Communities salute local farmers

• Thomas County Central program gets industry certification
• Ga. Cotton Commission honors Extension agent
• Farm issues coming to the Georgia Legislature
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Lowndes County names Farmers of the Year

Staff Reports

VALDOSTA — Agriculture is Georgia’s number one industry and on Dec. 9 the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners, Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce and the Lowndes County Extension Office held a local farmer appreciation breakfast and presented the 2021 Farmer of the Year awards, recognizing a large and small farmer from Lowndes or Echols counties. Jared and Justin Corbett with Corbett Brothers Farms were named Large Farmer of the Year while Aaron Horne with Horne Legacy Farms was named Small Farmer of the Year.

Following in their father’s footsteps, Justin and Jared Corbett took over Ken Corbett Farms in the beginning of 2019, and it’s now known as Corbett Brothers Farms. They specialize in growing a multitude of crops including bell pepper, squash, and cucumbers. Corbett Brothers Farms also opened the first U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Certified citrus packing facility in the State of Georgia. They grow a trademarked brand of citrus located in many grocery stores known as Besties.

Horne Legacy Farms is a family owned and operated blueberry farm located in Valdosta. This small family operation provides blueberries to local distributors and holds an annual “u-pick” event that helps give the local community a fun agriculture experience.

“Lowndes and Echols Counties have a rich tradition of being large farming communities and providing an abundant supply of food and fiber to not only our community and state but all around the world,” said Bill Slaughter, Lowndes County Board of Commission Chairman. “The Lowndes County Board of Commissioners are proud to recognize our farmers and show appreciation to them.”

The agriculture industry represents more than $357 million in annual farm gate value within Lowndes and Echols counties.

Forty-six nominations were received for Large and Small Farmer of the Year, with some farmers receiving multiple nominations. Georgia Department of Agriculture Commissioner Gary Black was the keynote speaker for the breakfast.

“This event would not have been made possible without the support from our partners including, Lowndes County Board of Commissioners, CJB Applied Technologies, Georgia Grown, and Lowndes County Extension Office. We are grateful to have partnered with entities who share the same strong appreciation for our local agricultural community,” said a Chamber representative.

Both the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners and Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce plan to make this an annual event to be held in November.

For more information on the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners, visit: www.lowndescounty.com. For more information on the Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce, visit: www.valdostachamber.com.

Chamber of Commerce salutes Colquitt Co. growers

By Jack R. Jordan

MOULTRE — The Moultrie-Colquitt County Chamber of Commerce gave away a total of $6,400 in cash to local farmers as part of its Harvest Celebration.

Held Dec. 2 at the Family Living Building on the grounds of the Sunbelt Ag Expo, the Harvest Celebration was a “way to celebrate and honor the people involved with Colquitt County’s biggest industry,” said Tommie Beth Willis, president and CEO of the chamber.

The Harvest Celebration has been going on for “over a decade,” Willis said. This year’s event featured more than 20 vendors. While the chamber of commerce does not require payments to set up a booth during the event, they ask for donations that go into the raffle.

This year, vendors donated a total of $6,400 to be given away along with other prizes such as two year memberships to the YMCA, a Milwaukee tool set from Home Depot, a Blackstone griddle from Lowe’s and many other prizes.

“This is just one of the ways we hope to give back to some of the most important members of our community. When everybody was staying home or out of work, farmers were still out there — growing food for Americans,” Willis said in an interview preceding the event.

The Harvest Celebration is always set on the first Thursday of December but was canceled last year due to concerns of COVID. However, the chamber still raised money and decided to give the donations to the S.T.E.M. programs of Odom, R.B. Wright and Hamilton elementary schools, according to Willis.

This year, Hamilton Elementary fourth and fifth graders returned the favor by singing the National Anthem and a rendition of “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree.”

Lunch was provided by multiple entities including National Beef, Southern Valley, Long Farms, Packer Produce and the Moultrie Federated Guild. Everything was grown or sourced in Colquitt County, Willis stated.

After the lunch, door prizes were given out. The $6,400 was split up with 24 $100 winners, four $500 winners and two $1,000 winners.

“There’s nothing like getting some cold hard cash right before the holidays,” Willis joked after the money had been handed out. “We want to thank all of those who put everything on today and all of the farmers who have done so much for our community.”

From left, Marianne Bridges of the Moultrie-Colquitt County Chamber of Commerce, Greta Collins of the Colquitt County Farm Bureau and Tommie Beth Willis, president and CEO of the chamber, draw names during the door prize giveaway.
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Ag leadership program celebrates 2021 grads

By Jordan Powers
University of Georgia

ATHENS, Ga. — The 2021 Class of the Advancing Georgia’s Leaders in Agriculture and Forestry program graduated in early November.

Members of the 2021 Class of the Advancing Georgia’s Leaders in Agriculture and Forestry program gathered for a graduation ceremony in early November.

Twenty-five professionals representing agriculture, forestry and allied sectors graduated from the Advancing Georgia’s Leaders in Agriculture and Forestry Class of 2019-21 in November.

The joint program between the University of Georgia’s College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources aims to educate, empower and connect today’s professionals in agriculture, forestry, natural resources and allied sectors to be dynamic industry leaders.

Lauren Griffeth, program director for AGL and UGA Cooperative Extension leadership specialist with the CAES Office of Learning and Organizational Development, shared her pride at witnessing the 2019-21 class complete the program.

