

Per Order, Processing Plants Remain Open

To help protect the food supply chain during the COVID-19 national emergency, President Donald Trump signed an executive order April 28 to keep meat and poultry processing facilities open.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue thanked Trump for his response, which seeks to keep employees safe and the supply of protein flowing.

"Our nation's meat and poultry processing facilities play an integral role in the continuity of our food supply chain," Perdue said. "Maintaining the health and safety of these heroic employees in order to ensure that these critical facilities can continue operating is paramount."

Under the executive order and Defense Production Act authority, the U.S. Department of Agriculture will work with meat processors to assure operations follow guidelines by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Alabama Commissioner of Agriculture & Industries Rick Pate sought to ease consumer fears.

"I understand consumers' concerns as they hear about temporary closures of meat processing plants in the U.S.," Pate said. "In the short term, consumers may not be able to find specific cuts of meat due to temporary limitations, but there is no widespread shortage of meat. Processing plants are working hard to resume normal production levels while ensuring the health and safety of their employees. I am confident that the American food supply system is safe, abundant and sustainable."

Planting In Full Swing Across Alabama



Planting season is in full swing in Alabama. Most corn is planted, and concentration is shifting to cotton, soybeans and peanuts. Some farmers are in teaching mode, too, giving hands-on lessons to children out of school during the coronavirus pandemic. Pictured are Jamie Yeager of Dallas County and his daughters, Lillian and Casey. Photo courtesy Wendy Yeager

USDA Outlines COVID-19 Relief

The Alabama Farmers Federation welcomed news from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) outlining relief for farmers hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic through the \$19-billion Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP).

The immediate relief program will provide critical support to farmers and ranchers, maintain the integrity of the food supply chain, and ensure every American has access to food.

CFAP will use funding and authorities provided in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act; the Families First Coronavirus Response Act; and other USDA existing authorities. The program includes:

Direct Support to Farmers and Ranchers: This program will provide \$16 billion in direct support based on actual losses for agricultural producers where prices and market supply chains have been impacted and will assist producers with additional adjustment

and marketing costs resulting from lost demand and short-term oversupply for the 2020 marketing year caused by COVID-19.

USDA Purchase and Distribution:

USDA will partner with regional and local distributors, whose workforce has been significantly impacted by the closure of many restaurants, hotels and other food service entities, to purchase \$3 billion in fresh produce, dairy and meat. Procurement is estimated to be \$100 million per month in fresh fruits and vegetables, \$100 million per month in a variety of dairy products and \$100 million per month in meat products. The distributors and wholesalers will then provide a pre-approved box of fresh produce, dairy and meat products to food banks, community and faith-based organizations, along with other nonprofits serving Americans in need.

On top of these targeted programs, USDA will utilize other funding sources to purchase and distribute food.

Local Federations Give Back During COVID-19 Pandemic

To care for their communities during the coronavirus pandemic, local farmers across Alabama are giving back through their time, talents and resources.

For some, that looked like donating meals to workers on the frontlines. Henry County Farmers Federation provided meals for local nursing home residents

and staff, while farther north in Morgan County, the local Farmers Federation and Young Farmers provided over 180 meals for night shift employees at Decatur Morgan Hospital and Parkway Hospital.

Meanwhile, the Baldwin County Farmers Federation donated \$5,000

each to Prodissee Pantry and Feeding The Gulf Coast. In Coosa County, funds were given to a nonprofit to feed schoolchildren.

Additionally, peanut farmers helped spread encouragement through peanut butter donations. The Alabama Peanut Producers Association and its farmer-members donated 5,760 jars of peanut butter to regional food banks across Alabama. The peanut butter was provided by Peanut Proud Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to humanitarian efforts. Lazenby Farms of Lee County also donated over 1,000 cases of peanut butter to the Food Bank of East Alabama.

Submit photos of good deeds from local Farmers Federations to Marlee Moore at mmoore@alfafarmers.org.



The Baldwin County Farmers Federation (BCFF) donated \$5,000 to Feeding The Gulf Coast. From left are Ray Bertolla, BCFF President Hope Cassebaum, Alabama Farmers Federation state board member Mark Kaiser, Feeding The Gulf Coast's Kari Ann Kinder, Joel Sirmon and Preston Ryals.

Dig Deeper

The COVID-19 Ag Report outlines the pandemic's effects on farmers at AlfaFarmers.org. Throughout the crisis, the Alabama Farmers Federation has held conference calls, where county Federation presidents, state board members, state commodity committee members and affiliated board chairmen received updates and shared concerns.

