are part of the supply chain of cotton-related medical products that are critical to healthcare professionals.

The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are difficult to predict. For the cotton industry, the disruption to retail demand will become evident in the near term. However, we believe the long-term fundamentals for cotton are still encouraging. We remain hopeful that industry coalitions along with elected representatives will work together to rebuild struggling areas of the cotton value chain to be stronger than ever in the future.

Finally, the cover story of this edition could not be more timely. I never met Roy B. Davis but I am a student of his ideas and his determination to persevere through difficult circumstances. Mr. Davis was a man for all seasons including ones like we are currently living. We owe a great deal to Mr. Davis and his belief that true cooperatives would change this country for the better. History has certainly validated his vision. We will be served well to follow his example.

Sincerely yours,

Kevin Brinkley  
President and Chief Executive Officer

P.S. This edition of Commentator marks the end of a stellar 35-year career for John Johnson, Director of Public Relations & Legislative Affairs and Corporate Secretary for PCCA. John worked on 120 editions of Commentator among his many other responsibilities at PCCA. We are grateful for his creativity and his dedication to quality that made this publication nationally recognized and the winner of numerous awards during his career. We wish John a very long and happy retirement.



# Adding Value One Million Bales at a Time

By Blair McCowen  
Photos by Jayci Cave

Since 1963, PCCA has been adding value to its grower-owners' bottom lines through cotton warehousing services. What first began as two locations in Altus, Oklahoma, and Sweetwater, Texas, grew into a total of five with the addition of the Liberal, Kansas, location in 2004, and Rule and Big Spring, Texas, locations in 2008.

With a total storage capacity of 1.5 million bales and growing, PCCA is able to store, sort and ship its farmers' cotton quickly and efficiently. Overseeing the division is Vice President of Warehouse Operations Jay Cowart, as well as the PCCA Warehouse Committee, chaired by Gary Feist, Southern Kansas Cotton Growers Gin Manager.

"I think our position in the supply chain is critical in that when the market demands heavy shipments we are able to accomplish that," Cowart said. "We don't want to be a bottle neck in this process, we want to make sure that we get cotton to the market rapidly, and hopefully add value that way."

The comradery between the PCCA Warehouse Division staff and the Warehouse Committee is essential to the success of this complex component of the cooperative. In the same way the Pool Committee provides guidance for cotton marketing, the Warehouse Committee helps ensure value is added to each bale that passes through the doors of a PCCA warehouse.

"Our staff works with the Warehouse Committee to ensure the Warehouse Division has the resources necessary to receive, store, and ship each crop," Cowart said. "They regularly review warehouse capacities to determine if any additional warehouse space will be needed. We review rolling stock and personnel requirements, including H-2A needs, based on the expected crop size. The staff also reviews with the Warehouse Committee PCCA's tariff to ensure that it is adequate to fund the operations of the division, but also that it promotes the flow of cotton. After a thorough review of all these items, the Warehouse Committee will make their recommendations to the board of directors."

Feist said one of the goals of the Warehouse Committee is to continually stimulate the flow of ideas to keep PCCA on the leading edge of cotton warehousing.

"It is a lot more complicated than just unloading a truck and sticking a bale in there. It is very tightly operated and a lot of thought goes into the PCCA Warehouse Division."



PCCA Warehouse Committee Chairman, Gary Feist

"One of our priorities is to give Jay support and feedback that he can take and pass on to his group at PCCA," Feist said. "It's a sort of checks and balances system."

While warehousing cotton may look simple to some from afar, Feist said it is a rather complex process when millions of bales are involved.

"It is a lot more complicated than just unloading a truck and sticking a bale in there," he said. "It is very tightly operated and a lot of thought goes into the PCCA Warehouse Division."

Cowart agreed with Feist and said there are many components that go into warehousing cotton that others may not realize.

"Probably the thing that people don't realize is that every single bale of cotton is selected individually, so whoever purchases it has an exact list of bales they want," Cowart said. "It can come from a range of buildings and locations within those buildings. In theory, an 88-bale load of cotton can come from, in the case of this plant here in Altus, 55 different buildings. Performing it and at the speed it has to be performed is pretty complex."

While bales are constantly brought in and out of PCCA's multiple warehouse locations, other plans to improve efficiency and effectiveness within the division are in the works too. As cotton acres increase and growers are able to produce more fiber on less land over time, more space is needed to effectively store the cotton as it awaits the journey to its final destination. In the Altus, Oklahoma, warehouse location, PCCA has expanded some current warehouses and built additional structures to meet the needs of its customers in a timely manner.