“This class had to endure a lot of difficult circumstances due to the pandemic, but they came back with flying colors and all of them completed the requirements and graduated. I’m really proud of them for enduring, and I know that their resilience is going to make them exceptional leaders moving forward,” Griffeth said.

The graduation ceremony took place at the UGA Chapel with reception on Herty Field. Class awards, voted on by the graduating class, included the Outstanding Leader Award and Outstanding Leadership Project Award, both presented to Ben Lancaster. Lancaster is the director of sales and marketing at IFCO in Moultrie, Georgia. Zippy Duvall, president of the American Farm Bureau and graduate of the 1996 class of the Georgia Ag Leaders Foundation Forum, received the Outstanding Alumnus in Agriculture and Forestry Award.

“Being selected to participate in the AGL program was an honor and a privilege,” Lancaster said. “It was an honor because I got to represent my family and my employer, IFCO Seedlings, across the state and at our nation’s capital. It was a privilege because of the wonderful relationships and lifelong friendships I formed along the way. The AGL program helped me to more clearly see and understand the uniqueness of all people and it highlighted for me the greatness of agriculture and forestry across our state.”

Graduates of the 2019-21 AGL class include:
- Daniel Atkins, area marketing manager, Weyerhaeuser; Brunswick, Georgia.
- Toby Bowen, account manager, AGCO; Athens, Georgia.
- Jason Bragg, vice president, government relations, Georgia EMC; Atlanta, Georgia.
- Sam Brown, owner and landscape architect, Fiddleheads Garden Center; Dalton, Georgia.
- Jordan Carter, director of sales and marketing, Leger and Son, Inc.; Cordele, Georgia.
- TR Clark, regional manager, F&W Forestry Services, Inc.; Hogansville, Georgia.
- Francie Cotton, southwest Georgia field sales representative, Bayer; Albany, Georgia.
- Hillory Culpepper, assistant director of development, Georgia FFA Foundation; Sylvester, Georgia.
- Nicole Duvall, program coordinator, Agricultural Commodity Commission for Milk; Madison, Georgia.
- Dusty Engel, precision ag manager, Lasseter Tractor Company; Tifton, Georgia.
- Chan Flanders, forest, Faircloth Forest Products; Dublin, Georgia.
- Susan Harrell, financial analyst, Timberland Owner; Culloden, Georgia.
- Aaron Hemmer, regional lending manager, AgGeorgia Farm Credit; Starr, South Carolina.
- Matt Hestad, vice president of engagement, Georgia Forestry Association; Covington, Georgia.
- Jessica Jarvholm, executive director, Piney Woods Farm; LaGrange, Georgia.
- Ben Lancaster, director of sales and marketing, IFCO Seedlings; Moultrie, Georgia.
- Jason Little, director of valuation services, Forest Resource Consultants, Inc.; Forsyth, Georgia.
- David Martin, president/CEO, Widget Development and Trading Company, LLC; Atlanta, Georgia.
- Samantha McLeod, executive director, Georgia Pecan Growers Association; Chula, Georgia.
- Arren Moses, president, Edward Moses Farms; Uvalda, Georgia.
- Sarah Nerswick, agriculture education teacher/FFA advisor, Brunswick High School; Rockville, Maryland.
- Erin Nessmith, project owner, Vivayic; Madison, Georgia.
- Blake Poole, middle Georgia field representative, Office of Georgia Gov. Kemp; Buchanan, Georgia.
- Eric Simpson, development coordinator, West Georgia Farmers Cooperative; West Point, Georgia.
- Keaton Walker, chief marketing and PR director, Circle P Farms, Circle P Meats, Woody Folsom Trailers and Feed; Hawkinsville, Georgia.

Nominations for the next AGL class will open Feb. 1 and close March 1. Information on the nomination process and opportunities to support the program are available at agl.uga.edu or through Program Coordinator Katie Fife at katiefife@uga.edu.
ABAC ag school names nine student leaders

Staff Reports

TIFTON — Nine students have been selected as School of Agriculture and Natural Resources leaders at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.

SANR leaders include Chrys Milner, an agricultural education major from Tifton; Brittany Braddy, an agricultural education major from Mount Vernon; Charley Lollis, an agricultural communication major from Perry; Lindsey Winzell, an agricultural education major from Cairo; Caleb Warren, an agribusiness major from Warner Robins; Justin Nichols, an agricultural education major with an agricultural studies concentration and a minor in agricultural communication from Rochelle; Ivey Cook, an agricultural education major from Ty Ty; Bridget Dixon, an agricultural communication major from Kite; and Jamya Barnett, an agriculture major from Wauchula, Fla., college officials said in a statement.

Suzanne Bentley, SANR academic and career coordinator, said the students play a key role in the growth of the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

“Working with these nine SANR Leaders is truly a privilege,” Bentley said. “We have a strong team with a diverse talent pool which makes them a dynamic, well-rounded team. These students tackle all tasks given to them and they serve the SANR well.”

Selection for the SANR leaders was based on grade point average, club/organization activity and leadership skills. The members of the group will be prominent at events sponsored by the SANR, Stallion Days and other recruitment opportunities.

