

### **Farmer of the Year:**

Kelly Kitten was born in Slaton, TX to Carol and Clarence Kitten. Farming has been in the Kitten family for several generations and Kelly grew up helping his dad farm cotton. He graduated from Cooper High School, where he met and later married his wife, Andrea. He graduated summa cum laude in 3 years from Texas Tech University in 1988, where he majored in Ag Economics. He studied for exams while in a tractor farming with his family. By 1992, he owned his first plot of land while continuing to farm on Kitten family land. He is now farming 1400 acres of cotton, including plots of his own, his parent's land, and the land of several landlords in Slaton, TX.

Kelly has three children. His oldest, Aaron Kitten, graduated from Texas Tech and is currently farming with Kelly. Aaron is married to Justine Kitten, a native Virginian, who is a pediatric occupational therapist in Lubbock. Kelly's daughter, Kaylee Kitten Vela, is pursuing her clinical doctorate in audiology from Texas Tech. She was recently married to Jonathan Vela, who is a co-owner of a media management company. His youngest son, Kaden Kitten, is a freshman at South Plains College in Levelland and majoring in Mechanical Engineering.

Kelly couldn't imagine doing anything else but farming. He was born into it and it is in his blood. It is his passion and it shows in his work ethic. He is a hard-working farmer and he is very good at what he does. For these reasons, we present to you Farmer of the Year, Kelly Kitten.

### **Farm Hand of the Year:**

Modesto (Mo) Vasquez, Born in Brownsville Texas. His Family moved to Slaton around 1953. Him and his family worked for Alex Bednarz and lived on the farm. Mo has farmed all his life and continues to work the land that he grew up on. He is very knowledgeable in all aspects of farming. While growing up Mo picked cotton by hand but now drives an eight row cotton stripper. He has mastered the art of using GPS technology to let the systems do some of the driving for him. Mo is a great farmer and even better person. He is always willing to help when he is asked. He is a huge asset to Kurt Kitten Farms and runs most of the farming operation.

### **Railroader of the Year:**

Rodney Simmons, also known as, Giggles was born in Slaton, TX to Claude M and Viola Simmons. He graduated Slaton High School in 1972 joining the Army soon after in 1973 and served our Country until 1976. During this time he married his high school sweetheart, Martha Piwonka, daughter of Milton and Lorraine Piwonka, in 1974. Railroading has been in the Simmons family for several generations including his father, grandfather, and uncles. His love for the railroad has been past on through his son, Michael and son-in-law, Dusty Follis. Rodney decided to hire out with the Santa Fe Railroad on October 8, 1979. He has been very active in the railroad through the United Transportation Union, participating in the Safety Committee for BNSF, and was asked to be a trauma responder by his fellow railroaders for traumatic events.

Rodney's hard work and dedication to the Railroad has allowed him to provide a college education for his wife and three children. His oldest, Michael Simmons, graduated from Texas Tech and is raising his family of four in Slaton along with his wife, Tish Simmons while working for BNSF. His oldest daughter,

Amanda Brown, graduated from University of Phoenix and is working for Capital Farm Credit as a financial analyst. Amanda is married to Dustin Brown, a Lubbock Firefighter and Training Captain of the Slaton Volunteer Fire Department. Amanda and Dustin live in Slaton raising their two children. Rodney's youngest daughter, Valerie Follis, graduated from South Plains College with an Associate's Degree in Business and went on to receive an Associate's Degree in Surgical Technology. Valerie is married to Dusty Follis, a BNSF Railroader, and is raising their two children in Idalou, TX. Rodney loved to be active in his children's lives while coaching his son in Slaton Little League Baseball and teaching his children the responsibilities through the FFA.

Rodney is very active in the community being a member of the Knights of Columbus and Saint Joseph Church. He worked beside his brother in opening and managing the Simmons Brothers Meat Market in Slaton while being employed with BNSF Railroad. Rodney is looked up to and respected by many railroaders through training and being a mentor by working to ensure that the job is done in the most efficient and safest ways to haul freight for America's needs. We present to you Railroader of the Year, Rodney Simmons.