Elizabeth Thompson of Cullman County made the Sweet 16 during the Virtual Collegiate Discussion

Meet, held by the American Farm Bureau Federation April 27-May 1. She graduated from Auburn University in agricultural economics this spring.

The Federation sent a letter to the U.S. Forestry & Wildlife Service supporting a proposition to allow genetically engineered crops in wildlife management programs. The proposed program would help Southeastern National Wildlife Refuges meet management objectives.

FarmCorps Connects Farmers, Servicemen

The Alabama Farmers Federation is putting boots on the ground through Alabama FarmCorps, a program connecting farmers who need labor with military personnel looking for their next mission amid the coronavirus pandemic.

National Guardsmen, reservists and veterans qualify for FarmCorps. Farmers

advertise positions and servicemen apply at AlabamaFarmCorps.org.

The Federation is coordinating the program with the National Guard. U.S.

Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-Alabama, supports the program. The FarmCorps concept originated with

Arkansas Farm Bureau and U.S. Rep. Rick Crawford, R-Arkansas, a House Agriculture Committee member.



Federation Seeks Award Nominees By June 7

The Alabama Farmers Federation is accepting nominations to recognize an Auburn University (AU) researcher and an Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) employee whose work tangibly affects farmers and the state's agriculture industry.

Nominations for each award are due June 7 at tinyurl.com/AlfaAwards20.

For the second year, the Alabama Farmers Agriculture Foundation will sponsor the awards. The recipients address problems relevant to Alabama agriculture and forestry.

The Alfa Award for Production Agriculture Research will recognize AU faculty for creative and original research. The winner receives up to \$10,000, which can fund graduate students or research operations.

The Alfa Award for Extension will honor ACES staff developing or implementing solutions for stakeholder-identified problems. The winner receives up to \$5,000 for programming costs.

Awards will be presented during the Alabama Farm & Land Expo July 30.

Partner Profile: Koebernick Concentrates On Cotton, Soybeans

Jenny Koebernick is an assistant professor at Auburn University (AU), where she concentrates on disease resistance breeding in cotton and soybeans. She also studies management

strategies for improving yield potential. Koebernick joined AU in 2016. She earned a Ph.D. in agronomy from Texas A&M and holds M.S. and B.S. degrees from the University of Tennessee.

COMMODITY CORNER

AFVGA

Demand for local fruit and vegetables is up across the state as spring crops are beginning to mature. Strawberry and peach crops are less than ideal due to a mild, wet winter.

-Hunter McBrayer, executive director

BEEF

The state veterinarian's office received the first shipment of Allflex 840 EID tags from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. These tags are free to producers so long as they use them in replacement animals. Any producer wishing to utilize these tags should contact the state veterinarian's office at (334) 240-7255.

-Brady Ragland, division director

HAY & FORAGE

While demand for hay is high, many cattle-raising customers have been impacted by declining cattle prices. Rain from recent storms was well received – as long as it wasn't accompanied by damaging hail, wind or tornadoes.

-Brady Ragland, division director

EQUINE

Several equine events are postponed or canceled due to COVID-19. However, enthusiasts from across the state have been creative and hosted virtual barrel races and trail rides.

-Brady Ragland, division director

FORESTRY

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the new-construction market, which impacts lumber demand, prices and capacity. Housing starts data for March marks the largest month-over-month percentage decrease in starts since March 1984. However, southern yellow pine (SYP) lumber prices made a surprising comeback in mid-April. Forest2Market's composite SYP lumber price for the week ending April 17 was \$358/MBF, a 5.9% increase from the previous week's price of \$338/MBF but a 10.7% decrease from the same week in 2019. Learn more at Forest2Market.com.

-William Green, division director

GREENHOUSE, NURSERY & SOD

Retail garden centers continue to see increased demand for horticultural items by homeowners. Retail centers continue to operate under state-issued social distancing guidelines.

-Hunter McBrayer, division director

COTTON

The U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol is now on the Textile Exchange's list of preferred fibers and materials. The Trust Protocol is one of 36 fibers and materials that over 170 participating brands and retailers can select as part of Textile Exchange's Material Change Index program.

-Carla Hornady, division director

MEAT GOAT & SHEEP

Local prices for lamb and goats have held steady. However, Alabama should prepare for a fall in prices as seen in Western states during the pandemic.

-Brady Ragland, division director

POULTRY

Alabama's poultry industry remains strong during the current pandemic. Poultry processors are running at a reduced capacity, but have not had to shut down. Growers have been impacted by slowing of the production cycle but are diligently working to supply shoppers with fresh product.

