

local Agriculture

2025

YESTERDAY,

TODAY &

TOMORROW



A special publication of The Advocate & Democrat and The Daily Post-Athenian



Agriculture has strong effect on economic development

FROM METRO CREATIVE GRAPHICS

Though it's easy to look at the tech industry and think this increasingly influential sector is what makes the world go round, something closer to the very core of the Earth may be what's driving your economy.

The agricultural sector plays a strategic role in a nation's economic development and prosperity. From the earliest days, agriculture has been heralded as playing a crucial role in North American culture. Farmers who grow produce and raise livestock for meats and other products have long exemplified what it means to work hard and take initiatives to be self-sufficient.

The symbiotic nature of agriculture and the economy is noticeable when examining the ups and downs of each. This is because food production and the potential of agriculture extends beyond the fields and local food stands. These resources impact supply chains and other markets. A strong agriculture base influences other employment sectors like food manufacturing, biotechnology, hospitality, machinery building, and much more, while a weak agriculture can adversely affect those sectors.

While it can be difficult for residents of developed nations to visualize agriculture's effect, one only needs to turn to impoverished and developing nations to

see just how big an impact agriculture can have on an economy. Agriculture provides food and raw materials, eventually creating demand for goods produced in non-agricultural sectors. Also, food provides nutrition that can serve as the foundation of a healthy nation. Earning a living in agriculture strengthens purchasing power, which fuels other markets. Eventually, farming can pave the way for development, including roads, markets, shipping services, exporting, and many other sectors.

Agriculture is an important economic building block. An especially important sector, the agricultural industry, when supported, can contribute greatly to sustained economic growth.



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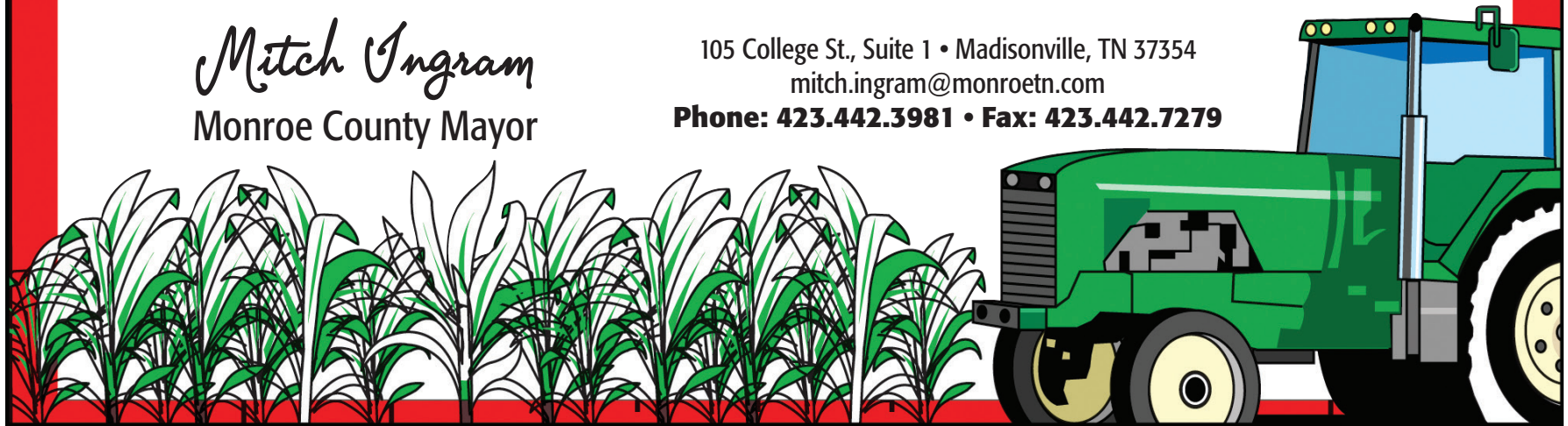
Here's to those who work in acres, not hours



***Farming - An industry that feeds you
is an industry worth preserving.***

Mitch Ingram
Monroe County Mayor

105 College St., Suite 1 • Madisonville, TN 37354
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McMinn show barn, ag expo center to get new life

A few years ago, McMinn County upgraded the park out by the land-fill and renamed it Bicentennial Park. Since then, the park has seen significantly more interest and activity.

