

VALUE ADDED PRODUCER GRANT SUCCESS



SOUTHERN
EXTENSION
RISK
MANAGEMENT
EDUCATION

RALSTON FAMILY FARMS | ARKANSAS RIVER VALLEY

Growing rice in Arkansas is commonly associated with the Delta region along the eastern border of the Natural State. However, there is a hidden gem tucked away between the mountains of the north-central Arkansas River Valley. This is where the Ralston family has called home for generations. Beginning farming this land in 1999, Tim Ralston has watched his farm evolve into the dream that he once longed for. Using precision leveled ground and irrigation water from the Arkansas River, the Ralston's grow 3,000 acres of rice and smaller amounts of wheat, corn, and soybeans yearly.

Location is an important element to farming for all growers, and the location of Ralston Family Farms has both its advantages and disadvantages. While cooler weather and efficient irrigation practices assist River Valley farmers during the growing season, their distance from Arkansas' major rice producers is evident. The Ralston's and their neighbors spent many years hauling their grain to large rice mills in southeast Arkansas because of the absence of local rice mills to market their product. Because of this distance, River Valley farmers could not connect to their consumers.



Source: Ralston Family Farms

“The grant helped fund our packaging. This packaging is unique and assures that we maintain our brand.”

- Tim Ralston

In 2017, the Ralston's were awarded a value added producers grant (VAPG) by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). As a result, Ralston Family Farms received assistance for start-up costs to package their own rice, supplementing their new mills. With the help of the University Of Arkansas Division Of Agriculture's Food Science Department, the Ralston's developed package designs, labeling, and marketing for their products. Their operation now provides consumers with the unique ability to track their product from the field to their plate. Today, the Ralston family continues to use responsible and sustainable farming methods to provide high quality rice for the world.

The Southern Risk Management Education Center ([SRMEC](#)) seeks to empower producers to manage marketing and price risks which includes promoting the Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program. The VAPG program helps farmers and ranchers understand, develop and implement diversification strategies to enhance their business' products. In partnership with Agricultural Marketing Resource Center ([AgMRC](#)), SRMEC promotes successful value added ventures across the Southern region. To learn more about farmer and rancher VAPG successful stories visit <https://srmec.uaex.edu/News/vapg-success-stories.aspx>.



Understanding “Value-Added”



The USDA defines “value-added” as any agricultural commodity or product whose value has been increased by:

- Undergoing a change in physical state (e.g., turning fruit into jam);
- Being produced, marketed, or segregated for its special character or identity (e.g., GMO-free, organic, grass-fed);
- Transforming natural resources into energy on the farmstead (e.g., biodiesel);
- Being aggregated and marketed as a locally-produced food (e.g., as part of a Buy Local campaign, state-produced branding or labeling effort); or
- Linking farmers with local and regional supply networks in which they are equal partners (e.g., farm to school or other mid-tier value chains)

Visit srmec.uaex.edu/News/vapg-success-stories.aspx to read value-added success stories!