

Federation Responds To Coronavirus

The Alabama Farmers Federation is taking steps to ensure access to exceptional service continues while protecting the health of members and employees in light of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19).

The organization is actively monitoring developments related to COVID-19 and is following the guidance of public health officials.

The Federation and Alfa Insurance emphasize cleanliness at facilities and service centers, including using disinfectants and providing ample locations for handwashing or sanitizing. Additionally, the companies have instructed employees to follow recommended hygiene practices and to stay home if sick or exposed to the virus.

Members are encouraged to pay dues at 1-800-964-2532 or by visiting AlfaInsurance.com.

Federation events impacted by COVID-19 include the Jr. Beef Expo, which has been postponed. The Women's Leadership Conference and Farm-City Awards Luncheon are canceled. Federation leadership continues to evaluate upcoming events.

Alfa customers are encouraged to take advantage of the company's service options. Customers may make payments, file a claim, access ID cards and conduct other routine business online at AlfaInsurance.com or the Alfa2Go app. Customers also may call 1-800-964-2532.

Alfa offices are closed to walk-ins, but customers may call to schedule an appointment. Claims offices are staffed but closed to the public.

Please contact the local Alfa office for questions or to schedule an appointment.

Auburn Students Tour Top Farms



Sponsored by the Alabama Wheat & Feed Grain Producers, 27 Auburn University students toured farms across the state during the Alabama Ag Expedition March 8-13. Stops included Dee River Ranch outside Aliceville in Pickens County, where siblings Annie Dee, right, and Mike Dee taught students about electronic ID of cattle, conservation, row crops and irrigation. The trip showcased the diversity of Alabama agriculture and ag careers.

Outbreak Highlights Broadband Needs

With schools and offices throughout the country closed to stem the spread of COVID-19, access to broadband is critical as citizens increase internet usage for online classrooms, teleworking and try to stay connected and informed.

Unfortunately for many rural Americans, a troubling situation is made worse by lack of critical connections high-speed internet provides. Federal Communications Commission data show 26.4% of rural Americans lack broadband access.

"Rural students without broadband access are going to be limited in their ability to stay connected with teachers and peers and stay on top of schoolwork. And in many cases, adults in rural households have off-farm jobs that may require them to work from home at this time. Without that option, their jobs could be in jeopardy," explained the American Farm Bureau Federation's (AFBF) RJ Karney.

With the decline in primary care physicians throughout rural America, broadband access also allows medical personnel to consult with specialists on results, diagnoses and treatments.

"With health care facilities in all communities poised for an onslaught of potentially very sick and certainly very contagious COVID-19 patients, doctors and nurses in rural facilities have to be able to quickly connect with specialists. Telemedicine networks, which require broadband access, are likely the best way to do that," Karney said.

Ensuring reliable access to broadband throughout rural America is a priority for AFBF and the Alabama Farmers Federation. Congress recently passed the Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability Act, requiring broadband providers to report more specific data to create a more accurate National Broadband Map. With more precise data, federal agencies can target funding to areas in need.



On The Move In Ag

Chris Langley was appointed to the Alabama Forestry Commission March 12 for a five-year term. The Chambers County logger and cattleman won the 2017 Alabama Farm of Distinction contest, serves on the Chambers County Farmers Federation board and is a past chair of the Alabama Farmers Federation's State Forestry Committee. He and wife Elizabeth live in Camp Hill and have four children.

The Alabama Farmers Federation welcomed two new employees in March. In the Public Relations & Communications Department, Brooke Foster is the employee communications director. In the Governmental & Agricultural Programs Department, Kaelin Lockhart was hired as an administrative assistant.

Soybean Leaders Discuss Budget Proposals

The Alabama Farmers Federation State Soybean Committee met Feb. 17 in Montgomery to review budget proposals. From left are Federation Soybean Division Director Carla Hornady, State Soybean Committee Chair Colt Clemmons of Lauderdale County, Vice Chair John DeLoach of Shelby County and Auburn University's Dr. John Beasley.

Get Ag-tive

The Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries is accepting grant applications for projects that enhance the competitiveness of U.S. specialty crops in foreign and domestic markets. The application deadline for specialty crop block grants through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is April 27. Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, horticulture (including honey) and nursery crops (including floriculture). Learn more by visiting agi.alabama.gov/scbgbp.