Now, McMinn County Mayor John Gentry is hoping to repeat that success with the show barn and agriculture expo center. The show barn is located beside the National Guard Armory between Athens and Etowah, while the expo center is connected to Athens Regional Park, behind the conference center.

The discussion of revamping both came during the McMinn County Commission's recent strategic planning summit, as Gentry and UT Ag Extension Agent Tim Woods filled in the members with their thoughts.

The show barn was originally built in 1966 exclusively by volunteers and Woods noted it's in need of work.

"We've done hardly anything to that barn in 28 years," he said.

Among its needs

are new water lines, electrical work, turning the show-ers into concession stands, redoing the wash racks and adding rock to land between the barn and armory to create trailer parking.

Woods said he's been in contact with the manager of Tri-State Exhibition Center in Cleveland and he said they're booking a lot of two to four day shows there. That could open up possibilities for both the show barn and expo center.

"Our facility is more of a day facility," Woods said. "They've had to turn away, over the past couple of years, a bunch of day events because they're already booked. They could steer that up here. He said he thinks he could probably fill us up every weekend."

Woods noted he sees a lot of potential in both locations with the right amount of care.

"If we can get it right and get it real usable, we could keep it booked all the time," he said. "That also might benefit the eastern region, the 33

counties in our region — 4-H and FFA kids. We're sitting on a gold mine a little bit. We're sitting right here on this expo center with Tri-State booked up, Roane State booked up and there's nobody in between but us."

Gentry did note that Monroe County is planning to build a "major ag center" in the future, but that will take some time to complete.

"We want to beat them to the punch," Gentry said.

He did an informal poll of the commissioners and there was no dissent in getting to work on revamping both locations.

"We're going to fix it up nice like we did Bicentennial Park," Gentry said. "Even if nobody visits, I want our ag people to have a nice place to do what they do."

He said the Athens City Council has also discussed finding a way to continue work on the conference center, which would also positively impact the expo center's revamping. During the council's strategic sum-



mit, expanding the conference center received one vote on the priority list.

During the commission's summit, improving the show barn and expo center slotted in as the fourth highest priority, receiving five votes and eight points.

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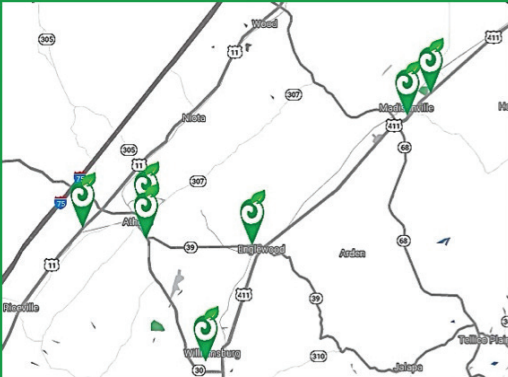
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Monroe planning new expo center near Madisonville park

Monroe County is working on a multi-use facility project that is currently planned to be brought into the Madisonville area.

Monroe County Mayor Mitch Ingram recently discussed the county's ag/expo center plans with hopes of bringing the new facility to the county in 2026.

"Ag/expo project will be a multi-use facility, approximately 50,000 square feet, where it can be used for different agriculture events and expos," Ingram said. "There is no facility like this between Knoxville and Chattanooga. We have had several people reach out to us saying that Monroe County is dead center and would be a perfect location, so we plan on having this being a multi-use facility."

Ingram noted that the facility could be used for public events with approximately 3,500 seats.

"It could even be used for concerts and things of that nature as well," he noted. "We have the design plans and we have the property. This is all going to be paid for by grants. We've built up a pretty good nest egg now so we could actually start seeing some dirt move, probably this spring."

According to Ingram the property for the facility will be near Kefauver Park.

"We are looking at 2026 for a completion date ... We've just been very intentionally and specifically trying to schedule this out so it is not a burden, financially, on the county at all," Ingram said.

Ingram noted that they hope to make the new facility into a feature that anyone could use.