"This will be the fourth crop in a row that production has exceeded warehouse capacity at Altus," Cowart said. "Current indications are that cotton acreage will at least sustain its current levels or potentially increase. The amount of cotton that a warehouse facility can receive is dependent upon how quickly the cotton arrives from the gins and how quickly the merchants ship the cotton out. There have been times that we were able to handle twice as much cotton because the pace of shipments allowed for it. These additions will obviously increase our rated capacity and our ability to handle crops that actually exceed our capacity."

Oklahoma is not the only state in PCCA's service area that is seeing an increase of cotton acres and production. Cotton is still on the rise in Kansas, which brings on an urgent need for more warehouse space. In 2018, the cooperative added 45,000 bales of storage space to the warehouse in Liberal, Kansas, and is currently looking to expand in the Wichita area.

"Something we are in the process of discussing is building a new warehouse in Kansas," Feist said. "That is going to be a big asset for those of us in

*Continued on page 4...*



“A growing number of producers have discovered that cotton will work in their farming operation as it provides an alternative to the current crop lineup.”

*...continued from page 3*

the middle part of the state, like NexGineration and Southern Kansas Cotton Growers at Anthony and Winfield. It will be much more efficient for us and will hopefully reduce our ginning cost too.”

Cowart said the need for an additional warehouse location in Kansas was brought on by many factors, including water needs, crop rotations, and grain prices.

“A growing number of producers have discovered that cotton will work in their farming operation as it provides an alternative to the current crop lineup,” he said. “In Southwestern Kansas, cotton is a great alternative to crops with a higher water requirement. In South Central Kansas, it has proven to be a very viable crop to enter into the traditional rotation of soybeans and milo. Cotton acreage has also taken on another boost due to stagnant grain prices. This has all resulted in cotton production exceeding our warehouse capacity, and the distribution of production has illustrated the need to locate some of our new capacity in the Wichita, Kansas, area.”

With much work to be completed, PCCA relies on its skilled employees to execute the necessary measures to get the job done.

“We have some very long-tenured employees that know exactly what they are doing,” Cowart said. “The gins, the growers, they trust us with their cotton to keep it in good condition and we pride ourselves on being able to get it shipped rapidly if the market is demanding it.”

Whether the task at hand is overseeing daily operations that preserve decades of quality standards or developing new ideas to make future endeavors more efficient, PCCA is dedicated to serving the cooperative’s grower-owners. From Texas to Oklahoma and Kansas, the Warehouse Division and Warehouse Committee are ensuring value is always added, one million bales at a time.

“That’s our whole goal,” Feist said. “We are there for the producers.”

## the COTTON BOARD

Many people in the industry may be familiar with The Cotton Board and its efforts to support and promote the U.S. cotton industry, but do you know the faces of the organization in your area? Both Shelley Heinrich and Christi Short serve as Regional Communications Managers and work hard to educate and build relationships with producers and others in the industry. Learn more about them and The Cotton Board with each of their features on the following pages.

# Meet SHELLEY HEINRICH



**"They are salt of the earth kind of personalities. They are very genuine. They are very thankful and appreciative of the information that you give them."**

These are the words Shelley Heinrich used to describe the cotton farmers she has the opportunity to work for. Since July of 2017, she has been The Cotton Board Regional Communications Manager for the Southern Plains. The Cotton Board is the oversight and administration arm of the Cotton Research and Promotion Program.

"My primary role is to communicate to producers what the Cotton Research and Promotion Program is doing with their assessment dollars," Heinrich said. "I spend my days communicating with cotton farmers in the Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas Panhandle, and South Plains areas."

Heinrich and her husband, Burt, have been married for 31 years and have four children, Heath, Lauren, Aubry and Reagan. Prior to working at The Cotton Board, Heinrich worked for many years in the banking industry before retiring to stay home and help her husband on the family farming operation. She then found her own place in the agricultural industry and began working for National Sorghum Producers. She was with them three and a half years before she joined The Cotton Board team.

Heinrich said the most interesting thing she has learned since she began working at The Cotton Board is that producers are not the only ones that pay into The Cotton Research and Promotion Program.

"Importers pay an assessment as well, and the collection breakdown is about 50-50," Heinrich said. "Importers pay in on products that contain cotton that are coming back to the U.S. and producers pay in on the bales they produce."