“Serving and advocating for the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources has been the best opportunity of my year,” Nichols said. “The SANR is where students become family on ABAC’s campus and the foundation for success is laid. I hope to take my passion for the SANR and help other students develop the same appreciation in their time on and off-campus.”

SANR leaders at ABAC include Caleb Warren, Brittany Braddy, Lindsey Winzell, Charley Lollis, Bridget Dixon, Jamya Barnett, Ivey Cook, Chrys Milner and Justin Nichols.
Staff Reports

THOMASVILLE – Students interested in pursuing veterinary science as a career have an improved local pathway to assist their education toward making that happen. Thomas County Central High School’s Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education Veterinary Science program now has its industry certification from the Georgia Department of Education, which means it has cutting-edge trade equipment, exemplary curriculum, and a well-trained instructor to offer the highest learning level it can achieve.

The last of the school’s CTAE departments without industry certification, the agriculture program completed the process for the veterinary science pathway this December, a five-year adventure that included purchasing all necessary equipment and various documentation. The accomplishment marks TCCHS as the only school in the state’s southern region to hold this specific industry certification.

Veterinary science teacher Nikki Smith, who joined TCCHS in 2017 when the school first began its vet science program, spearheaded the effort. Her veterinary science appreciation stems from childhood: she grew up on her family’s farm that bred and raised horses and worked at the local veterinary hospital.

“I have always had a passion for veterinary science and wanted our program to excel and give students hands-on opportunities that might spark a passion in them like I had throughout high school,” Smith said. “Mrs. [Beth] Adams and I agreed that there is a need in our community, as well as state, for employees in the vet industry.”

Beth Adams, CTAE director, is very proud of Smith and her hard work throughout this process. “She has really put a lot of thought and effort into her program, and it showed as she reviewed her standards with her certification team,” Adams said.

The certification process includes the following phases: initial application, self-evaluation, onsite team evaluation, and re-certification. TCCHS began from the ground up, including curriculum and equipment.

“Before the evaluation team can come together for the formal evaluation, I had to acquire documentation for six standards (performance indicators, administration, facilities, educational, instructional staff, and educational science specialty area) and 94 substandards,” Smith said. “There were also 83 pieces of equipment to be purchased.”

After procuring these documents and all equipment, Smith had a pre-evaluation meeting with Georgia FFA South Region Animal Science Teacher Todd Claxton to review the program’s efforts and discuss the formal evaluation, which took place a month later and included, Claxton, Adams, Dr. Jenifer Mason, an industry leader and professor at Southern Regional Technical College.

Veterinary science teacher Nikki Smith proudly holds TCCHS’ industry certification documentation.

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and community leader Sydni Ingram, the Georgia Farm Bureau Women’s Committee Representative and Thomas County Agriculture Extension agent. “We all met together where I presented our classroom, lab, equipment and all documentation needed for certification,” Smith said. “We discussed how industry certification has and will impact our classes in the future and how we can continue to grow.”

This industry certification allows TCCHS to partner with the SRTC Veterinary Technology program and the Thomasville-Thomas County Humane Society, too. Students may continue learning through SRTC’s program or start entry-level jobs in the industry after high school graduation.

“I am most excited about the relationships we have built with industry members and businesses in the community,” Smith said. “We were able to take the vet science students on a field trip recently to both programs, and it was a great learning opportunity for students. At SRTC, students could view different surgeries and talk with professors and students about their program. At the humane society, students were able to socialize with animals and learn how valuable our shelter is and how we can help in the future.”

Achieving industry certification means a great deal to Smith and is a massive accomplishment.

“This has been one of the biggest goals I have set for myself since starting at TCCHS, and now to have achieved that goal, I have an overwhelming sense of pride and excitement for what is to come,” she said. “It has been a long process, but I am overjoyed to have been able to work with everyone on this and finally see it through. I hope that through this achievement, others can see the passion that I have for veterinary science and wanting our students to have the best opportunities to learn. To now be able to provide students with the best there is to offer and show that we are dedicated to their learning and sparking their passion is a great feeling.”

TCCHS must undergo re-evaluation every five years to maintain its industry certification. For more information, visit www.georgiaffa.org.

Submitted photo
Todd Claxton, Georgia FFA South Region animal science teacher, assists TCCHS teacher Nikki Smith during the certification process.

Continued from Page 8

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Cotton Commission honors Ben Hill Co. Extension agent

Staff Reports

PERRY, Ga. — County UGA Cooperative Extension Service Agents are an important resource for Georgia cotton farmers. Agents are known for delivering timely and accurate information, which is instrumental for the success of Georgia’s farmers. They also perform community specific research and education and outreach programs designed to help farmers maximize yields and efficiency.

The Georgia Cotton Commission sponsored the King Cotton Award to recognize outstanding contributions of county agents to Georgia cotton producers for the 21st year in a row. The Allen B. Fulford Award honors the accomplishments and memory of Allen B. Fulford, who served as a county Extension agent and state cotton agronomist. This award credits those with less than 10 years of service.

The award was presented at the 2021 Georgia Association of County Agricultural Agents Annual Meeting & Professional Improvement Conference in November.