"We've already had some boat manufacturers reach out to us about having a boat expo down there, so it's going to be great for things like that," he said. "It will also be a revenue generator for the county as well."

In addition to the project being grant funded, Ingram noted that they had received a lot of sponsors and community members to help with the project.

"I think the impact of this facility will be incredible not only for Monroe County but for the region," Ingram expressed. "I think this is a risk worth taking and I think it will provide huge dividends for this county."

Reflecting on the project's history, Ingram remembered the process they went through to



get the facility to the stage that it is currently in.

"The stepping stone was securing the property, which the county commission allowed us to do that several years ago. We've been sitting on this property and we've used it for some different public events like rodeos, but from there we started different committees," he recalled. "The committees visited other facilities, seeing the pros and cons, and then we finally started putting all the ideas down on paper and honing it down to what we want. Now we've just

been securing the funding. It's a very long process and now we are to the point where we will start seeing some excavating and construction because we have some funding."

Ingram expressed his intent to be as transparent as he can be concerning this project.

"This has not been the top priority of the county but it is one of those things that we have been preparing for," he said. "We are really excited to see this project come to fruition after a lot of dreams and feedback, so we are really excited about it."

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Athens chamber names Philpott farmer of the year



File Photo
Perry Philpott (left) won the 2023 Farmer of the Year award at the Athens Area Chamber of Commerce meeting. Presenting the award is NRCS District Conservationist Brandon Moore.

Perry Philpott was named this year's Farmer of the Year, with the award sponsored by the McMinn County Soil Conservation. NRCS District Conservationist Brandon Moore presented the award to him.

Philpott was born and raised in McMinn County and Moore noted he is a multi-generational farmer. He is married to Sarah Philpott and they have four children. He farms with his father, Dale, and brother Mark.

He serves on the advisory board of Farm Credit Mid-America, Tennessee Wesleyan University Business Department and People's Bank of East Tennessee. He is on the board of the Monroe County Cattlemen's Association and is a member of the Tennessee Cattlemen's Association and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

"Perry's passion for farming comes from the love of the land and conservation," Moore said. "Perry said 'I love seeing my children grow up in agriculture and cultivating the same love for it that my father and grandfather instilled in me.'"

Philpott noted that he was born in Athens and raised in Englewood.

"I'm proud of this community, proud of this county," he said. "Thank every single one of you here. Thank you very much."

Philpott received the honor during the 2024 Athens Area Chamber of Commerce's annual meeting at The Barn at Faith Farms.

Each year, the chamber and its sponsors honor Farmer of the Year, Teacher of the Year, Mother of the Year, Young Woman of the Year, Young Man of the Year and Woman of the Year.

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McMinn County 4-H members recognized for Roundup participation

BROOKE CASS
McMinn County 4-H Youth Development

McMinn County residents Isaac DeBusk, Grace Huff, Emma Rue and Grace DeBusk traveled to UT Martin last year to attend the 101st Tennessee 4-H Roundup.

This statewide event is only open to senior high (9th-12th grade), active 4-H members. While there, these 4-H'ers had the opportunity to attend educational sessions, compete in their 4-H project area, participate in service learning projects, visit a university campus and more.

This time, Huff was one of the 73 youth that received the honor of being inducted to Vol State. Receiving this award is the highest recognition available to a TN 4-H'er.

"The Vol State award is given only to 4-H members who are highly involved, have shown commitment to 4-H and have reached the status of Honor Club and All Star members. This award is not one given lightly — it is only awarded to the highest level of youth involved in the program. It is a great honor for those

who are initiated as it was to the youth who have come before," Extension Specialist in the Tennessee 4-H Office Lynne Middleton, who coordinates the event annually at 4-H Roundup, said. "The group of 4-H members who are initiated into Vol State are the cream of the crop and our top members in the state."

In addition, Rue won the Senior Level I Swine Project Portfolio Competition. To enter this contest, a 4-H'er must create an in-depth online portfolio of their project work as well as highlighting their citizenship involvement and their leadership successes. To complete the contest, the 4-H'er must participate in an interview process at TN 4-H Roundup.

Past Vol State Inductee and Project Winner Isaac DeBusk attended 4-H Roundup as a graduating senior.