One grower by themselves could not do what those collective producer dollars are doing for the industry, Heinrich said. She said her favorite part of the job is having the opportunity to educate growers.

"You get to go out there and get your boots in the dirt with them, explain it and watch them get excited about it," Heinrich said. "That's what is fun. My favorite part is educating."

According to their website, The Cotton Research and Promotion Program's ongoing goal is to develop, fund and implement a coordinated plan of research designed to strengthen upland cotton's competitive position and to maintain and expand domestic and foreign markets and uses for cotton. Heinrich said one aspect that is unique about The Cotton Board is communication with the organization actually conducting the cotton research and promotion, Cotton Incorporated, is a two-way street.

"You are feeding the research and promotion staff of Cotton Incorporated new ideas coming from producers, and they share about the research and promotion they are doing on behalf of growers," she said. "Being the go-between and helping both sides understand the others' work is awesome and fun."

Heinrich said the research that Cotton Incorporated does on the production side ranges from seed genetics to the engineering of equipment and environmental issues.

"I can relate to that really easily because that is what we talk about at the dinner table almost every night," Heinrich said. "At my house we are always farming."

On the textile side of things, Heinrich said Cotton Incorporated is doing research and building relationships with brands and retailers to try and increase the amount of cotton they use in their products. They are constantly looking at trends and introducing innovative solutions to work toward their goal. The research and promotion funded by The Cotton Board benefits all those across the cotton industry as they strive to keep cotton the fiber of choice to textile mills.



Shelley Heinrich with her family.

"Cotton Incorporated's Ag & Environmental Research Division works on a variety of projects aimed at advancing cotton's position in the marketplace and within the sustainability community," Heinrich said. "Consumers continue to put pressure on brands and retailers to be more transparent with their supply chains. Cotton Incorporated sees this as a unique and advantageous opportunity to position cotton as the fiber of choice."

Heinrich said her favorite event that The Cotton Board puts on is the producer tours to Cotton Incorporated. She enjoys these events because it allows growers to see what exactly their contribution to the Program provides.

"You can take somebody that does not understand the Cotton Research and Promotion Program, and take them to Cotton Incorporated, then they are able to see first-hand the operations and leadership," she said. "It's like the lights turn on when they get to see for themselves and experience some of the research that takes place across the cotton industry. They see their investment dollars in the program hard at work and they become advocates themselves."

Another aspect Heinrich enjoys about her position is the opportunity to work with all the people in the cotton industry as well as the other organizations like PCCA and Plains Cotton Growers.

"Working with who we call our industry partners has been very helpful to me in establishing relationships within the industry," Heinrich said. "They have been more than helpful in getting my feet on the ground and helping create awareness for the cotton industry. We are all in this together and if we aren't helping each other, we serve no good to any of the producers at all."

Whether at work traveling across Texas, Oklahoma or Kansas, or at home eating dinner with her family - Heinrich is passionate about promoting agriculture and supporting the people in it.

By Jayci Cave

Photos courtesy of Shelley Heinrich

# Meet CHRISTI SHORT



**A Garland, Texas, native and graduate of Texas Tech University with a degree in agricultural communications, Christi Short has been involved in agriculture almost all her life.**

Though she did not grow up on a farm, as soon as she began riding horses and volunteering at equestrian centers in the Dallas area, the industry touched her heart. She's been in it ever since.

After serving as the Texas Tech's 2010-11 Masked Rider and graduating from college, Short worked for the Plant and Soil Science Department at the university for almost six years before coming into her position with The Cotton Board in 2017. Today, she serves as the Southwest Regional Communications Manager. Her service area includes Northeast, East, Central, Far West, and South Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico.

"I get to work with our producers in the Southwest area and educate them on what the Cotton Research and Promotion Program is doing on their behalf, what programs they should be aware of and invite them to come tour our research facilities," she said. "I give presentations and speeches at local, regional, and state meetings, and really build those relationships with our growers to help them understand what the program is, how it benefits them, and how they can get involved in it."

The Cotton Board is responsible for collecting the government assessment on the bales of U.S. upland cotton produced and working in conjunction with Cotton Incorporated to carry out research and marketing, Short said.

"Cotton Incorporated does the consumer-facing advertising, so we get to do the producer-facing messaging," she said. "It is really important in the industry for us as The Cotton Board and Cotton Incorporated to understand what some trends are with farmers and the consumers."