The Allen B. Fulford Award winner is Holly Anderson of Ben Hill County, where she serves as County Extension Coordinator as well as Agriculture & Natural Resources Agent. Anderson has worked for Extension since 2015. Her six years of service are all in Ben Hill County. Anderson conducts county research on cotton for variety selection, insect management and irrigation usage. In addition, she holds producer education programs regarding agronomics, weed control, economics and defoliation. The priorities for the local research are made in collaboration with local growers. Anderson has been recognized on both state and national levels in presentations on cotton irrigation scheduling, thrips management, variety selection and moisture sensor usage. She enjoys getting to work one on one with local producers and helping them stay up to date on the latest information UGA Extension has to offer.

Founded in 1965, the Georgia Cotton Commission is a producer-funded organization located in Perry, Georgia. For more information about the Georgia Cotton Commission please call (478) 988-4235 or on the web at www.georgiacottoncommission.org.
Staff Reports

VALDOSTA – A packed house in the Lowndes County Civic Center witnessed 65 students from Lowndes, Lanier and Echols counties exhibit hogs at the 45th Annual Lowndes Area Market Hog Show.

The exhibitors were first- through 12th-grade students and some were either members of FFA or 4H, organizers said in a statement in the fall.

Grace Mullis of Lanier 4-H exhibited the grand champion. Brooke Stone of Lowndes FFA exhibited the reserve champion hog.

Other Top Five hogs included third overall, Emily Ann Livingston of Lanier FFA; fourth overall, Lily Grace Kinsey of Echols FFA; and fifth overall, Tori Millirons of Lowndes 4-H.

Weight class winners included Class 1, Everleigh Rogers of Lowndes 4H; Class 2, Skyla Blank of Lanier 4H; Class 3, Joshua Purney of Lanier FFA; Class 4, Noah Rogers of Echols 4H; Class 5, Tori Millirons of Lowndes 4H; Class 6, Lily Grace Kinsey of Echols FFA; Class 7, Levi Rowland of Lowndes FFA; Class 8, Emily Ann Livingston of Lanier FFA and Grace Mullis of Lanier 4H.

Showmanship winners included: Grade 1, Cannon Taylor of Lanier County; Grade 2, Kennedy Newham of Echols County; Grade 3, Colby Davis of Echols County; Grade 4, Harper Copeland of Echols 4-H; Grade 5, Sven Lobbloom of Echols 4H; Grade 6, Tara Millirons of Lowndes FFA; Grade 7, Noah Rogers of Echols 4H; Grade 8, Sawyer Taylor of Lowndes FFA; Grade 9, Tori Millirons of Lowndes 4H; Grade 10, Kenna Corbett of Echols FFA; Grade 11, Lily Grace Kinsey of Echols FFA; and, Grade 12, Ava Brogdon of Lanier FFA.

Overall showmanship classes of the grade-level showmanship winners was held.

Harper Copeland of Echols 4H won junior overall showmanship. Tori Millirons of Lowndes 4H won the senior overall showmanship. The classified show judge was Clay Walker. Walker praised the exhibitors in the event for the quality of the animals.

The sale followed. The show is sponsored by Lowndes County Farm Bureau, Lanier County Farm Bureau and Echols County Farm Bureau.
Legislators expect to consider ag issues

State may ease raw milk rules

ATLANTA — Raw milk can only be sold in Georgia as a pet product, but there is growing concern about how much of that unpasteurized — and largely unregulated — milk is being sold in a glass for human consumption.

A legislative study committee has taken up the issue and is mulling potential legislation that would allow raw milk to be sold for people in Georgia while creating state regulations and setting minimum standards for a product that can be vulnerable to harmful bacteria, such as E. coli, if not handled properly.

State Rep. Clay Pirkle, a Republican and south Georgia farmer, says he is generally wary of regulations but that he sees food safety as the glaring exception. Concerns about public safety, he said, are driving interest in legislation for him.

“Anyone can bottle and sell raw milk under a pet label if they pay a small licensing fee (to the state),” said Pirkle, who is leading the study panel. “No inspections, no regulations, no safety guidelines.”

Pirkle said the study committee will make a recommendation soon on whether lawmakers should consider legislation that could potentially bring raw milk into the mainstream. The regular session starts in January.

‘Right to Farm’ debate to be renewed

Environmentalists and others opposed to large livestock operations are leaders in the fight against changing the state’s Right to Farm law.

ATLANTA — After a year in limbo, “Right to Farm” legislation being pushed by groups representing the farming and livestock industries would be back before the General Assembly this winter.

“There’s no bigger issue to our organization than right to farm,” Will Bentley, president of the Georgia Agribusiness Council, told members of the Georgia House Rural Development Council Dec. 8. “It’s becoming more and more of an issue around the state.”

The Right to Farm Act would make it harder for property owners living in areas zoned for agricultural use to file nuisance lawsuits against nearby farms or livestock operations. The Georgia Senate passed the bill during the 2020 legislative session but it fizzled in the state House of Representatives.

After staying quiet during this year’s session, groups including the Georgia Forestry Association and the Georgia Poultry Federation are vowing to renew their campaign in support of the measure during the 2022 session.

The need to protect farms and livestock operators from nuisance suits has grown increasingly urgent over time, said Mike Giles, president of the poultry federation.

Year after year, more and more urban and suburban residents move to the country to enjoy the rural lifestyle, Giles said. Once they get there, some are bothered by the smells, dust and noise associated with nearby farms and livestock operations and file nuisance suits, he said.

Giles pointed to $100 million awards in nuisance suits in North Carolina that have crippled farmers.


