

# THE COOPERATOR

DECEMBER 2019

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## 'Season of extremes'

Despite a growing season 'bookended' with challenging weather conditions, Tennessee's 2019 harvest is expected to post impressive yields for corn and cotton.

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## THE COOPERATOR

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# Say Cheese!

## Holidays are perfect for family photos



Glen Liford

Editor

In a few weeks, thousands, if not millions, of photos will be taken at family Christmas gatherings around the country.

The proliferation of smart phones containing high-quality cameras has increased those numbers exponentially. Just about everyone carries a phone, and often everyone wants their very own version of the family snapshots.

It's instant gratification that has eliminated the excitement of dropping a roll of film off at the drugstore and waiting days to see the resulting photos. Careful... I'm showing my age.

I've taken thousands of pictures of my own family over the years at Christmas and other holidays, birthdays, and just day-to-day activities. Since the early 1980s when I got my first SLR camera, a rugged Canon

AE-1 for Christmas, I have been a constant nuisance trying my family's patience as I've stuck a camera in their faces. Actually, the nuisance part goes back a bit further as there were some 110-mm cameras and even a Polaroid or two before then, but I'm getting sidetracked.

Since I got the good camera, I have been herding the family together each Christmas for an annual group photo. In spite of the often vocal and vigorous protests from anxious children wanting to open presents, and even some annoyed parents, uncles, and aunts whose patience was wearing thin, I have insisted that before we went further with the festivities, we pause and take a group picture (well, several, actually, because inevitably someone will blink or see a squirrel and look away during the process).

The group of photos, when viewed these many years later, are precious to me and illustrate our family story. It's a bittersweet feeling to look at these pictures with the new additions of children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and also the absence of beloved family members who have passed on.

The family protests slightly less than they did in the early years, though some still try to be somewhat stubborn out of principle. But I think I finally have them trained, and in recent years my nieces have begun to take over my role as the one insisting on the family's cooperation and taking the picture before we get started.

I realized from the start that these pictures would be invaluable heirlooms to the family. I'm working to gather these in one collection and make copies for the entire family.

I have not always done a great job at sharing copies, but I think I did better before the smart phones. I wonder how many of those images taken on phones will be shared and what their longevity will be. Pictures were meant to be shared, and even though we're told our data is secure in the cloud, will these files be available for future generations? Perhaps it would be better to print a few copies to share today.

If you would like to start this annual ritual in your own family, here are some suggestions:

1. Use a tripod and the self-timer feature on your camera.
2. Stage the tallest family members in a row of chairs so you can get everyone in the frame.
3. Have children kneel in the front, as they're more limber and don't injure as easily as the older family members.
4. Depending on how large your family is, using a wide-angle lens can be helpful. Or, if your family is really large, choose an outside setting so you have more room to work.

Good luck and Merry Christmas!



Make time for holiday photos this Christmas.



Rob Dongoski, a partner at Ernst & Young LLP and leader of the company's Global Agribusiness Sector told participants at the Tennessee Agricultural Forum how megatrends are transforming agriculture due to changing customer demand.

## 'Understand the customer'

It's the first step in adapting to traditional ag's disruptors, Dongoski says at Tennessee Agricultural Leadership Forum

Story and photos by: Glen Liford

**A**s changes in agriculture accelerate, keep your eyes on the customer.

That's the message Rob Dongoski, a partner at Ernst & Young LLP and agribusiness leader, brought to the Tennessee Agricultural Leadership Forum held on Oct. 25 at the Embassy Suites in Franklin.

Sponsored by Farm Credit Mid-America, CoBank, and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, this year's forum theme was "The Future of Agriculture is Today." The event attracted members from throughout

the ag community who came to take part in thought-provoking sessions, discuss the latest trends and topics, and enjoy networking opportunities.

As the keynote speaker, Dongoski brought an informed perspective to the event as he leads Ernst & Young's Global Agribusiness Sector, which advises agribusinesses on strategy and innovation and helps them develop effective business structures. He also works with Ernst & Young's Next Way Platform that analyzes megatrends influencing the future of multiple industries, including agriculture.

As these megatrends displace traditional behavior and attitudes, they will reshape agriculture and force it to adapt to new customer demands, Dongoski said, adding that people should expect this transition to occur "super fast."

The first megatrend he asked the group to consider is the move toward urbanization. The population of larger cities continues to increase.

"It's not just New York, Chicago, L.A.," said Dongoski. "It's the resurgence of places like Des Moines and Omaha. Clearly, in Nashville, we see that as well."

The second megatrend is "We live in a world where everything is connected." This, he said, will become more critical as technology continues to evolve and become even more widespread, and the lack of broadband access in rural areas will have to be addressed.

Today's leading businesses have one thing in common, he explained, and that's a focus on technology and innovation. The top companies — Apple, Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Facebook — all rely on technology and embrace change.

"These companies now have a very distinct focus on agriculture and food," Dongoski said. "[They] are all trying to chase this ecosystem around the agriculture and food world."