Having recently married into a farming family since starting her job at The Cotton Board, Short said she has learned more about the life of an agriculturist than when she was working in different segments of the agricultural industry.

"While I worked in the ag industry for several years, it is so different from being directly involved in the

ag side of the family operation," she said. "My life has never revolved around the rain or the temperature or weather conditions, so it is interesting to have to learn these things that I didn't pay much attention to before and now it impacts our day-to-day activities."

Short said her favorite part of her job is building relationships and friendships with those in her service area.

"I want farmers to be comfortable enough to call me to ask questions or a gin manager to invite me to their annual meeting," Short said. "Getting to know people better on the farm personally, whether it is about their family, their history on the farm, their history in a particular business and just getting to connect with them on that personal level—it makes our time together so much more meaningful and special."

The Cotton Board also works with other industry organizations with different focuses, such as the National Cotton Council on matters of government policy and lobbying, Cotton Incorporated for research, as well as local and regional cotton businesses, to achieve common goals. Short said this is the most unique aspect she has learned about The Cotton Board during her time there.

"At The Cotton Board we have our set of things that we work on," she said, "but we rely on these other organizations to do whatever is in their respective fields so we can all work together for the betterment of the cotton crop and for the cotton farmers in that realm."

As working for farmers is part of her job that she enjoys most, Short said she has learned over the course of her agricultural career that farmers are special because of their way of life.

"I think farmers are the best people to work for and to work with," she said. "You hear it said in different ways in different groups, but there's such a unique work ethic and kind mannerisms that you witness in farmers. They are out working hard every day not only to produce crops, food, and livestock, for the rest of the population, but it is also their livelihood."

Producers can become involved in the cotton industry in a variety of ways, from serving on their local and regional cooperative boards to participating in industry organizations such as The Cotton Board. Each year, The Cotton Board hosts producer tours of Cotton Incorporated in North Carolina. Short said this is her favorite event of the year.

"I really enjoy watching the networking of producers from all over The Cotton Belt take place, seeing some people reconnect and just building this really unique relationship and friendship that they can have because they are cotton farmers and they have that huge community in common," Short said. "I like watching the relationship building and networking happen during those tours."

Another way Short encouraged producers to become more involved in the industry is on social media.



*Christi Short and her husband, Ross Short*

"Social media is not going anywhere and it is the quickest way people get access to information," Short said, "and if in the agricultural industry we aren't sharing our story and our information, somebody else is going to do it and we lose control of whether that information is correct, factual, or accurate, or if that is what is actually happening on the farm. We have to figure out a way to combat that messaging, and the best way to do that, I think, is for growers and everybody involved in the agricultural industry to share their story."

Ever since agriculture tugged on Short's heartstrings in her childhood, she has served as an industry advocate in many facets. From her time at Texas Tech University to working for The Cotton Board today, she has worked to further the message of agriculture and to support the industry and its people. 🌱

*By Blair McCowen*

*Photos courtesy of Christi Short*

## GROUNDING IN TRADITION INVESTED IN YOUR FUTURE®

With strong roots holding steadfast after 67 years of business, your cooperative remains firm in its core values and principles while simultaneously keeping a keen eye on the future. With a foundation laid by farmers, conducting ethical and transparent business to add value to our growers' bottom line is our purpose – as is being there for future generations of your farming family.

### HISTORICAL SUCCESS

**1953:** Founded by farmers, for farmers

**1960:** Began developing the High Volume Instrument Testing System (HVI)

**1963:** Established cotton warehousing operations in Altus, Oklahoma and Sweetwater, Texas

**1975:** Introduced electronic cotton marketing with TELCOT

### INNOVATION FOR THE FUTURE

**2000:** Entered a joint venture to form The Seam®

**2003:** Launched the Member Access grower-owner platform

**2013:** Developed Module Tracking technology for cooperative gins

**2014:** Introduced Scale Capture gin software

Gleaning insight from the events and values of the past combined with the intentionality of innovating in the days that lie ahead allows us to uniquely serve our growers and their co-op gins. Simply stated, understanding where we come from is key to discovering where we can go next.

Our work matters. As a true grower-owned cooperative, we invest in our members and our community. We are committed to those we serve (love your neighbor) which includes our members, customers, employees and vendors. We always want what is best for them.

