

COOPERATIVE

SPRING 2025

# FARMING



# NEWS

DOWN TO EARTH NEWS FROM OUR FRIENDS AT THE CO-OP





# "I'll never plant another variety of pinkeye peas if I can't have Mississippi Pinkeye 2."

**NEW RELEASE!**

## Mississippi Pinkeye 2 Purplehull

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Mississippi Pinkeye 2 retains the most desirable characteristics of superior yield and disease resistance of Mississippi Pinkeye, with the additional benefit of improved emergence and survivability in cool, wet soils typical of early spring weather.



"I'll never plant another variety of pinkeye peas if I can't have Mississippi Pinkeye 2. I don't want any other variety. I have tried other pinkeyes, but they don't yield, cook or taste like Mississippi Pinkeye 2. I like the size of this big pea and it shells out easy. It freezes pretty and tastes like you just shelled them.

We planted late and it was a dry year, but the plants still got knee high loaded down with peas. Mississippi Pinkeye 2 - that's my pea."

- Lisa Holmes



"Planted two varieties of pinkeye peas this year: Texas and Mississippi Pinkeye 2. I planted the second week of March."

Mississippi Pinkeye 2 was the best pea by far. The plant was larger, had longer pods and more pods per plant than the Texas, and was taller and also grew off faster. The pods had a good purple color and shelled out better. They also freeze well. Again, there were more peas per bush than the Texas plant, plus you can pick all season long."

- Michael Anderson



"Our Mississippi Pinkeye 2 Purplehull peas were really good producers and our customers liked them. They made long pods and the peas were larger than the other varieties we planted. They mature more evenly which makes picking easier and more profitable.

The new Mississippi Pinkeye 2 Purplehull will be a big part of my operation again next year."

- Bob Compton



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### On the Cover:

2024 E.P. Garrett Manager  
of the Year Keith Griffin  
of Madison County  
Cooperative.

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# Letter from the Editor

We are excited for another year Down-to-Earth news from the Co-op! 2025 will be a busy one at the Co-op. From helping farmers prep, plant and harvest to supporting livestock producers who nurture, feed, breed and care for their animals, the Co-op has just what you need to succeed. And you don't need to be a member to shop the Co-op, everyone is welcome. Each store offers local expertise, friendly faces and competitive pricing on a wide array of inventory such as farm and garden supplies, pet and livestock feed and even great gift items.

We are excited to present our exclusive 2025 issue featuring Alabama Farmers Cooperative's 88th Annual Membership Meeting where President and CEO Rivers Myres looked back through the history of ups and downs farmers have overcome since AFC's establishment in 1936. The meeting was also a time to celebrate our 2024 E.P. Garrett Manager of the Year recipient Keith Griffin of Madison County Cooperative. Griffin brings strong leadership along with a sense of humor into his role as General Manager and recognizes that it is teamwork that truly makes the dream work for their customers.

Throughout this publication, you can read more about a new Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries initiative, the latest farming, livestock and forestry news, what youth-in-ag groups have been up to, as well as heartwarming tales from our regulars. In the Co-op Corner, we share how stores are going above and beyond their typical job duties to better serve their communities, celebrate one salesman for earning a prestigious award for helping customers and take a look at how future leadership is being cultivated within AFC.

Be sure to follow us on social media and through the new digital storytelling blog on our website, [www.alafarm.com](http://www.alafarm.com).

As always, thank you for being a loyal reader, customer and part of the AFC family.

*Tiffany Lester*

Editor-in-Chief





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# ACES FARM AND AGRIBUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ALABAMA AGRICULTURE

KELLI J. RUSSELL, PH.D., AND MYKEL R. TAYLOR, PH.D., AUBURN UNIVERSITY



# CATALYST

A Plan for Propelling Alabama's Economic Growth

In the Fall of 2024, Governor Ivey unveiled CataLyst, her comprehensive economic strategic plan for Alabama. CataLyst included eight target sectors for economic development in Alabama over the next decade: metal and advanced materials, mobility, defense, technology, chemical manufacturing, forestry and wood products, bioscience, and agriculture and food. The plan aims to enable growth in these target sectors to develop talent, facilitate innovation, prioritize infrastructure, and enhance Alabama's business climate. To help inform the development of the initiatives in CataLyst, 115 Alabama agriculture producers and business owners participated in 11 focus groups to document their perspectives on the industry and opportunities for growth in agriculture. Agricultural organizations and stakeholder groups helped organize the focus groups

facilitated by Auburn University.

Producers and agribusiness owners stressed the challenges of profitability, the need for additional transportation infrastructure investments, and land transition as key issues hindering potential economic development. In these discussions, producers also emphasized the opportunities for economic growth through agriculture in Alabama in processing and agricultural manufacturing, the additional development of further aggregating capabilities, innovative investments in agriculture programs, and more agricultural workforce development programs. Agribusiness owners and Alabama producers agreed that agriculture is a strong economic driver in Alabama, and further investment in the industry through CataLyst initiatives will benefit rural communities and those involved in agriculture. 🌱



# PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF THE FAMILY FARM

ADAM N. RABINOWITZ, PH.D., AUBURN UNIVERSITY

The 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture reports data about agricultural producers' involvement in estate or succession planning. In Alabama, only 52% indicated they are involved in that process, a decrease of 4% from 2017. Now consider that the average age of Alabama producers is 58.7, up from 58.0 in 2017. Meanwhile, 39.3% are 65 or older, an increase from 35.9% in 2017. It's no secret that farmers are getting older, but the lack of planning is a concern. We all know estate planning is critical to preserve farms for future generations, yet too many do not want to deal with the inevitable and plan for the future.

Estate planning resources are readily available

through the Alabama Cooperative Extension System that can help one get started with the process. While, ultimately, legal documents should be drafted by an attorney, the family conversations and thought process can start well before that visit. Think about what is most important to you and your family. It is also important to think about how land is to be transferred. Leaving land to multiple children equally can create family disputes and uncertainty in decision making. It is best to discuss these issues as a family.

Most importantly, not spending the time to engage in estate planning can put farmland at risk. When land is passed down to multiple heirs without clear legal documentation, it becomes known as heirs property. This can limit land management, complicate access to federal programs, and if not resolved, become vulnerable to loss through partition sales, tax sales, or adverse possession. Spending a little time today can save major headaches in the future and preserve the family farm legacy for generations to come. 🌱





# THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE STARTING AN AQUACULTURE FARM

ATARYN GARLOCK, PH.D., AUBURN UNIVERSITY



Aquaculture is a rapidly growing agricultural sector, and the potential for aquaculture in Alabama and in the U.S. is high as demand for farm-raised seafood is increasing. However, before jumping into fish farming, there are many benefits and disadvantages to consider. Things to consider range from biological and physical factors, such as site selection, water quality and system design, to economic and financial factors, such as your financial position, market demand, and risk. As fish farming is generally becoming more intensive, greater capital investment and higher degrees of management are required, not to mention there are lower margins for error. Thus, the importance of economic and financial considerations during the planning stage cannot be overemphasized.

Before making a significant investment in commercial fish farming, it is important to do some financial planning either on your own or with the help of an accountant or financial expert. Some things to consider are your financial position, the profitability of the proposed enterprise and whether the business will generate enough cash flow. Many fish farmers do not have the capital to start a farming enterprise without a loan. There are lenders who specialize in aquaculture loans; however, it is important to consider how much the interest will cost as high interest rates can erode cash flow and profits. Evaluating cash flows is important in developing a loan repayment plan that aligns with farm revenue. There are budgeting and other financial resources available to help fish farmers assess whether their enterprise will be profitable and have sufficient cash flow (SRAC publications 4400-4403).

Risk is an important aspect of any farming business. Aquaculturists should plan to cope with production

challenges associated with disease and natural weather events, as well as uncertainty associated with markets, prices, and government policy, realizing that no matter how well you plan, there will always be unforeseen challenges and mistakes made. Large investments in unproven production systems are likely to be unprofitable until technical issues can be sorted out and lower costs of production can be achieved. Beginning aquaculturists should stick with proven species and production systems. Even in years when production is good, volatility in market and input prices can lead to economic losses. Starting small can help minimize risks while you learn about production and develop your markets.

Deciding how you will market your product begins in the planning stages, not when you have a pond full of market-ready fish. Seafood markets are highly competitive, and U.S. producers face steep competition from imported seafood that is produced primarily from countries with lower production and processing costs. It is important to consider the extent of market saturation, your product's value proposition, and how you will make your product competitive. Fish farming should be market-driven, not production-driven. Developing a solid marketing plan will help identify what species, sizes, and volumes you should produce. Things to consider in your marketing plan are who will buy your product, how much they will buy, how frequently they will buy it, what price you will receive, and how stable demand and price are.

These are just a few economic and financial aspects to consider before starting a fish farm. Aquaculturists are highly encouraged to connect with Auburn Extension, who have a breadth of aquaculture expertise and are always happy to assist prospective and existing aquaculturists. 🌱



# ALABAMA'S THANK A FARMER INITIATIVE

## CELEBRATING AGRICULTURE'S BACKBONE



In 2025, Alabama Agriculture Commissioner Rick Pate is launching the "Thank a Farmer" initiative to spotlight the essential role farmers play in our state's economy, environment and food security. As agriculture faces challenges like rising costs, supply chain issues and government overreach, Pate believes it's time to honor the hard work of Alabama's farmers.

"Our farmers are the foundation of our food supply," said Pate. "They work tirelessly to provide fresh, safe and sustainable food and fiber for our families and communities." Alabama is a leading agricultural state, known for peanuts, cotton, soybeans, corn and poultry.

Despite the obstacles—such as fluctuating commodity prices and unpredictable weather—Alabama farmers continue to drive the state's agricultural success and economic stability by contributing nearly \$5 billion annually and supporting over 350,000 jobs for Alabamians.

The "Thank a Farmer" initiative will emphasize these farmers' dedication, from large-scale operations to small family farms, and the impact they have on local communities. The initiative also invites the public to get involved by sharing their gratitude and reflecting on where their food comes from. Pate hopes this movement will build a stronger connection between producers and consumers. Individuals can also show their support by signing a petition at [www.thankstofarmers.com](http://www.thankstofarmers.com) to have October 12

declared as Farmers' Day in Alabama.

The campaign's long-term goal is to inspire public appreciation for agriculture, leading to greater investments in farming technology, infrastructure and education. "This initiative is about creating lasting change," said Senator David Sessions, Chairman of the Alabama Senate Agriculture Committee. "We need to ensure the future of Alabama's agriculture is solid and that our farmers are appreciated for all they do."

Ultimately, the "Thank a Farmer" initiative is a call to recognize and celebrate Alabama's farmers. As Jon Hegeman, Central Vice President for the Alabama Farmers Federation, puts it, "Farmers are the backbone of our state. They deserve our thanks and respect, and I appreciate Commission Pate for highlighting this issue." 🌱

### How You Can Get Involved

- Visit [www.thankstofarmers.com](http://www.thankstofarmers.com) to sign the petition to create Farmers' Day in Alabama.
- Support local agriculture by shopping Sweet Grown Alabama products.
- Share your gratitude on social media with #ThankAFarmerAL.



# THINGS THAT OCCUPY MY TIME

BY DR. TONY FRAZIER


I have not only been around regulatory medicine for nearly a quarter of a century, but I have been deeply involved in it. From the first quarantine I ever wrote for a herd of brucellosis-positive cattle to supervising tracebacks of positive BSE cattle to recently working with the state health department to assure dairy cattle are tested for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (Bird Flu), my life has revolved around implementing and carrying out regulations that are in place to safeguard the health of Alabama's poultry and livestock. Over my years I have met a good handful of government veterinarians who believe that a new regulation could solve all the world's problems. My philosophy has always been to try to help the producer and to regulate only when necessary.

One of the issues that has been evolving since shortly after I became State Veterinarian is Animal Disease Traceability. When I left private practice to become a field veterinary medical officer for my area in South Alabama, brucellosis was making its last attempts to not be eradicated. One of the foremost responsibilities of my job was working with veterinarians,

producers, USDA officials and other state animal health employees to help the state become brucellosis free.

In the early 2000's, we realized that we were no longer placing the silver medal ear tags in cattle because the biggest portion of brucellosis testing had ceased after most states were declared free of the disease. So, the discussions became more organized and focused on how we would be able to trace animals that were exposed to a disease with no form of identification on most of the livestock in the country. In about 2005, USDA became serious about introducing an identification system that could enhance tracebacks of diseased animals and identify where exposed animals may have gone.

Today's technology gives us the benefit of being able to get in front of a disease outbreak rather than chase it. We have the capability through electronic ID tags and computers to track movement of exposed animals in seconds rather than days of going through stockyard receipts and interviewing producers. I just googled a question earlier today. The computer came



*We have the capability through electronic ID tags and computers to track movement of exposed animals in seconds rather than days ....*



up with 19,100 articles in 0.14 seconds. That is a little difficult for me to wrap my brain around, but I cannot argue that there are some very good benefits that go along with technology, and we should take advantage of whatever is out there. Electronic Identification Devices are already being used in tracing certain regulated diseases such as trichinosis, tuberculosis and BSE.

The Animal Disease Traceability regulation that we have in place now is not significantly different from what was in place when I wrote my first health certificate back in 1988. The regulation at that time said certain classes of cattle and bison must be identified on a certificate of veterinary inspection (health certificate) before crossing state lines. Feeder cattle could be identified as group lots and did not require individual ID. Today's rule that went into effect on Nov. 5, 2024, is not significantly different. It does establish that the RFID tag is the only acceptable means of identification going forward. The silver USDA tags, brands and tattoos are no longer accepted as official methods of identification.

Is the program perfect? I believe that if feeder cattle, that are not required to be identified, can still carry diseases such as foot and mouth disease, we still have some work to do. However, the use of RFID technology and computers to trace diseased and exposed animals has helped us kick the can down the road a lot further that it was. Twenty years ago, I said this issue would not be resolved until years after I retire. I haven't changed my opinion.

Another issue that not only will not go away but seems to be getting a bigger hold on regulatory medicine is the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza virus (HPAI). Flu viruses have first and last names. This virus' name is H5N1. This virus has been around on the other side of the world since the late 1990s – maybe longer. Then around 2005, it was reported that several people in Asia and more specifically Vietnam, in close contact with sick chickens were sometimes getting the disease. In a proactive move, the United States began putting plans in place to deal with the HPAI if it was found in the United States.

Since the early 2000s the Alabama Department of Ag and Industries, along with neighboring states, the Alabama Department of Public Health, stakeholders in the poultry industry, and USDA have put plans into place and exercised the plans for recognition, response and recovery if the virus, usually carried by wild waterfowl, did not honor our state lines and came into Alabama.

Over the last couple of years, we have been thankful



*One of the main reasons for the increase in egg prices is because over 100 million table egg-laying birds have died or have been culled to stop the spread of the virus since 2022.*

for our preparation. We have had two backyard flocks and two commercial flocks that have become infected with the H5 N1 virus. Because of our preparation, rather than it spreading like wildfire, the individual cases did not turn into outbreaks. We hope that continues to be the trend.

The H5N1 virus has not shown any inclination to go away. It continues to wreak havoc here in the United States where it is still considered a foreign animal disease. One of the main reasons for the increase in egg prices is because over 100 million table egg-laying birds have died or have been culled to stop the spread of the virus since 2022.

And the virus has become much less discriminating as to what species it infects. In the past few years, 26 countries have reported more than 48 mammal species that have been infected. In the United States the virus has been detected in several species on a very sporadic basis. The one that had got the spotlight here in the United States is dairy cattle. Since early spring of last year through mid-December, nearly 500 US dairy farms have tested positive with more to follow, I am sure.

Presently we are working with the Alabama Department of Public Health to implement a testing program for HPAI. Our Auburn lab will do the testing while our branch labs assure that the milk samples are handled and shipped properly. There are a handful of cases where dairy workers on positive farms have tested positive for the virus, but their symptoms have usually been mild. One person from Louisiana died from H5N1 bird flu. That person was over 65 and had underlying medical conditions.

I must add that our poultry meat and egg supply is very safe to consume as is pasteurized milk.

Occasionally, I do want to let you know we are continuing to work both for the health and safety of our animal population as well as public health in general. If you have questions or concerns do not hesitate to call my office; 334-240-7253. 🌿

# MAKING AN IMPACT FOR A CLEANER ALABAMA

BY SHAY GRANT

Fall is always a lively and exciting season filled with back-to-school activities, football games, pep rallies and holiday festivities! As the Clean Campus Coordinator, I had the privilege this year of visiting many schools across our great state, ranging from elementary schools to colleges, to promote our shared mission of keeping Alabama clean and beautiful. From September to December, I spoke with students about ways they can make a difference in their homes, schools and communities. I like to emphasize the ripple effect: small changes lead to big impacts. It all starts with you! Your actions can lead to a big problem or a big solution.

Many of our state's community colleges actively participate in Alabama PALS (People Against a Littered State) programs, including the Spring Clean-

Up and Adopt-a-Mile. This year Jamie Mitchell, PALS Executive Director, and I had the honor of speaking to the Freshman Class of 2028 at Miles College. These students have enthusiastically joined the Clean Campus Program, and we are excited to see how their leadership will impact not only the beautiful campus of Miles College but also the surrounding community of Fairfield, Alabama.

Christy Waddell, our Adopt-a-Mile Coordinator, and I visited Council Traditional School in Mobile on our way to the annual Coastal Cleanup. Council Traditional, an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, is encouraging its fifth graders to explore the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These students are delving into how local governments and businesses can make a difference.



*Students at Miles College in Fairfield, Alabama show off their new reusable bags after joining the Clean Campus Program.*



*Council Traditional School students in Mobile, Alabama are delving into how local governments and businesses can make a difference in environmental issues. They were excited to participate in the Coastal Cleanup at Dauphin Island.*



As part of their IB Primary Years Programme (PYP) Exhibition in May, they will present environmental issues tied to their chosen SDG and propose actionable plans to address them locally. The enthusiasm of these fifth graders was contagious! They were excited about participating in the Coastal Cleanup at Dauphin Island and invited us to return in May for their PYP Exhibition to see their environmental projects firsthand.

Bear Exploration Center's Green Team in Montgomery has been a part of the Clean Campus Program since 2017. They have an amazing group led by the art teacher Mary Bonikowski. It's no wonder they often have winners in the Poster Contest, and they also usually enter the scrapbook contest. The Green Team not only keeps their campus clean but also does many beautification projects around the school and builds school pride. Bear has a wonderful out-



*The "Green Team" at Bear Exploration Center in Montgomery, Alabama has been a part of the Clean Campus Program since 2017. They do several beautification projects and maintain an outdoor classroom where they grow vegetables, flowers and herbs.*

door classroom where they grow vegetables, flowers, herbs and have a great composting bin.

Montgomery Christian School has gotten involved in the Clean Campus Program for the first year. The school is looking forward to the spring poster contest and taking plenty of pictures to document their journey to put into a scrapbook to enter the scrapbook contest in the fall. I was invited to visit their Kindergarten and First Grade Classes. I read aloud a book about looking out for litter and listened to their ideas on how they can keep their campus litter free starting with being "litter getters" on the



*Clean Campus Coordinator Shay Grant reads an anti-littering book to Montgomery Christian School kindergarten and first graders. This is the first year the school is participating in the Clean Campus Program.*

playground during recess. I look forward to following their journey with PALS.

The Student Government of Grand Bay Middle School invited me to help kick off their clean campus program as they prepared for the first clean-up of the year. After my presentation they worked on posters to get their student body excited about cleaning up their campus. Great leadership skills are being developed and put to great use for their campus and community.

