

# Cultivator

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## Four Federation Priority Bills Passed

Alabama legislators passed four Federation priority bills before the 2015 session ended June 4.

Gov. Robert Bentley has signed into law bills tightening Country of Origin Labeling for catfish served in restaurants and clarifying the process for municipal annexations.

Sen. Bobby Singleton, D-Greensboro, and Rep. A.J. McCampbell, D-Demopolis, sponsored the catfish bill, while Sen. Paul Sanford, R-Huntsville, and Rep. Ron Johnson, R-Sylacauga, sponsored the municipal annexations legislation.

At press time, bills allowing the purchase of up to four F4 farm tags and making the queen honeybee the state's agricultural insect were awaiting the governor's signature.

Sen. Clay Scofield, R-Arab, and Rep. Alan Boothe, R-Troy, sponsored the F4 farm tag bill. Rep. Jim Patterson, R-Meridianville, sponsored the honeybee bill.

On June 2, the governor signed the Education Trust Fund budget. It includes \$5 million for Career Tech Operations and Maintenance, \$3.9 million for the Career Tech Initiative and \$2.4 million for the Family Practice Rural Health Board.

Bentley vetoed the Legislature's General Fund (GF) budget proposal, which relied on budget cuts instead of new revenue. The proposal would have zeroed out funding for registration fees for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations and cut funding for the Alabama Water Enhancement Program in half.

A special session focused on the GF is expected later this summer.



Limestone County farmer Jessie Hobbs said periods of extremely wet weather followed by dry conditions have hurt his crops. While corn he planted in March is already over head high, the corn planted in early May at his farm is barely a foot tall.

## Spring Weather Tough On Alabama Crops

Periods of heavy rain followed by weeks of dry weather this spring have been tough on Alabama farmers.

"We have a single crop of corn, but it looks like two," said Limestone County farmer Jessie Hobbs. "We have some that's over head high that we planted in March. The rest we had to plant in May because April was so wet, and it doesn't look very good."

Wet weather at the end of May also pushed back wheat harvest. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Crop Progress and Condition report, Alabama farmers have harvested 30 percent of this year's wheat crop, putting them 5 percent behind the five-year average.

"I think we had an awesome wheat crop until the first of April when it started raining so much," Hobbs said. "I think we'll harvest about 10-15 bushels per acre less than last year, and last year wasn't that

great for wheat either."

Marengo County farmer Stanley Walters has completed his wheat harvest.

"It was not as good of a crop as we normally do, but it also was not a disaster," Walters said. "It was probably off by about 20 percent."

Walters said the spring weather has been a challenge, and he has had to replant more this year than ever before.

"We would get way too much rain, then it would get too dry, and then we'd have too much rain again," Walters said. "Farming is all about timing."

With all the spring rainfall, though, no part of Alabama is currently experiencing drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

The USDA planting report also showed Alabama farmers have planted 70 percent of this year's soybean crop and have harvested 94 percent of the first hay cutting.

## Commodity Corner

### Dairy, Pork and Poultry

Every five years, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) requests comments on rules that regulate animal feeding operations. ADEM will hold a public hearing on Animal Feed Operation/Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (AFO/CAFO) program rules July 15 at 10 a.m. at 1400 Coliseum Blvd. in Montgomery.

-Guy Hall, divisions director

### Cotton

U.S. cotton planting at the end of May was only 61 percent complete, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Crop Progress report. The five-year average for the same time period is 78 percent. Planting in several states has been delayed due to heavy rains.

-Carla Hornady, division director

### Catfish

Research to help solve the aeromonas problem facing catfish farmers is under way in west Alabama. Vaccinated fish and a special diet will be tested to see if treatments reduce farmers' losses due to the disease. See the next page for more information. Results should be available this fall.

-Rick Oates, division director

### Peanuts

Peanut planting is approximately 75 percent complete. Planting was delayed due to a wet April. A dry start to May allowed farmers to catch up, but rains returned at the end of the month, pushing final planting into June.