As the population continues to increase, those people will require more food. Some estimates suggest there may be 11 billion people in the world in the next few decades. Statistics also say it will take 70 percent more food raised on maybe only 10 percent more land. Maybe those projections are slightly high, he said.

"We're also in a world where 30 percent of food is wasted," he said. "Whether that is post-harvest or post-meal, it's a daunting number when you think about it."

Protein consumption is up and will continue to rise as living standards increase.

"Once you get a certain level of income in your pocket, you start to upgrade," he said. "For people on a rice and grain diet, they upgrade their food. We're seeing that, and there are challenges that come with it."

The percentage of income spent on food is decreasing. In the U.S., consumers spend roughly 8 percent of income on food. In some countries, many spend as much as 70 to 80 percent, he explained. Reducing that amount to only 50 percent could open up the potential for economic growth.

"Affordable ag and food in these countries becomes the greatest economic liberator," said Dongoski.

(See Ag Leadership, page 6)

# Ag Leadership

(continued from page 5)

Agriculture is attracting investors who have contributed \$17 billion in assets that are being used to bring innovations to market in agriculture and food technologies around the world. Those innovations can be broken down to four areas: science, mechanical/robotics, technology/data, and business models.

"In the science area, for example, a lot of pure biological development is occurring around seed innovation and animal genetics," he said. "We need to keep the engine running. Companies are coming up with interesting ways to apply treatments without chemicals. There are lots of biologics that can be applied."

Another exciting development called CRISPR, which stands for "clusters of regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats," is more simply explained as a technology that can be used to edit genes.

"It's probably the No. 1 thing to watch in this particular space of innovation," said Dongoski. "It has potential in plant, animal, and human health. If it gets told as GMO 2.0, we lose. It's that simple."

Moving on to the tech and mechanical data world, Dongoski said three areas are at the forefront: imagery, robotics, and sensors/wearables.

"Drones were the coolest thing ever 10 years ago," he said. "Now they're just devices. They're data collectors. Imagery is going to be really important as a data collection engine. Robotics — whether on a row crop farm or in a dairy — will continue to advance. Not just because it is cool or easier for labor but because there is a lack of labor."

From those relatively tame developments, it's only a short jump to augmented reality, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and advanced analytics, he said. It's exciting ideas like these that are drawing the incredible investment to the industry.

Finally, business models continue to evolve and transform traditional models. Consolidation, he said, is the big thing. His team was involved in high-profile mergers like the Bayer-Monsanto agreement and the Dow and DuPont consolidation, which created Corteva, among others.

"We're seeing consolidation across the value chain," he said. "Big food manufacturers are buying small companies."

Farms, too, are getting bigger. The average age of farmers continues to rise — it's now around 60 years old, and many are getting out of the business.

Ag retailers are another area where consolidation is occurring, he said, noting that these businesses typically do three things: distribute, divide buys, and provide in-field services.

"If the big cropping suppliers can go direct, [retailers] have to express value differently," he explained.

Dongoski left his strongest piece of advice for the ag leaders until the end: always know your customer. He emphasized that understanding the customer is key as agricultural leaders consider how to adapt to the change occurring in the production cycle.

"How do you leverage technology and innovations?" he asked. "Where do you invest? Investing right can make or break you. We all recognize you have to be smart."

"Be active. Talk to your neighbor, your farm credit, your Extension office, your universities, even a consultant. Do extra diligence before you invest. It is make or break. Long term, I am extremely bullish on the industry. I think there are a lot of things we have yet to tap into."

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# 'SEASON OF EXTREMES'

Despite a growing season 'bookended' with challenging weather conditions, Tennessee's 2019 harvest is expected to post impressive yields for corn and cotton



Story by: Sarah Geyer;  
photos by: Sarah Geyer, Glen Liford,  
Wesley Long, and Chris Villines

**G**reene County producer Mark Klepper describes 2019 as a “season of extremes” for Tennessee farmers with unrelenting rainfall and flooding during April planting and several weeks of hot temperatures and drought conditions leading into harvest.

Although worry over rain or the lack thereof served as “bookends” for this year’s growing season, weather conditions during the critical growth stages for the state’s corn and cotton crops were rated favorable to ideal.

According to the Nov. 8 crop production forecast report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the state’s corn harvest is expected to reach a second consecutive year of record-setting yield, averaging an anticipated 174 bushels per acre, an increase of 6 bushels over last year. Cotton yield numbers are also expected to increase over last year with a predicted average yield of 1,116 pounds per acre, 75 pounds more than 2018.

However, Tennessee’s soybean crop didn’t fare as well. The NASS Sept. 10 report showed the crop appeared to bounce back from delayed planting, and the NASS predicted increases in both soybean production and yield as compared to last year. Then came the hot, dry days of September and early October, and in its Oct. 12 forecast report, the NASS had decreased September’s production prediction by 12 percent. The Nov. 8 report continues to predict that late-season production loss, but the average yield, estimated at 47 bushels per acre, bests last year’s harvest by 1.5 bushels.