As we move deeper into 2025, I look forward to visiting even more schools and seeing what students come up with for the Poster and Recycled Art Contests. If your school is interested in scheduling a visit or has questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at (334) 263-7737 or via email at [shay@alpals.org](mailto:shay@alpals.org). All Alabama PALS programs are offered to schools free of charge, thanks to our invaluable state partnerships and corporate sponsors. Together, let's continue fostering a culture of environmental stewardship across Alabama. Here's to a cleaner, brighter future! 🌞

# LIMESTONE COUNTY PIG SQUEAL

## BRINGING A TRADITION BACK HOME

BY CAROLYN DRINKARD

The 4-H Pig Squeal Project is one of the most popular events for youngsters throughout the state of Alabama. This program teaches young people recommended management practices for growing and raising swine. Participants develop swine management skills, learn to produce healthy pigs, develop awareness of business management and develop record-keeping skills. When completed, 4-H youngsters bring one hog to a 4-H hog show and sell it at an auction afterward.

In the past, the Northwest Alabama 4-H Pig Squeal Show and Auction was a regional event, involving four or more different counties. Over the

past few years, Limestone County Pig Squeal participation has grown significantly.

In 2024, students, parents and community members wanted to have their own Pig Squeal Project in Limestone County. To make this happen, Chloe Wilson, the Limestone County Extension Coordinator, asked the community, parents, students, businesses and others to help. Wilson put out the call for volunteers, and the Limestone County community partners responded in ways she never could have imagined.

"It meant all hands on deck for this show to be successful," Wilson said. "There was no way my



*Liddy Hawkins, Grand Champion Market Hog*



*Show judge and former Cherokee County Extension Coordinator Danny Miller takes a moment to assess the show entries.*



4-H'ers and I could do this on our own."

In a Pig Squeal event, a show area is important. Panels are used to separate and pen animals. The estimated cost for metal pen panels was \$20,000.

"We didn't have that kind of money to spend," Wilson stated.

Lauren Graham, a 4-H volunteer and the Advanced Agriculture teacher at the Limestone Career Tech Center, volunteered her students to build the panels. The Limestone County Legislative Delegation donated \$5,000 for the metal as well as a few other donations, and Graham's classes built sturdy panels that can be used for years to come.

The 2024 Limestone County 4-H Pig Squeal Project brought the tradition back to Limestone County on May 4. It was the first livestock event in almost 10 years. Held in the old barn at the Tennessee Valley Research and Extension Center in Belle Mina, the popular project caused many visitors to remember having other agriculture events here years before. One family recounted stories of three generations attending events in the "back barn" at the Tennessee Valley Research Station.

The event also produced a festive atmosphere for all. The Limestone County School System loaned bleachers for guests, and the Limestone County Cattlemen's Association grilled hamburger and hot dog plates free of charge. Pepsi-Cola donated drinks. Even the auctioneer volunteered his time.

The turnout was exceptional and the sale was a big success. Eighteen hogs were auctioned for \$11,991. Both businesses and individuals purchased the hogs at higher than market prices.

"It went so smoothly," Wilson said. "We had



*The Limestone County Cattlemen's Association volunteers smile as they cook great food for the large crowd.*

volunteers for every aspect of the show. We could never have done this without the support of our community."

Wilson expressed great pride in her 4-H students. Each show participant wrote a personal thank-you note to the buyer who purchased a hog.

Wilson also praised the many volunteers who helped in so many other ways. Parents, students, community members, retired Extension workers and many others were there to help. Wilson even received donations from people who heard about the event and sent contributions to support the 4-H'ers.

"We worked tirelessly planning this event on the backend. I am so happy that everything went so well," Wilson explained. "We are already looking forward to next year. I can't wait to see how many kids sign up."

The first Limestone County Pig Squeal Project rallied a community and revived a tradition that everyone hopes to build on. It became a uniquely Limestone County event, held at home. 🌻



*Karizmah Williams concentrates on guiding her hog for the judges to see her showmanship.*



*Sara Beth Graham shows her skill with getting her hogs to move before the judges.*



*Hannah Stebbins, Reserve Grand Champion Market Hog*

# IT'S GREAT TO BE A HAMILTON AGGIE

BY ALLYSON EVANS

In the Northwest section of Alabama there is a little town of Hamilton that has a population of around 6,900 people. Within this town, you will find the Hamilton High School FFA Chapter which is composed of around 112 students who are working toward becoming agriculturalists within their community. The school system is very diverse which helps to be able to have a program such as this where these children can learn and hone their talents.

This chapter is one that is not truly like any other chapter in Alabama. It stands out due to its way of partnering with other Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) in the school. Each year, the chapter is given the opportunity to assist with projects within the school for Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), the prom committee, junior class Calendar Girl Committee, and many more. The students are given many opportunities to perfect their skills while showing the school community what it is like to be in the agriscience program. One of the major projects that the chapter was able to be part of was creating a student-led pharmacy within Chelsea

Humphres' classroom. The students created shelving for the imitation pill bottles, supplies, and learning materials. The students also put together a sink for use within the pharmacy and hung boards for them to work through their medical math problems. This will also double as a veterinary clinic for her vet science students that are working to become certified. Partnering to complete this was a true honor for these students because it was the first real project they were tasked with during their time in Introduction to Agricultural Construction.

These students have also been able to advocate for FFA and the agricultural industry at our local hometown annual Fall Festival. The students built their own set of cornhole boards for students and fellow community members to stop by and play during the festival, as well as their very own large Jenga set that was a hit with the younger children. During this time, they were able to tell adults and kids alike about their experience in FFA and why they enjoy being a part of this CTSO so very much. This allowed them to be out in the community for the first time at this level as both officers and club members.

Another project that the students were tasked with was making the HOSA students' ideas of an in-school hospital room a reality. This was a task that included hanging patient information boards, glove holders, wipe holders, curtain rods and curtains, and safety glasses holders. Not to mention, they had to move in hospital beds for the students to use for their patient dummies so that they can complete their skills training. This has been a dream of Mrs. Humphres and her students for a while and being able to help them bring

*Hamilton High School FFA students in the General Agriscience pathway that have become skid steer-certified through Beville State Community College.*







*FFA students enjoy playing corn hole on their boards they built in Introduction to AG Construction for the Fall Festival in Hamilton, Alabama.*



*AG Construction students moved hospital beds in for HOSA students and completed the hospital lab project.*

this idea to life was something that the students are very thankful for and proud of.

This chapter has also been working on improving the greenhouse facility that we have on campus. It has needed these repairs for a while and the chapter was awarded a grant from Alabama Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils (RC&D) this past fall that made this dream also a reality. Students have been putting together different raised garden beds while also cleaning up the actual greenhouse for a few weeks now and it is slowly but surely becoming what they want it to be for the school and community. It allows them to go to our middle school and share the fruits and vegetables grown in the garden with the younger students because they look up to their peers and want to get involved in what they do. This means it will be more students becoming educated in agriculture while also being more students for the program in the future. It does wonders for the younger students to actually be able to see food grown in front of them because many are not told of things such as this at home and do not realize where their food actually comes from.

Hamilton High FFA is a student organization that represents partnership, local support, school fellowship of CTSOs, and community involvement. It is an organization that continues to assist the school student body as well as community members which is one of our major goals when it comes to wanting to be in FFA. It allows students to grow their leadership skills, team building, and personal growth. Without the support of our school, RC&D, community, and parents, FFA would not be the organization it is at Hamilton High School. Each of those is a key segment in what this FFA Chapter is and as a thank you, the chapter will continue to grow, improve, and expand what it is for the school and community. 🌻



*Students assist with hanging patient boards for the HOSA Program that can be used in their hospital lab construction at the Fall Festival in Hamilton, Alabama.*



*Change to Career and Technical Education teacher Allyson Evans poses with a few Hamilton High School FFA officers at the 2024 Beville State Community College Ag Expo.*

# Co-op CORNER

## CO-OPS CULTIVATE MEANINGFUL LIFE COMMUNITY, COMMITMENT AND CONSERVATION

BY TIFFANY LESTER

### A LIFE OF SERVICE

The spirit of volunteerism runs deep in Clay County, Alabama. It is also deeply rooted in the heart of Clay County Exchange General Manager Jeff Kinder.

Kinder has spent nearly 30 years working at the Co-op. But his impact extends far beyond the store's walls – he has dedicated more than 30 years as a volunteer EMT with the Clay County Rescue Squad.

His journey into emergency services was inspired by his father-in-law, a founding member of the rescue squad. Since joining the team, Kinder has balanced his responsibilities at the Co-op with his role as a first responder, answering an average of one emergency call per day. "Some of the things you see you don't enjoy," Kinder admitted, "but as far as helping people out, I like helping people."

Kinder has been honored with the Rescue of the Year award three times and has received a Lifetime Award for his unwavering dedication. Yet, recognition isn't what drives him. "A lot of times when you help somebody out, nobody thanks you," he said. "But you're not there for that. You're there to help people."

Managing the Co-op and serving as a first responder requires an extraordinary level of commit-

ment and caffeine. With only one part-time employee working three hours a day, Kinder shoulders much of the store's daily operations. He often starts his day as early as 4 a.m. and remains on call, ready to lock the gates and rush to an emergency at a moment's notice.

Despite the demands, he finds fulfillment in both roles. "I just enjoy doing both," he said. At Clay County Exchange, Kinder ensures farmers and local producers have the supplies they need,







whether it's cattle feed, minerals or hunting supplies. "I try to help them get what they need when they need it. We're not as big as some of the stores, but at times we're pretty busy. It's busy for one person," he remarks.

Kinder's passion for service has inspired his daughter to follow in his footsteps. She earned her EMT certification while still in high school and has since advanced to become a paramedic and RN, volunteering alongside her father.

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS, ONE PAW AT A TIME

Meanwhile, at DeKalb Farmers Cooperative-Albertville, employees are extending their impact beyond agriculture by supporting a unique community initiative.

Albertville Innovation Academy Agriscience teacher Sherry Little and facility dog, Georgia, are regulars at the store. The pair stops often to pick up Georgia's special kibble.



"A facility dog is like an emotional support dog for our students and faculty. If we have any type of traumatic event, she is there to emotionally support our students and staff," Little explained. "You have someone that's going through some grief, and Georgia doesn't judge. She sits with you and lets you deal with your issues quietly."

Recognizing the importance of Georgia's work, the local Co-op has stepped in to sponsor her food, which ensures Georgia remains allergy-free. "Supporting Georgia by feeding her is helping the kids. They are getting a kind look, touch and attention they might need. She just makes the kids happy when she is around them," store manager Brad Childress said.

You don't have to be a member to shop the Co-op. Everyone from farmers to gardeners, pet owners or anyone looking for a gift for a loved one is welcome.

"Most folks in town don't know what the Co-op has to offer, and we want to change this," Childress added. "It's important to us to build relationships in the community with customers and potential customers. We are trying to reach a broader customer base now with the urban sprawl."

The partnership is something Little believes would not have been possible had she asked a big box store. She appreciates the more personal interactions she and Georgia receive when visiting the Co-op.





## CONSERVATION, COMMUNITY AND THE CO-OPS

Down in Central Alabama, another Co-op general manager is working to foster a sense of community and conservation.

"Growing up on a farm and all my life hunting and fishing, it's a favorite pastime," explained Tim Wood, General Manager of Central Alabama Farmers Cooperative. "A lot of my memories, family events have all been encapsulated by being in the outdoors. A large portion of what we do here at Central Alabama Farmers Co-op has to do with the outdoors, with the sporting goods division, the feed divisions and with the apparel. It's important not only to me personally, but it's also very important to our business."

His passion for the outdoors is pushing efforts to revitalize a local "unusable" marina, making it a hub for fishing tournaments and outdoor recreation. "Every generation is getting further and further away

from the land," Wood observed. "We need to get people back into enjoying what we have done for so many years."

Working with the Alabama Wildlife Federation's local cook-off and state funding committees, Wood helped plan the successful dredging of the marina, installed new docks and created a gathering space for anglers and outdoor enthusiasts. "It was a project that encompassed the whole community," Wood explained. "This will be great for the economy in Selma, in Dallas County, in Central Alabama."

## DOING GOOD IN THE COMMUNITY

From providing essential supplies to supporting emergency services and conservation projects, AFC Member Co-ops across Alabama, parts of Southern Tennessee and North Florida are more than just stores. They are community lifelines, embodying the principle that meaningful work extends beyond business transactions.

In the small towns where the Co-ops are located, the connection between business, service and community is inseparable. Whether it's ensuring customers have what they need when they need it, responding to a crisis or preserving outdoor spaces, the people behind these efforts cultivate something truly invaluable – a meaningful life for all.

The work of these stores and their managers truly highlight the Co-op's mission: cultivating a meaningful life on and off the farm. 🌱



Selma photos are courtesy of Billy Pope.



# GROWING LEADERS

## AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

BY TIFFANY LESTER

At AFC, we believe people are our greatest asset. Alabama Farmers Cooperative's Authentic Leadership Program (ALP) is an eight-month program focused on leadership principles, life lessons and creating a lasting legacy. In its second year, ALP expanded to include the Co-op employees, offering new opportunities for improved communication and relationship-building between the AFC Main Office and Cooperative staff.

Throughout the program, 19 participants took

part in nine workshops developing skills in leadership in agriculture, integrity and ethics, time management, social etiquette, finance and operations and effective communication. Additionally, participants visited Madison County Cooperative locations, Tate Farms and Associated Growers Cooperative, Inc. cotton gin to gain a deeper understanding of how the entire system works together to support agriculture. The program culminated with a capstone project presentation focused on



2024 Participants: Jamie Vann, Angela Walker, Keith Griffin, Donna Solomon, Kyle Neal, Elena Mathewson, Dennis Snider, Emily Moran, Michael Hixon, Tiffany Lester, Pearson Lewis, Tara Hunter, Peyton Smith, Linda Blackwood, Ramsey Prince, Sarah Brown and Slayde Guess Not pictured: LaKeia Redus and Julia Young





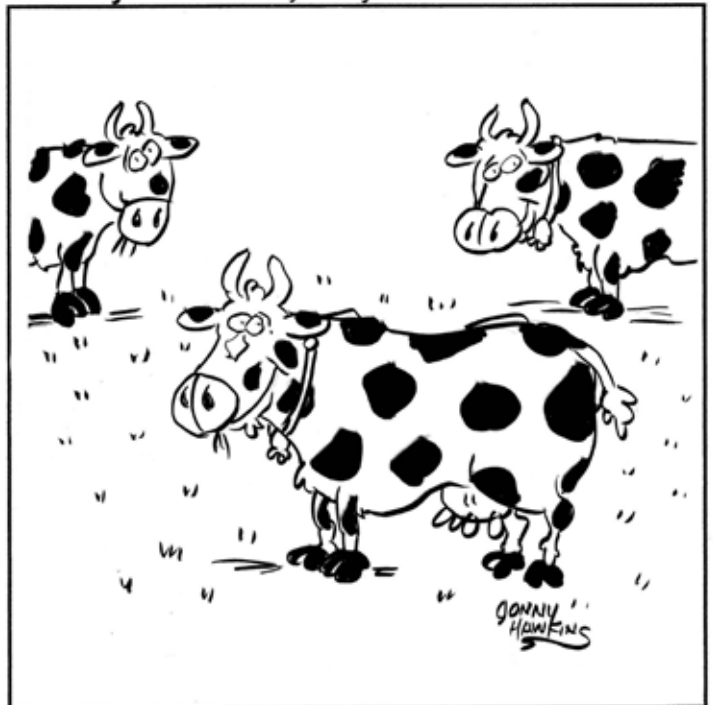
*The ALP Impact Award was presented to Keith Griffin, General Manager of Madison County Cooperative, by AFC President and CEO Rivers Myres.*

new business opportunities for AFC.

During the graduation ceremony in June 2024, AFC President and CEO Rivers Myres presented the 2024 ALP Impact Award to Keith Griffin, General Manager of Madison County Cooperative, for his willingness to lead by example and admit that there is always room to grow as a leader, no matter how seasoned you are.

"Everyone who took part in this year's Authentic Leadership Program is worthy of the Impact Award," said AFC President and CEO Rivers Myres. "However, Keith stood out because he could have stayed at the store and let a younger employee do this, but he didn't. He knew that even though he's been around for a while, there's always room for improvement and he was willing to admit that and learn to become an even better leader. There is nothing more powerful than leading by example." 🐾

#### **Country Chuckles by Jonny Hawkins**



**Two Halfsteins and a Holstein**



# AFVGA PARTNER OF THE YEAR

## CO-OP SALESMAN RECEIVES AWARD

BY TIFFANY LESTER

At the 2025 Alabama Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (AFVGA) Conference, the organization honored Blount County Farmers Cooperative outside salesman Mel Wade with the Partner of the Year Award for his lifelong dedication to agriculture and his tireless efforts to support Alabama farmers.

"It's an honor to receive the Partner of the Year Award because I got recognized for doing what I love to do," Wade said. "But what's really special are the relationships I've built over the years by being a man of my word and meeting our customers' needs. My biggest goal is to help farmers any way I can with the products and services that we offer at the Co-op and I'm proud to do that."

After graduating from Chilton County High School in 1971, Wade studied wildlife biology at Auburn University. Upon graduation, he began working at Gold Kist farm supply, which turned into a 47-year career in the agriculture industry.

Mel has spent the last 12 years at the Co-op where



he has become a trusted and reliable resource. Whether delivering products to the farm, taking soil, water and tissue samples or offering advice, Mel approaches every task with a passion for helping customers meet the many challenges of fruit and vegetable production.

Blount County farmers know they can count on Mel, and weekly farm deliveries to Chilton County ensure his reach extends even farther. His commitment to going above and beyond for his customers and colleagues has earned him respect throughout the farm community.

Outside of work, Mel enjoys hunting and fishing with his grandson, Aidan. He also serves his community as chaplain for the Oneonta Fire Department and as a member of the Murphee Valley Volunteer Fire Department. 🌱



# GROW WITH TARTER



WATCHMAN WIRE MESH GATE

A great light confinement option for smaller animals. The 2"x4" 8-gauge wire-fill keeps hooves out of harm's way. This 1 3/4" steel tubing gate features a long-lasting corrosion-resistant finish.



200 SERIES BOX BLADE

Use this implement to make quick work of leveling out dirt or gravel. It's the perfect tool to solve problems with ruts, washouts, and potholes. Available in 5' and 6' models.



OVAL MEGA 300

This 300 gallon trough makes a great livestock waterer. The rust-resistant galvanized steel is built to last. A rolled rim top creates a smooth safe edge. Includes a handy drain plug.



