



# IN THE BAG

Eastern Mississippi's Southern Seed & Feed is growing alongside the farmers it serves.

**E**very town has its heartbeat. Whether it's a town hall, barber-shop, general store or restaurant, there's always a hub around which the community revolves.

In Macon, Miss., a small agricultural town near the Alabama state line, some would argue that the hub is the Southern Seed & Feed mill, a thriving seed producer and manufacturer of livestock, pet and wildlife feeds.

Situated where the hardtop of a rural highway becomes gravel road, its towering silver grain bins and elevators are a natural neighbor to the surrounding fields of corn, soybeans and other row crops.

### **An Unexpected Success**

The mill is, indeed, a focal point of both the road and of Macon itself.

But it didn't start out that way. For owner Roger Koehn, the business has grown from a small traveling seed-cleaning service to become an unexpected success.

"If you'd told me where we'd be now 30 years ago, I'd never have believed you," he laughs. "I couldn't have dreamt it."

Koehn says the genesis and subsequent steady growth of the mill — which produces livestock, pet and wildlife feeds, as well as seed for pasture grasses, wildlife plots and row crops — has always been linked directly to the needs of the area's farming community.

"I started in business in 1983 because a friend of mine had a portable seed cleaner he wanted to sell," says Koehn. "I just kind of took a chance because nobody else around here was doing it. I went from farm to farm cleaning seed, but after a



*Southern Seed & Feed is a family-run business. Owner Roger Koehn, right, relies on daughter Katie, left, to handle sales and training, and son, Seth, center, to manage the plant.*

while, realized there was also a need for quality feed in the area. One thing led to another."

The product that would become the "flag ship" of Southern Seed & Feed was born of necessity and opportunity.

"Our first feed product was shelled corn," Koehn explains. "Because we already had the seed cleaner, we could also use it to clean the corn. At that time in the industry, most of the corn wasn't cleaned to remove hulls, pieces of cob and other types of debris, so that set us apart."

### **Triple-Cleaned Corn Makes a Name**

By the late 1980s, Southern Seed & Feed Triple-Cleaned Corn had become known throughout eastern Mississippi, especially among hunters and poultry producers.

"A lot of our corn is fed through a self-feeder that has a spinner on the bottom and a little hole through which the corn drops," says Koehn. "If you have trash in there, it stops up the feeder, burns out the motor and doesn't spread evenly."

Thanks in large part to the popularity and quality of Triple Cleaned Corn, the Southern Seed & Feed brand would

become a mainstay in farm-supply stores and co-ops throughout Mississippi and Alabama over the next three decades, especially as other mills in the area closed for a variety of reasons. Today, Southern Seed & Feed has a devoted following for products ranging from catfish food to cattle feed, and Koehn and his staff often formulate custom blends upon request.

### **Custom-Blended Rations**

"Sometimes we make a custom ration based on cost, and sometimes it's based on the nutrient content," says Koehn, who works closely with his son, Seth, the plant manager, and daughter, Katie, who handles sales and safety training. "We use a nutritionist where necessary, but I usually do the formulations."

A cattle producer himself, Koehn owns a 280-head commercial cow-calf operation that gives him an added connection to the livestock industry he serves. But it's the collaborative relationship between the mill and the region's farming and trucking industries that has made Southern Seed & Feed an asset to the surrounding counties.

"We purchase local crops almost exclusively," Koehn says. "There have been only



*Southern Seed & Feed, above, mills a variety of feeds and custom blends from grain grown in eastern Mississippi. The company's Triple-Cleaned Corn, left, has been a popular product for more than 30 years.*



a couple drought years when we've had to bring in Mississippi Delta corn, but that's about the furthest we've gone."

### **A Game Changer for Local Farmers**

Bart Harris, vice president and branch manager of Mississippi Land Bank in Starkville, says the impact Southern Seed & Feed has each year on local farmers is a "game changer."

"The company greatly benefits this area," says Harris. "The amount of grain and seed that is purchased by Southern Seed & Feed from local farmers and producers makes the company a valuable asset to our local farm community. Not everybody has a large feed mill nearby where they can easily sell and deliver their crops."

With 25 full-time staff members, the mill is one of the larger employers in the community, but many more people, including truckers, owe a part of their livelihood to the company.

"The products that go out of here are hauled by local contract carriers," says Koehn. "We don't consider them employees, but in many cases, their living is made from here. We keep them busy for most of the year."

A solid partnership between Mississippi Land Bank and Southern Seed & Feed adds value to the company's presence in the community. For example, the Land Bank financed a 2013 project to expand the mill's off-loading area, which has enabled

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because we make things so much easier for them."

### **More Pelleted Feed**

An upcoming Mississippi Land Bank-funded modification to the mill will enable Southern Seed & Feed to manufacture pelleted feed — a product that currently must be manufactured at another facility — within the next year or so. Koehn says this upgrade will allow for further expansion of his product line and hopefully provide

**– Bart Harris, Mississippi Land Bank**

farmers to deliver crops much more efficiently during harvest time.

"Thanks to that project, trucks are in and out of here in 20 minutes or so," says Koehn. "They used to have to wait in line a while. If we weren't here at all, they'd be heading to a chicken feed mill where the wait would be close to eight hours. We have a lot of people who want to sell to us

even more opportunities for local farmers to market their crops.

"We try to be very strategic about how we grow and what products we offer," he says. "It's my hope that we will continue to be good partners to the Mississippi Land Bank, our local farmers and our community." ■ MJ

*For more information, go to [www.southernseedfeed.com](http://www.southernseedfeed.com).*