Opponents say an earlier Right to Farm law Georgia lawmakers passed during the 1980s contains adequate protections for farmers.

“Existing farmers are protected,” said Gordon Rogers, executive director of Albany-based Flint Riverkeeper.

But supporters of updating the Right to Farm Act say new farming operations are most in need of protection from nuisance suits because Georgia is running out of sparsely populated areas where residential encroachment has not occurred.

“There’s just no part of the state where you can put agriculture where there’s not already people there,” Bentley said.

Jacob Matthews, a government affairs specialist with the Georgia Farm Bureau, said Right to Farm protection is an economic issue.

“If we’re trying to boost rural Georgia’s economy, it’s important to make sure the opportunity is there for people to come in and start new farms,” he said.

Rogers said environmental organizations that oppose the updated Right to Farm Act don’t object to row crop farming or timber operations.

But he said the bill’s real intention is to protect giant livestock operations like the industrial hog farm operated in North Carolina by Smithfield Foods that was sued successfully by neighbors late last year.
Staff Reports

TIPTON — The Georgia Power Foundation recently made a donation to support Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in two areas, student scholarships and the Destination Ag program at ABAC’s Georgia Museum of Agriculture.

“Georgia Power is proud to support ABAC student scholarships and innovative programs such as Destination Ag,” Georgia Power Area Manager Lynn Lovett said. “Education at all levels is very important to the quality of life in all of the communities that our company serves and being actively involved in supporting these efforts is one way we can invest in the greater good.”

Lovett recently visited the museum to meet some of the ABAC students who are instructors for the pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students participating in the field trips and interactive programs associated with Destination Ag, college officials said in a statement.

GMA Director Garrett Boone said the mission of Destination Ag is to be “a dynamic educational program connecting students and teachers through educational activities to the importance of agriculture and natural resources in their daily lives,” college officials said.

More than 20,000 area students and teachers are expected to visit Destination Ag during the 2021-22 school year.

“The support from Georgia Power through the years has been greatly influential in engaging elementary students and providing them with the opportunity to develop personal relationships with agriculture and natural resources,” Boone said. “I appreciate Georgia Power’s dedication and devotion to Georgia’s youth and ABAC’s Georgia Museum of Agriculture.”

Georgia Power donations support ABAC

Ag scholarship deadline Jan. 20

Staff Reports

MOULTRIE, Ga. — The Moultrie-Colquitt County Chamber of Commerce Agricultural and Rural Services Committee will be awarding a $1,000 scholarship to a local student who desires to further their education in agriculture.

The recipient will be a 2022 graduating senior residing in and attending school in Colquitt County with a B average or higher, according to a press release from the chamber. He or she must enter a post-secondary school or college and major in the field of Agriculture, Agribusiness, or Ag Education after graduation. A copy of confirmed enrollment by a school official at the post-secondary institution must be submitted to the Chamber Ag and Rural Services Committee before payment of scholarship will be distributed to the recipient.

The scholarship may be applied toward tuition, room and board, or books and supplies. Scholarship applications and guidelines can be picked up at the Moultrie-Colquitt County Chamber of Commerce, the CHHS Guidance Office, and at the Colquitt Christian Academy Office.

The deadline for submitting applications to the chamber is noon Thursday, Jan. 20.

For more information, contact the Chamber at 985-2131 or stop by the Chamber of Commerce at 116 First Ave. S.E.

Milk

Some cash-strapped dairy farmers, intrigued by tales of raw milk being sold at a premium at farmers markets across metro Atlanta and north Georgia, also see a chance to reach new customers. In the background are not-so-distant memories of the hundreds of thousands of gallons of raw milk that Georgia producers dumped early in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kenneth Murphy, a Meriwether County dairy farmer and lifelong raw milk drinker, and others have argued state intervention would help level the playing field with producers currently working with little government oversight.

“I get roughly $1.60 a gallon. The pet food people get $8 to $10 a gallon for theirs,” Murphy came to Atlanta to tell lawmakers earlier this month. “I’m not going to be able to sell probably the whole 140-cow volume every day, but it will give me an opportunity to get a little bit more money for my milk.”

Farrah Newberry, executive director of Georgia Milk Producers, said a potential raw milk bill is one of the group’s top priorities for next year – second only to so-called right-to-farm legislation that agricultural interests have pushed unsuccessfully the last couple years. But other industry groups, like the National Milk Producers Federation, oppose changes that expand availability.

“We’re not really condoning that everyone should drink raw milk, but we don’t think it’s fair that our guys who are trying to be clean and safe don’t even have the opportunity to take on that liability. You can’t really insure something that’s illegal to sell,” she said.

Unlike what’s found in jugs on grocery store shelves, raw milk has not been pasteurized. Pasteurization is a process where milk is heated to kill bacteria, but raw milk enthusiasts say it also wipes out naturally occurring enzymes.

The most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which spans a five-year period ending in 2012, identified one outbreak in Georgia. Most of the outbreaks happened in states where raw milk sales were legalized.

“I can tell you that DPH does periodically hear about raw milk-associated cases of reportable bacterial infections, but we have not had a Georgia-specific associated outbreak since 2007,” said Nancy Nydam, spokeswoman for the Georgia Department of Public Health.