POLY BUNK FEEDER

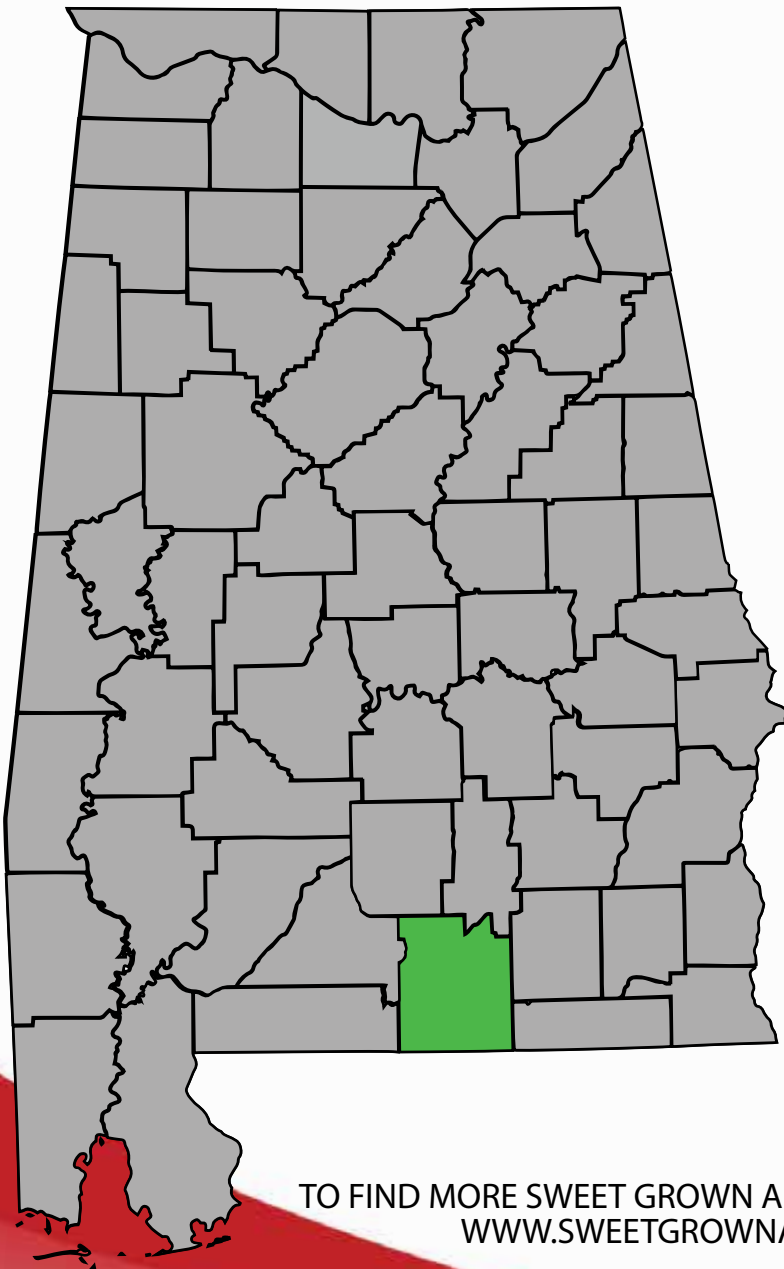
Built to last and can withstand abuse from any size herd. The replaceable poly one-piece 9" deep bunk liner is made from recycled materials is riveted in place and has drain holes.



## Pleasant Pastures

Andalusia, AL

*Pleasant Pastures is a family farm in South Alabama with beehives spread across Covington, Conecuh and Escambia counties. We offer honey by the bottle or in larger quantities such as by the bucket or barrel, and sell bee nucs for those looking to start or expand their beekeeping. New for 2025, we are opening a u-pick strawberry patch! Check our Facebook page for dates and hours, and make plans to bring the family to come see us and enjoy fresh, Sweet Grown Alabama strawberries!*



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Facebook: Pleasant Pastures



Instagram: @pleasant\_pastures\_

TO FIND MORE SWEET GROWN ALABAMA PRODUCERS, VISIT  
[WWW.SWEETGROWNALABAMA.ORG](http://WWW.SWEETGROWNALABAMA.ORG).

# GROWING MORE THAN JUST GARDENS:

## BONNIE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

BY SAVANNAH BURGESS

Since its inception in 2023, the Bonnie Leadership Program has embodied Bonnie Plants' unwavering commitment to fostering the personal and professional growth of its associates. Created in partnership with Auburn University, this transformative initiative draws participants from Bonnie facilities across the United States, encompassing a rich diversity of experiences, perspectives and skills. By prioritizing leadership development, the program aims to equip associates with the tools to navigate

today's challenges while laying the groundwork for a thriving future at Bonnie Plants.

### A FRAMEWORK FOR LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE

The Bonnie Leadership Program is built on three key pillars of leadership development:

1. Lead Self: Focused on building self-awareness, resilience and personal accountability, this pillar emphasizes the importance of a strong foun-



2024 Participants: Ryan Gordon, Brad Bellinger, Bo Hancock, Michael Mize, Darby Evans, Chad Eberle, Andrew Baity, Caitlyn Tomblin, Joey Moorer, Erica Woody, Justin Haynes, Eric Soto, Anna Jones, Tyler McCullough, Derek Szala, Summer Lynch, Adam Alley, Jessy Rush, Jessica Angle, Daniel Tokotch, Alley Thomas, Manny Plata, Makhalea Whitehead, Kelly King, Tanner Cimo, Brandon Hoshaw, Marley Dawson, Carlota Lugo, Jordan Singleton and Brady Butler



dation for effective leadership.

2. Lead Others: By enhancing interpersonal and team leadership skills, participants learn to create engaged and motivated teams.

3. Lead Bonnie: This pillar integrates strategic thinking, financial stewardship and change management to align personal growth with the company's success.

These principles serve as the cornerstone of the program, guiding participants as they navigate their leadership journey.

## CULTIVATING KEY COMPETENCIES

Participants engage in an intensive curriculum designed to develop critical leadership skills and competencies, including:

- Stress Management / Mental & Physical Health: Techniques to build resilience and maintain wellness.
- Time Management / Prioritization: Strategies to optimize productivity and achieve work-life balance.
- Accountability: Encouraging a mindset of ownership and responsibility.
- Enneagram & Understanding Self & Others: Tools to enhance emotional intelligence and empathy.
- Crucial Conversations: Frameworks to navigate disagreements and foster win-win outcomes.
- Effective Communication: Approaches to build clarity and trust through impactful interactions.
- Teambuilding / Associate Engagement: Methods to create collaborative, high-performing teams.
- Coaching and Feedback / Motivating Others: Guidance for empowering associates and inspiring growth.
- Financial Stewardship: Understanding financial principles to drive organizational success.
- Continuous Improvement: Embracing innovation and process enhancements.
- Ethics: Prioritizing integrity in decision-making.
- Successful Change Management: Leading teams through transitions with confidence and foresight.

## REAL-WORLD IMPACT

Beyond the classroom, participants take part in individual and group projects that reinforce their learning. For instance, each participant crafts a Leadership Legacy Statement, a personal guide to navigating their career and life with purpose. Group projects tackle real-world challenges Bonnie Plants faces, allowing participants to apply their skills in meaningful ways and contribute directly to the company's success.

The program's impact is both profound and enduring. Carlota Lugo, Training Specialist at Bonnie Plants, shares how the program transformed her life:


"The Bonnie Leadership Program has been a life-changing experience for me, affecting not only my professional life but also, and more profoundly, my personal life. As an immigrant, I buried a lot of my crucibles to keep moving forward. I now recognize them as the pathway that led me to Bonnie, reigniting the light that has always existed within me."

Brad Bellinger, Transportation Specialist, states: "During my time in the Bonnie Leadership Program, I had the opportunity to develop valuable leadership skills through hands-on experiences and respectful guidance. The program fostered a supportive and collaborative environment, allowing me to connect with others in the company and engage in meaningful discussions. I gained a deeper understanding of effective communication, decision-making and team dynamics. Overall, the Bonnie Leadership Program was an enriching experience that has equipped me with the tools and confidence to pursue my leadership aspirations with greater clarity and purpose."

## BUILDING A THRIVING FUTURE

The Bonnie Leadership Program reflects the company's dedication to creating a culture of leadership and continuous improvement. As the program grows, it stands as a testament to the company's belief in the power of leadership development—not just for today, but for generations to come.

Since the creation of the program, 20 of the 56 participants between both cohorts have moved into expanded roles within the organization.

By investing in its associates, Bonnie Plants ensures its workforce is equipped to lead with integrity, creativity and purpose. This initiative not only strengthens the individuals within the organization but also secures a future of sustained growth and innovation for Bonnie Plants. 

# 'ROOTED IN RESILIENCE'

FARMERS AND AGRICULTURE PROFESSIONALS FROM  
NINE STATES ATTEND THE SOUTHERN AGRONOMY  
SUMMIT IN NASHVILLE.

BY PAGE HAYNES

Education and camaraderie were key for row-crop farmers and industry personnel as they met for the recent 2025 Southern Agronomy Summit in Nashville. Hosted by GreenPoint Ag for the fourth consecutive year, the January 7-9 conference was chockfull of leading industry experts and break-out sessions on all sorts of topics relevant to growing crops successfully. More than 200 growers attended.

The event, themed "Rooted in Resilience," began with GreenPoint Ag Vice President of Retail Sales and Operations Amy Winstead welcoming participants. General session began with the video inspired by Paul Harvey's familiar 1978 speech, *So God Made a Farmer*. The video was accompanied by Winstead reading a portion of a 1940 article in *The Farmer-Stockman* magazine describing a dirt farmer, written by Boston B. Blackwood.

In his opening remarks, GreenPoint Ag President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Jeff Blair spoke

about the importance of ag techs and agronomy teams and the potential role they can play in a farmer's success.

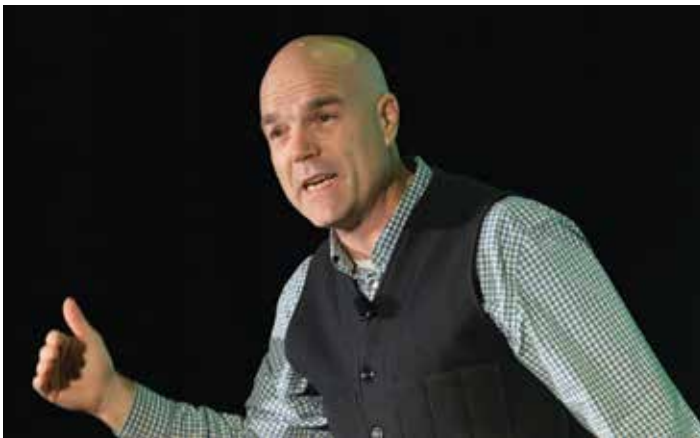
"We are focused on helping farmers," Blair said. "This summit brings the entire supply chain together to have deep agronomic discussions around agronomy in the South. Farming down here is different — it's tougher. There are different soil types, a wide variety of geography, and a lot of different crops. Here, we can have everyone together — from our manufacturers and sponsors to WinField United, to GreenPoint, to our Co-ops and our retail store personnel, to our farmers and growers. We are all united in one role ... and that is to help our growers succeed."

Blair also pointed out that "trust is the very foundation of the Co-op system."

"I encourage you to lean in, get to know each other, and depend on others," Blair advised participants. "It's hard to be successful on your own without trusting and relying on others for their agronomy expertise and guidance."

Other highlights included a pep-talk from Walter Bond, a former NBA (National Basketball Association) player, as well as a group panel discussion with Leah Anderson (President of WinField United and Senior-Vice President of Land O'Lakes), Shannon Huff (President and CEO of Tennessee Farmers Cooperative), Rivers Myres (President and CEO of Alabama Farmers Cooperative), and Blair who shared their perspectives and insight on current topics.

Jim Wiesemeyer, the Washington Bureau Chief for the United States' leading agricultural farm journal *Pro Farmer*, was on hand to offer his expertise and insight on Washington politics and farm and trade policy. He



"Trust is the very foundation of the Co-op system," said Jeff Blair, President and Chief Executive Officer of GreenPoint Ag, to hundreds of attendees at the 2025 Southern Agronomy Summit.





Moderator Joey Caldwell listens intently as Leah Anderson shares her perspective on current agricultural events, along with fellow panelists Shannon Huff, Rivers Myres and Jeff Blair.

brought attendees up to date on potential happenings with the new administration and what it might mean in terms of agricultural policies, procedures and players.

Conference speakers offered many insights on additional current agricultural issues. Sessions covered topics like biologicals in the field, artificial intelligence, soil fertility and the Endangered Species Act.

"The Southern Agronomy Summit is exceptional for our Cooperative," said Morgan Farmers Cooperative General Manager Bradley Hopkins. "I bring most of my team including our on-staff agronomist and range and pasture team. The insights they learn is extremely important and can be utilized back at home, offering our growers and producers new innovative practices to better serve their farming operation. Also, networking with other producers and managers during the event is extremely beneficial. With a shared goal of helping our customers, we can collaborate to address our varying challenges. It's also essential for me to stay informed about emerging technology and market factors."

"This event continues to add value to our Co-ops through continued learning from qualified speakers in their respective fields. It is also another chance to build relationships with our GreenPoint Ag staff," said Colbert Farmers Cooperative General Manager Daniel Waldrep. "Our customer base expects great customer service, continued education and building value-added relationships with them. This is why I attend the meetings every year."

Sessions also included tools for risk mitigation, driving planter technology, managing equipment costs, spray drone updates, weed management in ryegrass, Johnsongrass, barnyardgrass and goosegrass,

as well as a slew of other topics.

"I enjoyed learning about equipment efficiency and the technology being implemented that will help us optimize productivity and provide a maximum output while using minimal resources. It's also always great to hear from the agronomy experts who give new insight on applications of various fertilizers and chemicals. Their years of service and knowledge is invaluable. Learning from them gives us the opportunity to better serve our customers at the Co-op," explained Waldrep.

Producers, retail sellers and operations, and industry professionals totaled 184 representatives from GreenPoint Ag, 104 from Alabama Farmers Cooperative, 186 from Tennessee Farmers Cooperative and 172 vendors and manufacturers. Nearly 40 speakers also took part in the conference.

GreenPoint Ag was formed in 2020 to better serve agronomy farmers and rural communities in the Southern United States. It is a joint venture of Alabama Farmers Cooperative, Tennessee Farmers Cooperative, WinField United, Tipton Farmers Cooperative, Farmers, Inc. and Tri-County Farmers Association. For more information about the 2026 Southern Agronomy Summit or for information about GreenPoint Ag's wide array of products and services, contact your local Co-op. 🌱



Jim Wiesemeyer, the Washington Bureau Chief for the United States' leading agricultural farm journal Pro Farmer, told the crowd that "changes are going to occur" in Washington politics as he spoke on current events, agriculture, financial aid and the economy.

# FEEDING BULLS

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BY JIMMY PARKER

Summer often brings breeding season to most cattle farms in Alabama. Granted, some are in other seasons but generally the needs are the same when it comes to the nutritional needs of the bull leading up to, during and after the breeding season. With the constant improvement in genetics and the need to bring in new bloodlines, the breeding bulls we use are often young and still growing. These young bulls have different requirements, and I think that is the

best place to begin. Here are five points that University professionals recommend as part of your plan especially for young and growing bulls:

1. Allow for an adaptation period (if in a new environment)
2. Conduct breeding soundness exams
3. Provide healthcare paying close attention to feet and leg health and structure





4. Adjust feeding to achieve a body condition score of five or six before breeding season
5. Allow plenty of exercise to help condition the young bulls

Prebreeding bulls all need to be fed to a body condition score of five to six. However, special care needs to be given to young bulls so as not to push them too hard and create damage to feet and legs. Here are some pointers on how to tell if your body condition score is within that range:

1. Ribs are not visible
2. Some fat covering the forerib and each side of the tail head (not too much)
3. Noticeable flesh in the flank
4. Moderate width of brisket when viewed from the front

It is always a good idea to feed young bulls a ration that will help them adjust to the coming time with the cow herd where most likely their feed will be severely limited. So, any dietary adjustments that will help their rumen adjust to a forage diet versus ones that are feed heavy is important so they don't fall apart when they go to work. Many times, yearling bulls that are too heavy heading into

breeding season have a difficult time adjusting and often have a very difficult time settling cows and then recovering from their first breeding season. AFC Feed's CPC Developer is a great choice to develop young bulls in a safe and cost-effective way when fed according to labeled directions.


Young bulls generally need to gain one to three pounds per day leading up to breeding and require extra calories and protein to grow and maintain a good body condition to adequately service the cow herd. Generally, bulls in this age group will need to be fed around two percent of their body weight of a quality feed. This will help them grow adequately and maintain a good body condition in preparation for the breeding season.

A good vitamin and mineral program is essential leading up to breeding. Spermatogenesis takes approximately sixty days in bulls so what they are consuming two months before turn out will be a very big factor in the success of a breeding season and with calf prices at all-time highs, any extra open cows is a significant financial hit. Diets that are high in zinc, selenium and vitamins C and D are critical for male reproductive health. Iron, copper and manganese are also important.

High quality forages are critical for younger bulls while adequate forages are usually enough for mature animals. Feeding older bulls super high-quality forages will often lead to bulls that are over-conditioned and perform poorly. Extra weight in older bulls can often cause feet and leg issues, injuries and lead to early culling.

Most often bulls that are working during the breeding season will lose some weight. This is totally normal but keep in mind that they will most often need to be fed a bit when they are removed from the cow herd after breeding. It is important, especially in young bulls, that they be fed to recover so that they will continue to grow and mature, and are still around for the next breeding season. Mature bulls will need less special care and are much more likely to recover from losing weight during breeding.

Cattle prices are high and bulls are costly, so keeping them in the breeding herd for as long as needed makes a great deal of sense. As was mentioned earlier, just having one or two extra calves in your calf crop will pay for any feed, vitamins and minerals that are bought and fed to your herd bulls for many years. It makes sense economically to pay attention to details in bull management especially before breeding season. 🌱



High quality  
forages are critical  
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animals.

# STARCHES, SUGARS, CARBOHYDRATES, **OH MY!**

KELLY VINEYARD, M.S., PH.D.

Low sugar and starch. Low carb. Non-structural carbohydrates. Metabolic needs. With the rise in popularity of feeding specialized diets to horses with various metabolic concerns, there seems to be a lot of discussion about these terms. But, what do they mean and how does it affect you, your horse and your horse's feeding program?

## **CARBOHYDRATES IN HORSE FEEDS**

There are two primary forms of carbohydrates found in horse feed ingredients:

- Non-structural carbohydrates (NSC)
- Structural carbohydrates

## **NON-STRUCTURAL CARBOHYDRATES**

Non-structural carbohydrates, or NSC, are the simple sugars and starches present in horse feed ingredients. Simple sugars (such as glucose and fructose) and starches (simple sugars that are attached together as a chain) are readily digested and absorbed in the small intestine. This results in a rise in blood glucose and subsequently, blood insulin levels.

Glucose derived from non-structural carbohydrate digestion serves as an important energy source in the diet of performance horses, providing the horse does not have a dietary carbohydrate sensitivity, such as with insulin resistance or PPID. As long as concentrate meal sizes are appropriate, horses will digest and utilize NSC quite efficiently. As a general rule of





thumb, keep concentrate meals to 0.5 percent body-weight or less.

However, if a horse consumes an excessive amount of NSC in a meal (such as when a horse gets into the feed room and gorges himself on feed), the small intestine can become overwhelmed and NSC will be delivered to the hindgut. This situation should be avoided at all costs, as excessive NSC in the hindgut can lead to major problems such as hindgut acidosis, colic and laminitis.

Feed ingredients such as beet pulp and alfalfa meal are lower in NSC, while grain ingredients such as corn, oats, and barley are higher in NSC.

## STRUCTURAL CARBOHYDRATES IN HORSE FEEDS

Structural carbohydrates in horse feeds are found in the cell wall portion of plants and serve as important fiber sources. Structural carbohydrates are prevalent in forages but are also present in higher fiber feed ingredients such as soy hulls and beet pulp. Structural carbohydrates are digested in the horse's hindgut through microbial fermentation and serve as another important energy source, but they do not result in a rise in blood glucose or insulin.

Both non-structural and structural carbohydrates play a vital role in providing energy in a horse's diet. Every horse is unique and it's important to develop a diet based on your individual horse's metabolic needs.

## LOW SUGAR/STARCH DIETS FOR HORSES

For horses with carbohydrate sensitivities, managing their sugar and starch intake is critical. Horses with insulin dysregulation, laminitis, PPID or other veterinary-diagnosed conditions need diets with controlled starch and sugar. Diets that have low NSC levels, like WellSolve L/S® or Enrich Plus® horse feed, can support normal glucose and insulin responses to feeding.

Purina® Strategy® Healthy Edge® horse feed is a controlled starch and sugar formula containing fewer calories that can be helpful to optimize body condition while supporting the needs of the performance horse. With the new inclusion of Outlast® Gastric Support Supplement, Strategy® Healthy Edge® horse feed is a great choice to support the needs of horses with a history of gastric concerns.

