Farmers begin using new pesticide shed

By DICK WRIGHT
Advocate staff writer

The Frey brothers’ new “agri-chemical mixing center” on their farm near Morganza is the first one in Louisiana to be finished and put in use under a U.S. Department of Agriculture program that helps with the cost.

The Freys’ building is a metal frame shed open on two sides and positioned near cotton fields.

At first glance, it could pass as a storage shed for equipment.

But this building has a sloped concrete floor with a catch basin in the middle. That is to trap pesticide that may spill during the filling of tanks that are on the big tractors that work the cotton fields.

To one side of the shed is a sink where pesticide handlers can wash after they have finished mixing and filling tanks. Next to the sink is a shower for a quick rinse in case pesticide mixture is spilled on the handler.

“It is really wonderful to have,” Mitch Frey, one of the farming Frey brothers, said.

“We sat down and decided we would do this to stay on the good side of everything,” he said.

According to the Soil Conservation Service, which provides technical assistance to build the sheds, the purpose is “to provide a chemical mixing center where agrichemicals can be properly handled without harmful effects to the environment.”

Mitch, Mark, Marty and Matt Frey own Quad M Investors, a partnership. They succeeded their father, Fred Frey, and uncle, Edwin Leonards, in farming when the older men retired.

The four brothers farm 4,500 acres, growing cotton, corn, soybeans, wheat and rice. They also do precision land grading on farms and construction sites.

Three Frey brothers, from left, Marty, Mitch and Matt Frey, built this new pesticide mixing shed on their Morganza farm with federal help.
They put the new pesticide mixing building by the cotton fields because cotton requires the most applications of different herbicides and insecticides, they said.

Mitch Frey compares the convenience of the new shed to having air conditioning — it wasn't something they had to have, but now they have it they wonder how they did without it.

Farmers could sign up for cost-sharing government help last year to build a mixing shed.

Government financing is through the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, the USDA agency responsible for farm programs. The USDA's Soil Conservation Service supplies the design and gives technical assistance in the location and construction.

Elwood Hargreaves, county executive in New Roads, said three Pointe Coupee Parish farmers signed up originally, but only the Freys carried through with plans for the mixing shed, claiming the ASCS office reviewed signups around the state and decided how available money for the program would be spent, he said.

Robert Soule said a Soil Conservation Service representative told him the ASCS office has plans for the buildings, but the farmer chooses the contractor for the construction.

The Freys decided to build a mixing shed because their tractors are so large, Mitch Frey said.

The roof of their shed covers a space 36 feet by 42 feet. The concrete slab is 31 feet by 21 feet. Soule said it was built to withstand winds of 100 miles per hour.

Demonstrating how the shed is used, one of the Freys drove in a John Deere tractor outfitted with equipment that he said can plow 12 rows of cotton at one time. The tractor, stopped on the concrete slab, which is curbed to catch spills, and next to the source of the pesticide and water.

The Freys said they use the shed mainly when they are putting pesticides on cotton.

Mitch Frey said some farmers might not find such a shed worth the expense if their fields are not close together.

Before they had the shed, the Freys used a water wagon to take water to the field and mix pesticides in the open. There was no way to control spills.

Liquid from spills that occur on the slope of the new pesticide mixing building is caught and recycled back into the tank.

Soule said the Frey brothers built a large shed, but the SCS basic plan can be smaller and it can use wooden framing and have all four sides open, which would hold down the cost.

Lowndes said the ASCS pays 75 percent of the cost of a building, up to $7,000. The farmer is expected to pay the rest of the cost in cash, not "in kind," that is, by furnishing labor or other non-monetary contributions.

Anyone wanting more information about building a pesticide mixing building may contact their local ASCS or SCS office.