As harvest numbers begin to roll in, Co-op’s proprietary brand of seed, Croplan™ by Win-Field United, is once again being reported as a top performer for producers across the state, including the following farmers.

### The Kleppers — Greeneville

In spite of a challenging year weather wise, Mark Klepper is pleased with results he got from the Croplan corn varieties in 2019 on his Greene County farm. Mark, who along with his dad, Allen, raises about 700 acres of row crops — 540 acres of corn and 160 acres of soybeans. He also has a herd of 200 beef cows and eight chicken houses.

“It’s actually been a rough season,” says Mark. “We had too much water during planting, too much water probably all the way up to July. And now [in the midst of harvest in October], it’s been extremely dry. It’s been one extreme to the other. I would call it the season of extremes.”



Greene County grower Mark Klepper, right, and his father, Allen, had good results with Croplan corn varieties in 2019 in spite of a challenging season that included a wet start and a dry ending. The Kleppers work with Greene Farmers Cooperative Agronomy Salesman Jason Crawford for recommendations and products for their operation.

The wet weather was particularly troubling for the veteran farmer, since a good portion of his crop ground is in low-lying areas where water tends to pool when rain is heavy. One of the fields, he notes, is adjacent to a creek that has overflowed its banks and flooded the tract three or four times over the past several years.

“I planted it in the right conditions when it was dry, so I had a good stand,” he says. “It didn’t drown it out too badly.”

In spite of the obstacles, however, Mark is optimistic about yields and is expecting to be pleased with the results.

This is the second consecutive year he has relied on Croplan seed. More than half of his acreage this year was planted with Croplan varieties, including 5290, 5678, and 6926, due in large part to the success he enjoyed last year and the advice from Greene Farmers Cooperative Agronomy Salesman Jason Crawford.

Several years ago, Mark had a misstep with the Croplan brand when the variety he planted didn’t yield as highly as some of the other seed he planted.

Last year, Jason convinced him to give Croplan another try, offering to help him choose some varieties that might better suit his management style.

Mark planted Croplan 5290 on his last piece of land to see how it would work. The seed was barely in the ground when they received a drenching rain, and the field flooded. After the crop came up, he took the planter and reseeded only the areas that didn’t come up.

“Luckily, there wasn’t much I had to re-plant,” says Mark. “The Croplan still averaged 200 bushels an acre.”

So this year, Mark and Jason sat down together and looked at the possibilities. Jason

had done his homework and consulted with Croplan sales representative Caleb Robertson to help choose the best options.

“I’ve been pleased,” says Mark. “I like a pretty plant. And one thing about Croplan is it usually produces a tall stalk with a good ear on it. I like to see it look good, and, of course, I also want it to yield.”

### The Wards — Cornersville

On a scale of 1 to 10, Dwight Ward says he’d give the 2019 growing season an 8.

“If we had gotten some rain in September, I would’ve rated it even higher than that,” says Dwight, who with son Dwayne and grandson Ethan, raises close to 2,000 owned and leased acres of soybeans and corn on the family’s Richland Farm in Cornersville and on land in neighboring Giles County. “It just quit [raining] and was so hot that a friend of mine said, ‘Lord, I don’t know what you’re cooking but I think it’s done!’”

The Wards, members of both Lincoln and Marshall Farmers co-ops, diversified their crops, raising four different varieties of Croplan soybeans — 4487, 4500, 4825, and 5137 — and two different varieties of Croplan corn, 5678 and 5370. Their use of Croplan products dates back to 2013, when the family exited the dairy business they had operated since 1970 and switched to row cropping.

As of mid-October, they had harvested all the corn, the 4487 soybeans, and most of the acreage planted in Croplan 4500.

“What we harvested on the 4487 was in the 50-bushel range, and the 4500 is yielding similar to that,” reports Dwight.

(See Harvest, page 10)



Dwayne Ward, left, and father Dwight of Cornersville planted four different varieties of Croplan soybeans and reported yields in the 50-bushel range on the two varieties they had harvested as of press time. Their Croplan 5678 corn averaged 215 bushels per acre, while Croplan 5370 averaged 200.

## Harvest

(continued from page 9)

“We planted the 5370 corn on what we thought was poor ground but still averaged around 200 bushels per acre, which is pretty good. The 5678 averaged around 215 bushels [per acre].”

The Wards’ crop diversification strategy is a “smart move,” says Brett Jones, Tennessee Farmers Cooperative agronomist.

“I think it’s wise for them to diversify their crop so they can look at the different maturities and what varieties do better,” Brett says. “It’s very easy to fall into a trap of planting everything in one variety. If something adverse happens, though, your whole crop is going to fall on its face.”

Lincoln Farmers Cooperative Manager Mark Posey says that how the Wards manage and “feed” these crops helps them be successful, noting that a key is yearly soil sampling.

