

Poultry farmers want changes to integrated system

Poultry farmers throughout the Southeast told government leaders May 21 they want better treatment and more money from the companies who provide them with the birds and feed used on their farms.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack listened as farmers expressed concern over how little control they have once they invest hundreds of thousands of dollars to become a contract grower during a meeting on the campus of Alabama A&M University. The meeting was the second of five workshops President Obama's administration will hold this summer and fall to examine competition in agriculture. The meetings are to explore whether a few large corporations dominate seed, cattle, chicken and hog markets in the United States. Holder said stepped-up antitrust enforcement in agricultural businesses is a top priority for the administration.

Alabama Farmers Federation Poultry Division Director Guy Hall attended the meeting, as did several members of the Federation's State Poultry Committee. Hall said it was good to see the dialogue the meeting created.

"It was an emotionally charged meeting because we're dealing with farmers' livelihoods and the ability for integrators to stay in business," Hall said. "I am hopeful that the meeting will help generate more open communication between integrators and producers.

"Many poultry growers feel that their contracts need to keep pace with increasing energy, labor, building and other production costs. As the cost of these inputs increases, so should the rate of pay on their



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Grace Headed to Runoff



Dorman Grace, right, watches election returns with Walker County Farmers Federation Board Member Russ Runyan and his wife Linda following Tuesday's primary. Grace, who is endorsed by the Alabama Farmers Federation, will face John McMillan in a runoff for the republican nomination for commissioner of agriculture and industries on July 13.

Grace moves to runoff for primary election

Walker County farmer Dorman Grace learned Tuesday night that he will face John McMillan in the republican runoff July 13 for commissioner of agriculture and industries. But true to his farm roots, Grace was up early the next morning making plans to win the race.

"I'm very humbled and appreciative of the support that people from all across the state have shown me and my family," Grace said. "Heading into the runoff, it's more important than ever that we energize our agricultural base for this race. We need our rural supporters to educate their urban counterparts about the importance of this office."

Grace, who is endorsed by the

Alabama Farmers Federation, will be busy in the coming weeks raising campaign funds and visiting voters throughout the state.

"People have been so supportive and generous, but we can't quit now when we're so close," Grace said.

In other election news, Blount County farmer Clay Scofield is in a runoff for the republican nomination for Alabama Senate District 9, the seat currently held by retiring Sen. Hinton Mitchem, D-Union Grove.

Scofield, a member of the A.L.F.A. Leaders program, faces Don Spurlin in the runoff. The winner of the republican runoff will face democrat Tim Mitchell in the November general election.

Policy Development



Covington County Farmers Federation commodity chairmen recently met to review the Federation's policy book in preparation for the upcoming state policy development meeting. Seated from left are Cotton Chairman Glen Walters, Wheat and Feed Grains Chairman Karl Brown and Poultry Chairman Tommy Thompson; back row, Beef Chairman Russell Wiggins and Dairy Chairman James Waite.

Cole chosen for NFIB leadership program

The National Federation of Independent Business, Alabama's leading small business association, has named David Cole of Montgomery to its state Leadership Council.

Cole is the Alabama Farmers Federation area organization director for Barbour, Bullock, Crenshaw, Macon, Pike and Russell counties. Alfa joined NFIB/Alabama in 2003.

As a member of the NFIB/Alabama Leadership Council, Cole will assist in developing the association's statewide agenda and building strategies to support small

businesses throughout the state. Leadership Council members are nominated by NFIB's state director or current members and elected by the council.

"We need strong advocates for small business on the Leadership Council, and David certainly fits the bill," said Rosemary Elebash, state director of NFIB/Alabama.

"David has a lot of energy and brings a lot of good ideas to the table," Elebash said. "We look forward to working with him to promote and protect the right of our members to own, operate and grow their businesses," she said.

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contracts, giving them the opportunity to make a living."

However, U.S. poultry companies claim export restrictions and high feed prices have made poultry less profitable for a number of years causing them not to be able to give pay increases to farmers.

"The vertically-integrated poultry production system has evolved over several decades, and it is highly efficient," Hall said. "However, if farmers and integrators can't make a profit, they won't be able to stay in business. We support an open dialogue between growers and integrators that will result in contracts that are mutually beneficial for both farm families and the companies that invest in our communities."

Hall added that he hopes increased cooperation and communication will allow both groups to reach an amiable solution.

Gary Staples, a poultry farmer from Steele, was among those who spoke at the meeting. He told federal officials that while he has made money in the past as a poultry farmer, profit margins for him and other farmers have narrowed. Staples said he and other farmers are forced to follow integrator demands for fear of losing their contracts to grow chicken. Without a contract, farmers can't repay the considerable debt they owe for their farm, he said.

