

Cultivator

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Rick Oates Named New State Forester

After a nearly yearlong search, the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) appointed Rick Oates state forester April 3.

Effective April 10, Oates replaced Interim State Forester Gary M. Cole.

In his new job, Oates oversees 240 employees who protect and sustain Alabama's forest resources. The AFC has an annual budget of approximately \$22 million.

The Texas native most recently served as the Alabama Farmers Federation's Forestry Division director and was the Alabama TREASURE



Oates

Forest Association (ATFA) executive director. He also directed the Federation's Wildlife and Catfish divisions.

Federation President Jimmy Parnell commended AFC on Oates' appointment, citing his education, experience and passion for forestry.

Oates formerly served as chief of staff for Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries Commissioner John McMillan and held multiple positions with the Alabama Forestry Association.

Oates has a master's degree in forestry from Auburn University. He and wife Kelly live in Montgomery and have two children.

William Green will work with the ATFA, as well as the Federation's Forestry and Wildlife divisions, during this transition period. Brian Hardin is the Catfish Division contact in the interim.

Ag Advocacy Abounds At Women's Conference



The Alabama Farmers Federation's Women's Leadership Conference taught over 250 women about ag advocacy in Birmingham April 5-6. Attendees learned about cooking, GMOs and peanuts and heard from keynote speaker Marji Guylor-Alaniz, founder of FarmHer. Pictured are Jefferson County's Mandy Wesley and Kathy Anderson with food blogger Stacey Little.

Soybeans Projected Alabama's Top Crop

Following a national trend, Alabama soybean acreage is expected to outpace other row crops in 2017, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Prospective Planting report.

Alabama farmers are predicted to plant 450,000 acres of soybeans this year, a 7 percent increase over last year's 420,000 acres.

Cotton acreage is expected to rise 25 percent from 345,000 acres last year to 430,000 this planting season.

The report predicts a 9 percent increase in peanut acreage — 190,000 this year versus 175,000 acres last year.

Corn acreage should decline this year, according to the report. USDA reported 330,000 acres in Alabama in 2016. A 27 percent drop is expected, landing acreage at 240,000 acres.

This year, hay is expected to be 800,000 acres, a slight fall from 810,000

acres in 2016.

Last fall's drought, coupled with low commodity prices, may be driving farmers toward cotton and peanuts and away from corn, said the Alabama Farmers Federation's Carla Hornady.

"The drought last fall sharply reduced Alabama's winter wheat and oats acreage," said Hornady, the Federation's Cotton, Soybean and Wheat & Feed Grains divisions director. "Profit potential for cotton and peanuts is thought to be better this year, and many farmers believe improved cotton varieties did well despite last year's dry, scorching summer and fall."

While USDA's report is based on the most accurate available data, Hornady said weather could still influence farmers' decisions up until the crop is in the ground.

The Prospective Planting report was published March 31.

Alabama Farmers Donate To Wildfire Relief Efforts

Alabama farmers, the Alabama Farmers Agriculture Foundation (AFAF), the Alfa Foundation and the Alabama Farmers Federation recently donated \$80,000 to wildfire relief efforts in the Midwest.

Ranchers in Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas and Colorado were devastated by recent wildfires, which destroyed more than a million acres of prime grazing land and killed thousands of cattle and swine.

To maximize the donation's impact, the AFAF, Federation and Alfa Foundation matched \$25,000 from county Federations. Donations were accepted through March 31.

"As with past disasters, the agriculture

community responded with a generous outpouring of hay, supplies and prayers," said Federation President Jimmy Parnell. "Through our Farm Bureau contacts and Cattlemen's Associations in affected states, we determined cash donations were the most needed and efficient way for us to help."

Parnell said the Federation worked to provide direct assistance to those in need without creating transportation and logistics issues.

Several affected farms were part of Alabama's 2016 Beef Tour in Kansas.

Auburn Ag Accolades

- **Dr. Steven Leath** was named Auburn University's (AU) next president in March. The plant pathologist and current Iowa State University president assumes his new duties July 15 and replaces Dr. Jay Gogue.
- **Dr. Geoffrey Williams** is AU's first scientist dedicated to honey bee research. Williams, whose most recent research could be key to finding the cause of colony collapse disorder, comes to Auburn from the University of Bern in Switzerland.