“When Dwight was dairying, he knew if he fed those cows they would make more milk,” explains Mark. “He treats his crops the same way. He ‘feeds’ them nutrients according to what the soil sample dictates, and the crops respond accordingly. Not everyone has that mindset.”

### The Hunts — Henderson

Bart Hunt, a third-generation Henderson row crop producer, farms more than 2,500 acres in Chester and Madison counties with the help of two people — Jack, his business

partner and father, and Luke, his 17-year-old son and Chester County High School student.

This year, the First Farmers Cooperative members planted 750 acres of corn, 300 acres of soybeans, and 1,500 acres of cotton. Despite the extreme weather conditions in early spring and late summer, Bart says his corn crop had ideal growing conditions and averaged a yield of more than 200 bushels per acre.

The family’s soybean crop, on the other hand, suffered from the late drought, says Bart, averaging about 45 bushels per acre.

“The beans were cut short by probably 10 to 15 bushels,” he says. “Considering all the heat and dry weather they went through, I guess that was pretty good.”

At press time (Nov. 4), the Hunts’ cotton harvest is nearing the halfway point. Bart says so far the crop looks “really good.”

This season is the first they’ve planted cotton since 2011. When he decided to reintroduce the crop last fall, the producer reached out to fellow farmers and friends for recommendations on the market’s new seed technologies.

“Bart was looking for exceptional yields across the board,” says Ryan Zawacki, an agronomist with First Farmers Co-op. “I knew that Croplan 9608 B3XF, a relatively new variety, would fit his needs for yield, his management practices, and his ground.”

The producer designated 220 acres on two of his better producing farms for the variety and also suggested First Farmers use a 24-acre section of this land for a First Acre test plot with the variety. The farmer planted those acres the last few days of April and first of May, and the weather turned cool and wet shortly after the seed was in the ground.

“The plants had a tough time coming out and looked really rough during the first month after emergence,” says Bart. “After that, we had just about ideal conditions. We got rain about every time we needed it and had plenty of heat units.”

Though the Hunts don’t have numbers for their entire cotton crop, Bart says the Croplan fields, which were the first harvested, averaged a yield of 1,805 pounds per acre, and the First Acre plot yielded an average of 1,974 per acre.

“The Croplan cotton impressed me,” says the producer. “I have to tell you, I was a little apprehensive about it, but the results speak for themselves. I’ll definitely plant it next year and probably double my acreage.”



Henderson’s Bart Hunt, left, and his father, Jack, raise cotton, corn, and soybeans on 2,500 acres in Chester and Madison counties. Bart’s son, Luke 17, also helps with the family’s farming operation. This year, the Hunts planted 220 cotton acres in Croplan 9608 B3XF, which averaged 1,805 pounds per acre.



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Todd Steen, TFC Nutritionist

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Everything starts with forage, both quantity and quality. It is important to test and evaluate forage to understand and estimate the amount of nutrients needed to meet the animal's requirement and, subsequently, estimate what feed is needed to make up any shortfall. When forage quality is low, overall forage intake will also be low. Factors such as type of forage (grass, legume, etc.) and maturity (as forages grow and mature, forage digestibility declines) affect the quality.

On most of our operations, energy and protein are needed in the largest quantity. Data related to maintaining cattle weight shows the positive results of increasing protein to aid the animal's ability to consume and digest more forage. However, most forages in our area provide diminishing responses to exclusive protein supplementation only. For the most part, only in times of extremely poor forage quality will protein-only supplements elicit gains. Generally, energy and protein will be necessary, especially with lactating cows.

The most cost-effective supplements may not be based on protein concentration. There are many different types of supplements available to producers based not only on nutrition but also on labor needs. Many free-choice, unlimited access products aid when it is difficult to feed animals daily. It is critical to evaluate labels of all products/commodities/ingredients in order to make the best purchasing decision. Look for recommended feeding rates. Some protein supplements may have both protein and energy but cattle may not be able to consume enough to matter. Where forage is limited, the percentage of the diet made up of the supplement will be higher,

so some self-regulating products that allow for only ½ lb. per day of intake may not provide enough nutrition.

It is necessary for all stages of production to plan for a desired level of

performance. Forage is the vital portion when choosing supplementation to meet the goals. Co-op feed representatives are specialists in evaluating the proper feeding strategies for all stages of production.



Regular forage testing is critical to cattle management. If forage quality is not at the desired level, supplementation is recommended to provide cattle with the proper amount of protein and energy.



Trevor Smith, TFC Agronomist

# Technology makes a good plan even better

**F**or farmers, winter is the planning season. Granted, it's not as exciting as planting or as glamorous as harvest, but planning is a crucial part of a successful farming operation. Farmers know better than anyone that planning in agriculture can prove very difficult.

Throughout a growing season, there are many unforeseen variables and obstacles farmers must overcome for success. This unknown may cause some farmers to simply skip planning altogether. They think, "If I know I'm going to have to change my plan anyway, then why even have one?"