It's important to understand that individual horses will have variable responses to feeding of similar diets. A horse's response to sugar and starch can be

impacted by a variety of factors including:

- Age
- Gender
- Body condition
- Fitness level
- Metabolic status
- Wellness and/or disease

## WHAT'S IN THE BAG?


Recent research at the Purina Animal Nutrition Center found that five healthy horses fed a four pound meal of Purina® Strategy® Healthy Edge® had a low glucose and insulin response to feeding.<sup>1</sup> When these values are compared to existing research, they are even more striking as they are lower than those found previously when horses consumed oats<sup>2</sup> or even good quality grass hay,<sup>3</sup> further highlighting the low starch and sugar characteristics of Purina® Strategy® Healthy Edge® horse feed.

The higher fat and fiber content of Strategy® Healthy Edge® horse feed supplies a controlled number of calories from sources with lower starch and sugar content, which can result in a lower glucose and insulin response to feeding. This creates an appropriate diet for horses that may benefit from this type of concentrate feed.

It is important to understand that individual horses will have variable responses to feedings of similar diets and this response can be impacted by a variety of factors including age, gender, body condition, fitness level, and health.

Purina features a full line of complete feeds and supplements specially formulated to provide low starch and sugar content while meeting the nutrient and calorie requirements for horses at any stage of life.

It is important to work closely with a veterinarian to understand what a horse's blood test results mean and how diet influences the results.

Every horse is unique and so is their nutrition. Finding the right horse feeding program is paramount to helping your horse perform and feel the best. Find the right feed for your horse with our Feed Finder Tool. 



1 HR 272- Strategy and Strategy Healthy Edge Glycemic Index. RD Jacobs and ME Gordon. 2018.

2 Glycemic Index of ten common horse feeds. AV Rodiek and CL S tull. Journal of Equine Veterinary Science. May 2007.

3 HR 233- Physiological responses of horses to Standlee Timothy Hay. RD Jacobs and ME Gordon. 2018.



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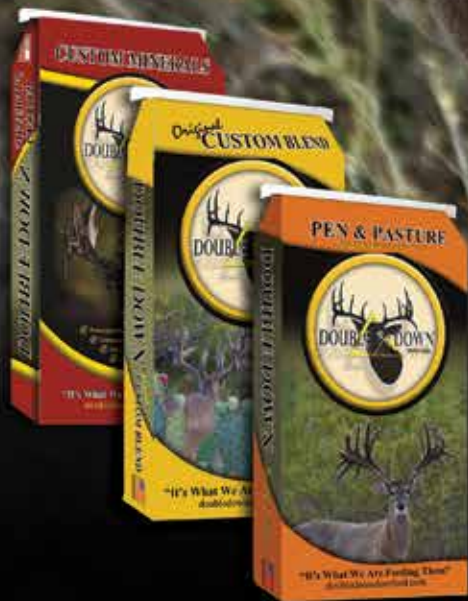
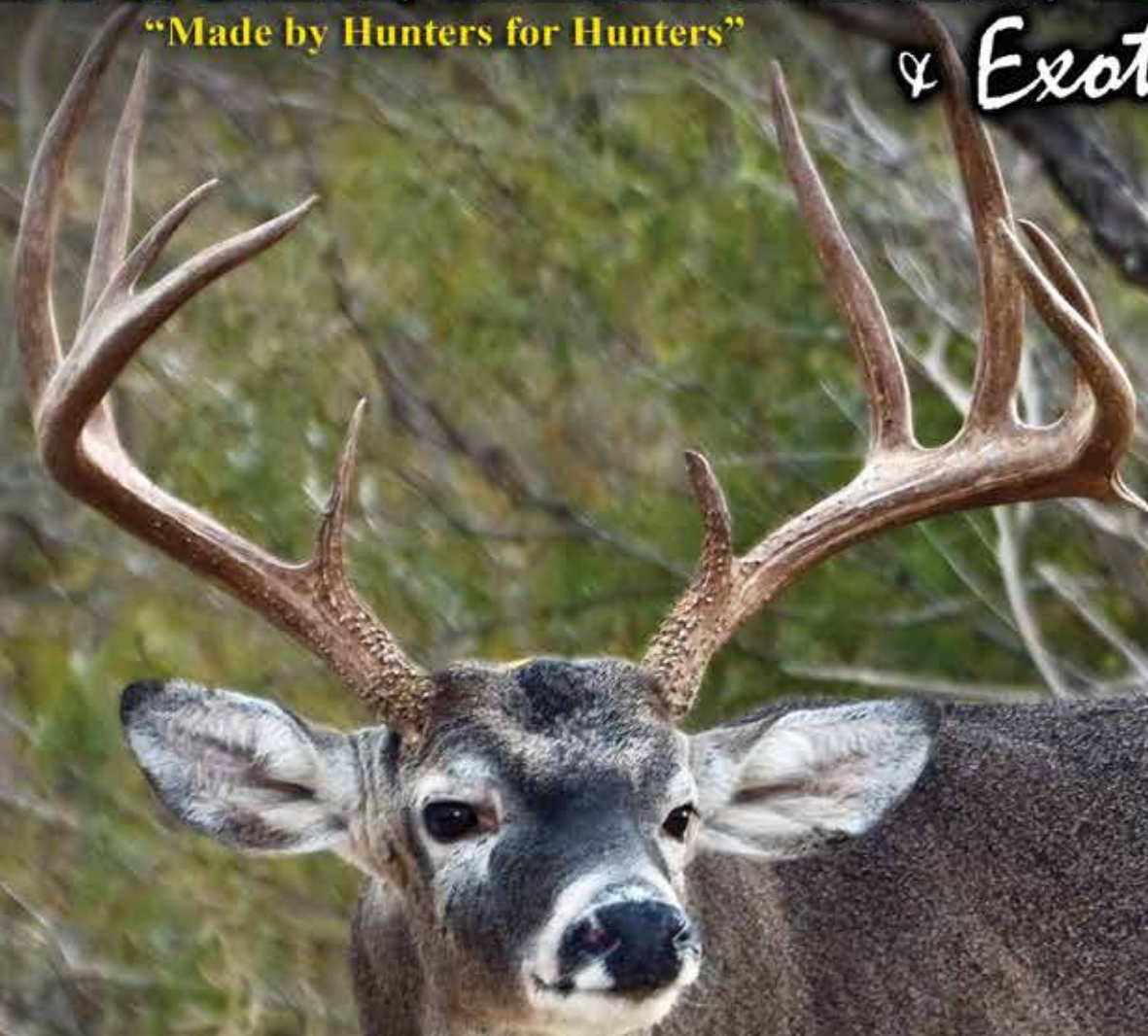




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# PULLING THE WOOL OVER A WHITE TAIL'S NOSE

## THREE SENSIBLE SCENT SETUPS

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BY TODD AMENRUD

As many of you know, I love the challenge of using scent to try and fool a whitetail's sense of smell ... especially if they're mature bucks. I've had phenomenal luck using scent for whitetails, and following are three proven tactics that are my favorites.

### TRAIN THE BUCK TO SHOW UP WHEN YOU'RE THERE

"Mock Scrapes" could be an entire article series itself. There are so many variables, but timing and location are two of the most important. While mock scrapes can draw a response as soon as bucks lose their velvet in early September, I see better results from late September through the first week in November, and then again after the main surge of breeding has finished and through the end of the season. When the bucks are actively chasing and breeding, mock scrapes are probably not your best tactic.

Location is also a key. You can't just use any tree with an overhanging branch (licking branch) and expect success. Concentrate on areas closer to bedding areas where you would naturally have a better chance at seeing a buck during legal light.

You want to target an area that a buck is claiming as his, then move in and make it look and smell like there's a rival buck invading his turf. Look for areas with the largest scrapes, spots that contain nu-


merous scrapes or clusters of scrapes and scrapes that you know have been freshened again and again. Once you locate an area with activity, try to duplicate the variables the local bucks preferred.

While bucks can make a scrape without one, 99.9 percent of the time an overhanging branch, most often referred to as a "licking branch," is necessary to induce scrape activity. They interact with the licking branch by chewing on and/or licking it and scent marking it with their forehead and preorbital glands. The majority of scrapes are made underneath these licking branches which are usually about five and a half feet off of the ground.

The actual ground scrape is made by the buck scratching the ground with their front hooves and whisking the leaves and dirt away. Then, the majority of the time he will urinate down his hocks and over his tarsal glands into it. The order of these steps may vary from one buck to another, but most often they will occur in exactly this order.

Remember, the purpose of the mock scrape(s) isn't/aren't necessarily to get the buck to interact directly with the set; it's to get them to show up during legal light and spend more time in the area. The best results I've had come from making a series of mock scrapes and using Magnum Scrape Drippers over them - my own fake "scrape line" so to say. Magnum Scrape Drippers are heat-activated so they drip



A photograph of a whitetail buck with large, multi-pointed antlers. The buck is standing in a field of tall, green grass, looking upwards and to the left. The background is a dense thicket of green foliage. The lighting is warm, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

*Whitetails all have different personalities (for lack of a better word). One buck may do a back-flip and bolt away from a smell and the next buck might come in a few minutes later and do a lip-curl for five minutes, relishing the aroma.*

*(Photo credit: Dennis W. Donohue)*



during daylight hours conditioning bucks to show up during legal shooting light and stay in the area longer.

The Super Charged Scrape Dripper has a higher output than the Magnum Dripper to replicate more deer traffic. The Super Charged Dripper will operate for about seven to 12 days on four ounces of scent, where a regular Magnum Dripper will put out that same four ounces in about two to three weeks. In my view, both have their place.

You can use a buck's existing scrape(s) – in the whitetails' world the same scrape may be utilized by many different bucks. However, more often than not I'll make my own, trying to copy the specifics found with existing scrapes in the area.

The actual mock scrape is best created with a sturdy stick found in the area. Try to make the scrape on flat ground (if possible) and make sure it is free from all debris.

I prefer to use several drippers, each on their own scrape, and possibly vary the scent in each. I believe with more than one mock scrape you're increasing the chances that something's going to be right with at least one of them that will draw a response. I've used as many as six drippers and created over a dozen mock scrapes in an area about the size of an acre. My three favorite scents are Active Scrape, Golden Scrape

or Trail's End #307 used in the dripper.

## THE PATH TO SUCCESS

While I enjoy making all kinds of scent setups, I would have to say that "a straightforward scent trail" has proven to be the most successful over the years. A Pro-Drag is the best tool that I have found to create a scent trail with because it holds a lot of scent and it's easy to control. You can use any type of liquid scent when making a trail, it doesn't have to be a "deer smell," you are alright to use food lures or curiosity scents, too. The Pro-Drag makes it easy to attach the drag line to a branch and drag the trail off of the exact path my feet are taking. Obviously in thick brush this will be difficult, but wherever possible I believe it leaves the most faultless trail possible for a buck to follow.

This type of drag also leaves the scent in contact with the ground almost continuously. It leaves a much easier trail for the buck to follow than boot pads. Boot pads are still a good way to leave a trail, but with each step you take the scent away from ground contact. With the Pro-Drag the scent is in contact with the ground most of the time so the buck can put his nose to the ground and "go to town." It's also easy to control over fences or through wet areas.



*The easiest scent setup to create is likely a simple wick, where you place the lure crosswind from you in an effort to lure in whitetails from downwind of it. This buck seems to love the smell emanating from the Key-Wick above. (Photo credit: Paul Marion)*





*This buck with beautiful piebald white spots on its left front shoulder followed a scent trail right down a logging road past the author's blind.  
(Photo Credit: Todd Amenrud)*

The type of scent you use may have an influence over the type of trail, the distance you leave it and the tools you use. When using “deer smells” like an estrus lure or buck urine, I will often leave long trails – sometimes close to 3/4 of a mile or more. In fact, I’ve been known to drag trails right off of my ATV down a logging road with success. Whitetails travel and/or cross these roads all the time so it would be a natural route and bucks will often put on 10 miles or more during a day in search for hot does. I’ve had long estrus trails work well during the rut. It can also work well for curiosity type lures and even food smells, but those scent trails I tend to make shorter – I guess they could be just as long, I just have never needed to. When making long trails, stop to reapply the scent from time to time to create an easy-to-follow trail for your buck.

## KEEP IT SIMPLE

A standard wick set-up is simply designed to lure in deer from downwind. This is the easiest scent tactic that I know. Place out lure-soaked wicks crosswind from your position at your maximum confident shooting range. Maximum range is important because we want the smell to draw in the deer before they get

directly downwind of you.

This setup can be created by using felt wicks like a Pro-Wick, Quik-Wiks, Key-Wick or even one of the heated scent dispensers on the market. This is also a great tactic to get your buck to stop in a shooting lane. I’ve arrowed mature bucks that have literally had their nose touching a lure-soaked wick.

I’ve heard naysayers comment that scent only works on younger bucks or does and fawns. I couldn’t disagree more. Every animal is unique and has a different personality. One buck may do a back-flip and bolt away from a smell, where the next buck may sit there for five minutes doing a lip-curl, relishing the same set.

It doesn’t matter what type of scent you use or how you set it up, if there are unnatural odors, or more so, “danger smells” present, all your work will go for naught. Keep your setup free of foreign scent (the use of rubber gloves and Scent Killer Gold help dearly).

A hunter should use all other information in conjunction with your scent setups. Know where the does are bedding, what the preferred food sources are, where your target buck is bedding and where he may have other scrape areas. Consider it all collectively before making your setup. ●

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**242+/-ac Talladega County AL - Blue Mountain Preserve** Blue Mountain Preserve, a new expansive legacy property in the heart of Alabama. Surrounded by the Talladega National Forest this 242 acre preserve boasts exclusive views of the Southern Appalachian Mountain Range. Stepping into the main lodge the ceilings soar with picturesque windows capturing the stunning views. **#12153 \$2,500,000**



**1442+/-ac Dallas Co AL -** Huge free range whitehairs are common in this area and the habitat on this place includes everything a whitetail deer needs! It includes various stages of mast producing hardwoods, planted and natural pine stands, clear cut areas yielding early successional habitat perfect for bedding areas, and open land. Chickasaw Creek traverses through the property dividing Dallas County to the north and Wilcox County to the south. The property includes 2 homes facing Chickasaw Road with the older home being used as a hunting camp and a brick home being used as a weekend retreat. **#12168 \$4,999,999**



**20+/- Staples Equestrian Facility Cherokee Co. Ga. -** Discover the epitome of equestrian lifestyle raising at this exquisite 20-acre training facility nestled in the heart of Northern Georgia's equestrian country. Located in a serene countryside setting yet convenient to the amenities of nearby Alpharetta, this beautifully maintained property offers a blend of top-tier training facilities, state-of-the-art infrastructure, and natural beauty. **#12175 \$2,850,000**



**178+/-ac Lauderdale Co. AL West Trace -** Mature pine/hardwoods that would make an excellent recreational tract or homestead. This property lays out very nice with some rolling hills covered in mature timber. Adding to the allure of the property is an old hand-hewn log cabin overlooking the two ponds. The log cabin is off grid but has a nice front porch to sit and watch ducks, deer, turkey, or the grandkids fishing! There is one large food plot located towards the center of the property and plenty of areas that could be pushed in to provide more forage for wildlife. The entire Eastern boundary of this farm is The Natchez Trace Parkway which is managed by the National Park Service. **#12187 \$979,000**



**Auburn Oaks Monroe Co. -** Located just outside of Auburn, Alabama, this beautiful property has two homes, a large entertainment venue, several stocked lakes/ponds, a sporting clay course, and all on approximately 600+/- acres. Take advantage of this excellent opportunity to own a bit of history. Formerly owned by Coach Pat Dye of the Auburn Tigers! **#11534 \$6,500,000**



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**195ac Talladega Co. -** The 8400+ sq ft colonial home is stately and timeless, perfectly situated on Lake Socapatoy. Built in the 1970s, the home was custom built with entertaining in mind. **#11220 \$1,950,000**



**185+/-ac Wayne Co TN -** Water sources are abundant with approximately 1.2 mile on the Green River, and multiple year-round springs. The improved internal road system gives access to all the river frontage as well as multiple small green fields. A historic hand-hewn barn hidden among the hardwoods overlooks one of the most scenic and unique views in the entire river bottom. Timber is a mix of natural regeneration hardwood (oak, hickory, maple, ash, and poplar) and planted pine ridges. All secondary is clean and easily harvestable, and sets up well for early fall buck hunts and spring time turkeys. **#11728 \$489,000**

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# SORTIN' IT **OUT**

## A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING FOREST PRODUCTS PART 2: HARDWOOD

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BY BILLY RYE

Understanding the types of forest products present on their property can help landowners to manage and market their timber for its “highest and best use.” This article is the second in a two-part series that discusses the types and relative value of some of the most common forest products found in Alabama. While the first article exposed readers to pine products, this article will focus on those made from hardwood timber.

### **COMMON HARDWOOD PRODUCTS IN ALABAMA**

In general, the term “hardwood” refers to any de-

ciduous tree species in Alabama. While some species have wood that is as “soft” as pine, most have a more dense or “hard” wood. The prices paid for standing hardwoods in Alabama will vary by the product, the amount of competition between local timber buyers, and the inventories of wood at area mills. Below is a list of the most common hardwood products in Alabama ranked in the relative order of their value.

**Veneer.** Sometimes referred to as “peeler logs,” this product is soaked, peeled, dried, glued, and pressed to make plywood when it reaches the mill.<sup>1</sup> Hardwood veneer is used in the manufacturing of furniture, cabinets, flooring, ceiling, and molding. Only high-quality hardwoods are used to make the veneer







used in plywood. Trees must be tall, straight, have very little taper, very few knots, and large enough in diameter to meet mill specifications to be used for veneer. The value of the finished product and the scarcity of quality trees result in some of the highest stumpage prices paid for hardwood products.

**Staves.** A stave is a narrow piece of wood that is used for the sides of barrels.<sup>2</sup> The wood in white oak (*Quercus alba* L.) has the strength, durability, and liquid-tightness to make excellent staves. In addition, the white oak wood helps to produce the distinctive flavors found in whiskey and bourbon. The prices paid to landowners for oak stave logs are at a premium.

**Hardwood Sawtimber.** Trees that are in this product category are of sufficient size and quality to produce lumber. The length and minimum diameter will vary by the mill purchasing the wood and the product sought. Some products will be cut and hauled tree length while others are cut to a pre-determined size at the harvesting site. Within this product category there are a couple of notable subcategories.

## HARDWOOD TIMBER SUBCATEGORIES

**Grade hardwood sawtimber.** This product category produces high quality wood and yields high revenues to landowners. Grade hardwood sawtimber is used to produce high quality flooring, cabinetry, furniture, molding, siding, and some dimensional lumber. Mills producing these products demand logs which have tight and even grain, relatively free of defect including knots, and which are long enough to make the desired product. Depending on the product, landowners often receive high prices for their quality hardwood sawtimber.

**Tie-logs.** This product is used to produce crossties for the railroad industry. Crossties are used as a cross beam to support the rails on a railroad and are frequently replaced for safety reasons. The good news is that these trees do not have the quality standards of most grade hardwood products. However, the trees used to make this product must be solid and free of decay. The prices paid for standing tie-logs are less than those paid for grade hardwood sawtimber but much higher than those paid for hardwood pulpwood.

**Misc. hardwood sawtimber.** Some of the trees that fail to meet the standards for high grade hardwood may still be sawn into lumber with lower specifications. Logs that are large enough and have enough solid wood may produce lumber that is used for sawhorses, livestock troughs, barn stalls, low-tech low-cost bridge decks, hunting blind material, and fencing. Some sawmills even sell low grade lumber for hobby wood which is used in making rustic taxidermy mounts, furniture, and indoor wall paneling. While the prices paid for low grade sawtimber are lower than those for high grade sawtimber, they are usually much higher than the prices paid for hardwood pulpwood.

