

Specialist Will Assist State's Rural Projects

The Alabama Department of Commerce is adding a rural development manager to work with rural communities and counties across the state to enhance their competitiveness in the economic development process and better prepare them for projects.

Greg Canfield, Alabama Department of Commerce secretary, said he hopes to have the position filled with an experienced professional in coming weeks.

"While we have had success in facilitating rural economic development, we want to continue to improve and do more to help the state's rural counties and small towns and cities," Canfield said. "This specialist is going to help communities become better equipped to work on job-creating projects while also providing connectivity to Commerce's project managers and to any other state resource or agency that is needed as part of a team."

Rep. David Standridge, House Rural Caucus chair, said the statewide position has been a caucus priority.

"Rural Alabama obviously has its challenges as well as its unique opportunities in economic development," he said. "One problem is a lot of rural counties and small towns don't have resources for an economic development specialist or a professional."

The rural development manager will provide technical assistance to rural communities under consideration for economic development projects. They will provide assistance and training for rural communities seeking to become more competitive for economic development projects.

Dixie Green Named Farm of Distinction



Dixie Green Inc. of Cherokee County was named Alabama's 2019 Farm of Distinction April 4 in Birmingham during the Alabama Farm-City Awards Luncheon. As winners, Hank and Shelia Richardson received over \$15,000 in prizes and will represent Alabama in the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Ag Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year contest. The Richardsons, seated, are pictured with contest sponsors.

Floods, Trade Likely To Affect Planting

Historic flooding in America's Corn Belt and international trade negotiations are altering planting intentions of some Alabama farmers.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued its annual prospective planting report March 29 when many farms from the Dakotas to Missouri were still under water. The floods came just before planting season started in the Midwest and are expected to reduce corn, wheat and soybean acreage.

"I expect none of those flooded acres were considered in USDA's report," said Macon County Farmers Federation President Shep Morris. "That would make a significant difference of what could be planted there."

USDA predicts U.S. farmers will plant 92.8 million acres of corn, a 4% increase over last year. In Alabama, the report predicts farmers will plant 280,000 acres of corn – 20,000 acres more than 2018.

Whether it's global markets or poor

domestic demand, USDA's report says soybeans will dip to 84.6 million acres, down 5% from last year. The expected drop in Alabama soybean acres exceeds national predictions. USDA estimates 280,000 acres will be planted – down 65,000 acres from last year, a 19% drop.

Cotton should remain Alabama's largest row crop, with about 510,000 acres – about the same as last year. U.S. cotton acreage is predicted to rise 2% to 13.8 million acres.

Alabama peanut farmers are expected to plant 170,000 acres, a 3% jump from 2018. U.S. peanut acreage is expected to rise 2%, topping out at 1.4 million acres.

While Alabama isn't a major player in the U.S. wheat market, planting last fall is up 6% from the previous year, and farmers are expected to harvest 170,000 acres. However, U.S. wheat acreage is predicted to be down 4%. The 45.8 million acres represents the lowest wheat acreage since records began in 1919.



Ragland Joins Federation As Commodity Director

The Alabama Farmers Federation welcomed Brady Ragland to its staff as Beef, Equine, Hay & Forage and Meat Goat & Sheep divisions director.

The Lubbock, Texas, native will monitor policy in those areas and lead the Federation's youth livestock efforts.

Ragland graduated from Texas Tech with a bachelor's degree in animal science and a Master of Science in ruminant nutrition. He previously served as San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo's livestock director. He lives in Prattville.

Ladies Learn About Advocacy, Politics

Over 200 Alabama Farmers Federation members attended the Women's Leadership Conference in Birmingham April 3-5. They enjoyed advocacy, storytelling, political and gardening workshops. State Women's Leadership Committee members Debbie Dunn of Geneva County and Delle Bean of Calhoun County helped collect pop tabs for Ronald McDonald House Charities.

Ag In Action

- **Alabama's 2018 pecan crop value** was down 33% from 2017, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). U.S. utilized production value was down 27%. Alabama produced 1.65 million pounds, down from 1.85 million pounds in 2017.
- **The Women in Ag** survey aims to gauge the goals, aspirations, achievements and needs of women in agriculture. Participants will be eligible to receive one of five \$100 gift cards raffled after the survey closes June 21 at fb.org/women.
- **Over \$3.6 million** in USDA grants were awarded to Tuskegee University and Alabama A&M University. Funds promote food and ag sciences programs and research.

On The Move In Ag

Charlie Thompson of Lauderdale County is serving on the American Sheep Industry Association (ASIA) Production & Research Council.

Kirk Smith of Blount County is also serving on the ASIA Young Sheep Entrepreneurs Committee. Both are State Meat Goat & Sheep Committee members.

Daniel Carter of Autauga County made the Collegiate Discussion Meet Sweet 16 during the American Farm Bureau Federation FUSION Conference in Milwaukee March 15-17. He is a sophomore at Auburn University.

Get Ag-tive

Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) and **Agricultural Land Easement (ALE)** program applications are due April 15 at local U.S. Department of Agriculture service centers. Distributed through the Natural Resources Conservation Service, WRE helps enhance and protect habitat for wildlife, reduce flooding impacts, recharge groundwater and more. ALE funding will protect agricultural lands by limiting non-agricultural uses. Learn more at nracs.usda.gov.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) sign-ups are due April 25. EQIP includes wildlife, forestry, cropland erosion, cropland irrigation, grazing land and water quality concerns. Visit nracs.usda.gov to learn more.



Junior Beef Expo Highlights Hard Work

About 180 youth exhibited over 350 head of cattle March 14-16 during the Junior Beef Expo (JBE), sponsored by the Alabama Farmers Federation. More than \$80,000 in prize money was awarded during JBE in Montgomery. Judge Jim Bloomberg of Illinois talked with Amelia Thrower of Marshall County during the Junior Showmanship Contest March 14.