Other common concerns voiced by farmers in the meeting included little negotiation power for farmers when their contract expires; fear of retaliation (loss of contract) if they speak out against unfair practices; no control or compensation for inconsistency of feed or poor chick quality; payment method that compensates farmers (ranking system) based on other flocks collected at or near the same time from other farmers; and considerations in compensation for extended time between flocks, which greatly reduces the farmer's income.

Vilsack said the USDA could use regulatory power to complement the Justice Department's antitrust efforts. The department is getting funds to hire more lawyers and investigators and formed a joint task force with the Justice Department to coordinate antitrust enforcement.

Obituary

Dr. Robert A. Voitle, the former associate dean of Auburn University's College of Agriculture, died May 21. He was 72.

Voitle played a key role in the establishment of Ag Hill programs such as the intern program and the Ag Alumni Association. He also helped establish the Ag Ambassa-

dors program and was fundamental to the construction of Auburn University's first computer lab in 1982.

After stepping down as associate dean in 1999, he continued to teach until his retirement in March of this year.

Federations, Alfa help AU equine classes

Donations from 16 county Farmers Federations and Alfa Insurance have enabled the equine division of the Animal Sciences Department at Auburn University to purchase a new portable ultrasound unit that will enable students to study the reproductive process in pregnant mares. This high-quality, portable system replaces an older machine that no longer presented clear images and hindered learning for students in the equine reproductive techniques class.

County Farmers Federations that donated were Autauga, Cullman, Dale, Etowah, Jackson, Jefferson, Lawrence, Macon, Montgomery, Morgan, Russell, Shelby, Talladega, Tallapoosa, Tuscaloosa and Walker. Alfa Insurance contributed matching funds.

"Students will be able to visualize the mare's reproductive tract and follow its changes during the estrous cycle," explained Dr. Betsy Wagner, an assistant professor in the department. "By observing the changes such as the development of an ovulatory follicle, students will learn to make decisions about the optimum time to breed, timing of hormone treatments and scheduling follow-up diagnostics like checking for pregnancy."

Enterprise to host commercial satsuma production meeting

A regional commercial satsuma production meeting will be June 17 in Enterprise at the Enterprise City Schools Service Center. The program begins at noon and includes lunch.

Topics include production basics, disease and insect issues, budding and propagation. Participants are asked to pre-register by June 14.

For information or to register, contact Neil Kelly (334) 714-6910 or the Coffee County Extension Office at 334-894-5596.

Equine Ultrasound



Auburn University's equine division of the Animal Sciences Department now has a new portable ultrasound unit that will aid students in the reproductive study of pregnant mares. From left are Nate Jaeger, director of the Alabama Farmers Federation's Equine Division; Dr. Betsy Wagner, AU assistant professor; and animal science students Megan Kendrick, Shelby Million and Rachel Hogue.

Cleburne Farm Day



The Cleburne County Farmers Federation and the Cleburne County Extension office recently sponsored Farm Day for more than 500 area students. In this photo, Cleburne County Women's Leadership Committee Chairman Jane Harris shows students how some vegetables, such as carrots, onions and potatoes, grow underground. Students also learned about food preservation such as drying and canning.

Leadership Conference



Jan Woodham, left, and Lyn McDaniel, right, of the Dale County Farmers Federation Women's Leadership Committee examine applications for the Youth Leadership Conference with County Federation Board Member Timmy McDaniel. The conference is June 11-13 at the 4-H Center in Columbiana. Lyn McDaniel has volunteered her time for the past two years as a chaperone for participants from Dale County.



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U.S. ag trade surplus continues to climb

U.S. exports for fiscal year 2010 are poised to achieve a value of \$104.5 billion in sales—an \$8 billion increase over last year and the second-highest level in history, according to *Outlook for U.S. Agricultural Trade*.

The trade surplus in agriculture is forecast to reach \$28 billion, the second-highest ever.

The report comes on the heels of a historic six-month pace of U.S. agricultural exports, which shattered records with \$59 billion in sales in the first half of the fiscal year and generated a 14 percent increase over the same period last year.

U.S. ag exports to China grew by nearly \$3 billion during the first half of the fiscal year to \$10.6 billion, making China the United States' top market for this period. Exports to Asia have reached record highs, led by strong increases in China and Southeast Asia.

OYFF Presentation



Jeff Whitaker of DeKalb County, second from left, is the 2010 Outstanding Young Farm Family in the Hay & Forage Division. He recently attended the Alabama Farmers Federation State Hay & Forage Committee meeting, where he received \$200 as the division winner. He will be among six finalists who will compete for the title of Alabama's Outstanding Young Farm Family at the Federation's annual meeting in Mobile in December. From left are Federation Young Farmers Director Brandon Moore, Whitaker, State Committee Chairman W.D. Flowers and First Vice Chairman Roger Brumbeloe.