I'm reminded of a Dwight Eisenhower quote: "In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable." Even farmers who frown on planning will enter a crop year with at least some forethought. They may begin by considering what hybrids or varieties they will plant and place an early seed order, or they may estimate a rough amount of acreage for each crop. They might look at what they bought last year to prepay for fertilizer. But is that really a plan?

What if we got more specific?

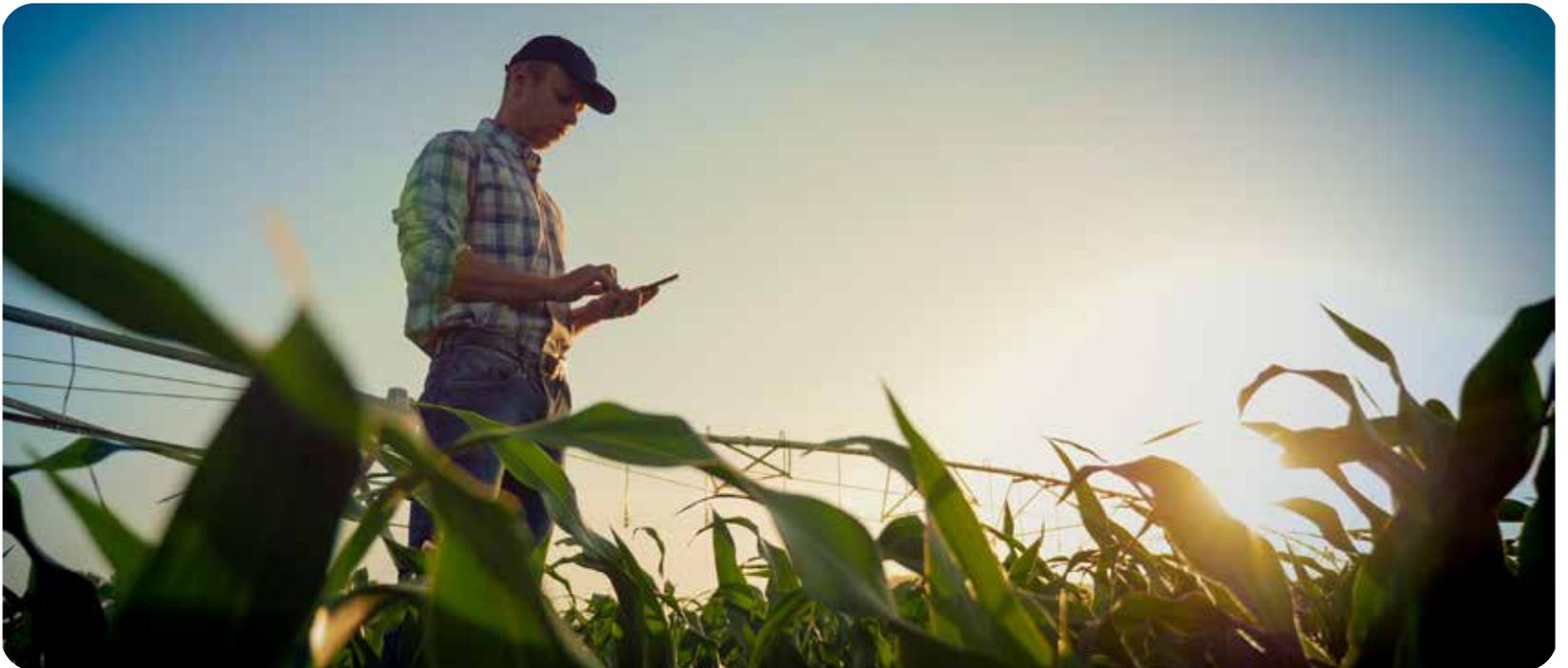
There's a new tool that can help us do just that. AgSolver is a new platform recently added to Incompass precision ag software. Using field boundaries, yield or satellite-imagery data, and a crop budget, growers can create an initial profit plan for any field in less than five minutes. From there, various individual components of the original plan can be adjusted to generate different expected outcomes.

One of the key parts of this process is the software's use of yield or satellite-imagery data from previous crops to break down the productivity of each field to a sub-acre. This can be eye-opening information! Every farmer knows that some parts of a field yield more than others, but there hasn't been a good way to quantify that in terms of actual net profit. With access to that information, we're able to make informed decisions on how to manage those individual areas. Maybe that means making investments to improve production or selecting acres that would be best left out of production all together.

Farmers currently using AgSolver are exploring other ways this data can help them

increase profitability within their operations. Some have used the data to evaluate the potential long-term financial advantage of adding drainage tile, sediment basins, irrigation, or other improvements to a particular field. Some have used data to determine a field's profitability to reach an agreement that is fair for all parties involved when negotiating new lease situations. An obvious use is comparing expected yield outcomes of different variable seeding and fertility rates. In all of these cases, the key takeaway is that the tool generates information needed to enhance a farmer's ability to make informed decisions. This technology is part of a growing trend toward managing for profit instead of managing for yield only.