"I would strongly encourage others to join 4-H for the betterment of themselves and the community around them, on a local, regional, state or even national level," he shared as he reflected on his time in 4-H.



File Photo
Shown here are McMinn County 4-H'ers (from left) Grace Huff, Emma Rue, Grace DeBusk and Isaac DeBusk.



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Monroe County youth wins beef heifer scholarship



Special to The Advocate & Democrat

The Youth Beef Heifer Initiative Scholarship is sponsored by Farm Credit Mid-America (FCMA) and the Tennessee Cattlemen's Association (TCA). Pictured, from left to right, are: Shane Williams, FCMA senior financial officer; Lauren Wingler, TCA youth ambassador; Jackson Overbay, Hamblen County — first place in the senior division; Caden McKnight, Monroe County — second place in the senior division; Levi Shults, Unicoi County — first place in the junior high division; Kara Brooks, Smith County — second place in the junior high division; Mason Harris, Unicoi County — first place in the youth division; Emma Teeple, White County — second place in the youth division; and Gary Dering, TCA president.

A Monroe County student was awarded the Youth Beef Heifer Initiative Scholarship, sponsored by the Tennessee Cattlemen's Association (TCA) and Farm Credit Mid-America (FCMA), during the Tennessee Cattlemen's Association Youth Awards Banquet, which was held on Saturday, Jan. 18, in Murfreesboro. The banquet was sponsored by Kubota Tractor Corporation.

The Heifer Initiative focuses on the cost-sharing of beef cattle for youth. First-place winners of each age division are awarded \$2,000 and a belt buckle sponsored by the University of Tennessee Animal Science, and the second-place winners are awarded \$1,000.

"The Heifer Scholarship Initiative is one of the most rewarding programs our association offers to youth," said

Melinda Hart, TCA director of youth programs and outreach. "We can help the future leaders of our industry by offsetting the cost of purchasing a heifer. This is just one way we can help them get off to the right start in our industry. We are grateful to partner with Farm Credit Mid-America on the heifer scholarship program again this year."

Caden McKnight of Monroe County received second place in

the senior division.

This scholarship money is to be put towards the purchase of a beef heifer of their choice from a Tennessee Cattlemen's Association member within one year of receiving the funds. There are three age divisions: Youth, Junior High, and Senior High.

The application for the 2026 Beef Heifer Initiative Scholarship will be available in the fall of 2025.

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McMinn County 4-H'ers attend TN Congress: A journey of learning and leadership



KAYLEN LEEKLEY

McMinn County High School 4-H'er

From March 9-12, Ellie Burns, Arianna Dawson, Kaylen Leekley and State Council member Grace Huff attended TN 4-H Congress in Nashville.

They were able to visit the capitol and have a mock vote on bills, experience the General Jackson Boat Ride, have a speech presented by a TSU representative, and learn more about the heart of Tennessee's government.

The highlight of their trip was

a visit to the Capitol Building, where they had the privilege of meeting Senator Adam Lowe and Representative Mark Cochran and enjoyed a special visit from Governor Bill Lee. These interactions allowed the students to ask questions, discuss key issues, and gain insight into the legislative process, fostering a deeper understanding of civic responsibility.

In addition to the educational activities, the group had a chance to explore downtown Nashville. The evening including a delightful dinner that allowed them to bond with

not only one another, but with other 4-H'ers from across the state. TN 4-H Congress was not just a trip, it was an opportunity for Ellie, Arianna, Kaylen, and Grace to grow as leaders and advocates for their community. Their experiences will undoubtedly inspire them to continue their involvement in 4-H and they will carry the lessons they learned with them into the future.

Leekley stated, "It's something you wouldn't expect to be life changing, but when you experience it, it's unforgettable."

Arianna Dawson shared,

"Unforgettable memories were made and lifelong friendships have been gifted to me."

The group would also like to give a big thank you to the sponsors that contributed to this event as well as to the McMinn County Adult Volunteer Brooke Leekley who attended Congress as well. They could not be more grateful for their support. As the attendees carry forward in 4-H, they will always remember this unforgettable trip.

For more information about McMinn County 4-H, reach out to the UT Extension — McMinn County office at 423-745-2852.



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