**Pallet grade.** Wooden pallets are used as a "bottom deck" for transporting and storing commercial goods.<sup>3</sup> They are made in a manner that permits goods to be lifted, moved, and stored by jacks, forklifts, and front-end loaders. Pallets are most often made from low quality hardwood sawtimber which is reflected in the prices paid for this product. However, the price for pallet grade material is much higher than that paid for hardwood pulpwood and a landowner will benefit financially from a logger that takes the time to separate these two products.





**Pulpwood.** Hardwood pulpwood has shorter fibers and is, therefore, weaker than pulpwood made from pine.<sup>4</sup> It is used to make tissue, writing papers, and some packaging materials. Due to its lower value, this product is usually relegated to wood from low value species, tops of trees cut for sawtimber, small trees, and trees with enough defect to keep them from making sawtimber. Prices paid for standing pulpwood are historically volatile and tend to be low.

## HARDWOOD PRODUCTS AVAILABLE IN SOME ALABAMA MARKETS

**Hickory drumsticks.** Drumsticks are a fundamental part of a drummer's toolkit, influencing their playing style, comfort, and the sound they produce.<sup>5</sup> Hickory is the most popular material for drumsticks due to its density and hardness, shock absorption, and balance and feel. While the specifications for this product are strict, the prices paid are exceptional!

**Cants.** A cant is a thick piece of wood that has been sawn on at least 1 side. It may be re-sawn or sold to another mill to produce boards of varying sizes. Prices paid to landowners will vary greatly depending on the value of the boards sawn from the cants.

**Cedar.** Cedar is prized for its color, decay resis-

tance, aroma, and its ability to repel moths, cockroaches, silverfish, and mildew.<sup>6</sup> The products produced from cedar include lumber, tongue and groove, shiplap, shingles, and the aromatic oil is placed in drawers, closets, garment bags, and storage containers to prevent mildew and repel pests. Loggers are reluctant to handle cedar as the wood is light and the stems have persistent limbs which must be removed prior to transportation to the mill. Regardless, cedar is marketable in some areas of Alabama.

**Pellets.** Wood pellets are a fuel commonly used as an alternative to traditional fossil fuels. They are made from sawdust, wood chips, and wood scraps from furniture manufacturing.<sup>7</sup> Wood pellets are viewed as a sustainable and renewable energy source, crucial in re-







*An example of woody biomass, otherwise known as "Hog Fuel."*

ducing the demand for fossil fuels and reducing waste from other wood-using facilities. The wood chips used to make pellets may provide landowners with additional revenue as otherwise non-commercial wood can be used to make this product.

**Woody biomass.** In some areas of our state, wood may be chipped on site, blown into a chip trailer, and transported to a mill where it is burned in a boiler to generate electricity. Trees that are too small to be used for other forest products, treetops, and even leaves may be chipped to make woody biomass. The resulting product is known as "dirty chips" or "hog fuel" to those in the industry. The primary benefit to the landowner is a cleaner planting site and the ability to press the "reset" button earlier to facilitate reforestation efforts.

Recognizing the various forest products present on their property can help landowners better understand the relative value of their standing timber. However, most landowners will only sell timber a few times in their lifetime and are likely unfamiliar with the other aspects of the most important phase of timber management. This is why I recommend that landowners use a consultant forester to represent them during the selling and harvesting of their timber. A consultant forester will serve as the agent for the landowner and will have certain fiduciary (legal) responsibilities. Consultant foresters will help level the playing field by using their education, experience, and expertise to help the landowner

get the most for their timber and ensure their interests are protected during the process. When interviewing a consulting forester, be sure to ask for their Registered Forester License Number, some local references, and a map of a few sales that the consultant has coordinated. By understanding the present forest products, making sure they are being sold for their highest and best value, and by utilizing the services of a consultant forester, landowners are much more likely to get the best price for their standing timber and enjoy a successful timber sale. 🌲

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# THESE THINGS HAPPEN

BY WALT MERRELL

Growing up as an only child, time and again, I found myself appreciating the companionship of a four-legged friend. There was Patches, the sheepdog, who pulled all the insulation out from under our neighbor's house; a Siamese cat, who I rescued from a culvert ... and later, her seven kittens; a hamster that probably traumatized me more with his unexpected death than he comforted me in his life; a parakeet that died making a valiant attempt to escape — and would have been successful but for that large bay window that he mistook for open air; and various goldfish, an occasional lizard and probably a few others that I forgot over the years.

Like Hannah and I both, our girls have

grown up rural. I was the first person on the school bus at around 6:15 every morning and the last person off the school bus at 4:30 every afternoon. We lived past the boonies and beyond the sticks in between Fairhope and Foley. Hannah grew up 10 or 12 miles outside of Andalusia, and, though remote, our experiences in childhood were remarkably different. From the age of nine on, I grew up in a single parent home ... that was past the boonies and beyond the sticks.

There was a family that lived 100 yards or so from us with school-aged children. The only ones my age were girls ... and 10-year-old little boys don't want to play with 10-year-old little girls ... they all have cooties. That left me, my pets, and my nearest





school-aged friend, Michael Willett, who lived several miles away.

No doubt, my rural upbringing taught me the value of furry companionship, and, because of that, and because all our children have been raised in the country, we've always known the importance that pets and animals play in the lives of children growing up "beyond the boonies."

"Daddy, either all the goats are taking a nap, or there's something really wrong." Bay's voice was stoic, yet curious. She wasn't exactly sure what she had seen and was careful not to jump to any conclusions, but she knew something was amiss. I took her by the hand, and we walked back down to the goat pen. There, our Billy and his two lady friends all lay motionless. Clearly, they were dead.

"These things happen," I explained. She nodded, seemingly with understanding, but I also recognized that she was not nearly as attached to our goats as she might have been to some of our other farm friends.

Cape, our middle daughter, was, however, quite fond of our rooster, Buttermilk. Buttermilk was a beautiful strutter. His rusted red breast offset by his black head made him look quite distinguished. He certainly ruled the roost and the yard, much to the chagrin of our turkeys and their patriarch, Tom. Tom dared not challenge Buttermilk, for Buttermilk was not one to mince concerns. He certainly appreciated the attention that Cape gave him, especially when it was accompanied by a handful of scratch, but if you challenged his hierarchy, he was fearless. On occasion, he even chased some unfortunate little girl wearing short britches across the yard. It's probably a good thing that Buttermilk was fat ... as in fat like a baby who drank nothing but Buttermilk ... because he never could catch the girls.

But that was also his undoing.

On the very day that Hannah and I were engaged, a wolf-hybrid raised by retired Judge Mel Cleve-

land gave birth to a litter of mutt puppies fathered by Judge Cleveland's golden retriever. As a young farmhand on his Shelby County farm, Judge offered me one of the litter. When the momma weaned them, I picked the cutest female and gave her to Hannah as a Christmas present and a memento for our engagement. We named her Belle, and we sometimes referred to her as the "white wolf," a testament to her beautiful, blonde coat and her prowess as a hunter.

Hannah would tell you, even to this day, that Belle was her favorite animal companion. Belle lived with us for 10 years, and we suspect in a fit of disorientation, got lost after we moved to our small farm in Covington County and she never came home. Two years later, I was driving down the road and thought I saw her on the roadside. I stopped, opened my truck door, and called the suspiciously familiar dog by her name ... she whipped her head around and ran straight to me, leaping in a single bound into my lap in the truck. With an unmistakable scar on her hip, I knew that we had been reunited with our favorite companion. Incredibly excited, I called Hannah and said, "Bring the girls outside ... I have an unbelievable surprise for you!"

Twenty minutes later, I pulled up at the farmhouse to an audience of eagerly expectant women of various ages. Upon opening the door, Belle leapt from my lap and into the waiting arms of the girls. Tears flowed like the Niagara as it was the most joyous reunion I'd ever participated in. Truly it was a Hallmark moment and one of the most wholesome things I have ever been exposed to ...

Within just a few minutes, Belle caught movement on the far side of the yard. Carnage ensued, and Buttermilk soon found out that he was too fat to run fast enough to escape the white wolf. Such was also the fate of many of his harem ... let's just say we ate fried chicken for several days after that.

"These things happen," I suggested to Bay and Cape. Banks was still too young to understand.



*Memories with Belle*



*Cape with one of our gray cats.*

Years later as she recalled the events, she looked at me and said, "No they don't, Dad. People don't bring home their long-lost dogs only to watch them murder all their pet chickens!"

I didn't have much to say in response.

Cape once found two kittens by the roadside near the farm. Her favorite of the two looked like Puff the Magic Dragon coughed up a gray fur ball. I'm quite sure that the flea circus made famous by Bugs Bunny cartoons lived in that cat's fur. She carried the cat, sometimes like a football, other times like a purse, and occasionally like something that might be living and have some fragility. Why it never bit her or clawed her is beyond all explanation, for, certainly in her rough and tumble youth, she was not prone to tender touches.

She'd hold the cat up near her face, and its fur would tickle her nose, rub her lips, and intermesh with Cape's own golden locks. It made me itch just to see it ... but we knew it made her happy. Cape later claimed that her wild-eyed grey friend disappeared after she delivered a litter of little baby kitties. I honestly don't remember ... but I know "these things happen sometimes."

Some years later, a dear friend, Jon Sellers of Red Level, Alabama, offered the girls a Black and Tan Hound mutt puppy that had been left on his doorstep. After some debate, we agreed that "Lincoln" would be his name. Lincoln grew up to be a fierce protector and a loyal friend ... he bit more than one visitor to our homestead, most times with the misunderstanding that they posed a threat. A boisterous laugh a few decibels too loud or a sudden step towards one of the girls might get you a nip. Lincoln was a faithful friend, too. He and I often went for walks through the piney



*Lincoln, when he was just a puppy.*

woods, sharing a Little Debbie Oatmeal Cream Pie and some really good conversation. He never repeated any secret I ever told him ....

Lincoln was a great tracker, too. I once refused to follow his lead when tracking a big nine-point for an hour as I hopelessly roamed through the hardwood bottoms in the dark of night thinking I was headed in the direction that I saw the big buck run. Emerging from the thick woods defeated, I found Lincoln sitting by the truck eagerly waiting. In a fit of desperation, I followed him off in the opposite direction, only to find the deer a mere 20 yards into the underbrush.

For ten years, Lincoln greeted me at the door every day when I came home. He had been shot by a sinister neighbor. He had bad hips. He had heart failure. But he never failed us. Not even when he died an old man. "These things happen," I said to myself as I cried when I lay his body in a hole down by the pond. He was a great dog ... I'd say the best. Banks, my youngest daughter, would agree. They were particularly close, too.

And these things do happen, for better or for worse, in life in rural Alabama. And no matter how hard the day was ... their memories will always bring us joy. 🐾

**Walt Merrell writes about life, family and faith. An avid hunter and outdoorsman, he enjoys time "in the woods or on the water" with his wife Hannah, and their three girls, Bay, Cape and Banks. They also manage an outdoors-based ministry called *Shepherding Outdoors*. Follow their adventures on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube at *Shepherding Outdoors*. You can email him at [shepherdingoutdoors@gmail.com](mailto:shepherdingoutdoors@gmail.com).**



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*AFC celebrates progress during the 88th Annual Membership Meeting.*

## A SOLID FOUNDATION

### 88TH ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

BY TIFFANY LESTER

At Alabama Farmers Cooperative's 88th Annual Membership Meeting in Montgomery, President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Rivers Myres took the stage to proudly reflect on the strength, resilience and heart of AFC and its people.

AFC's story began in 1936 when 11 Co-ops pooled \$11,000 during the Great Depression to form Tennessee Valley Fertilizer Cooperative. Myres recounted how this bold action laid a solid foundation for the future of AFC. "Think about how

difficult that must have been during the Depression," Myres said.

Over the next decade, things did not get easier. Thousands were called to serve the country in World War II, and hundreds of thousands of Americans lost their lives. Myres remembered a personal hometown hero, Bobby Wing, who went missing in action in 1943. To Myres, Wing represents one of many Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice for each of us.



Similar circumstances were experienced during the Korean War in the 1950s and the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Myres shared a photo of AFC Honorary Board Director, Sam Givhan, who earned a Purple Heart for his service as an O-1 Bird Dog pilot flying reconnaissance missions in Vietnam. "I didn't truly recognize the sacrifice these soldiers made for us until I was with Sam in D.C. at the Vietnam War Memorial a few years ago," Myres recounted. "He was looking for the names of his two groomsmen who didn't make it back."

Economic pressures began in the 1970s and led farmers to drive 3,000 tractors to Washington, D.C. to bring attention to their struggles. The economic crisis peaked in the 1980s, which was the worst decade for farming in America since the Great Depression.

Myres also spoke to the devastating impacts a natural disaster can have on a crop and shared a personal story of how Hurricane Andrew devastated their first cotton crop after he and his siblings inherited the family farm following his father's death in 1992.

"How many in here have lost a crop or livestock to a natural disaster?" Myres inquired.



*AFC President and CEO Rivers Myres delivers the President's Report.  
(Photo credit: Studio Panache)*

Numerous hands raised. "We put all that money in, take it all the way to the end and then lose it." He paused to ask the audience another pointed question – "Why do we do it?!" – before a photo of his young children and a bumper cotton crop appeared on the screen a few seconds later. "We do it for our families and our communities," Myres continued.

As Myres closed, he reflected on AFC's strong foundation and reminded the audience that while we are in the midst of challenging times – we've been here before and we will overcome. Myres ex-



*23 participating Cooperative members earned the President's Award for having positive local earnings and net margin to sales  $\geq$  1.5%. Not pictured: Jeff Kinder (Clay County Exchange) and Steve Lann (Marion County Cooperative). (Photo credit: Studio Panache)*



*CFO Brad Benson delivers the Fiscal Year 2024 financial report.  
(Photo credit: Studio Panache)*

pressed optimism for the future and invited Bonnie Plants President and CEO Mike Sutterer and GreenPoint Ag President and CEO Jeff Blair to the stage. Sutterer shared information about Bonnie's exciting new marketing partnership with Martha

Stewart and how data and AI are transforming the way Bonnie serves AFC's members more efficiently. Blair shared a powerful message about his life's journey and how a recent health scare reemphasized the importance of leaning into our interconnectedness to support the American farmer.

Today, AFC's initial \$11,000 investment has grown into \$369 million in equity. Myres attributes that to AFC's strategic plan for success – the three P's: People, Partnerships and Profits. "We're a family. We know who we are, where we came from and we understand the responsibility to make this dirt a better place to live."

Chief Financial Officer Brad Benson explained, "While the last two years have certainly delivered less than desirable results, AFC's overall financial position remains strong, with ample working capital, low debt and substantial investments in our joint ventures." He emphasized that AFC has also not wavered in its strategic initiatives of providing excellent service and delivering generous incentives and cash returns to the membership.

Exiting the grain business and divesting AFC's investment in Faithway Alliance were two diffi-



*AFC President and CEO Rivers Myres stands with John H. & Willodene Mathews Scholarship recipients Mattie Rae Gillespie, Preston Haney and Lydia East. (Photo credit: Studio Panache)*



cult but strategic decisions that allowed AFC to remain financially strong during turbulent times. AFC generated a total of \$14 million in patronage and retired \$4.1 million of equity back to its members in Fiscal Year 2024.

To conclude the membership meeting, AFC Chairman Jeff Sims shared a life lesson he learned while working with his grandfather 45 years ago. In the blistering July heat, Sims and his friends spent all day and into the night cutting and baling hay before the rain came. Just when they thought they were done, Sims' grandfather suggested they had time for one more load. "During the middle of that, my grandfather told us, 'Boys, don't look all down and out about having to work so late. Hard work is good for you. Hard work, it'll get you ahead in life. You'll appreciate it when you get older,'" said Sims.

At the time, Sims didn't realize how true those words were and how one sentence would stick with him throughout his life: "Hard work is good for you."



*Meeting attendees receive a printed copy of the 2024 Annual Report.  
(Photo credit: Studio Panache)*

As he looked around the room, Sims reflected on the hardworking spirit of the AFC team and emphasized that everyone plays an important role in AFC's success. "If we all continue to work hard and do our part, we will remain perfectly positioned for success going forward. As Rivers likes to say, you can 'Watch us win together!'" 🌟



*Bonnie Plants President and CEO Mike Sutterer shares plans for success in 2025. (Photo credit: Studio Panache)*



*AFC Chairman Jeff Sims concludes 88th Annual Membership Meeting.  
(Photo credit: Studio Panache)*

# E.P. GARRETT MANAGER OF THE YEAR: **KEITH GRIFFIN**

BY TIFFANY LESTER



2024 E.P. Garrett Manager of the Year Keith Griffin stands with his family after receiving the award. (L to R) Sloane Burton, Heather-Lynn Burton, Zeke Burton, Meg Griffin, Keith Griffin, Corey Griffin and Emily Griffin (Photo credit: Studio Panache)

Agriculture is a unique mix of tradition and innovation. It is in that world where leaders like Madison County Cooperative General Manager Keith Griffin shine brightly. Griffin recently received the prestigious 2024 E.P. Garrett Manager of the Year Award and was recognized at Alabama Farmers Cooperative's 88th Annual Membership Meeting. "I'm just grateful to have had the opportunity to work in this position," said Griffin. "We started out

at a low point, but with the support of my Board of Directors, employees and customers, every year has been successful. Sometimes I have to pinch myself I feel so proud."

After receiving his master's degree at Auburn University, Griffin's journey in the agricultural industry began at B&W Quality Growers, where he managed commercial watercress production operations for seven years. He then set out to find new



opportunities. "I didn't have much experience in sales, but I promised in my interview to be honest, fair and hardworking. I guess they bought it," he laughed.

Humor is a big part of Griffin's personality and leadership style. This approach has helped cultivate a positive work environment where employees feel at home, valued and motivated.

"I'm an introvert, but I've learned to get out of that comfort zone and engage more and be approachable. I think it makes us more of a team, more of a family. I know it sounds cheesy, but it's real," added Griffin.

Twenty-seven years later, he has stuck to his promises to be an award-winning leader who credits his team completely for the prestigious title. "I was shocked, but I was happy for our team at the Co-op because I know they worked really hard, and it's always good to be recognized," Griffin said.

"I can't think of a better Manager of the Year than Keith Griffin," said Jamie Vann, Madison County Cooperative-Meridianville Assistant Manager. "Sitting beside him at the table when his name was announced, I was proud to be working for him. When I congratulated him, he told me, 'WE DID IT!' which says it all."

Vann began working with Griffin while in the Future Leaders Program over 20 years ago and knows Griffin to be a man of faith, integrity, honesty and humility. "When he speaks, everyone listens. He promotes a family work environment and he understands it takes all the employees for Madison County Co-op to be successful," said Jamie Vann.

During the awards ceremony, AFC President and CEO Rivers Myres spoke to Griffin's strong leadership of always being willing to learn and grow. "He runs a Co-op in probably the most competitive area for employees that we have in the state of Alabama, and he has on his executive team the lowest turnover," said Myres. "That speaks for itself, and we're proud to have Keith on our team."

Over his nearly three-decade tenure, Griffin has witnessed significant changes in the Co-op system. His locations specialize in different areas of agriculture – one location focused solely on agronomy, one location focused on irrigation and grain bin sales and two retail stores.

To stay relevant in the market, change must



AFC President and CEO Rivers Myres and Keith Griffin  
(Photo credit: Studio Panache)

happen – a fact Griffin recognizes. Recently, the Madison County Cooperative has embarked on a new venture into landscaping materials – a strategic move to diversify and adapt to urban growth. "It's not the best time in agriculture, but we're leveraging our products for sustainability," Keith explains.

With an eye on the future through adaptability and growth, Griffin's goal for the stores remains the same as it was on his first day – service excellence. This approach has earned the Co-op a reputation for reliability and trustworthiness, fostering customer loyalty.

"The employees here at Madison County Co-op believe in the goal and the direction we're headed, providing the best service we can, not trying to cut corners and give the customer what they expect and deserve," explained Griffin.