-Russ Durrance, division director

PEANUTS

Plans are moving forward for the Southern Peanut Growers Conference July 16-18 at Edgewater Golf & Beach Resort in Panama City Beach, Florida. For registration and hotel information, visit southernpeanutfarmers.org/southern-peanut-growers-conference/. Questions? Call the Alabama Peanut Producers Association office at (334) 792-6482.

-Jacob Davis, executive director

BEE & HONEY

Spring build-up is well underway. Beekeepers indicate low to normal colony loss after the winter. Queens are breeding and laying brood.

-Hunter McBrayer, division director

Get Ag-tive

Alabama Agriculture Hall of Honor and Pioneer Award nominations are due June 10 at agriculture.auburn.edu/alumni/hall-of-honor/nominations/. The awards recognize those who made significant contributions to agriculture in Alabama through their work and lives.

National Corn Yield Contest entries are accepted through Aug. 15 at ncga.com. Harvest submissions are due Nov. 10.

Conservation Stewardship Program sign-up ends May 29. The Natural Resources Conservation Service program promotes water quality through installing and enhancing conservation practices. Learn more at nracs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nracs/site/al/home.

Events & Deadlines

Fridays in May at 10 a.m. -

Virtual Field Trips at fb.com/AlabamaFarmers

- May 8 - nursery crops
- May 15 - forestry
- May 22 - cotton

May 12 at 11:15 a.m. - Alabama Farm-City Awards on Facebook Live at fb.com/AlabamaFarmers

May 14 - Young Farmers Q-and-A sessions for prospective contests participants

- AlfaYoungFarmers.org

May 18 - Last possible day of the Legislative Session

June 1 - Young Farmers contests applications due

- AlfaYoungFarmers.org

July 23 - Alabama Peanut Referendum

July 30-Aug. 2 - Alabama Farm & Land Expo and Trade Show in Mobile

- Register by June 25 at FarmAndLandExpo.org

Sept. 11-12 - Alabama Ag in the Classroom Teacher Workshop in Opelika

- Apply by Aug. 15 at AlabamaAITC.org

Farm & Land Expo Is July 30-Aug. 2

Hundreds of farmers will visit Mobile July 30-Aug. 2 for tours, workshops, awards presentations and the Alabama Farm & Land Expo Trade Show.

Formerly the Commodity Producers Conference, the Alabama Farmers Federation rebranded the annual event as the Alabama Farm & Land Expo. Registration closes June 25 at FarmAndLandExpo.org.

Farm tours disperse across Baldwin, Escambia and Mobile counties during the conference, covering a variety of commodities and agricultural industries.

Saturday's general session will cover trade agreements and agriculture's response to COVID-19. The panel includes Daniel Whitley. Whitley oversees trade policy, market intelligence, and commodity analysis activities for the Foreign Agricultural Service as associate administrator. Other panelists are American Farm Bureau Federation Chief Economist John Newton and Allendale President Steve Georgy.

Workshops follow the general session. Topics include a harvest outlook, invasive species, social media marketing, meat exports, land management, grain bin safety and investments.

Attendees can interact with industry leaders during the Alabama Farm & Land Expo Trade Show the afternoon of Aug. 1. Exhibitors include machinery dealers, agricultural lenders, land consultants, livestock health specialists, feed and seed companies, and researchers. Interested exhibitors can learn more at FarmAndLandExpo.org.

Country music singer-songwriter Billy Dean will entertain attendees to close the conference.



Young Farmers Meet Remotely

Alabama Farmers Federation State Young Farmers Committee members got screen time with each other April 21 as they met remotely through Zoom. They discussed contests, conferences and other committee business. The meeting was just one example of how Federation business, education and committees have continued during the COVID-19 crisis.

Beef Cattle Management In Uncertain Times

Volatile commodity markets and other effects of COVID-19 have left many beef producers considering alternative management options for cattle they were planning to sell now or in the near future.

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) has gathered resources to help farmers deal with the possibility that cattle will need to stay on the farm longer than expected.

ACES experts suggest viewing this challenge as an opportunity to innovate instead of focusing on strain on existing resources. It's also time to improve the overall production efficiency of farms by focusing on 12 basic principles for managing an efficient beef cattle operation.

For example, improving soil health and fertility will increase forage yields and, combined with rotational grazing and integrated pest management, can increase stocking rates. By-product feeds may be an option for some.

Access the remaining principles at tinyurl.com/CattleManagement.



Local Farmers Feed Volunteers After Storms

The Tallapoosa County Farmers Federation (TCFF) donated meals to volunteers cleaning up damage following April 23 storms that rolled through the area. Volunteer groups included the United Way and local Baptist Association. The TCFF also fed Alfa Insurance agents, adjusters and customer service representatives who were responding to member claims. TCFF's Vickie Watkins, left, helped deliver the meals.