

Alabama Farmers Federation recognized at AFBF convention

The Alabama Farmers Federation was recognized for outstanding work in public relations and information during the opening session of the American Farm Bureau Federation's 91st Annual Meeting in Seattle.

Federation President Jerry A. Newby accepted the President's Award in Public Relations and Information from AFBF President Bob Stallman later in the program. The award is presented annually to the state in each of six membership divisions with the greatest achievement in one of the Farm Bureau's five program areas. Alabama again earned Awards of Excellence in all five areas: Agriculture Education and Promotion, Leadership Development, Member Services, Policy Implementation and Public Relations and Information.

Almost 4,500 farmers from throughout the United States and Puerto Rico attended the conference, including more than 100 from Alabama. The conference included a trade show, educational seminars and competitive events for young farmers. It concluded Wednesday with the annual meeting of voting delegates, who set policy for the 6.3-million member organization.

Lamar County dairy farmer Will Gilmer was elected chairman of the AFBF Young Farmers and Ranchers (YF&R) Committee.

Jennifer Cruise of Morgan County was a finalist in the YF&R Discussion Meet competition, which seeks to build leadership, problem-solving and consensus-building skills among young farmers.

Matt and Amy Winstead of Limestone County represented Alabama in the Excellence in Agriculture contest for young agricultural professionals who work off the farm.

Alabama's Outstanding Young Farm Family Gaylan and Angie Shelly of Escambia County competed in the YF&R Achievement Award contest.



January 15, 2010

Cultivator

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President's Award



American Farm Bureau Federation President Bob Stallman, left, congratulates Alabama Farmers Federation President Jerry Newby, right, on the state winning five Awards of Excellence and a President's award in public relations. Stallman was re-elected as AFBF president for a sixth two-year term at the convention.

Gilmer elected chairman of YF&R committee

Lamar County dairy farmer Will Gilmer was elected chairman of the American Farm Bureau Federation's Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee during the organization's 91st annual meeting in Seattle last weekend.

Gilmer, who's developed a national following for his *Dairyman's Blog* and tractor-seat Twitter posts, farms with his father, David. He was elected to a one-year term as chairman.



Gilmer

Gilmer, 30, called the chairmanship an opportunity to build on the foundation that's been established in recent years of using the YF&R com-

mittee as a tool to help tell farmers' stories.

"Through the *Dairyman's Blog* and other avenues I've had a chance to talk about animal care, environmental stewardship and food security," Gilmer said. "I hope we can get more farmers involved in reaching out to people, whether it be one-on-one, through farm tours, traditional media or social media. I believe the more of us that do that and the more people we can help have a personal relationship with agriculture, the better understanding they will have of what we (farmers) are doing."

Alabama Farmers Federation President Jerry A. Newby said the new position would help Gilmer grow within the organization.

Area Communication Meeting plans



The Dale County Farmers Federation will host the Area 8 Communication meeting in Ozark, Feb. 16. County Board members recently met to plan the meeting which will be held at the Ozark Civic Center. From left are, front row, Women's Committee Members Monica Carroll, Frankie Davis (chairman) and Loretta Culpepper; back row County Secretary/Treasurer Wayne Davis and Vice President Chris Thompson.

Cruise among finalists in FB Discussion Meet

A Morgan County young farmer and mother of three made it to the finals of the American Farm Bureau Federation's Young Farmers and Ranchers Discussion Meet contest Sunday in Seattle by drawing on her own experience to find solutions to problems facing agriculture.

Jennifer Cruise, who operates a horse and cattle farm near Arab with husband Robert, competed in the Final Four Monday and was honored as one of the finalists during the closing session of the AFBF Annual Meeting later that day.

As a finalist, Cruise received a \$6,000 savings bond and a Stihl Farm Boss chain saw, valued at \$360. Stihl is a long-time sponsor of Farm Bureau contests for young farmers.



Cruise

This Discussion Meet seeks to develop leadership, problem-solving and consensus-building skills among young farmers through competitive discussions structured more like committee meetings than formal debates. Cruise earned the opportunity to compete at the national level by winning the state competition in December.

In her opening comments at the first of three preliminary Discussion Meet rounds, Cruise challenged young farmers to reach out to those not directly involved in agriculture.

"We need to step out of our comfort zones to make changes that are better for agriculture, our society and America as a whole," she said.

The final round of the competition focused on bridging the gap between various segments of agriculture to ensure farmers have an impact in governmental affairs.

"When I married my husband nine years ago and became a full-time farmer, I had no idea how important it is for farmers to be involved in the legislative process," Cruise said. "When I became a Farm Bureau (Alabama Farmers Federation) member, I began to understand that we need to bridge the gap between farmers and lawmakers."