Barbour And Dale Counties Celebrate Agriculture, Educate Students



Two hundred and fifty third-graders dug into agriculture during the 2017 Barbour County Ag Day March 17. Students learned about tractors, soil, cotton, horses, goats, water systems, fighting wildfires and more. Barbour County Young Farmers and the local Extension office hosted the event at Eufaula High School.



Members of the Ariton High School FFA, along with Alfa Insurance and the Dale County Farmers Federation's Women's Leadership Committee, sponsored a booth at Ariton High Farm Day March 23 during National Ag Week. The booth provided ag career information for older students and coloring books for younger students.

Hybrid Sorghum List Available

To help farmers combat sugarcane aphid infestation, the Sorghum Checkoff recently released a list of hybrid sorghum varieties known to be resistant to the pests.

Visit tinyurl.com/sorghumlist17 to view the list.

Alabama Honey Production Up

Alabama honey producers are buzzing after yields grew 10 percent in 2016, according to a recent U.S. Department of Agriculture report.

The state's honey crop was 364,000 pounds in 2016, up from 329,000 pounds in 2015.

Alabama has 900 registered beekeepers and numerous hobby farmers.

Specialty Crop Grant Applications Due May 19

Farmers seeking to enhance the competitiveness of Alabama-grown specialty crops are encouraged to apply for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) grants through May 19.

Administered through the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries (ADAI), the 2017 USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program awards qualified applicants \$5,000 to \$25,000.

USDA defines specialty crops as fruits, vegetables, dried fruits, tree nuts, horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture). Proposals with shorter time frames are encouraged, though projects can last up to 34 months.

The Alabama Farmers Federation's Mac Higginbotham said this grant program is a great opportunity for producers.

"Consumers want to buy local, Alabama-grown foods, and programs like this encourage further development of Alabama's specialty crop market," said Higginbotham, the Federation's Bee & Honey, Horticulture and Greenhouse, Nursery & Sod divisions director.

Unfunded applications from previous years may be proposed for review. ADAI will submit applications to USDA in June, and grants will be announced this fall. Visit tinyurl.com/specialtycrops17 for more details.

Showmen Shine At 2017 Junior Beef Expo



At the 2017 Alabama Junior Beef Expo March 17, Blount County's Reagan Murphree took home Champion Senior Showman. She is pictured with Alabama Farmers Federation President Jimmy Parnell. For more photos, visit the Federation's Flickr and Facebook pages.

TREASURE Forest Hits Vanity Tag Order Goal

One year after a redesign and 1,000-plus pre-ordered tags later, the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association's (ATFA) new automobile vanity plate is ready to roll off the press.

ATFA's William Green thanked those who ordered tags for their patience through the process.

"We're excited so many Alabamians will show off their love for the forest with this new tag," Green said. "Keeping our plate in production means support for ATFA's educational programs, including Classroom in the Forest and landowner tours."

Those who pre-ordered the tag should soon receive an email from the Alabama Department of Revenue and a letter from Green detailing their next step. Tags will be printed in June.

Upcoming Events

- **April 22** - Dairy U in Auburn
 - aces.edu/go/719
- **April 26-27** - Food Entrepreneur Conference in Auburn
 - aufsi.auburn.edu
- **April 27** - Peanut Referendum
 - alpeanuts.com
- **May 1** - Commodity Producers Conference registration open through June 16
 - alfafarmers.org
- **May 1-3** - Alabama Master Gardener Conference in Huntsville
 - alabamamg.org
- **May 3** - Pecan Checkoff vote at local Extension offices
 - alabamapecangrowers.com
- **May 31-June 2** - Alabama Ag in the Classroom Summer Institute in Tuscaloosa
 - alabamaaitc.org

Simply Southern Joins RFD-TV Programing

Thanks to a partnership with RFD-TV, viewers nationwide can now watch "Simply Southern TV" Tuesdays at 6 p.m. Central Time.

"Simply Southern TV" is produced by the Alabama Farmers Federation and Alabama Farmers Cooperative. Visit SimplySouthernTV.net.

