



Delta Wildlife Partner

Josh Hankins

USA RICE

BY AMY TAYLOR

Josh Hankins is the Director of Grower Relations and the Rice Stewardship Partnership for USA Rice. Josh is headquartered in Arkansas and leads efforts to deliver on-the-ground conservation initiatives, assisting rice producers with increased on-farm energy and nutrient use efficiencies, water and soil conservation and wildlife management across the Mid-South. His efforts through public-private partnerships have helped bring in over \$80 million of conservation funding to the rice farming industry. Josh has wide-ranging work experience in the fields of agriculture, finance and medicine. He grew up in Arkansas, received his degree from Pepperdine University in California and lives in Little Rock with his wife and two daughters.

DW: *Please comment on your work and your partnership with Delta Wildlife.*

Hankins: The 2014 Farm Bill authorized a program called the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which took a small sliver out of the Farm Bill's conservation budget and opened it up to a competitive application process nationwide. If your organization can show you have the ability to form forward-thinking partnerships, can raise nonfederal dollars to support your cause and offer sensible solutions to natural resource concerns that producers will utilize on their working lands, then the RCPP can be a great fit. Our Rice Stewardship Partnership's first successful acquisition of an RCPP took place in 2015, and since then

we've secured seven others. In Mississippi, these programs will result in over \$5 million to expand rice farmers' voluntary, private lands conservation practices. These are funds that would be going to another part of the country had our Rice Stewardship Partnership not successfully advocated for them.



Though some of the programs target working ricelands in multiple states, they allow an unprecedented oppor-

tunity for conservation priorities to be identified at a local level, and because of this, our working partnership with Delta Wildlife in Mississippi was formed. Delta Wildlife's staff possesses significant knowledge of how to successfully deploy conservation programs in their region, which has been vital to the success, growth, and adoption of our Partnership's efforts in Mississippi. Generating buy-in at the regional level allows multiple entities to work together towards the same goals in a highly effective manner.

DW: *What are your current and future projects?*

Hankins: All of our Partnership's projects deployed and to be deployed in Mississippi focus on conserving working

ricelands, water and wildlife habitat. Rice is the most important grain in regard to human nutrition, providing more than one-fifth of the calories consumed by people worldwide. Likewise, rice is one of the most important food resources for waterfowl in the wintering areas of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. In fact, flooded rice fields provide more than one-third of the calories available to wintering waterfowl in the three regions rice is grown in the United States. Our US Rice producers are special and unique. They work the land to produce food for a hungry world, carefully manage the soil and water resources that support us all, and provide waterfowl and other wetland wildlife places to feed, rest and call home. A recent study was conducted that showed the total cost of replacing all winter-flooded rice habitat in the United States with restored wetlands would exceed \$3.5 billion. What's good for rice is good for ducks.

DW: In your opinion, what is the importance of an organization such as Delta Wildlife?

Hankins: It is important to keep our industry on the landscape for our rice growers, rural communities and wildlife, and our Rice Stewardship Partnership is helping do just that. None of the successes would be possible without the support and true working partnership with Delta Wildlife or without our leading financial sponsors: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Walmart Foundation, the Mosaic Company Foundation, Nestlé Purina PetCare, Chevron U.S.A., Freeport-McMoRan Foundation, Irene W. and C.B. Pennington Foundation, RiceTec, BASF, American Rice, Inc. – Riviana Foods, Inc., Delta Plastics, Anheuser Busch, Wells Fargo, Farmers Rice Milling Company, Horizon Ag, Turner's Creek & Bombay Hook Farms, MacDon Industries, Dow AgroSciences, Riceland Foods and Ducks Unlimited major sponsors.

If you grow rice in Mississippi, you will have another opportunity to sign up for our Partnership's programs later this year, and as new programs become available, we'll make sure you know where and when to sign up. Have a great 2018 growing season!

EAT MORE RICE... HAVE MORE SHRIMP.

**Rice makes shrimp better...
and not just on your plate.**

Mississippi rice farmers are doing their part to insure that Gulf shrimp populations are healthy and plentiful. How might you ask? Mississippi rice producers are working to reduce the amount of nutrients that leave their fields. This ultimately helps to reduce Hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico, creating a healthier and more productive fishery.