The Conservation Stewardship Program signup deadline is May 29. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is encouraging producers and private landowners to submit applications as soon as possible because funding is limited. Learn more at nrcs.usda.gov.

2020 National Wheat Yield Contest enrollment is open through the National Wheat Foundation. The contest is divided into winter wheat and spring wheat, with subcategories including dryland and irrigated. The deadline for winter wheat entries is May 15, while spring wheat entries are due Aug. 1. Learn more at WheatFoundation.org.

COMMODITY CORNER

AFVGA

The Alabama Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (AFVGA) board recently met to discuss upcoming events, sponsorships and timelines. The board voted to have the 2020 AFVGA Conference and Trade Show at the Lodge at Gulf State Park Nov. 19-20. The conference will cover fruit and vegetable production, food safety, labor and more.

-Hunter McBrayer, executive director

PORK

At the National Pork Industry Forum, Under Secretary of Agriculture for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Greg Ibach announced an African swine fever (ASF) action plan, should the disease be detected in the U.S. In the plan, Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue would immediately declare an "extraordinary emergency" if ASF was detected in the U.S. The U.S. Department of Agriculture would lead the response to control and eradicate the disease, which poses no human health or food safety risks.

-Russ Durrance, division director

PEANUTS

Alabama peanut growers will vote on the Peanut Referendum April 9. Find up-to-date polling locations by visiting alpeanuts.com.

-Jacob Davis, executive director

WILDLIFE

The Conservation Advisory Board met March 1, where the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources discussed the new baiting privileges. For the 2019-2020 season, 151,286 hunting licenses were sold (up from 146,828) and 158,211 baiting licenses were sold.

-William Green, division director

COTTON

Cotton leaf roll dwarf virus (CLRDV) is now considered part of the environment, according to Alabama Extension and Auburn University. Most researchers agree the symptoms are sporadic and impact on yield is inconsistent. However, there are many things researchers now know about CLRDV since its recognition in Alabama in 2017. The disease will likely impact 2020 crops. Learn more at aces.edu.

-Carla Hornady, division director

BEEF

Most livestock commodity prices have fallen sharply amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. As consumers raid the meat case at the grocery store, it's important the supply chain remains unbroken. At this time, there are no known shutdowns of harvest facilities and the USDA remains committed to supplying backup federal inspectors to facilities if needed.

-Brady Ragland, division director

Ag In The Classroom Applications Due April 15

Teachers are encouraged to apply by April 15 for the Ag in the Classroom Summer Institute in Opelika May 27-29.

Attendees learn to incorporate ag into the classroom, tour farms and receive educational materials. Apply at AlabamaAITC.org.

Limited Access Available At USDA Service Centers

Many U.S. Department of Agriculture Service Centers are currently open for business, some by appointment only, amid the coronavirus pandemic.

For up-to-date information, visit farmers.gov/coronavirus.

Alabamians Encouraged To Complete Census

Alabama residents are encouraged to stand up and be counted for the 2020 Census.

This month, the Census Bureau will begin mailing invitations to Alabama households asking them to respond online, by phone or by mail. The Census form includes 10 questions and takes about six minutes to complete.

Mailed invitations include a code, which is used to complete the Census online at my2020census.gov. The online Census form closes in August.



Federation Honored For Support Of Girls Ranch

Farmers from Chambers, Lee and Tallapoosa counties met with Alabama Farmers Federation President Jimmy Parnell March 5 at the Tallapoosa County Sheriff's Girls Ranch in Tallapoosa County. Ranch Director Candice Gulley presented Parnell a hand-painted work of art in thanks for the organization's continued support. From left are Tallapoosa County Farmers Federation President Jacob Hodnett, Chambers County Farmers Federation Jack Robertson, Parnell, Gulley and Lee County's Mahlon Richburg.

USDA Forecasts 1.4% Increase In Farm Income For 2020

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) forecasts farm income will hit \$96.7 billion in 2020 – a 1.4% increase from last year, accounting for inflation. That's slightly higher than the average annual income since 2000 but well below the 2013 peak of \$139 billion.

Meanwhile, farm production costs are getting more expensive, and financial

instability is rising. USDA economists say the farm sector is now at its highest risk of insolvency since 2003 – though not near 1980s farm crisis levels.