-Caleb Bristow, division director

### Meat Goat & Sheep

The 8th Small Ruminant Conference is July 24-25 at Lakepoint Resort State Park in Eufaula. The program will cover reproduction, genetic selection, market grading, internal parasitism, silvopasture and more. The event is free, but registration is required by Wednesday, June 24. Contact Maria Leite-Browning at ml10002@aces.edu or (256) 372-4954.

-Nate Jaeger, division director

### Bee & Honey

A bill designating the queen honeybee as the state's agricultural insect passed the Alabama Legislature this session. The bill was a priority for the State Bee & Honey Committee as it will help emphasize the important role the queen honeybee plays in agriculture. The Monarch butterfly will continue to be the official state insect.

-Mac Higginbotham, division director

## Leaders Applications Due June 30

Applications for Class IV of Agricultural Leaders for Alabama (A.L.F.A. Leaders) are due June 30.

The two-year program focuses on personal development, political involvement, effective communication and the Alabama Farmers Federation mission and structure.

The class is limited to 16 participants. Eligible applicants must be between 25 and 45 years old and in good standing with their county Federations.

Visit [AlfaYoungFarmers.org](http://AlfaYoungFarmers.org) and click on A.L.F.A. Leaders on the left side of the page for more details and an online application.

## Federation Staff Adds Three Summer Interns

The Alabama Farmers Federation welcomed Auburn University seniors Michelle Bufkin and Marlee Moore and



Michelle Bufkin

University of Alabama graduate student Caroline Chapman for summer internships starting May 11.

Bufkin, an agricultural communications student, is the Organization Department's first intern. Her work includes producing educational activity sheets and Ag in the Classroom curriculum development.

Moore, also an agricultural communications student, works in the Public Relations and Communications



Marlee Moore

Department where her duties include writing, copy editing and photography.

Chapman is interning with Destinations, the Federation's in-house travel and event team, which is also a first for the department. Her work includes planning and on-site preparations for Federation and Alfa Insurance events.



Caroline Chapman

## Outstanding Young Farm Family Honored



Paul and Vicki Morrison of Dale County received a special commendation at the Alabama State House May 28 for being named the Alabama Farmers Federation 2014 Outstanding Young Farm Family. From left are State Sen. Jimmy Holley, R-Elba; State Rep. Steve Clouse, R-Ozark; the Morrissons; and State Rep. Alan Boothe, R-Troy.

## Roby Visits Farms In The Wiregrass



U.S. Rep. Martha Roby of Alabama's 2nd Congressional District, right, spoke with Coffee County farmer Andy Sumblin during a farm visit May 28. She talked to a group of peanut producers and reiterated her dedication to agriculture and protecting farmers' interests in Washington, D.C.

## Alabama Catfish Checkoff Funds Auburn Study

Farmer checkoff dollars are helping develop a vaccine to stop a pathogen that harms catfish shortly before harvest.

On May 14, researchers vaccinated fingerlings at Auburn University's (AU) E.W. Shell Fisheries Center as part of a new trial aimed at preventing aeromonas.

"We're trying to vaccinate fish much like other livestock animals," said AU's Jeff Terhune. "We want to give them immune protection before encountering the disease in the pond."

Aeromonas, a bacterial pathogen, kills mature catfish, said Terhune, associate professor in AU's School of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Aquatic Sciences.

He said aeromonas has cost Alabama catfish farmers nearly \$12 million in revenue since it was first detected in 2009.

The vaccine developed by Auburn scientists is the first in a series of trials geared at preventing aeromonas. Other trials include a probiotic feed supplement and a more resistant hybrid catfish.

Alabama Farmers Federation Catfish Division Director Rick Oates said he hopes the trials help secure the catfish industry's profitability.

"Farmers determine how their checkoff dollars are spent, and our farmers are willing to invest their money to find a solution," Oates said.

Earlier this year catfish farmers voted to increase their checkoff collection rate from 50 cents to \$1 per ton of catfish feed sold. The new rate is expected to generate up to \$120,000 annually, a portion of which is funding aeromonas research.

## AAES Conducting Precision Farming Tests

Guest column from AAES Outlying Units Director Dale Monks

Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station (AAES) staff are working on new processes to make farmers more competitive and economically sustainable.

Greg Pate, director at the E.V. Smith Research Center in Shorter, and Christian Brodbeck, biosystems engineer at Auburn University, are starting a multi-level precision farming project on that station.