The CDC cautions people against drinking raw milk. But Pirkle notes that other popular foods, such as sushi, raw oysters and a runny egg at breakfast, come with their own risks. He says he would insist on requiring a clear, prominent warning label on raw milk products.

“I’m not wanting to advocate that this is safe,” Pirkle said in an interview. “But for those who want to drink it — for whatever reason, they feel like there’s a health benefit to it, some of these people who spend a lot of time in the gym and don’t want anything that has ever been processed and they want it as close to the farm as they can get it.

“Right now, they’re risking their health in consuming raw milk. Because we don’t know if antibiotics have been in the cow, we don’t know if the cattle’s been TB tested, we have no idea what the Somatic cell count is with pet milk. So, it’s buyer beware.”
Georgia Peanut Farm Show to be held Jan. 19-20

Annual conference planned for UGA Tifton campus

Staff Reports

TIFTON — Producers can improve the bottom-line of their farming operation with knowledge, connections and information gained at the 45th annual Georgia Peanut Farm Show and Conference, held at the University of Georgia Tifton Campus Conference Center, Jan. 19-20.

The show hours for Wednesday, Jan. 19, will be 1:30 p.m. and Thursday, Jan. 20, will be 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Peanut farmers and those involved in the peanut industry will be able to learn more about the latest products, services and peanut research at the show, which is sponsored by the Georgia Peanut Commission.

The two-day show offers farmers an opportunity to view the products and services of more than 100 exhibitors and educational programs.

The University of Georgia Peanut Team will present an educational peanut production seminar on Wednesday, Jan. 19, from 1:30 until 3 p.m. and Thursday, Jan. 20, from 9 until 10:30 a.m., titled, “2021 Growing Season – Learning from a Very Challenging Year.”

UGA specialists will present information and tips focusing on the impact of weather on growth and development, disease management, challenges in fertility and peanut sustainability. Farmers will have the opportunity to earn private or commercial pesticide applicator certification.

An Industry Seed Seminar will also be held on Wednesday, Jan. 19, from 3:05 until 4:05 p.m. and Thursday, Jan. 20, from 10:35 to 11:35 a.m. during the show. This event is sponsored by the American Peanut Shellers Association Committee on Variety & Seed Development, Southern Peanut Farmers Federation and the Georgia Peanut Commission.

Growers will be able to learn about peanut varieties available for 2022 and varieties on the horizon.

During the show on Thursday, Jan. 20, there will be a free luncheon at noon for all peanut farmers in attendance. The Georgia Peanut Commission will also present a short program beginning at 12:15 p.m. that will cover award presentations and an update from the National Peanut Board and Washington, D.C.

The Georgia Peanut Commission, in cooperation with the OneBlood, will host a blood drive on Thursday, Jan. 20, from 8:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. during the show. Appointments can be scheduled in advance at www.oneblood.org/donate-now and use sponsor code #26218.

This year’s show, Kelley Manufacturing Co. is providing the Grand Door Prize of one season’s use of a new peanut combine (choice of four-row, six-row or combine with Load-On-The-Go option) and $5,000 cash money. At the end of the 2022 season, the winner has the option of purchasing the combine from an authorized KMC dealer with $15,000 off the list price. In lieu of the combine, the winner may choose the use of another KMC peanut harvest implement with a 10 percent discount off the list price for purchase.

Additionally, farmers can register to win the Grower Prize, donated by Amadas Industries. This prize includes a certificate good for $10,000 towards the purchase of any new Amadas self-propelled combine or $5,000 towards the purchase of a new four-row or six-row Amadas pull-type combine or $3,000 towards the purchase of a new Amadas six-row or eight-row peanut digger or $1,000 towards the purchase of a new Amadas peanut dump cart and a Grizzly cooler.

Amadas is also offering a second prize including a certificate good for a parts credit of $1,000 for Amadas parts through a local authorized Amadas dealer.

The winners of the Grand Door Prize and the Grower Prize must be certified peanut farmers with an FSA farm number and must be present to win.

For more information on the show, contact GPC at 229-386-3470 or online at www.gapeanuts.com.
Speakers named for cotton commission meeting

Staff Reports

Tifton — The Georgia Cotton Commission has named the guest speakers for its 15th annual meeting. The meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 26, at the UGA Tifton Campus Conference Center, commission members said in a statement.

The annual meeting is held in conjunction with the UGA Cotton Production Workshop conducted by the UGA Research & Extension Cotton Team.

The UGA Cotton Production Workshop will feature breakout sessions where attendees will learn the latest technical production strategies from the researchers whose projects are funded by the commission’s research program, commissioners said.

The Georgia Cotton Commission annual meeting will follow the breakout sessions and feature speakers from several industry organizations. The program speakers are Kent Fountain, chairman, National Cotton Council of America; Jimmy Webb, chairman, The Cotton Board; and Kim Kitchings, senior vice president of consumer marketing, Cotton Incorporated.

Fountain, the president/CEO of Southeastern Gin and Peanut, in Surrency, has served as the chairman of the National Cotton Council since 2020. He was a NCC vice president from 2016-18 and served on the NCC’s Board in 2011.

Fountain is a past president of the National Cotton Ginners Association and the Southeastern Cotton Ginners Association and serves as chairman of Premium Peanut, vice-chairman of the Georgia Ports Authority and director of Staplco and the Cotton Growers Warehouse Association.