Commodity Corner

Peanuts

After field trials in Headland, Fairhope and Georgia, Auburn University has released a runner-type peanut cultivar — AU-NPL 17 — thanks in part to checkoff dollars. The peanut has been praised for high yields and disease resistance. This variety is well adapted for the Southeastern climate.

-Caleb Bristow, division director

Poultry

In March, the USDA confirmed two highly pathogenic avian influenza cases in Tennessee. Subsequent cases were low pathogenic, including three Alabama commercial breeder flocks and three backyard flocks. Warm weather and increased biosecurity should decrease chances of further outbreaks. To ensure food safety, all flocks are tested before processing. For more information, visit AlabamaAvianInfluenza.com.

-Guy Hall, division director

Horticulture

If you love eating farm-fresh strawberries, look no further than the nearest roadside stand, farmers market or U-pick patch. Visit fma.alabama.gov for a full list of Alabama markets, or find a local strawberry grower near you at tinyurl.com/ALstrawberries17.

Mac Higginbotham, division director

Forestry

Forest owners are encouraged to watch "Alabama Private Forests" on Alabama Public Television. This program is directed at non-industrial private forest landowners and airs April 17 and 21 at 9 p.m. and April 30 at 6 p.m.

-William Green, interim division director

Beef

According to the USDA Jan. 1 cattle inventory report, beef cow numbers for Alabama were up 3 percent versus 2016, an indication that cow herd expansion will continue in 2017. This is supported by a 12.5 percent increase in replacement heifers, a relatively large figure when compared to other Southeastern states. Increased supply means farmers will need to protect themselves from downside risk and begin planning now to determine which value-added practices, like preconditioning, will benefit their bottom line the most.

-Nate Jaeger, division director

Cotton, Soybeans, Wheat & Feed Grains

U.S. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt recently signed an order denying a petition to ban chlorpyrifos, a pesticide crucial to agriculture. This vital pest-management tool remains available to help ensure an affordable food supply.

-Carla Hornady, divisions director

Moore Named Cultivator Editor

The Federation's Marlee Moore has been named editor of *The Cultivator*, the organization's leadership newsletter. Moore joined the Federation Communications and Public Relations Department June 6 as an agricultural communications specialist.

Moore, 22, graduated from Auburn University (AU) in agricultural communications in May 2016. She interned with the Federation in summer 2015.

"When Marlee was an intern, she immediately became an important member of our team," said Federation Publications Director Debra Davis. "Since then, her writing talents and passion for agriculture have grown even more and are obvious to Federation members and her coworkers."

As editor, Moore writes and edits the monthly newsletter, which is mailed to organization leaders and posted online. Additionally, she routinely contributes to *Neighbors* magazine and the Federation's online presence, including social media, and publishes the Alabama TREASURE Forest newsletter.

"I'm excited to take on additional responsibilities and continue promoting Alabama agriculture and the Federation," Moore said.

A Thomasville native, Moore, whose father is a forester, grew up around the timber industry. She was a Federation scholarship recipient and a leader in AU's College of Agriculture.



Moore



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Auxin Training Triggers Coverage Questions

Alfa Insurance is working to answer questions related to farmowner coverage triggered during mandatory herbicide training.

This spring, farmers and applicators who will use auxin herbicides on Dicamba or 2,4-D tolerant crops attended the four-hour training.

Danny Carter, Alfa's Property and Casualty Underwriting manager, said the training raised questions about liability coverage.

"Several of our farm customers have had questions concerning farm policy and umbrella policy coverage for chemical drift/overspray after recent chemical application training around the state for 2,4-D and Dicamba," Carter said. "A typical farm policy offers a \$25,000 chemical overspray/drift limit for crops and animals. Farm umbrella policies do not cover chemical overspray/drift."

Carter recommends farmers seeking additional coverage ask their local agent about policies through Alfa Agency.

Langleys Named Alabama Farm of Distinction



Chambers County's Chris and Elizabeth Langley were named the 2017 Alabama Farm of Distinction at the Alabama Farm-City Awards in Birmingham April 6. They will compete in the Southeastern Farmer of the Year contest this fall during the Sunbelt Ag Expo in Moultrie, Georgia. From left are Elizabeth, Christopher, Chris, Chelsea and Chandler Langley. For more Farm-City photos, visit the Federation's Facebook page.