Using precision ag techniques, they have para-tilled and planted corn under variable-rate center pivot irrigation in a pattern that follows the arc of the system.

AAES soil and plant scientists are setting up projects to record and analyze data layers. It is anticipated that Belle Mina and Fairhope experiment stations will be added to this project next year.

Results will be compiled into recommendations that will make Alabama farming more sustainable for future generations and ensure a safe, secure food and fiber supply for citizens.

## EPA Water Rule Raises Concerns For Farmers

Alabama farmers worry the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) finalized Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule released May 27 could greatly increase regulation of agriculture under the Clean Water Act.

"By inserting ambiguous language into the rule, EPA is opening the door to regulate any activity by a farmer, homeowner or business in areas that would not have been regulated prior to this new rule," said Alabama Farmers Federation President Jimmy Parnell.

Supporters of private property rights have criticized EPA's rule-making process as flawed. Of particular concern was the agency's failure to seek farmer input before releasing the proposed rule.

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed H.R. 1732, which would prevent the EPA from implementing the WOTUS rule. A similar measure, S. 1140, awaits action in the Senate. Without Congressional action, the rule will take effect 60 days after it was finalized.

Visit [www2.epa.gov/cleanwaterrule](http://www2.epa.gov/cleanwaterrule) to read the final rule.

## Upcoming Events And Deadlines

- **June 22** - Registration deadline for the Alabama Farmers Federation Commodity Producers Conference July 30-Aug.1 in Montgomery. Visit [AlfaFarmers.org](http://AlfaFarmers.org) for details.
- **July 1** - Due date for Young Farmers Excellence In Ag and Discussion Meet contest applications. Visit [AlfaYoungFarmers.org](http://AlfaYoungFarmers.org) for details.
- **July 13-15** - Alabama Teachers Conservation Workshop in Auburn, hosted by the Alabama Forestry Association. For information, call Ashley Smith at (334) 614-5048.
- **July 23-25** - 17th Southern Peanut Growers Conference at Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Georgia. For online registration, visit [CallawayGardens.com/ASPGC2015](http://CallawayGardens.com/ASPGC2015).
- **July 31** - Registration deadline for Auburn University's Ag Solutions Day Aug. 10 in Orange Beach. Visit [aces.edu/go/551](http://aces.edu/go/551) for information.

## Alabama Ag In The Classroom



Sparkman Junior High School teacher Bob Brechtel, left, talked with Madison County farmer Mike Tate as teachers visited Tate's family row crop and agritourism farm. The tour was part of Alabama Ag in the Classroom Summer Institute in Huntsville June 3-5, where 80 teachers learned how to incorporate agriculture into classroom curriculum.



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## Farmers, Congressmen Discuss National Ag Issues In Washington

**M**ore than 100 Alabama Farmers Federation members traveled to the nation's capital for the Washington Legislative Conference May 19-22.

During the four-day conference, attendees spoke with federal officials and Congressmen about agricultural issues such as Country of Origin Labeling (COOL), Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS), the farm bill and feral swine management.

"I talked with U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne about the COOL ruling that came out the week we visited and how that can directly impact the price we get for our beef products," said Anthony Faggard, a Mobile County beef cattle farmer. "We're fortunate we have a representative who shares a lot of our views, and we thanked him for his support."

Other events included an opening breakfast with U.S. Rep. Gary Palmer of Alabama's 6th Congressional District, briefings from U.S. Department of Agriculture staff, the Congressional Barbecue with meat provided by L.O. Bishop of Colbert County and lunch with U.S. Sens. Richard Shelby and Jeff Sessions.



Alabama Farmers Federation members mingled with U.S. Congressmen during the annual Congressional Barbecue dinner May 20 in Washington, D.C. as part of the group's Washington Legislative Conference. From left are Federation District 6 Director Dell Hill of Talladega County; U.S. Rep. Bruce Westerman of Arkansas's 4th Congressional District; U.S. Rep. Gary Palmer of Alabama's 6th Congressional District; Federation President Jimmy Parnell; and Federation State Poultry Committee Vice Chairman Dennis Maze of Blount County.