Beef Committee Sets Goals For The Year

Cattle farmers beefed up on legislation, the Beef Tour, federal updates and set committee goals in Montgomery April 3. From left are State Beef Committee 1st Vice Chair Tim Whitley, Blount County; Chair Phil Slay, Chambers County; Alabama Farmers Federation Beef Division Director Brady Ragland; and 2nd Vice Chair David Lee, Lowndes County.

COMMODITY CORNER

BEE & HONEY

Auburn University's Bee Lab is gathering information on bee populations in the state from bee and honey producers. Farmers are asked to fill out the Bee Informed Partnership's National Honeybee Colony Loss and Management Survey, which is found at bip2.beeinformed.org/survey/.

-Hunter McBrayer, division director

HAY & FORAGE

The Alfalfa in the South workshop is May 7 at Cattlemen's Park in Troy. Educational topics include variety selection, weed and insect control, economics and research updates. To register, call the Wiregrass Research and Extension Center at (334) 693-2010 by April 30.

-Brady Ragland, division director

COTTON, SOYBEAN,

WHEAT & FEED GRAIN

On Dec. 11, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed the Clean Water Act, which revised Waters of the United States (WOTUS) to clarify regulatory authority. Show support for the new Clean Water Act during the comment period, which closes April 15. Use this link to log in and send your message: tinyurl.com/WOTUScomment.

-Carla Hornady, divisions director

PORK

In late March, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reported U.S. pork is essentially free of veterinary drug residues. According to the National Pork Board, producers use antibiotics to keep pigs healthy, they follow proper procedures to ensure pork meets FDA regulations. Comparing production numbers, pig farmers are producing more pounds of pork – averaging 282-pound hogs in 2017 versus 266-pound hogs in 2009 – with fewer antibiotics.

-Brian Hardin, Governmental & Ag Programs Department director

WILDLIFE

This summer, USDA Wildlife Services will begin small-scale field trials in Texas and Alabama to test the effectiveness of sodium nitrite, a toxicant used to combat feral swine.

-William Green, division director

PEANUTS

Peanut farmers will vote April 15-May 3 whether to continue their national checkoff through the National Peanut Board. USDA recently announced the referendum on the Peanut Promotion, Research and Information Order. Paper and electronic ballots are available.

-Brian Hardin, Governmental & Ag Programs Department director

Vote Online For Bama's Best Peach Cobbler

Nominations for the Bama's Best Peach Cobbler contest close April 15. Submit nominations by commenting about your favorite restaurant serving peach cobbler on the contest announcement posted on the Alabama Farmers Federation's Facebook page.

Judges will visit the Final 4 restaurants in late April. The winner receives \$300, a plaque and bragging rights in early May.

Contest sponsor is the Alabama Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association.

Events & Deadlines

April 15 - Bama's Best Peach Cobbler nominations close

- [Facebook.com/AlabamaFarmers](https://www.facebook.com/AlabamaFarmers)

April 15 - Applications due for Alabama Ag in the Classroom Summer Institute in Florence May 29-31

- AlabamaAITC.org

April 17 - Alabama Grazing Academy in Clanton

- tinyurl.com/GrazingAcademy

April 27 - Tuskegee University Goat Day in Tuskegee

- Tuskegee.edu/GoatDay

May 1 - Registration deadline for Alabama Farmers Federation Beef Tour to Mississippi June 4-7

- AlfaFarmers.org

May 1 - Registration opens for Federation Commodity Producers Conference in Chattanooga Aug. 1-4

- AlfaFarmers.org

May 8-10 - Alabama Master Gardeners Conference in Clanton

- AlabamaMG.org

Obituary

Wayne Davis of Skipperville died March 31. He was 84.

Davis previously served on the Alabama Farmers Federation state board and was a past president of the Dale County Farmers Federation.

He is survived by his wife of 64 years, Frankie; daughter Beverly Miller (Glenn Royce); two grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.



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Leaders Get A Taste Of Alabama

Legislators and state leaders sampled fruits of farmers' labor during the Alabama Farmers Federation's Taste of Alabama legislative reception in Montgomery March 20. Over 100 elected officials attended, including Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall, left, who talked with farmers like Laslie Hall of Montgomery County, right.

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Cotton Blue Disease Overwintered In State

Alabama Extension plant pathologists and crops specialists confirmed cotton leaf roll dwarf virus (Cotton Blue Disease or CLRDV-AL) in Alabama.

The disease – spread by aphids – damaged cotton in 2018 in counties along the Florida Panhandle. Extension will soon issue guidelines to manage CLRDV-AL as planting season begins.

Extension's Austin Hagan said henbit, a common winter weed, tested positive for CLRDV-AL and is a likely host.

"Alabama cotton producers, particularly in counties along the Panhandle, should accelerate their winter weed control program in any remaining fields where cotton or peanuts will be grown in 2019," Hagan said.

Researchers are sampling winter weeds and perennials to test for the virus. Many no-till and reduced-till fields have been sprayed for winter weeds. Experts advise a burn-down herbicide application to kill winter weeds.

As a result of mild winter weather and possible overwintering, disease onset may occur earlier than in 2018.



Bayer Donates \$2,500 To Scholarship Fund

George Jeffcoat of Houston County received a \$2,500 America's Farmers Grow Communities program donation from the Bayer Fund. Jeffcoat, the Alabama Farmers Federation Southeast Area vice president, presented the funds to the Alabama Farmers Agriculture Foundation, which will award a scholarship to a Houston County student at Auburn University. From left are Federation Executive Director Paul Pinyan, President Jimmy Parnell and Jeffcoat.