Area Communication Meetings - Notice to Board Members

Area 2 (Matthew Durdin)

Tuesday, Jan. 19, 6:30 p.m.,
Musgrove Country Club, Jasper

Area 9 (Robert Utsey)

Tuesday, Jan. 26, 6:30 p.m.,
Thomasville Civic Center, Thomasville

Area 5 (Ralph Golden)

Monday, Feb. 8, 6 p.m., Elmer's
Restaurant, Hwy. 14, Tallassee

Area 10 (Paul Brown)

Tuesday, Feb. 9, 6:30 p.m.,
Baldwin County Farmers Federation,
Robertsdale

Area 4 (David Farnsworth)

Thursday, Feb. 11, 6:30 p.m.,
Bagley Center, Shocco Springs

Area 3 (Kyle Hayes)

Monday, Feb. 15, 6:30 p.m.,
Snead Community College Cafeteria,
Boaz

Area 8 (Boyd Deal)

Tuesday, Feb. 16, 6:30 p.m.,
Ozark Civic Center, Ozark

Area 6 (Tommy Martin)

Thursday, Feb. 18, 6:30 p.m.,
Bobby Miller Activity Center,
Tuscaloosa

Area 1 (Tom Jones)

Thursday, Feb. 25, 6:30 p.m.,
Greenbriar BBQ, Madison

Area 7 (David Cole)

Tuesday, March 2, 7 p.m.,
Lakepoint State Park Resort, Eufaula

Fruit and vegetable growers to meet Feb. 20

The Alabama Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association will hold an annual workshop on Feb. 20 at Auburn University. The workshop is open to all fruit and vegetable growers and interested growers and will be held in the Lowder Building on West Magnolia Avenue in Auburn.

Registration begins at 7:45 a.m. and meetings start at 8:30 a.m.

Speakers will address topics for both the experienced grower and the new grower and will cover such topics as the 2010 Farmers Market Authority senior and nutrition program, alternate crops for hoop houses, specialty fruit crops, vegetable production and more.

For registration information, please email Leslie Brashers at thebrashers1@bellsouth.net.

Protecting farmers, budget woes at forefront of legislative agenda

As the Alabama Legislature returned to Montgomery this week, it became clear the success for priority legislation of the Alabama Farmers Federation, as well as hundreds of other bills, will be affected by debate on a number of controversial topics.

At the forefront of the debate is the General Fund, which faces a \$600 million shortfall over last year, due in great part to the absence of federal stimulus funding for the upcoming budget year.

For the Alabama Farmers Federation, farmer leaders have said no issue is of greater importance than animal care, said Alabama Farmers Federation President Jerry A. Newby.

The organization's priorities in the Alabama Legislature this session will include efforts to ensure standards for farm animal care are based on sound science and not dictated by radical anti-meat activists.

The Federation is backing the

Family Farm Preservation Act, SB61, sponsored by Sen. Kim Benefield, D-Woodland, which would protect farmers from frivolous lawsuits so long as they are abiding by all state and federal regulations.

The Federation also will work to preserve the jobs and economic benefits created by agriculture by protecting existing sales tax exemptions on feed, seed and fertilizer.

There has been strong support among Federation leaders throughout the state for returning to a once-every-four-years system of property tax reappraisals. Furthermore, members are concerned about the tax implications of a constitutional convention, but support an article-by-article approach to revising the document.

Likewise, members are supportive of eliminating the sales tax on food, but are opposed to removing the state income tax deduction for the federal taxes they pay.

In addition to these priorities, the Federation will work to increase penalties for livestock theft, improve the condition of rural roads and bridges, clarify laws pertaining to farm vehicles and address landowner liability concerns for agritourism sites.

The Federation, along with Soil and Water Conservation Districts, supports legislation that would provide for the continuation of the Forever Wild program while funding soil and water conservation programs in all 67 counties and supporting efforts to preserve green space, especially in urban areas.

Gambling legislation, addressing the shortfalls of the Alabama Prepaid Affordable College Tuition (PACT) program, ethics reform and legislation that would transfer \$100 million annually for 10 years from the Alabama Trust Fund to be used on Alabama's roads and bridges all are sure to generate much debate this session.

GILMER from pg.1

"I'm excited about Will being elected to this position," Newby said. "He did an outstanding job as state young farmers chairman (in 2008), and he will do an outstanding job as national chairman."

Gilmer is the second Alabama farmer in three years to chair the national group. In 2008, Hale County catfish farmer Townsend Kyser was elected to the post.