A career that started managing watercress farms to leading a successful Co-op in Northeast Alabama is a testament to the impact of teamwork, adaptability and visionary thinking. As Griffin's locations continue to evolve, his legacy of leadership will undoubtedly inspire future generations in agriculture. 🌱

KEYNOTE SPEAKER:  
**SCOTT MANN**  
 LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE:  
 LESSONS FROM A GREEN BERET

BY TIFFANY LESTER

Leadership is often associated with authority, strategic decisions and vision. But in a compelling keynote speech, former U.S. Army Green Beret Scott Mann highlighted a different set of leadership skills that can save the day not only in unpredictable and volatile environments, but also in the real world: "What I found in my life is that what works in life and death works even better in life and business."

He began with a tale of his military team navigating life and building connections in war-torn Afghanistan. It revealed the more essential leadership principles are rooted in trust, empathy and adaptability.

Mann opened by describing the "churn" that defined the Afghan village where his team was stationed—a community plagued by decades of violence, instability and broken promises. He explained how we experience these "churn" challenges in everyday life as a mixture of short attention spans, disengagement, disconnection and distrust plaguing modern society. It can lead to a complete absence of trust.

Leadership in such an environment requires rebuilding trust from the ground up. Mann broke down how Green Berets distinguish themselves from other elite units like the Navy SEALs by working "by, with and through" local communities over extended periods. They immerse themselves in the culture, learn the language and embed deeply into the environment. This shows a commitment to patient, relationship-based leadership. For business leaders, trust is built incrementally through consistency, listening and showing up when it



matters most.

"They immerse themselves in the language and the culture and the environment, and they stay, and they stay, and they stay until the time is just right, and then they help the little guy stand up against the big guy from the bottom up."

In one instance, reluctant farmers stood beside Green Berets on a rooftop to defend their village from an enemy attack. Not out of duty but because they trusted the men who had built relationships with them over weeks and months. "We had to build rapport with people radically different from us," Mann explained. It's a skill that leaders in



any field can adopt: finding common ground with those we may not understand, especially in challenging circumstances.

Great leaders know how to bring people onto the “rooftop” when the night is darkest and the stakes are highest.

Mann reminded attendees that leadership isn’t about control; it’s about empowerment. Leaders who help others find their voices and strength are far more effective than those who simply issue commands.

“Surrounded on purpose” is a phrase Mann used to describe his team’s strategic positioning in a volatile environment. This mindset reflects an ability to embrace chaos rather than be overwhelmed by it.

In today’s world, where agricultural leaders face everything from global crises to rapidly evolving technology, adaptability is non-negotiable. Mann’s story illustrates how great leaders anticipate and adapt to changing circumstances, pivot when necessary and remain calm under pressure.

Finally, Mann’s description of Green Berets’ motto — *De Oppresso Liber* (to free the oppressed) — underscores the importance of purpose-driven leadership, which Alabama Farmers Cooperative practices day in and day out.

Mann’s post-service transition was rocky and left him questioning his purpose. With the guidance of a mentor, Mann turned to storytelling for healing and connection, which allowed him to teach leaders how to foster trust in a disconnected world. His journey even led to a touring play about the Afghanistan war produced by actor Gary Sinise.

“Struggle is a trust accelerant,” he said, explaining that sharing challenges can deepen connections and inspire resilience in others.

One of Mann’s most moving adventures he recounted involved Nezamuddin “Nezam” Nezami, an Afghan Special Forces soldier trained by the United States and a trusted ally. Nezami grew up surrounded by war in Afghanistan. But he later joined the Afghan Special Forces where his loyalty,

courage and dedication made him a beloved leader. “He was the hardest working person you ever met in your life. He would go on every mission that went outside the fire base. That’s pretty unheard of,” Mann explained. During a Taliban ambush, Nezami was shot through the face. He was quickly medevacked to safety, and after five weeks of

recovery, he returned to combat operations.

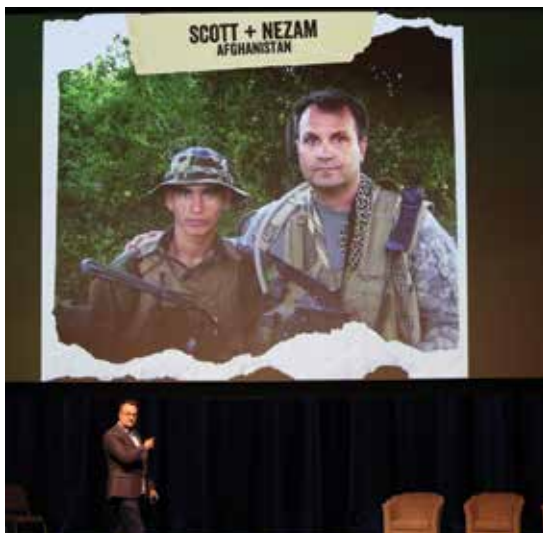
Years later, as Kabul collapsed in 2021, Nezami reached out to Mann for help. Against all odds, Mann and a network of veterans coordinated Nizam’s harrowing escape through the perilous streets of Kabul to safety in the U.S. in what they called “Operation Pineapple Express.”

He made a promise to Nezami, “If you stay alive, you’ll be my neighbor in

Riverview, Florida.” Thanks to a network of determined individuals behind the scenes, that promise was made into a reality.

In closing, Mann used the metaphor of an iceberg to explain how 80% of our leadership potential lies beneath the surface — in our ancient, human instincts of connection and community. While challenges like recession, supply chain issues, inflation and even talent management dominate the portion we see above the water, it is the deeper aspects of human nature that provide solutions to today’s challenges.

“What that is below the waterline is a meaning-seeking, emotional, social storyteller who struggles.” That M.E.S.S.S. framework can have a massive impact. Ultimately, Mann’s final message was clear: Leadership is not about rank or position. It’s about stepping up when others don’t, forging deep connections and navigating life’s storms with purpose. His book, *Nobody’s Coming to Save You: A Green Beret’s Guide to Getting Big Stuff Done* outlines actionable tactics for weaving these elements into leadership practices. “I’ll see you on the rooftop where the air is thin and human connection is the order of the day,” Mann concluded, leaving his audience inspired to lead with empathy and authenticity. ●



BREAKFAST SPEAKER:

**JAY MAHAFFEY**

## LESSONS LEARNED AT SCOTT LEARNING CENTER

BY TIFFANY LESTER



Jay Mahaffey, Manager of the Scott Learning Center and Science Fellow at Bayer, brought humor and insight to his presentation on lessons learned from years of agronomic research. His work spans 400 acres in Scott, Mississippi, answering key questions about cotton, corn and soybeans.

"We attempt to evaluate crops on a scientific basis to help counsel others," said Mahaffey. "People ask us how to do this or that better, what did I do right or wrong? We experiment to try to find the answer."

Here's a glimpse into what they've learned

about some of Alabama's most prevalent crops:

**PLANTING DECISIONS MATTER**

Mahaffey emphasized the importance of getting planting right the first time. "You plant cotton, you know you're going to plant a crop that's spending a month trying to die," he said. However, modern breeding advancements have made cotton more resilient and productive.

In corn, he highlighted the impact of planting depth using a study where shallow-planted seeds suffered from bird damage, cutting yields in half. "That's one of those decisions you make at plant-



ing, and you can only make at planting, that can have a huge impact on yield,” he explained. Similarly, planting too early led to a 44-bushel per acre yield penalty. “Where I planted when I could versus when I should ... I suffered to the tune of about \$250 an acre,” he noted.

## COTTON ADVANCEMENTS

Mahaffey described cotton as a “cantankerous plant that we delight in the labor and the effort it takes to grow.” His research demonstrated how breeding and technology have significantly improved productivity, making modern cotton 10 times more productive than in 1923. He credited the eradication of the boll weevil as one of the most significant advancements in agriculture, “I wouldn’t be an entomologist today, probably, if it wasn’t for chasing him around Franklin Parish, Louisiana, as a kid.”

Using a machine he and his team created called the “boll-o-meter,” researchers compared old and new cotton varieties, confirming that vegetative bolls now contribute 30% of total yield, up from 6%. Additionally, modern bolls are 6% heavier, with improved fiber-to-seed ratios. However, he stressed the importance of proper management by stating that farmers must “keep the plant in balance so that it’s putting the energy in reproduction rather than vegetation.”



## SOYBEAN ADAPTABILITY

Mahaffey’s team explored soybean yield compensation through an experiment using the “Skipulator,” another Mahaffey-engineered tool, to test thin and skippy stands. The results showed that soybeans naturally adjust for missing rows. “The real point of it is, if you have a questionable stand in soybeans, go out and carefully evaluate it to ensure you’ve got healthy plants,” Mahaffey advised.

Mahaffey closed with a reminder of agriculture’s complexity. “Agriculture is a complicated business that wrangles the complex interaction of human nature, biology and a bunch of other disciplines,” said Mahaffey. “The most complicated problem in the world is a bunch of really simple steps all put together.” More details can be found at [www.cropscience.bayer.us](http://www.cropscience.bayer.us). 🌱



# AWARDS CEREMONY

BY TIFFANY LESTER

## RETIREMENT AWARDS

AFC's 88th Annual Meeting culminates with an awards banquet celebrating the achievements of its Co-op members. At this year's event, AFC Chairman Jeff Sims recognized the retirement of two long-time Co-op leaders, John Curtis and John Holley.

After 45 years of service at the Co-op, Tennessee Valley Cooperative President John Curtis hung up his boots. He began his Co-op career as a "field man" when there were 30-plus dairies, a feeder pig sale and no-till wasn't a thing in Limestone County. "The Co-op is a way of life. I've got two families: blood family and my Co-op family," Curtis said.

Now retired, Curtis plans to work with his wife, Donna Jo, on her cattle and hay farm as well as spend quality time with his six grandchildren who live nearby. He will be replaced as President of Tennessee Valley Cooperative by Chris Carter.

Tennessee Valley Cooperative-Moulton General Manager John Holley was also honored for his 46 years of dedication and service to the Co-op. Holley began his career "doing whatever needed to

be done" including driving a spreader truck, mixing and stacking feed in the warehouse and maintaining the grain elevator. "I am fortunate to have been able to work around a lot of good people," said Holley. "They helped shape the way I ran things at the Co-op, and I appreciate all the work they did." Holley plans to spend his free time working on home and farm projects and spending time with his five grandchildren. John Appleton replaces Holley as the location manager. We wish them all the best of luck in their retirement. 🌟



(L to R) John Curtis, AFC Board Chairman Jeff Sims, AFC President and CEO Rivers Myres and John Holley (Photo credit: Studio Panache)



Federal Aviation Administration FAAS Team Program Manager Bill Hattaway presents honorary AFC Board of Director Sam Givhan with the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award.  
(Photo credit: Studio Panache)

## MASTER PILOT AWARD

Before concluding the event, honorary Board of Director and U.S. Army veteran Sam Givhan was celebrated and honored with a standing ovation as he received the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

The award, named after Orville and Wilbur Wright, is the highest honor given to pilots from the FAA. To earn this prestigious award, pilots must have demonstrated professionalism, skill and aviation expertise and maintained safe operations for over 50 years.

Givhan fought in the Vietnam War as an O-1 Bird Dog Pilot. There, he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, Purple Heart and 25 Air Medals. 🌟



# GUEST PROGRAM

## TEA, SOCIAL AND CHARITABLE ACTIVITY

BY TIFFANY LESTER

In line with AFC's mission, 88th Annual Membership Meeting guests worked to cultivate meaningful life on and off the farm by participating in a charitable project benefitting Butterfly Bridge Children's Advocacy Center.

Located in Central Alabama, Butterfly Bridge Children's Advocacy Center offers a safe, child-friendly environment to children victimized by abuse or neglect as they provide restoration and justice in their lives. Within the Center, families find support, resources, and most importantly a place where healing begins.

After hearing from Assistant Director Emily Hutcheson about how they assist children in need,

guests packed a total of 50 bags with teddy bears, blankets and encouraging cards to be given to kids who use the center's services. 🐻



## ENTERTAINMENT

### PENELOPE ROAD

BY TIFFANY LESTER

There were good vibes only during the entertainment portion of the Awards Banquet thanks to the smooth rhythms from Atlanta music group Penelope Road. The five-piece band boldly embraces a style they call "stanky funky junk" with a fusion of '70s rock, funk and soul.

Banquet attendees mingled and enjoyed dinner while listening to Penelope Road's original songs as well as covers of classics. Drawing inspiration from an eclectic group of both legendary and modern icons like Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder and Paramore, Penelope Road's fresh and distinctive sound showcases their passion for pushing boundaries through vintage vibes and contemporary creativity.

Named after the street they lived on, Charles Eastman, James Kopp, Max Moore, Koan Roy-Meighoo and Anthony Smith formed Pe-

nelope Road in early 2024. They credit social media for their big break – going from 10,000 followers to 100,000 in just two months, and garnering millions of views on their casual behind-the-scenes jam session videos. The fivesome is now touring across the country with multiple sold-out shows. 🎸



(L to R) Koan Roy-Meighoo, Anthony Smith, Max Moore, Charles Eastman and James Kopp (Photo credit: Studio Panache)





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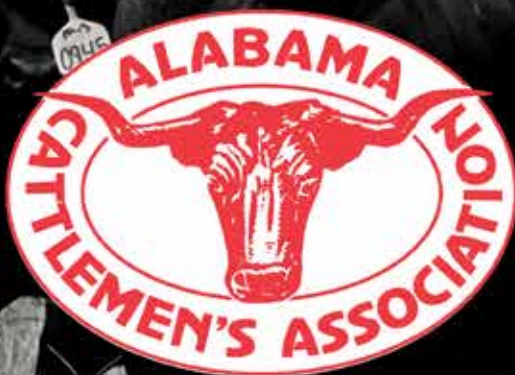
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# THE COST OF HIGH DOLLAR CATTLE

BY KEN KELLEY, PH.D.

Prices have been good for Alabama producers and should remain so for the near future. Lower inventories and steady demand have pushed cattle prices to the point of profitability for most producers (see figure 1).

However, it is always important to consider what the cost of production is for those producers and what will happen to profitability when cattle prices trend down (which they will). There are two components of profitability – income and expenses. So, what will expenses look like going forward into 2025? It is probably wise to consider where we have been and where we are now ... and why we are there.

Figure 2 is a graphical representation of what estimated cow calf costs have been for cattle producers nationwide since 1997 and estimated costs through 2026. The low point on the graph would be 1998

when the average producer spent \$364 per cow, and the most expensive year on the graph would be 2023 with a cost of \$1088 per cow. 2025 projections are for a slightly lower cost of production with the aver-

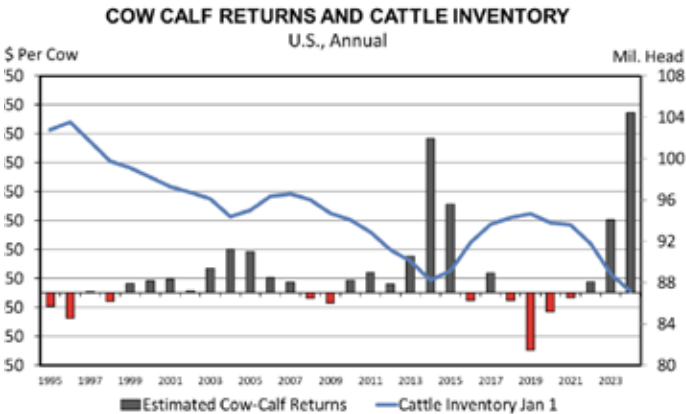
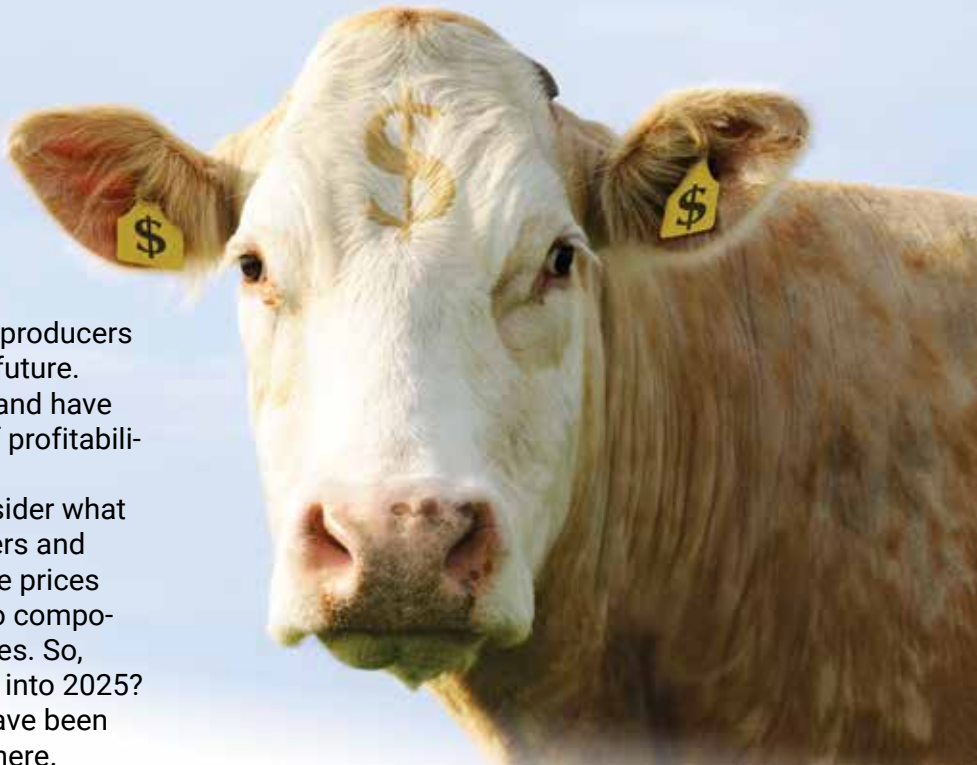


FIGURE 1

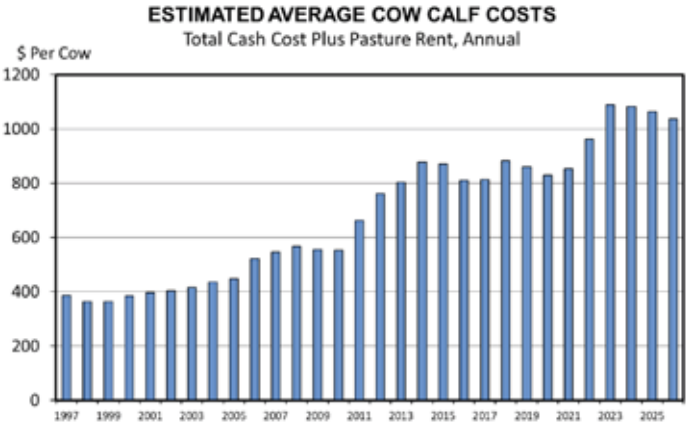


FIGURE 2



age national cost being \$1064 per cow. (Fig. 3)

When considering the hierarchy of expenses on a cattle operation, feed (including forages) is usually the largest and most expensive component we deal with (outside of the cost of breeding stock). As such, it certainly bears scrutiny. There are two major parts of most Alabama cattle producers' feed bills: forages and (for lack of a better term) "bagged feed."

First, we should consider the cost of forage (including both grazing and hay). Forage costs are driven by establishment expenses, fertilizer, chemical and fuel costs. As we can see in Figure 3, those costs are certainly down from the high point in 2023 and will project slightly lower into 2025. These prices were driven higher by both the effects of COVID-19 and the effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, even though we have seen some relief recently, these prices are remaining higher than pre-COVID-19 levels. Management of these expenses will be paramount to profitability as cattle prices come down in future years. Producers should continue to employ sound agricultural practices like soil testing to ensure they don't invest more than is necessary in forage production. They should also consider grazing management and hay storage to prevent loss of produced forages. (Fig. 3)

Producers should also consider their bagged feed costs into 2025. Feed cost indexes are the lowest they have been since 2021, driven mainly by lower corn costs. While this is a very positive thing for livestock producers, it is also important to remember that even with lower feed costs well managed cattle producers will normally find grazing to be the lowest cost and highest performing option for their cow-calf operations.