The recipient of numerous honors, he received the Southeastern Ginner of the Year in 2001 and the Horace Hayden National Ginner of the Year Award in 2016. Fountain, who was a member of the NCC’s 2001-02 Cotton Leadership Class, earned degrees from the University of Georgia’s College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences.

Webb has been the owner/operator of Harvey Jordan Farms in Leary, since 1988 where he grows cotton, corn and peanuts and is currently serving the industry as the chairman of The Cotton Board, the organization charged with administering the Cotton Research & Promotion Program.

Webb is a director of Southern Cotton growers and Staplco, a former director of the Georgia Cotton Commission, a cooperative delegate to the National Cotton Council and the former president of Cotton Council International. Webb is a partner in Edison Gin Co-op and president of Harvey Peanut Company. He holds a B.S. in agriculture from the University of Georgia and graduated from the NCC Cotton Leadership Class.

He also served on Cotton Incorporated’s board of directors and was the chair of the audit committee and the product research and development committee. Webb won the Georgia Farmer of the Year in 2006 and the Georgia Young Peanut Farmer of the Year in 2009.

Kitchings is the senior vice president of consumer marketing at Cotton Incorporated. She leads consumer and trade advertising, public relations, corporate strategy, global market insights and strategic alliances.

In this role, her primary goals are to motivate consumers and the trade to buy items made of cotton and to affirm cotton as the fiber of choice for sustainable and eco-friendly products.

During her 20-year career in the cotton industry, Kitchings has been instrumental in strategic assessments of global consumer demand and market evaluations for cotton. She oversees the use of a wide-array of tools such as digital marketing, social media, television, strategic partnerships and presentations to communicate cotton’s messages to various constituents.

Kitchings earned degrees from North Carolina State University and Meredith College and is a frequent presenter at industry conferences on innovation, consumer insights and marketing.

Following the annual meeting speakers, the commission will host lunch where sponsors will be recognized, door prizes will be given away and the Georgia Quality Cotton Awards for the 2021 crop will be awarded.

The meeting, production workshop and lunch are open to not only cotton growers but anyone interested in the cotton industry. The UGA Cotton Production Workshop breakout sessions will be repeated after lunch.

There is no charge to attend. Pre-registration is requested to help with meal plans. Register online at www.ugatiftonconference.caes.uga.edu or call (229) 386-4116.
Search starts for new ABAC president

By Terry Richards
terry.richards@gafhnw.com

TIFTON — The search is underway for a new president for Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.

The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia has named two committees to conduct a national search for the next president of ABAC, according to a statement from the college.

President David Bridges has announced his retirement after 17 years.

“ABAC has benefited from 17 years of strong leadership under President Bridges and is the heart of Georgia’s rural community as the state’s leading agriculture college,” Acting Chancellor Teresa MacCartney said. “Its next leader must continue to focus on supporting students for success in the 21st century through its innovative industry partnerships, community involvement and unique mission. I’m grateful to the committee members for joining us in this effort and look forward to seeing the results of their work.”

The search and screening of candidates is the responsibility of the campus-based presidential search and screen committee and will guide the first stage of the search. The members are:

• Ray Smith, Ph.D., search and screen committee chair, professor of crop science; department head of Department of Agriculture; School of Agriculture and Natural Resources.
• Elijah Alford, student and ABAC Ambassador.
• Tamara “Tami” Dennis, Ph.D., RNC, professor of nursing and RN to BSN program director, School of Nursing and Health Sciences.
• Diantha V. Ellis, J.D., faculty senate president and associate professor of business administration, Stafford School of Business.
• Jessica Gandy, staff council chair and financial aid counselor, finance and operations.
• Bernice Hughes, dean of students, academic and student affairs.
• Jack Martin, president, Student Government Association.
• Franzelle Mathis-Pertilla, Ph.D., associate professor of business, Stafford School of Business.
• Richard “Tony” Matthews, assistant professor of biology, School of Arts and Sciences.
• James N. McCrimmon, Ph.D., professor of turfgrass management, School of Agriculture and Natural Resources.
• Joyce Mims, community liaison, Southern Regional Technical College.
• Erin Porter, Ph.D., associate professor of agricultural engineering, School of Agriculture and Natural Resources.
• Darby Sewell, Ph.D., professor, family and consumer sciences and education, School of Arts and Sciences.
• Abul Sheikh, Ed.D., professor of business and information technology, Stafford School of Business.
• Yvonne Smith, Ph.D., RN, assistant professor, School of Nursing and Health Sciences.
• Niki Vanderslice, chair, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College Foundation.

The duties of the presidential search and screen committee include the development of a position description, recruiting candidates and conducting interviews. The search firm of ZRG Partners has been engaged to assist the search committee.

At the conclusion of its work, the campus committee will forward the credentials of three to five unranked candidates to the Regents Special Committee for consideration.

The Regents Special Committee will be chaired by Regent Barbara Holmes, with members including Board Chairman Sachin Shailendra, Regent W. Allen Judenrath, Regent Cade Joiner, Regent Lowery Houston May and Regent Harold Reynolds.
Researchers evaluate living mulches as cover crops

By Maria M. Lameiras
University of Georgia

For most row crop producers in Georgia, corn, cotton and peanut are planted in the spring and harvested in late fall. After harvest, the ground is left relatively bare, with the residue of the harvested crop the only organic material left on the ground. That is when cover crops come in.