Perhaps technology like AgSolver will eventually become a necessity for farmers. Twenty years ago, farming could be compared to playing a game of chess, but today it is more like playing 10 games of chess — all at the same time. I anticipate that as each operation evolves and grows, technology will continue to play an important role in helping farmers keep track of all those moving pieces.



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# TPPA Annual Meeting set for Jan. 6

All Tennessee pork producers who pay into the Pork Checkoff are stakeholders in the TN Pork Producers Association (TPPA) and are encouraged to attend the TPPA Annual Meeting on Monday, Jan. 6, 2020, in Murfreesboro.

Activities begin with a Pork Quality Assurance (PQA) training from 10 a.m. to noon at Middle Tennessee State University's Stark Ag Building. Dr. Stephen Herring with the National Pork Board will lead this training. There is no cost to attend.

The TPPA annual meeting and other afternoon events will take place at the Embassy Suites, located at 1200 Conference Center Boulevard in Murfreesboro. The Farm Animal Care Coalition of TN (FACCT) will meet from 2:45 to 3:45 p.m., during which time new FACCT Executive Director Julie Giles will give an update on the organization's activities. From 4:00 to 4:45 p.m., Dr. Samantha Beaty, recently named State Veterinarian, will provide an update on livestock neglect/abuse situations in Tennessee. The day wraps up with the Taste of Elegance Chefs' Competition and Bid for Pork Auction.

The TPPA meeting allows a time to discuss programs for the coming year and elect committee members and officers for the TPPA Executive Committee. Pork producers interested in serving as a candidate for the Executive Committee should contact the TPPA office at 615-274-6533 or email [porkpromotn@tds.net](mailto:porkpromotn@tds.net).

As part of the annual TPPA activities, the State Junior Hog Show will take place Jan. 7-9, 2020, at MTSU's Tennessee Livestock Center. In 2019, the show attracted 358 exhibitors showing over 750 hogs.



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## MY TESTIMONIAL

CO-OP



# PINNACLE

HORSE FEEDS

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#SHOPCOOP

*Abigayle*

### Dear Pinnacle Feeds,

To begin with, thank you. Thank you for having such a quality horse feed that is local, yet affordable while being comparable to much larger brands. I began my journey exploring Pinnacle Feeds a little over a year ago when your company had sponsored the International Barrel Racing Association State Finals. At the time, I was feeding products from one of the largest companies in the nation, of which I will not name. I had grown frustrated with their results, or lack thereof. I switched different types and still wasn't satisfied, even adding different costly supplements to an already expensive feed.

Some background on myself — I am a registered nurse currently seeking my master's degree, I have a degree in horse science with a strong background in equine nutrition and physiology, and have owned horses for 20 years. While I have shown many disciplines, I have always ridden, and currently ride barrel horses. Needless to say, I have a thorough understanding of what it takes to maintain a strong feeding program.

After seeing the Pinnacle Feeds posters at State Finals in 2018, it suddenly hit me to investigate what options you all offer. I was happy to find several options, all of which could meet anyone's needs for their own horses. Even better were the mineral, energy plus supplements, and the ration balancer, all of which seem designed to meet the needs of horses in the Tennessee region. Before switching feeds, I took the time to comb over and compare every ingredient on the feed labels. I was impressed at how much more simplistic, yet nutrient dense the Pinnacle Feeds were in comparison to the big name feed I was feeding my horses.

This is the part where I regret having not taken before and after pictures. I had decided to take my horses off of all supplements but even so, a couple of months after switching to Pinnacle Feeds, I was completely impressed. Both of my horses, one a 7-year-old, and the other 17, had developed a nice bloom and shine to their coats. Their toplines even saw a huge improvement, and just by changing feeds. Performance-wise, they are much quieter and focused, with plenty of energy to spare. They were even able to maintain their body condition and appearance throughout the winter months. Additionally, I am never short of compliments on how nice both of my horses look.

In closing, I want to reiterate my appreciation on your hard work in developing a variety of feeds that adequately meet the diverse nutritional needs of horses in our region. It is a relief that I can just run to the local Co-op down the road and find the best feed for what I may need at the time, all while saving a few dollars per bag.

Thank you,  
Abigayle Hanna

SEE YOUR LOCAL CO-OP



IT'S OUR NATURE TO NURTURE



Purchasing Co-op Cattle Mineral paid off in a big way for Eric West, seated, as his name was drawn as the grand prize winner of a John Deere XUV560E in Co-op's Golden Ticket Contest. Eric is joined in front of his family's Smith County farmhouse by his wife, Melanie (holding their daughter, Elena, 2), son Everett, and father, Richard.

# Grand surprise

## Smith County's Eric West 'tickled to death' after winning John Deere Gator in Co-op Golden Ticket Contest

Story and photos by: Chris Villines

Unfortunately, nowadays there are a plethora of scammers ringing up folks' cellphones and offering deals about as genuine as a \$3 bill.