There are numerous other expenses to be aware of as producers plan for our next year(s) in the cattle business in Alabama. Interest rates have been higher for us over the last couple of years as the Federal Reserve attempted to battle inflation. We have seen some easing of these rates, but they remain well

*Feed cost indexes are the lowest they have been since 2021, driven mainly by lower corn costs.*

above the extremely low rates we enjoyed only a few years back. This makes it more expensive to buy equipment and other necessary inputs and can certainly hamper our profitability – even with historically high calf prices. Likewise, machinery costs have been rising at a significant rate since 2021. These higher costs for machinery and implements coupled with higher financing costs certainly make it difficult to expand the small to medium cattle operation.

So, what does all this mean as far as profitability? It means that if we are good managers and good producers, we will have the opportunity to be profitable in the near term with our projected calf prices. However, as we move forward, managing expenses and planning for our future expense needs to be prioritized just like choosing our next herd bull or picking out our replacement heifers to purchase. 🐮

**Paid Indexes by Non-farm Origin and Month, Chemicals, Fertilizer, and Fuels – United States: 2011=100**

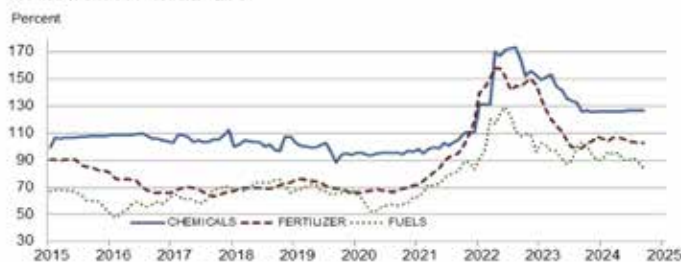


FIGURE 3

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# THE MUS

*Tim Kelley built his first dulcimer after reading the Foxfire books about Appalachia.*



# IN THE HANDS OF MUSIC MAKER

BY CAROLYN DRINKARD

Tim Kelley is a multitalented music maker who is emotionally and spiritually connected to the unique “music makers” he crafts. He lives with his wife, Hope, two children and six grandchildren in the small Tallahatta Community, west of Thomasville, Alabama. It’s an area of rolling hills, which got its name from the Choctaw Indians who once lived there.

Kelley is a gifted musician, who taught himself to play bass and rhythm guitars. For years, he has led the singing at Elam Baptist Church. He is now teaching his granddaughter, Alexis Harvell, to follow in his footsteps. Both are members of the Community Choir. Kelley has also sung and played guitar with many Southern Gospel groups.

Kelley enjoys the great outdoors. In college, he majored in forestry technology. He retired from the Alabama Forestry Commission and now works as a forestry specialist for Scotch Land Management. It was in these settings that Kelley honed his knowledge of the many types of wood that can be found in the forests of Clarke County.

“I have worked in the woods all my life,” he said. “I love it, and I love to hunt and fish in the great outdoors.”

Kelley is also a skilled craftsman who brings rhythm into his workshop by making some of the instruments he plays. It’s a time-consuming creative process. So far, he has only built his own electric bass guitar, but he dreams of making a dobro and rhythm guitar after he retires. One instrument he has crafted, however, has spoken to his soul. When he constructed his first dulcimer, he discovered a uniquely American instrument unlike any other.

“I first got the idea from the Foxfire books years

before,” he explained, “so when I got older, I built one.”

Kelley’s deep fascination for Appalachian folklore and music drew him to the dulcimer, a stringed instrument shaped like an hourglass or trapezoid. It is often associated with Scottish and Irish pioneers, who first lived there. The dulcimer is constructed



*Tim Kelley retired from the Alabama Forestry Commission and now works for Scotch Land Management. His love of the great outdoors has given him a wealth of knowledge about wood products for his musical instruments.*

of wood, usually found in the area where the craftsmen lived. This uniquely American music maker was often called a “hog fiddle” or “harmony box.” Its pure, soothing tones are mesmerizing, unlike those from any other stringed instrument.

“I really enjoy making these dulcimers,” Kelley stated. “They are very labor intensive with two melody strings that must be tuned, or it will have a drone sound like a bagpipe.”

Kelley conducts a symphony in sawdust as he experiments with many types of wood found locally. He uses hard woods on the sides and backs, but he prefers soft woods like cedar, yellow poplar and sweet gum for the sound board. These emit a more mellow tone. For visual effects, he etches beautiful images like leaves, hummingbirds, crosses or hearts on each creation.

Kelley combines his passion for music with his innate talents for woodworking. The results are one-of-a-kind, custom-made instruments with unmatched tonal quality.

Kelley’s creativity and inspiration come from the area where he lives. The Tallahatta Community in northwestern Clarke County is a melting pot of musical traditions and cultures. From the Choctaw Indians who roamed the hills to the early settlers who made their own stringed instruments, the area’s music blends the stories, preserves the heritage and connects these rural people to future generations. Their bluegrass, country, soul or Southern Gospel tunes speak of resilient, hardworking people who believed in God and helped their neighbors.

Whether hymns of faith or songs of hope, the rhythms resonate deeply within Kelley’s heart. With the introduction of his unique dulcimer, he has added another dimension to the rich cultural history of the rural Tallahatta Community, while preserving the generational wealth handed down to him. 🌿



*Tim Kelley's dulcimers are prized for their tonal quality, which comes from the local wood he uses including cedar, yellow poplar and sweet gum.*



# Howle's HINTS

BY JOHN HOWLE

## PLANNING AND PLANTING

*"Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty."*

**Proverbs 21:5**

Planning, planting, tending and gathering produce from the garden requires good planning and hard work, but hasty shortcuts definitely lead to an unproductive garden. Now is the time to plan the planting of your summer garden. Make sure your garden spot is in a well-drained area, and plan what soil amendments you will need.

Just like in your pasture, a soil test can tell you exactly what is missing from your garden soil. In the absence of a soil test,

much of our Alabama soil runs acidic, so anything you can do to neutralize the soil will help. Adding lime or woodstove ash can increase the pH of your soil to healthy levels. Once the threat of frost is gone is an ideal time to plant your peppers and tomatoes. Your local Co-op can provide you with all the soil amendments you need as well as seeds and plants for a productive garden.





*Spring is an ideal time to get your pepper and tomato plants in the ground after the threat of frost is gone*

It's a satisfying feeling to see all the rich spring growth of grass in the pasture this time of year. The dormant, dead grass of winter is being replaced with the colorful hues of green, and cattle are actively grazing the new growth. The big concern for grazing cattle this time of year is grass tetany.

Often, the quick growing grass of spring hasn't absorbed all the nutrients cattle need in the grass leaves. This can leave the cattle with a deficiency of magnesium and calcium. If left unchecked, the cattle can suffer from grass tetany. The easiest way to prevent this is to supply your cattle with trace minerals with higher amounts of magnesium and calcium to make up for the lost nutrients. Your local Co-op store can advise you on and provide you with the best trace minerals for your cattle herd to prevent grass tetany this spring.

***Your local Co-op store can advise you on and provide you with the best trace minerals for your cattle herd to prevent grass tetany this spring.***



*Your local Co-op can provide you with the right minerals for your cattle to avoid grass tetany.*

Once you've taken time to plan and plant your garden and supplied your livestock with their spring needs, take some time to turkey hunt. The meat of the eastern wild gobbler is a healthy, tasty and high-protein organic meat. There's nothing more exciting than hearing the echoing gobble of a tom turkey thundering through the hills and hollows of the woods.

Hunting turkeys sounds quite simple, but it takes some skill to outsmart these birds that can see and hear 10 times better than humans.

If you have located a gobbler on your property, set up on a location preferably higher than the bird in a blind on the ground. This can be brush and branches piled up in front of you to conceal your body outline. Sitting with your back against a shoulder-width tree helps as well.

Be sure you are fully camouflaged and have easy access to your shotgun while in the blind. By doing





*The thundering echo of turkey gobbles fills the hills and hollows this time of year.*

some occasional soft calling with some yelps and purrs, often the gobbler will come to your location searching for this lost hen. Be sure to call softly enough that the gobbler has to hunt for you. You are replicating the sounds of a hen, and the calling should be soft and seldom.

Once the gobbler is in range (this could be around 25 yards depending on your ammo), you can take a safe shot at the base of the neck of the gobbler. Sometimes, I hop in a blind just to call a bird in to observe him without taking a shot. You can learn a lot just listening to vocalizations of the hens and gobblers.

If you don't need the meat, a large, healthy flock of turkeys can help protect your pastures. If you ever have an infestation of army worms, a few flocks of turkeys and a murder or two of crows can clear out these damaging worms in no time. This can save lots of money over having to buy expensive pesticides.

Shortcuts can lead to poverty according to the above verse in proverbs. Keep your perimeter fencing in good shape, and keep plenty of quality grass grow-



*Keep your body and outline camouflaged and concealed during turkey hunts to increase your odds.*

ing in your pastures. Visit your local Co-op for the best prices on perimeter fencing such as barbed wire and woven wire fencing. A variety of gate sizes will allow you easy access into and out of your pastures, and wooden and metal fence posts can keep the fences strong for years.

If you are not already doing it, I would strongly consider intensive grazing with the use of easily moveable solar powered electric fencing. Often, all you need is one strand of braided nylon wire with metal filaments to keep the whole herd grazing in the areas you want them to. The more the herd is closely confined in grazing and moving regularly, you are getting the most out of the cattle with their droppings being concentrated in smaller areas. This allows the cattle to work FOR you instead of the other way around. In addition, the concentrated grazing will train cattle to eat more undesirable plants that you might otherwise have to spray.

This spring, spend plenty of time planning and working and avoid the hasty shortcuts that can cost money in the long run. 🌱



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# Simple TIMES

BY SUZY McCRAY

## ARE YOU READY?

There's several funny videos that have been making the rounds on Facebook, but they all seem to have the same theme. A male voice says, "Take my card to the store and get everything you think we need."

A woman is then shown unloading shopping bags in her kitchen. She takes out sev-

eral items and sits them neatly on her kitchen counter: a loaf of bread, some canned goods, a carton of milk, a tiny live baby goat kid, a roll of paper towels....

The scenario is carried out basically the same in several videos and they always make me laugh and then smile ... because who



doesn't need another goat?

But I always shake my head. It seemed our goat herding days were just about over. We were down to two goats. A way-too-fat Pygmy-Nubian cross, Gracie Girl, and her lanky-legged, fixed son Ringo. We got Gracie Girl in 2019 thinking we would breed her and she would be our newest milk goat. But COVID-19 and other health problems got in our way big time!

My health spiraled and with husband Mack doing all the chores including taking care of all my precious animals, I didn't want to add birthing-babies and milking twice a day to his already full line of chores.

But here we are five years later. We had briefly discussed a really good looking six month old miniature Nubian available in Georgia. But she was located almost on the Atlantic coast AND she was a bit more than our budget was comfortable with.

I was sitting at the kitchen table packaging some elderberry-echinacea dried teas for our farm store when Mack came back from a routine trip to a local big box store.

I knew he had something on his mind (other than helping me package tea in tiny tea bags!) when he plopped down beside me and pulled out his phone to display a cute photo of two Pygmy goats and a small-

er Nigerian Dwarf doe. "Do you want these," he casually asked.

Any one who knows me personally (or even barely at all) would know the answer to that question! I wouldn't have been much more surprised if he had produced a baby goat kid from a shopping bag and set it on the table!

There was a fixed male and a female, light brown with the regular Pygmy black markings, plus a much smaller black and white doe (whose markings resembled a cow!) named – as we soon learned – Spitfire!

They have belonged to a friend (related to us by marriage) from our previous church and Mack had even held her funeral a couple of years ago. Her family had been caring for her much-loved animals but the birth of the latest grandchild plus another grandson already toddling around, was just too much for them to handle at this time and they were just looking for a good home for the goat trio.

They were healthy, and we knew their history and background, and of course I said I wanted them! I'd had as many as 11 goats together through the years. I started with a very special Boer male, Harley, and bred him to two Nubians that I also obtained from Harley's previous farm. They were docile animals



*Ringo and Spitfire*





*Spitfire playing around.*

and great milkers with personalities that I sure hadn't expected.

As I grew older I began to downsize a little: not fewer goats but SMALLER goats. I began breeding Pygmies with Nigerian Dwarfs as the goats were smaller so I could better handle them by myself when trimming hooves, giving shots, etc. The little goats still gave plenty of milk for me to drink and for me to use in my goat milk soaps, lotions, and salves. In May one precious year, within a one week's time, I delivered a set of triplets and two sets of twins! I was in goat Heaven!

But age eventually took its toll on my goat herd and me. By this winter, all my original line of goats had died off (most all of natural causes) leaving me with Gracie Girl and her long-legged son.

But both of us, nearing age 73, have re-embarked on our goat journey! We have been drinking raw cow's milk which has been wonderful for my health but raw goat's milk is what my body really needs! So we are hoping by summer to breed the new Pygmy Patty to a male Nigerian Dwarf (so she will have smaller babies). It has been an adventure thus far that has really illustrated some important lessons to me.

We kept the newest three closed in a very large stall in our barn for several days. They were happy as they learned who we were and enjoyed big stacks of Blount County's hay. There was a lot of sniffing and head butting through the stall gate as Gracie Girl and Ringo made their acquaintance. Then the bright sunny day came when they would all be let out in the pasture together.

We expected a lot of head butting but the very first thing, little Spitfire ran over and tried to head butt

the much taller and bigger Ringo. He kind of looked bewildered as he leaned down to half-heartedly head butt back but you could tell he was kind of impressed with the spunky little goat!

We kept a pretty close watch for the next few hours as they all became better acquainted. And at night they are still kept three and two together in their own stalls. The big stall will be divided in half when Patty does become an expectant mama so that she and the little one can have some privacy when he or she is born. But hopefully even then they will all get along well soon in the larger pasture.

And Mack will be building a higher milking stand. One still safe for Patty to jump onto to be milked but one where I won't have to bend over quite as far if I'm the one doing the milking chores.

We've read and done several things in the past few years to make this farm more accessible and easy to work as we've gotten older and my health did weird things. He built eight raised beds for my medicinal and kitchen herbs so that I can have many plants but don't have to bend and struggle. He knows just about more than me about all the products we make and sell in our farm store, able to wait on customers comfortably and help them with their needs when I'm not feeling my best.

His next project will be installing a wider gate going into the pasture, and moving the current gate closer to the front of the barn for easier entry from the garden area and into the animals' areas to better meet their needs. He's run water lines to the different areas inside the barn (to the left for goats and ducks, and to the right for chickens, guineas and turkey) so hoses don't have to be dragged from one area to the other and everything is basically accessible from inside the barn!

We're adapting but still enjoying our homestead and still working hard every day. As the spaghetti squash spread over the garden hill and the heirloom tomato plants stretch upward in the greenhouse, we take pleasure and comfort in all the blessings God has bestowed on us.

The Psalms have many references of how God keeps us in our "old age." But one of my favorite verses is now Isaiah 46:4. "Even to your old age and gray hairs, I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you, I will sustain you and I will rescue you." 🌟

**(Suzy can be reached on her facebook page "Mack Suzy McCray" or by email at [suzy.mccray@yahoo.com](mailto:suzy.mccray@yahoo.com))**

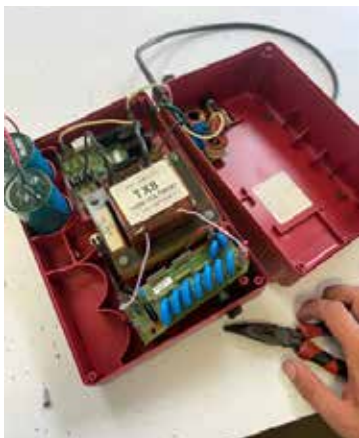


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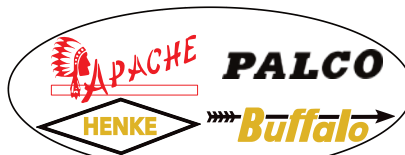


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# GRAZING GRACE

*The Lord is my shepherd ... I shall not want - Psalm 23:1*

## BE STILL

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BY GREG A. LANE

When I was a little boy and would get a splinter embedded in my finger, we always went through the same ritual in the Ray T. Lane household. My dad would get out a sewing needle, a match, a pair of tweezers, a band-aid and a bottle of Merthiolate. (By the way, if Mercurochrome was available, I always asked my dad to use that instead of Merthiolate. Every kid that grew up in the '50s and '60s knew the difference ... Merthiolate stung like the dickens when applied to a cut!)

With all of my dad's surgical tools in hand, we'd head to the couch and sit beside the lamp on the end table. My dad would put on his reading glasses to get a better look at the splinter. "I can see it in there ... now, this might hurt a little bit, but we'll get that splinter out," he'd say. Then, he'd light the match and hold it to the end of the sewing needle to sterilize his "surgical instrument." I remember watching the needle tip heat up with a bright orange glow. It was like being out on the open prairie watching a cowboy heat up his branding iron before branding a calf. In this instance, though, I was the calf!

When the tip of the needle cooled down from a bright orange to a dark brown, I knew it was time for the surgery to begin. My dad's sterilized "scalpel" was





prepped and ready to pierce my skin and pick away at the embedded splinter. My dad would then grab my arm and pull it toward the light, placing the wounded hand on the end table beneath the lamp. Once my arm was in the proper position and my hand was on the "operating table," he would clamp my arm between his arm and chest in an effort to immobilize me. Since I was the fourth of five kids in the family, my dad had perfected this surgical procedure through years of practicing on my siblings.

He would then grab the finger with the splinter in it and squeeze the area around the splinter. He was simply trying to force the splinter out as far as it would go so it would be easier to see and to pick at. But, in my young mind it felt more like he was trying to torture me! I couldn't even see over his shoulder to get a peek at what he was doing. It was a moment of complete trust. Then again, the more I think about it, there might have been a little bit of doubt and misgiving. I can remember, before he'd even touch my finger with the needle, I'd wince in pain and cry out, "Oww! Oww! That hurts, Dad! You're hurting me!" And my dad would always reply, "I haven't even started digging yet!" (Oh, the traumas of childhood!)

Without fail, there were two words my dad would always have to say to me during those homespun surgeries ... "BE STILL!" After all, little boys have a tendency to squirm during splinter-removal surgery, so Dr. Dad would have to calm me down. He knew if I was wiggling around during the procedure that he might accidentally poke me with the needle deeper than was necessary. Usually, the splinter was buried no deeper than 1/16th of an inch into my skin, but when he was digging with that needle to get it out, it felt like he was poking through all the way to the bone! "BE STILL!" he'd say over and over again. "BE STILL" was the only anesthesia available to me. You don't have to be knocked unconscious to have a splinter removed ... you just have to "BE STILL." Oh, the lessons I learned in Dad's surgery center. I learned patience, endurance and fortitude. I also learned that even when it felt like he was oblivious to my pain, he had my best interest in mind. Lastly, I learned the importance of being still while he was operating on me.

Many times, our Father in Heaven has to do surgical work on His children, just like my dad used to do on me. Memories of past failures need to be extracted. Unforgiveness has to be cut off at the roots. Sinful desires need to be eradicated. It can be a painful process. To His children, God says the same

thing my dad said to me ... "BE STILL." Yes, the procedure may be a little painful, but once it's all over you'll feel so much better. You've just got to trust His steady hand ... and "BE STILL." You've got to believe He has your best interest in mind ... and "BE STILL." You're not helping Him by questioning Him and complaining ... so just "BE STILL." Anxiously squirming around doesn't help matters, either. All that wiggling around is just making things more difficult. "BE STILL."