In accepting the position, Gilmer thanked his family as well as the Farmers Federation.

"I appreciate all of the Federation members who support the Young Farmers program," he said. "It has proven to be an effective program to develop young farmers and prepare them to take on leadership roles locally, statewide and nationally."

Gilmer holds a bachelor's degree in agricultural engineering, technology and business from Mississippi State University. He and wife, Joni, have a son, Linton, 4, and a daughter, Jillian, 9 months. His Web site is gilmerdairyfarm.com. From it, visitors can access the Dairyman's Blog and connect with the dairyman through Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

USDA study will examine catfish industry

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is taking an in-depth look at issues facing the U.S. catfish industry, including health, production practices and pond management. The study, conducted through USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service - National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS), marks the third NAHMS study of the catfish industry.

From January through mid-February, representatives from USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will survey selected catfish operations in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi.

"The 2010 catfish study will gather health and production data on America's catfish farms," said William Weaver, director of the NASS Alabama Field Office. "In order to continue to be highly productive, the U.S. catfish industry relies on this objective, science-based information regarding successful management practices."

Catfish producers will be asked to provide data regarding fish man-

agement, health, disease prevention practices and other aspects of their operation. The study will identify production practices and measures that promote efficient production and improve product quality.

Survey results will help develop baseline information on health and health management practices of catfish farms and provide current data for economic analysis of the industry and to help guide future research and education.

The survey is conducted every five years and is the industry's chance to weigh in on where the industry is currently headed and how best to use our resources to benefit our catfish industry," said Terry Hanson, an economist in the Department of Fisheries and Allied Aquaculture at Auburn University.

Individual survey responses are strictly confidential and used only in combination with other responses to report regional and national estimates. For information on NASS surveys and reports, call the NASS Alabama Field Office at 1-800-832-4181.

Federal Land Bank changes name

The Federal Land Bank Associations of Alabama — names familiar to farmers and landowners for more than 90 years — have undergone a name change and broadened services to include operating and equipment loans.

The Federal Land Bank Association of North Alabama is now known as Alabama Farm Credit, while the Federal Land Bank Association of South Alabama is now known as Alabama Ag Credit. The name changes were made to reflect their new status as agricultural credit associations (ACA). Both now offer short- and intermediate-term financing in addition to land and mortgage loans.

The name and lending changes are the result of a vote by the cooperative associations' stockholder-owners last September to convert to ACAs. While Alabama Ag Credit and Alabama Farm Credit each continue to finance and refinance rural real estate, timberland and recreational land purchases and improvements, the associations will now also offer loans for equipment and operating expenses, such as seed, feed and livestock purchases.

"Our association is not merging or being acquired. We are a very strong financial institution, and we are excited about growing even more with this new opportunity," said Thomas Dozier, chairman of the Alabama Ag Credit Board of Directors. "You will still find the same friendly people to work with and the same land financing experts. Only now we have even more to offer our stockholder-owners."

Alabama Ag Credit and Alabama Farm Credit finance farmers, rural landowners and agribusiness owners throughout Alabama, and are part of the nationwide Farm Credit System, the nation's largest lender to rural America.

Deadline near for survey of cotton crop intentions

The National Cotton Council's (NCC) annual survey of 2010 planting intentions recently was distributed to upland and ELS cotton producers across the Cotton Belt.

Producers are encouraged to respond by the Jan. 19 deadline. The current survey was distributed through a combination of regular mail and email with the intent of reaching all cotton farms across the Belt.

Growers who did not receive a survey may contact the NCC via email at econsurvey@cotton.org for survey instructions.

The survey, which is conducted annually to aid with industry planning and policy deliberations, provides the basis for the economic outlook presented to delegates during the NCC Annual Meeting in early February. Survey results initially will be presented to members of the American Cotton Producers on Feb. 5.



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THE CULTIVATOR is published every other Friday by the Alabama Farmers Federation, a member of the American Farm Bureau Federation. Correspondence may be addressed to **THE CULTIVATOR**, P.O. Box 11000, Montgomery, AL 36191-0001, Debra Davis, Editor or Jeff Helms, Director, Department of Communications.

Legislative agenda



Board members of the Russell County Farmers Federation recently met with State Rep. Lesley Vance, D-Phenix City, to discuss the upcoming legislative session. From left are Russell County board members Eddie Reid, Women's Committee Chairman Jo Ann Laney, County Federation President Ben Bowden, Vance, Farm-PAC Trustee Jimmy Batcheldor, John Rudd and Young Farmers Chairman Jeremie Redden.