The value of assets such as farmland and machinery is expected to decline by \$18.1 billion from 2019, while debt is projected to rise by \$2 billion, accounting for inflation.

Ivey Announces Primary Runoff Election Is July 14

The Primary Runoff Election originally scheduled for March 31 has been postponed until July 14. Gov. Kay Ivey made the decision in light of concerns surrounding the coronavirus pandemic.

The announcement followed an emergency ruling from Attorney General Steve Marshall giving Ivey authority to delay the runoff under the State of Emergency declaration.

Obituary

John Michael Jenkins of Hayden died March 3. He was 70.

He was a longtime member of the Jefferson County Farmers Federation.

Jenkins is survived by his wife, Mavis Graves Jenkins; son, Barry Jenkins (Candy); and granddaughter, Taylor Jenkins.



Pork Producers Gather In Kansas City

Daniel Tubbs of Walker County and Wesley Gates of Pickens County recently attended the National Pork Forum in Kansas City, Missouri. During the event, they heard from Greg Ibach, Under Secretary of Agriculture for Marketing and Regulatory Programs. From left are Tubbs, Ibach, Gates and Alabama Farmers Federation Pork Division Director Russ Durrance.



Catfish Challenge Heats Up

The Alabama Catfish Producers sponsored the Catfish Culinary Challenge for high school students, who created dishes using U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish. The state competition was March 5 in Montgomery. Judges sampled 17 dishes and were, from left, Dr. Diane Best of Jacksonville State University, State Catfish Committee Chairman Sid Nelson of Sumter County and Alabama Farmers Federation Catfish Division Director Mitt Walker.

Farmers Forge Ahead During Pandemic

While the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has altered daily patterns of many U.S. citizens, American farmers continue to harvest and plant crops and tend livestock and poultry – all essential to the nation’s food supply.

“Food is essential all year-round, but in the face of a pandemic, it is critical the shelves remain stocked and supplies remain plentiful,” said U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue. “President Trump is encouraging a ‘whole of America’ approach to the challenges we currently face.”

Perdue said the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) also is working to protect the health of its employees, as well as stakeholders in the food delivery systems.

The Alabama Farmers Federation is monitoring effects of the virus on its members and agriculture production, said President Jimmy Parnell.

“Farmers in Alabama and across the U.S. continue working to grow the food and fiber we all need,” Parnell said. “Their resilience in the face of challenges should encourage all Americans. We are blessed with abundant and affordable food, thanks to their determination, innovation and hard work.”

Alabama farmers are beginning to see impacts due to the closure of businesses, as well as disrupted commodity markets. Specifically, farmers who supply fresh food to restaurants are seeking alternative markets.

The U.S. government has suspended visa processing in Mexico to combat spreading the virus. The suspension began March 18. Other concerns are possible interruptions of USDA inspections required for much of the food sold in America.

Young Farmers Gather To Learn, Network In Mobile

Over 400 Young Farmers and agribusiness professionals from across the state gathered in Mobile Feb. 28-29 to tour farms, network and honor exceptional farm families.

The Alabama Farmers Federation’s Young Farmers Conference also allowed Tommy Tuberville, the FarmPAC-

endorsed candidate for U.S. Senate, to interact with and encourage young voters. FarmPAC is the Federation’s political action committee.

“If you work hard and have perseverance, you can find success at anything,” said Tuberville. “This country’s future is bright. You’re the lifeblood of

this country.”

The conference featured tours across Mobile and Baldwin counties, where attendees learned from longtime farmers about a plethora of production practices, including row crops, horticulture, cattle, hay and specialty crops.

Outstanding Young Farm Family finalists were also named after in-person interviews with a panel of ag professionals. They are Joe and Ashley McCraney, Barbour County; Josh and Savannah McCoy, Dale County; and Ben and Bethany Johnson, Randolph County. Judges will visit their farms in May, and the winner will be announced during the Alabama Farm & Land Expo Aug. 1 in Mobile.



A group of Young Farmers toured Federation District 11 Director Mark Kaiser’s farm in Baldwin County during the Young Farmers Conference Feb. 29. Checking out equipment and learning from the row crop, cattle and hay farmer were highlights of that stop.