We make the following commitments to deliver high value to those we serve:

We can be trusted to follow through on what we say

We will make decisions and act with integrity

We will strive to deliver **reliable** results that make our grower-owners stronger

We will be uniquely **responsive** in solving problems

We will exhibit **professionalism** at all times to others

We will be distinctively **forward-thinking** as we creatively deliver solutions



# THE LEGACY OF *Roy B. Davis*



BY JOHN JOHNSON

PHOTOS COURTESY  
OF DRUE FARMER,  
GRANDDAUGHTER  
OF ROY B. DAVIS.

It is widely agreed that much of the success of the local and regional cotton co-ops of West Texas is attributable to one man: Roy B. Davis, General Manager of Plains Cooperative Oil Mill (now PYCO Industries, Inc.) from 1943 to 1971. He has been described as a man of vision, innovation and courage, and he was widely known as a man of character, sincerity and integrity.

Davis was born in McGregor, Texas, in 1900 and graduated from Lubbock High School and then Texas A&M University with a degree in dairy husbandry. Following graduation, he worked as a county agricultural extension agent in Gaines, Terry and Hale counties in West Texas from 1927 to 1932. He then served as CEO of Plains Cooperative Creamery in Plainview from 1932 to 1937 before joining the staff of the Houston Bank for Cooperatives. There, he traveled throughout Texas helping organize and advise farmer co-ops. It was during this period of his career that he adopted the co-op philosophy as his own. In 1943, Davis was hired as general manager of Plains Cooperative Oil Mill in Lubbock.

Prior to 1943, the oil mill struggled due to low volume, inadequate working capital, and low earnings, but under Davis' leadership it became the world's largest cottonseed oil mill. By embracing new technologies for oilseed processing, the mill's daily crushing capacity went from 50 tons to 1,200 tons. However, he was always looking beyond the front gate of the oil mill.

"No single person was more important to the development of cooperative agriculture as a force in West Texas where he helped farmers form co-ops," wrote William N. Stokes, Jr., in the book *Oil Mill on the Texas Plains*. While Davis never sought personal glory or credit, there is no doubt about his contributions to the co-op and cotton industries.

Many who knew him and witnessed his accomplishments have described Davis as a visionary, a tireless and relentless worker, a man of the grassroots and a consensus builder. Gail Kring, retired President and CEO of PYCO Industries, Inc., first met Davis when he worked at the oil mill while studying at Texas Tech University.

"Roy was a quiet man," Kring said. "He wasn't loud or anything, but he was always thinking about co-ops. He was pretty serious about his business

*Continued on page 14...*

**"He just decided he was going to help the West Texas farmers because they needed the co-op system, and the three regionals have always been supportive of each other and have backed each other up in critical times."**





...continued from page 13

day in and day out, and he did a lot of work in Washington to protect the co-ops. He was very well known there and very well respected, and a very good voice for West Texas.”

In addition to helping organize local co-op gins, it was Davis’ vision that led to the creation of Farmers Cooperative Compress and Plains Cotton Cooperative Association to complete the co-op supply chain. He also helped establish Plains Cotton Growers, Inc.

“He was always looking out for the farmers by extending further into the marketplace and having control of the pricing,” Kring said. “He just decided he was going to help the West Texas farmers because they needed the co-op system, and the three regionals have always been supportive of each other and have backed each other up in critical times.”

Davis’ granddaughter, Drue Farmer, also knew firsthand about his dedication to West Texas cotton farmers.