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Psalm 46:10, which says, "BE STILL and know that I am God." In our moments of pain and heartache, our Father in Heaven wants to alleviate our suffering, but we must yield to His voice ... "BE STILL." If we're wiggling around and being overly anxious, the surgical process might take longer than necessary.

So, if the Great Physician is doing a surgical work in your life right now, yield to His wisdom and fatherly advice. Everything is going to turn out fine if you'll just obey His one request ... "BE STILL."

#### **Exodus 14:14**

**"The LORD will fight for you; you need only to BE STILL" 🌟**

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# SPRING CLEANING FOR GRILLING

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BY ANGELA TREADAWAY

Outdoor cooking is one of the crowning moments of summer. Grilling is perfect for entertaining at home, the lake, birthday parties or just because. Plus, it is a fantastic way to be outside to thaw from the cold winter and/or spring months.

Before we fire up the grill, we must first do a little spring cleaning. Regardless of the type of grill you use, it must be cleaned to provide a safe clean meal. No one wants to tell the grill expert, “Hey, I’m not feeling so well after eating your burger.” Not only is it embarrassing, it’s unsafe. No one wants to become sick from an unclean grill.

So, what is the best process for cleaning a grill? First, remember most grills have been dormant through the winter months just like us. Just as we need a reboot, so does your grill. Also, remember that each grill is different, so each needs different care.

A charcoal grill that has been sitting through the winter will need to be cleaned from top to bottom. The first step to getting rid of old ashes is put on some gloves to remove the grates and set them aside. Ideally, this should be done before winter hits, but as we all know, we get busy, and it sometimes does not happen. Do not burn the old ashes as it will be difficult to clean the grill properly, it could release harmful chemicals and if inhaled could cause respiratory issues, not to mention it will smell terrible. After removing the ashes, clean the area with clean hot, soapy water. Next, it’s time to clean the grill grates. This can be accomplished in a few ways. One practice is scrubbing the grates with a grill brush that has strong bristles to remove food debris. Be sure to use a new, clean grill brush to avoid leaving metal or brush debris behind. The debris could get into cooked foods. A saf-



er choice would be to use a wood scraper. If the grill brush or wood scraper does not work due to cooked debris and stubborn build-up from storage, soak grill grates using a large tub. I use a large garbage bag to soak the grates in a 2:1 solution of vinegar and water before scrubbing; for particularly tough spots, use a ball of aluminum foil to scrub for additional cleaning. A word of caution: if your charcoal grill has porcelain grates, read your owner's manual for proper cleaning instructions. If you do not have a manual, avoid using stainless steel scrubbing. If in doubt, try cleaning a small area that will not disturb or damage the grate. Once you have cleaned the grates, you will need to re-season the grates. Using a brush or paper towels, coat the entirety of the interior and both sides of the grates with your choice of oil or fat. Clean the lid the same way. Do not use oven cleaner or bleach cleaner as it acts as an added chemical that will disintegrate the grill, top and bottom. Plus, it could contaminate food prepared on the grill. Clean the grill after each use and remove ashes often to lengthen the life of the charcoal grill and your nickname as "life of the summer grilling party."

A gas grill that has been dormant from the winter needs to be wiped down on the top exterior with a soft, dry cloth, removing as much dry debris as possible. Do this to avoid a messy cleaning experience. Once you have removed all the excess debris, wash it with warm soapy water and a clean cloth. When cleaning the exterior, avoid excess water around the grill switch or starter and the area where the gas will be attached. Both the gas attachment and starter need to be checked for safety to avoid gas leakage. We do not want to damage these parts of the grill, as it could be dangerous when we use the grill. The next area of importance when cleaning a gas grill is remembering to clean the bottom tray or grease pan and other areas where grease may start to build up, causing a fire hazard.

Step two is removing the grates and cleaning them with warm soapy water. If the grates need extra care, soak the grates in a 2:1 water and vinegar solution in a large tub or large garbage bag, or prepare a paste using warm water and 1/2 cup of baking soda. Apply the mix onto the grates, let it soak, then scrub the grates using a putty knife, before washing and rinsing.

Once the grates are cleaned, re-season them with a paper towel and a high-heat oil or fat to prevent food from sticking when the cooking process begins. Another way to keep the grill clean is to clean the grates and grease tray area after cooking. Once the grill is

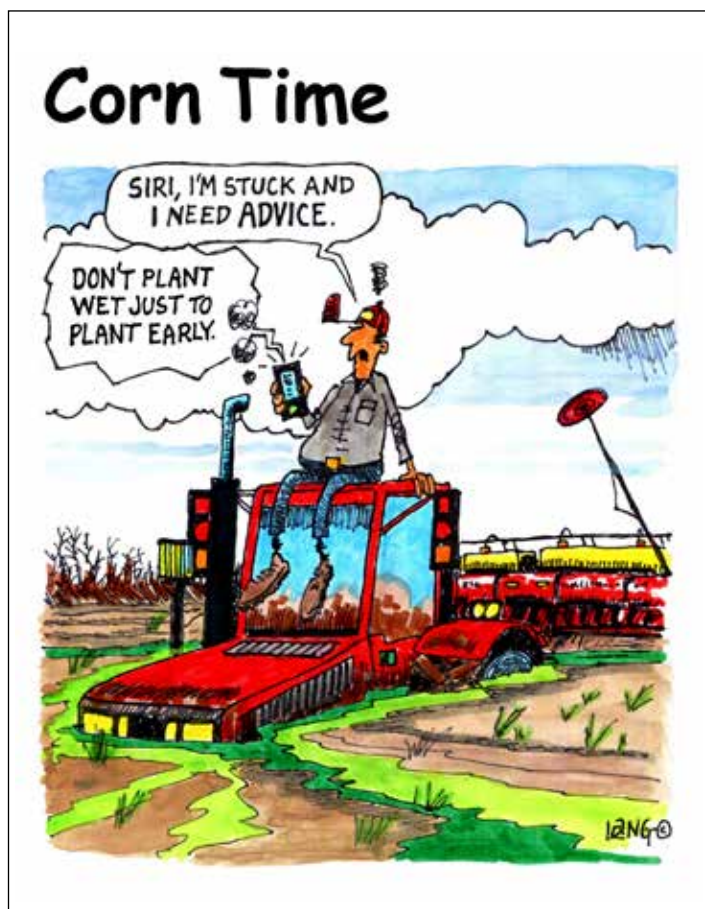
cleaned, use a grill cover to protect your efforts.

If you own a flat grill, the cleaning process is a little different. When cleaning the flat grill, let the grill cool down completely. Use a griddle scraper to remove excess from the grill, pushing leftover food into the grease tray. If the grill has not been cleaned properly or again has sat dormant for months, use water to remove the food.

Flat grills can rust when they are not maintained. If this happens to you, use water and a grill pad recommended for flat grills. After thorough cleaning, dry the grill, then re-season it using a paper towel and a high-heat oil or fat for the next use. To keep a flat grill clean after cleaning, cover the grill with the recommended cover.

Regardless of style, remember to keep all grills away from enclosed spaces, as well as distance them from areas with vinyl siding and other fire hazards. If the smell of gas around a gas grill or gas flat grill becomes strong, turn it off and do not relight the grill or griddle for several hours. The reason for this is that gas fumes are not visible but are very flammable even after the gas source is turned off or removed.

In conclusion, the best way to keep your summer cookouts going is to ensure your charcoal, gas and/or flat grill is cleaned and maintained. 🍖



# BUZZ INTO SPRING

## TIPS TO HELP POLLINATORS THRIVE

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BY BETHANY O'REAR


Spring is my absolute favorite season! Don't get me wrong – fall is wonderful and garners a close second place in my book. However, nothing excites me more than seeing those first spring blooms after so many days of cold weather and colorless landscapes and gardens! Spring is also a welcome time for many of our pollinator friends. The warmer temperatures and colorful blooms in all shapes and sizes are just what they need to get buzzing and busy!

Pollinators are essential to the reproduction of a vast majority of flowering plants and food crops. Plants depend on a plentiful, healthy population of pollinators for fruit set, quality and size. Just as plants need polli-

nators for survival, pollinators are extremely dependent on plants. Throughout the year, these industrious creatures rely on a wide variety of flowers to provide the nectar and pollen that serve as their food source.

Who are our pollinators? Most of us automatically think of bees, but they are only one of several species. Butterflies, beetles, moths, flies, birds and bats are also instrumental in the success of our cultivated and natural habitats.

What you do in your own backyard can greatly affect pollinator activity and health not only in your garden, but in your community as well. Adequate provision of food, water and shelter are essential to increasing



*A bumblebee pollinates an Indian Blanket flower.*





*A Gulf fritillary pollinates an orange zinnia.*



*A male ruby-throated hummingbird pollinates a petunia.*

pollinator numbers.

Due to cooler temperatures, increased moisture and ample time for root establishment prior to spring growth, fall is the perfect season to add new pollinator plants to your garden or landscape (especially trees and shrubs). However, spring still offers plenty of time to incorporate pollinator-friendly additions. In fact, plant availability at your local Co-op may be more extensive this time of year, particularly when looking for just the right perennials to add to your new or existing pollinator garden. While there are many lists of numerous pollinator plants, not all can withstand the heat and humidity of our Alabama summers. Be sure to select those that are adapted to our climate. As you plan your garden areas, it is important to consider the variety of plants for your location as well as the bloom times. The goal is to create a garden where flowers are available from spring to frost each year.

It is also necessary to provide a clean, reliable water source, whether natural like a pond or stream, or man-made such as a bird bath or even rocks that serve as puddling areas. Pollinators need sources of water for many purposes, including drinking and reproduction. The provision of some type of shelter is another key component to increasing your pollinator population. Pollinators need sites for roosting and nesting as well as protection from severe weather and predators.

Minimizing pesticide use is an extremely important (and often overlooked) step in the support of pollinators. Bees and other pollinators are easily injured by many insecticides so it is important to use them only when absolutely necessary. In the event that insecticides are required, be sure to choose one that is the least toxic to bees. Also, it is important to consider the formulation of the insecticide. Dust formulations are particularly dangerous to bees because they stick

to their bodies and are then transported back to the hive. Application timing of the insecticide is also crucial. If you must apply an insecticide in an area where bees are active, do so only late in the evening or early in the morning when bees are less active.

Now that you have made plans to increase the number of pollinators that call your area of the world home, we need your help! The Great Southeast Pollinator Census is a citizen-science project focused on creating sustainable pollinator habitats, increasing the entomological literacy of community members and generating useful data about pollinator populations. This project began in Georgia in 2017, and has now grown to include South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, and this year, Alabama joined the effort!

On August 22 and 23, 2025, it will be all hands on deck as we count and report pollinators in our backyards and communities. The process is simple: You will choose a favorite pollinator plant for counting. This plant can be in your own garden, community landscape, botanical garden or any space that pollinators like to visit. You will count and identify insects that land on the flowers of that plant for 15 minutes. After counting, you will enter your information online, adding your counts to Alabama's total. That's it! If you are still a little unsure, don't worry. Every month leading up to the census, Alabama Extension will highlight a different pollinator and give you the information needed to prepare for the census days in August. We will need the help of Extension professionals, teachers, students, Master Gardeners, nature lovers, stay-at-home parents, 9 to 5'ers, retirees — and everyone in between! Let's all work together on this effort and put Alabama on the Southeastern pollinator map! Please visit [www.aces.edu](http://www.aces.edu) every month for an update as we get ready. We are buzzing with excitement! 🐝

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# Co-op PANTRY

BY TIFFANY LESTER

**These recipes are delicious all year long.**

## **Beef and Pasta Primavera**

- 1 pound 96% lean ground beef
- 1 (14-1/2 ounces) can reduced-sodium beef broth
- 1 cup uncooked, whole-wheat pasta
- 2 zucchini or yellow squash, cut in half lengthwise, then crosswise into 1/2-inch slice
- 1 can (14-1/2 ounces) no-salt-added diced tomatoes
- 1 1/2 teaspoons Italian seasoning

Heat large nonstick skillet over medium heat until hot. Add ground beef; cook 8 to 10 minutes,

breaking into 3/4-inch crumbles and stirring occasionally. Pour off drippings.

Stir in broth, pasta, squash, tomatoes and Italian seasoning; bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and cook 9 to 11 minutes or until pasta and squash are almost tender and sauce is slightly thickened, stirring occasionally.

## **Ham Steaks in Madeira Sauce**

- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 3 1/2 tablespoons salted butter, divided
- 2 (12-ounce) boneless cured ham steaks
- 1/4 cup Madeira wine (can substitute for marsala or port wine, or sherry)







1 cup unsalted chicken stock  
 4 ounces fresh button or wild mushrooms, thinly sliced  
 1 tablespoon finely chopped shallots  
 1/4 cup English peas (optional)  
 1/4 cup heavy cream

Heat oil and 1 1/2 tablespoons butter in a large skillet over medium-high. Add 1 ham steak to skillet, and cook until browned, about 2 minutes per side. Remove from skillet, and repeat procedure with remaining ham steak.

Return steaks to skillet. Add Madeira, and cook, stirring occasionally, 1 minute. Add stock, mushrooms, and shallots to skillet; cook, periodically spooning cooking liquid over steaks, until mushrooms are tender, about 8 minutes. Remove ham and mushrooms with a slotted spoon; set aside.

Add peas, if using, and heavy cream to skillet. Stir and continue cooking until mixture is thickened, 4 to 5 minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in remaining 2 tablespoons butter until blended. Cut ham into 8 equal pieces; serve sauce and mushrooms over ham.

## Herb Roasted Chicken with Garlic and Herb Butter Sauce

4 medium carrots, sliced  
 1 whole chicken (about 3 to 4 pounds)  
 Olive oil  
 Kosher salt  
 Black pepper  
 Herbes de Provence  
 Granulated garlic  
 Granulated onion  
 Crushed red pepper flakes

### For the garlic and herb butter sauce

1 stick butter, divided  
 1/2 cup shallots, diced  
 8–10 cloves garlic, minced  
 1/4 teaspoon Herbes de Provence  
 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes  
 1 cup dry white wine (such as Chardonnay)  
 Zest from a whole lemon  
 Juice from half a lemon  
 1 tablespoon fresh parsley, finely chopped  
 1 tablespoon fresh basil, finely chopped  
 1 tablespoon fresh dill, finely chopped  
 2 teaspoons fresh sage, finely chopped  
 1 teaspoon fresh thyme, roughly chopped  
 1/2 teaspoon fresh rosemary, finely chopped  
 1–2 tablespoons heavy cream (optional)  
 Salt and pepper, to taste

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F.

Line the bottom of a large baking sheet with foil, then top with a baking rack (if you have one).

Prep the chicken by removing the backbone from the back of the bird using a VERY sharp chef's knife or sharp kitchen shears. You can freeze the backbone to use for stock at a later time, or discard it. Clean the chicken cavity by removing the internal



organs. Use a sharp knife to cut a small slit between the breastbone, which will allow the bird to lay flat.

Flip the bird over, flesh-side down and flatten the breast meat as much as you can so that the entire chicken is in one even layer. Pat the skin completely dry with paper towels to remove any excess moisture. Keep the surface dry as well. The chicken will continue to secrete juices as you handle it, so keep paper towels handy to keep the skin dry. Using your fingers, gently separate the skin from the flesh so that you can easily massage seasonings onto the breast and thigh meat later.

Flip the bird back over, flesh-side up and season liberally with flaky kosher salt, black pepper, Herbes de Provence, granulated garlic and onion, and crushed red pepper flakes. Or, use your favorite seasonings here — totally your call. Drizzle some olive oil over the seasonings to create a sludgy-paste. Massage those seasonings all over the open flesh side of the bird as well as under the skin. Try your best not to get the seasonings on the skin, because they will burn in the oven and end up tasting bitter. Flip the bird over flesh-side down, skin-side up. Use paper towels to remove any accumulated juices and seasonings from the skin. Make sure the skin is dry, then drizzle about a tablespoon or so of olive oil over the surface of the skin. Massage the skin with the oil to make sure it's evenly coated in a thin layer. Don't neglect the nooks and crannies.

Sprinkle a generous layer of flaky kosher salt all over the skin. Ideally, you only want to season the skin with salt, because anything else will burn — even pepper. However, you can still add pepper to the skin if you simply love the way it looks. Transfer the seasoned and oiled bird to your prepared baking sheet and place it in the center of your 425 degree oven for about an hour, or until the internal temperature of the breast meat registers at least 155 to 160 degrees on an instant-read thermometer, and the thigh/leg meat registers at least 165/170 on an instant-read thermometer. It's okay to remove the chicken 10 degrees shy of its optimal cooking temperature because it will continue to cook even after you remove it from the oven — often going up about 10 degrees. But if you're nervous, just take it out when the breast meat registers 165 degrees and the dark meat registers 175 degrees. Because ovens vary in heat-strength, going by "time" is never a good method for people across the board. Instant-read thermometers are your best friend, so please get one ASAP.

When the chicken is fully cooked, remove it from

the oven and set aside to rest at least 10-15 minutes before carving. Do not cover the bird; we don't want the condensation to sog up the crust we just worked so hard to get.

## SPRING TIME INSPIRATIONS

### Seasonal Vegetable Stir-Fry

Use spring vegetables like asparagus, snap peas, and carrots.

**Year-Round Adaptations:** Swap in seasonal veggies such as summer squash, fall broccoli, or winter cabbage.



### Quiche or Frittata

Add spring greens like spinach or leeks with a touch of goat cheese.

**Year-Round Adaptations:** Rotate fillings with summer tomatoes, fall mushrooms, or winter root vegetables.





## Easy Potlikker Soup

1 bunch collard greens  
3 tablespoons butter  
2 slices smoked bacon, chopped  
1/2 small onion, diced  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes  
2 cups water  
2 cups chicken stock (or vegetable broth)  
1 teaspoon sugar  
2 teaspoons cider vinegar  
1/2 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper  
1 dash salt (optional)

Remove the thick ribs from the collard greens. Wash the greens thoroughly and chop coarsely.

Melt 2 tablespoons butter in a pot over medium heat and add the bacon and onion. Saute until bacon is almost done and onion is translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and crushed red pepper flakes and saute for an additional 2 minutes.

Add water and increase heat to high. Bring to a boil. Cover, turn heat to medium and simmer 30 minutes.

Stir in the broth, sugar and vinegar into the pot and bring again to a boil. Stir in the greens, allowing them to wilt a bit to make more room if necessary. Simmer over medium-low heat, partially covered, about 50-60 minutes, or until tender. Add additional stock or water if too much liquid boils away.

Check for seasoning and add pepper and the remaining tablespoon of butter. Add salt only if necessary (since the bacon and broth are salty). Ladle greens with broth into bowls and serve with hot sauce and cornbread.



## SPRING TIME INSPIRATIONS

### Roasted Veggie Salad

Combine roasted carrots, beets, or radishes with a light dressing.

**Year-Round Adaptations:** Use roasted summer zucchini, fall sweet potatoes, or winter Brussels sprouts.

### Fruit Crisp or Cobbler

Use early strawberries or rhubarb for a spring dessert.

**Year-Round Adaptations:** Add summer peaches, fall apples, or winter pears.



### Grilled Fish Tacos

Add a bright slaw with fresh cilantro and lime.

**Year-Round Adaptations:** Incorporate seasonal toppings like grilled corn salsa or pickled onions.

### Smoothies

Blend fresh strawberries, spinach, and a splash of orange juice.

**Year-Round Adaptations:** Switch to summer berries, fall pumpkin, or frozen winter fruits.



### Did you try one of these recipes?

Snap a picture and share it on social media! Tag us and use the hashtag #CooPantry!





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**Jason Barkett - J.E.B. Agriculture Consultant**



**“I grew up farming and I'm impressed with Top Pick Pinkeyed peas.**

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**Bo Levins - Planterville, Alabama**



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**Rob Peacock - Pike Road, Alabama**



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