When an unfamiliar number appeared on Eric West's caller ID, it's understandable that he ignored the call.

"If I don't know the number, I typically won't answer," says Eric, who lives and farms in the McClure's Bend community near Defeated Creek in Smith County. "But then the same number called me back again a short time later. I thought, 'This is someone who's really trying to get ahold of me.'"

So he answered. Good move.

On the other end of the line was Gary Williams, Tennessee Farmers Cooperative feed specialist, informing Eric he was the grand prize winner of a John Deere XUV560E Gator in Co-op's "Golden Ticket" Cattle Mineral Contest. Eric was one of hundreds automatically qualified for the grand prize through his purchase of Co-op Cattle Mineral during the contest period, which ran Aug. 1, 2018, through July 31, 2019.

"I was in disbelief, I guess," admits Eric, a beef cattleman who buys Co-op Supreme Cattle Mineral-ALTOSID (#96622) at Smith Farmers Cooperative in Carthage. "I never win anything!"

After confirmation that it was, indeed, real, Eric's next call was to his wife, Melanie, a nurse at Riverview Regional Medical Center in Carthage. She, too, was initially skeptical.

"I said, 'Are you sure this isn't a scam?'" she says with a laugh.

The couple's 6-year-old son, Everett — they also have a 2-year-old daughter, Elena — was told a surprise would be coming to the farm but not informed of what it would be.

"I knew about the time it was going to be delivered, so I picked Everett up a little early from school so he would be here when it came," says Eric, who lives with his family in a 19th century farmhouse built by his great-great-grandfather's brother. "When we

got home, I told him to be on the lookout for something coming down the road. All of a sudden, I heard him shout, 'There's a Gator! There's a Gator!' He was beyond excited."

The thrill for Eric and his father, Richard, who also lives and farms close by, is having a new utility vehicle to replace the 1963 Willis Jeep they had been using to traverse their hay and pasture land and check on their combined 110 Angus-based mama cows in their cow/calf operations.

"Having the Gator is definitely going to come in handy and make things a lot easier and more convenient for us," Eric says. "I love the versatility and maneuverability of it. It's got a sharp turning radius, so I'm not having to back up and pull up like I did with the old Jeep.

"Dad has his cattle and hay and I have mine, but we help each other out. We raise the calves and sometimes sell them straight off their mamas. I prefer to precondition them and wean them when possible."

And he adds that the use of Co-op Cattle Mineral is instrumental to the animals' performance:

"The Co-op mineral seems to make the cows come back in heat quicker, stay bred, and helps them shed their placenta and afterbirth quicker."

He'll no doubt be putting the Gator to good use taking bags of mineral to the feeders and performing other chores around the farm, with Everett often riding shotgun after school.

"I'm forever grateful to Co-op because I don't know that I would have ever bought



Eric, third from left, details the surprising call he received from Tennessee Farmers Cooperative Feed Specialist Gary Williams, far right, informing him that he'd won the Gator. With them are Smith Farmers Cooperative Salesman Bob Gregory, left, and Richard.

[a Gator] on my own. I've found all kinds of uses for it!"

Since he received the XUV560E in mid-September, Eric reports he's logged more than 80 hours on the vehicle and has added two accessories: a windshield and soft top.

"I'm tickled to death with it," he says.



Eric says he's now able to more easily navigate his rolling farmland in the McClure's Bend community to make daily checks on his Angus-based cow/calf operation.

**THE MAKIN' GREAT GAINS GIVEAWAY EVENT**



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With the completion of the Golden Ticket Contest comes a new Co-op Cattle Minerals promotion, "The Makin' Great Gains Giveaway Event."

Here's how you could be a winner:

1. From now through Aug. 31, 2020, purchase bagged authentic Co-op Cattle Mineral.
2. Open the bag and look for a silver ticket (150 silver tickets have been placed in random bags).
3. If you find a silver ticket, take it to your local Co-op and redeem it for your prize. Prizes range from Co-op bagged and bulk cattle feed to Co-op mineral products.

Visit your participating Co-op for more details.

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# UT AgResearch Center holding open house for Bull Test

The Middle Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center in Spring Hill will host the annual University of Tennessee Bull Test Station Open House on Thursday, Dec. 5. The event offers visitors a chance to view 105 bulls that will be featured in this winter's Bull Test Sale. There is no cost to attend, and lunch will be provided.

The open house begins at 9:30 a.m. CST with an educational program covering the latest technologies in beef cattle genomics and an overview of research conducted at the Bull Test Station. The sessions will also include discussions on bull selection and how to choose a bull that will best fit your operation.

After the last session, visitors can view the bulls that hail from some of the Mid-South's top Angus, Hereford, Simmental, and SimAngus breeding programs. By Dec. 5, these bulls will have just completed the 84-day performance test, which measures weight gain, frame score, and reproductive

soundness. Bulls can be purchased during a public auction on Friday, Jan. 10, 2020. Bids will be accepted, both online and at the Middle Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center.