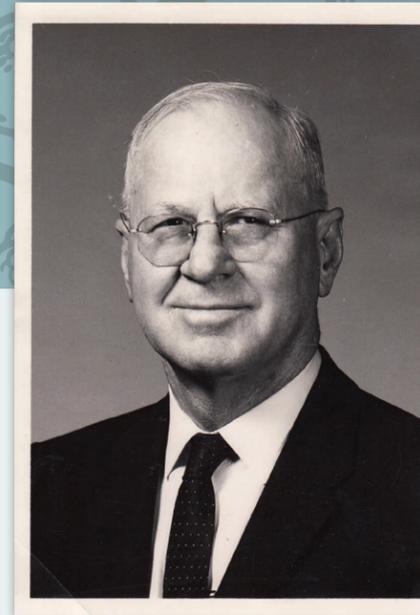
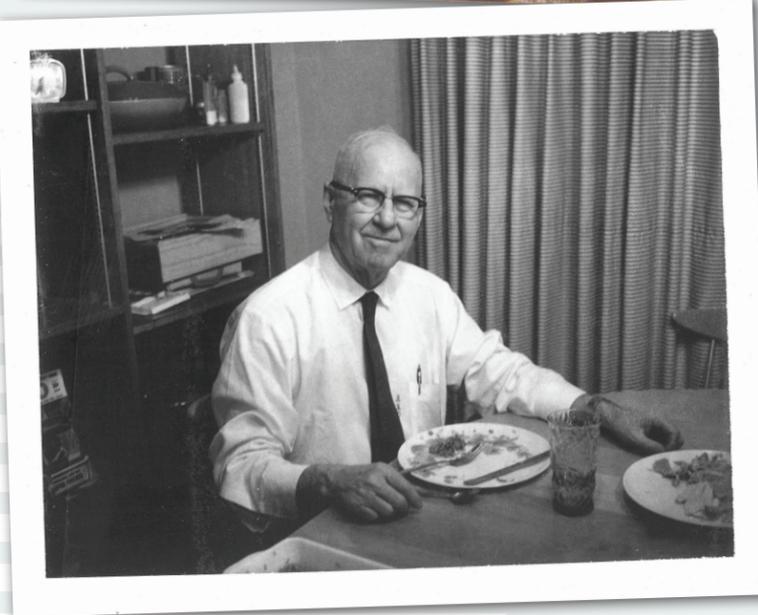
“He was a patriot and believed in the American way and the farmers,” she said. “His heart was with the farmers, and he taught us to have those same values. He taught me that agriculture is the backbone of West Texas and our economy and how important it is to support the farmers. He was a wonderful man.” Farmer offered additional insight about Davis’ character.

“Grandad was always the kind that spoke softly and carried a big stick. He was a very humble person. I think a lot of that was because he was focused outward. He was focused on how to make a better life for the farmers, how to improve the industry, not just on himself. He never looked at himself as a visionary, but I think other people admired him, and we all admired him.”

Jimmy Nail, retired PCCA employee and former co-op gin manager, had many opportunities to directly observe Davis’ efforts and accomplishments.



[scan to learn more](#)



**“Mr. Davis was our inspiration in times of trouble, our support in times of need and an humble and appreciative friend in times of success.”**

“He was just a good man, and he worked very hard,” Nail said. “Wherever he needed to go, he would go. He would go out to the gins, too, and visit with them about some of their problems. He was also such a gentleman as far as that goes, and he always seemed to know what to say and how to say it.”

Davis’ leadership and influence extended beyond West Texas cooperatives. He served as president of the National Cotton Council in 1968 and as its board chairman in 1969. He continued to serve as an advisor to the NCC Board of Directors until his death in August 1975. He also served as secretary of The Cotton Board and as president of the National Cottonseed Products Association, and it was his vision that eventually led to the founding of Cotton Incorporated.

“He was a big force in getting the enabling legislation for the referendum to establish what is now Cotton Incorporated,” said Duane Howell, retired farm editor at the Lubbock Avalanche Journal. “I never heard of anyone who didn’t think a lot of Roy B. Davis. He was universally liked and respected, and I think that was one of the assets that helped him accomplish so much in the industry for the good of all cotton, really.”

To honor Davis’ leadership and many accomplishments, the Texas Federation of Cooperatives and some of its member associations endowed the Distinguished Roy B. Davis Professorship in Agricultural Cooperation within the Department of Agricultural Economics at Texas A&M University in 1971.

Upon his retirement from the oil mill in 1971, Davis served as a consultant for Texas Tech’s Textile Research Center and for PCCA. Following his death on August 22, 1975, the PCOM Board of Directors approved the following resolution:

“Upon the death of our great leader and friend, we express our admiration and gratitude for the honor of having been associated with him during the period of growth and development of the cooperative cotton system on the High Plains of Texas. Mr. Davis was our inspiration in times of trouble, our support in times of need and an humble and appreciative friend in times of success. Monuments to his greatness stand all about us. He was instrumental in the growth and development of a cooperative ginning, compressing, milling and marketing system which has been of untold benefit to cotton growers in this area. He was a man that walked with kings but kept the common touch. We will be forever indebted to him for his counsel and guidance and hereby dedicate ourselves to furthering the causes for which he labored so well.”

Likewise, Duane Howell wrote the following in the Avalanche Journal:

“Roy B. Davis was good, he was modest, he was loving and humane. But his 74-year life left no doubt that he was also great. When he walked among giants, they often seemed a little smaller.”