Cover crops are non-crop plants like crimson clover and rye that are planted after cash crops are harvested in the fall. They are left to grow until producers prepare for spring planting, at which point cover crops are terminated. Cover crops provide living roots in the ground over the winter, and a mat of residue on the soil surface prior to cash crop planting. Over the last few decades, researchers have found that cover crops improve various soil properties and contribute positively to weed management.

Now, UGA weed scientist Nicholas Basinger and doctoral candidate David Weisberger, researchers in the University of Georgia’s College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, are studying the use of both annual and perennial cover crops called “living mulches” in cotton. Weisberger developed a program to test the use of living mulches and annual cover crops in cotton production in Georgia based on previous work using living mulches in corn production performed by UGA Professor Emeritus Nick Hill.

“It seemed like a natural extension of the work to try this with one of the state’s most economically relevant row crops,” said Weisberger, who received funding for the three-year project from Cotton Incorporated. “Cover cropping and even the use of living mulches is not that new, but it is something that’s fairly new to cotton production.”

Under the surface

In fall 2019, Weisberger, Basinger and a team of soil scientists from the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences including soil pedologist Matthew Levi, doctoral student Chandler Greuner, and soil physicist Nandita Gaur established a study at the J. Phil Campbell Sr. Research and Education Center in Watkinsville, Georgia. Research plots were planted with a bare ground control, two annual cover crops — cereal rye and crimson clover — and a living mulch. The living mulch is a white clover (cultivar ‘Durana’) that was originally developed by UGA as a forage for cattle.

“Being able to do studies like this, bringing in other students and faculty from our department to get a really full picture both from above and below ground, can help drive a better understanding of what’s actually happening in the system and what the true benefits and drawbacks of each system are,” Basinger said. “That helps us have more understanding about where we would prescribe this and where it will best fit.”

The goal of the study is to quantify both aboveground and belowground effects of these annual cover crops and a living mulch compared to a standard no-till bare ground system. The researchers are measuring cotton yield and weed suppression as well as changes in the soil’s

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Mulches

physical and chemical properties. Weisberger and Basinger are focused on how these cover crops may help to manage Palmer amaranth, a costly and problematic weed.

“The goal has been to incorporate more cover crops so that there’s a blanket on the soil that suppresses those little Palmer amaranth seeds that are down in the ground and keeps them from waking up,” Weisberger said. In the weed-control studies, researchers are calculating how well the cover crop or living mulch suppresses weed emergence, survival and adult seed production in cotton plots pre-seeded with this problematic species. “The idea was to start at the same level of infestation and to look at how those different covers, or lack thereof, affect the weed population over time,” Weisberger said.

Gruener and Levi will also study the soil health benefits of both the living mulch and annual cover crop study plots. They will measure changes to soil physical properties that affect water movement and storage, in addition to changes in organic matter, particularly nitrogen and carbon.

Getting out of the weeds

According to Basinger, it is important to balance long-term and short-term goals with a study like this. “So many of these properties, especially from the soil perspective, are slow to change, so that’s one of the big challenges we have. Soil properties tend to change much more slowly, but from a weed perspective we can determine some important findings each year,” Basinger explained.

The initial findings are promising. In the first year of the study, both the cover crop and living mulch plots showed a major reduction in the number of Palmer amaranth weeds that emerged. This is particularly important for a weed like Palmer amaranth that has developed resistance to seven herbicide sites of action globally, including resistance to herbicides like Roundup and Atrazine. One important way to lessen the selection pressure of herbicides on this weed is to reduce the number that germinate and are exposed to those herbicides.

The living mulch system may have additional benefits related to both economics and the environment. Because crops are planted into 10- to 12-inch strips in the living mulch system, herbicides are only used in this strip area. “By covering the ground with our living mulch and just treating those strips, you reduce your herbicide input by approximately 70%,” Weisberger said. Additionally, based on Hill’s previous research with living mulches in corn, this species of white clover has also been shown to provide 50 to 60 pounds per acre of nitrogen. This may help eliminate or greatly reduce the need to purchase synthetic nitrogen fertilizer.

Using a living mulch system is not without its tradeoffs, however. Living mulches may reduce yields given that, unlike terminated annual cover crops, they require nutrients and water throughout the season. Fields planted with living mulches also require irrigation, removing them as an option for dryland production systems.

Cost–benefit analysis

“This living mulch system isn’t necessarily going to be perfect for every farmer in Georgia or the Southeast, but it does fit a niche and there is a group of growers who are interested in sustainability and who have the irrigation resources they need to try it,” Basinger said. “We’re seeing a lot of benefits from it just from a weed suppression standpoint. The focus of our lab is integrated with management and our job is to find all the tools that are in the toolbox and be able to look at those and see what combination of tools we can utilize to give us a really resilient system.”

Because farming systems and environments vary so greatly in Georgia, the researchers made sure to include two different annual cover crops in the study. For example, cereal rye has been used widely in Georgia as an annual cover crop because of cold tolerance and the ability to grow it in many soil conditions, as well as having deep roots and rapid accumulation of biomass. To learn more about cover crops from Basinger and Weisberger, check out the “Got Weeds?” episode of UGA’s Integrated Pest Management Program podcast, “IPM on the Fly.” Or follow along with @ugaweeds on Twitter.
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