# RUN YOUR OWN RACE

## Ciera Ware



BY JAYCI CAVE

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CIERA WARE

### GROWING UP SHE KNEW SHE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE INVOLVED IN AGRICULTURE.

It is in her blood, it is how she was raised, it is what she knows. For Ciera Ware, farming and taking care of the land is not only her profession, but her passion.

"I think one of the most important things my parents instilled in all of us kids was to do what you want to do and just run your own race," Ware said. "That's something my dad has always said, and to not worry about what other people are doing because at the end of the day no one else is going to live your life. You have to live your life for yourself, your family and your community and just do what you think is right. That is what I really love about farming. Since I work for myself I now have the opportunity to do what I need to do or what I want to do. I already have my dream job so I think that is something that I have been really lucky with."

While she is living her dream today, Ware said she did not always know that farming was the path she should take.

"I knew that I wanted to be involved in the agriculture industry, but I didn't know that I wanted to farm necessarily," Ware said. "Once I got to Texas Tech I figured out pretty quick that I missed the plant side of things, and cotton really is my primary passion in life. So, I decided that I didn't want to be on the sidelines with cotton, I wanted to be a farmer. I started talking to my dad about starting my own operation and he was really supportive."

Before her last semester studying Plant and Soil Science at Texas Tech, Ware's desire to become a farmer became a reality as she had the opportunity to rent some land and begin farming on her own. Her operation is between Ralls and Cone, Texas, and she is a member of Owens Co-op Gin. As she enters into her second crop season, she said she takes pride in caring for the land and wants to improve it as much as she can.

"I think it is important to care for the land because like everyone always says, you want to pass it on to future generations," Ware said. "I think that with me personally I just have such a connection to the land that I don't like seeing the land not in its ideal shape. It is so much a part of people around here that I think it is so important to see the land being taken care of in the best way possible."

Farming is not without its challenges. Ware said two of the biggest challenges growers face today are mother nature and the increasing cost of inputs. Even with the challenges, Ware said farming is in her blood.

"I have such a connection to the land," Ware said. "I almost think of it as a family member because it has always been there. It has always been such a huge part of how my siblings and I were raised, and I think those farms that I

grew up on will always be a part of me. I hope that my kids can have the same experience where they can just have such a connection to the land and what it means to people out here."

Her passion for farming does not stop in the field. Ware also developed a passion for telling agriculture's story and advocating for the industry. Ware said it is important to personalize the story you are telling so people know the differences and similarities of agriculture across the country.

"I think it is important because there are so few people involved with it anymore," Ware said. "Also, it is what I have grown up with and to be cliché, I guess it is in my blood. I think it is really important to not only advocate for the ag industry in general, but where you are from and the crop that you are growing."

This passion led her to start her own podcast, Farming on Mars, in 2018 to specifically focus on the South Plains cotton industry and discuss topics of interest to her, Ware said.

"I really enjoy listening to podcasts in general. Then I started thinking that there wasn't a podcast dedicated to cotton on the South Plains and that is something that I love hearing about, and I especially love hearing from farmers," Ware said. "There are a bunch of magazines and other outlets like that where they tell farmer stories, but I guess I wanted to have it more where they were telling their own stories and to actually hear their voice and hear them tell it in their own words. I think that I come at it from a unique perspective just because of my background and what I do now."

Ware said her podcast has evolved from the original direction she envisioned for it. Instead of the podcast features focusing solely on their operations or the industry today, she said it has morphed into an oral history podcast where many farmers tell stories and give historical records of their operation through the years.

"I think that is really cool for me because," Ware said, "especially starting out as a farmer, I want to hear how other people have done it and kind of glean what I can learn from it, but also what maybe I can implement on my operation that some people have forgotten about."



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There is no doubt that farming is a labor of love. Ware said the biggest thing she has learned in her short time farming is the importance of faith.

"I don't know if it is very practical advice, but you have to have a lot of faith that an opportunity is going to come up," Ware said. "You have to have a lot of faith that it is going to work out and that the weather is going to cooperate and the markets are going to cooperate."

Ware truly has taken her father's advice to heart and is running her own passionate race toward her goals. Whether it be telling her story, or those of others in the cotton industry or working to nurture and grow her next crop, she does it all with a great amount of thought, pride and passion. 🌱

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