The open house will conclude with an industry-sponsored lunch. For more information,

including directions to the site, visit <http://middle.tennessee.edu> or call 931-486-2129.

The UT Bull Test Program is a cooperative effort between UT Extension, UT AgResearch, the UT College of Veterinary Medicine, and the Tennessee Beef Cattle Improvement Association.



Some of the Mid-South's top breeding programs will have bulls on display on Dec. 5 at the annual University of Tennessee Bull Test Station Open House in Spring Hill.

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Co-op's varied product mix creates a shopper's paradise where the perfect gifts await, and several of those gifts are made right here in the U.S.A. Factor in the personal, attentive service and hometown convenience the Co-op offers, and it all works together to be the perfect recipe for holiday shopping.

Here are some quality products available at the Co-op that are sure to fill the 12 days of Christmas with joy.



## **Boss Buck 200-lb. All-In Gravity Feeder**

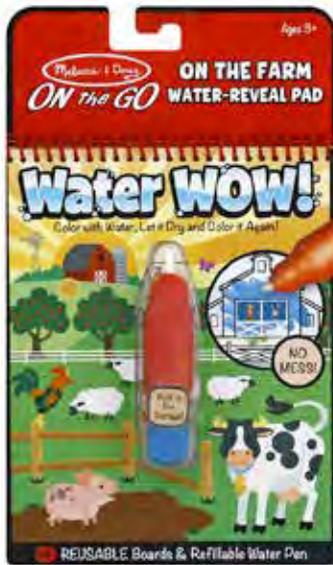
The Boss Buck Gravity 200-lb. All-In Gravity Feeder (#2183036) is built around a maintenance-free, tough, and lightweight roto-molded plastic hopper. This gravity-fed design holds up to 200 lbs. of corn or supplement. Thanks to its versatile, 2-in-1, galvanized steel leg system, this easy-to-use feeder converts from a gravity-fed setup to a battery-powered automatic feeder (automatic feeder not included). Features three custom-designed feed ports. Unit also features an internal cone for even food dispersement and a three-way inner sleeve to control the feed flow. Double-walled hatch lid allows the hopper system to breathe, thus eliminating condensation while achieving ambient temperature faster than steel or fiberglass feeders. All-galvanized hardware.



## **Police Security Trac-Tact Flashlight**

The Police Security Flashlight (#1901465) features a high-quality Cree LED chip that delivers a bright light at 280 lumens and up to 5 hours run time. The Trac-Tact's red LED light for night vision and a violet LED for blood tracking makes it perfect for the outdoors. This weather-resistant, architectural-grade aluminum flashlight has an industrial grade belt clip and Soft Switch technology, allowing seamless transition between the five modes. Includes 2 AA police security alkaline batteries.





## Melissa & Doug On The Farm Water WOW! Reveal Pad

Melissa & Doug On The Farm Water WOW! Reveal Pad (#1949207) offers a no-mess painting option for kids! This exciting paint-with-water coloring book includes four reusable pages and a refillable water pen. Simply use the pen to color in each scene – details and vibrant color appear with every stroke! Then let the page dry to erase the pictures and color it in again and again. This farm-themed book includes four scenes to color and a search-and-find activity for each scene. The chunky-sized water pen is easy for kids to hold and stores neatly in the front cover, making Water WOW! an ideal travel activity book and travel toy for kids!



## La Crosse Technology Wireless Thermometer

The Wireless Thermometer from La Crosse Technology (#6834191) is an excellent addition to any living room, kitchen, or study. It sets up quickly and features a large display that's easy to read on your way out the door. Add additional sensors for more temperature readings and enjoy a 12/24-hour clock. With this handy thermometer, you'll always know the temperature.



## Perky-Pet Squirrel-Be-Gone II Country-Style Bird Feeder

Perky-Pet Squirrel-Be-Gone II Country-Style Bird Feeder (#189705) turns your yard into a bird lovers' paradise. Attract everything from cardinals, finches, flickers, and grackles to grosbeaks, jays, juncos, and kinglets – even sparrows, wrens, and woodpeckers. Best of all, this wild bird feeder provides an optimal feeding station for birds – without catering to those sneaky squirrels.



## Lumax HD Quick Release Grease Coupler 1/8" NPT

Lumax HD Quick Release Grease Coupler 1/8" NPT (#2224508) provides a quick and simple connection. With the proprietary locking and quick-release mechanism, the coupler locks on and creates a leak-proof seal. The innovative design enables the quick-release coupler to firmly latch onto the grease fitting, allowing for hands-free greasing. No more fighting and struggling with stuck-on couplers. If a fitting becomes pressurized, just depress the thumb lever and release the coupler. No more broken-off fittings. No spurts or splashes when disconnecting. The waste and the mess are gone, creating a clean work environment at all times!





## Lodge ProLogic Pizza Pan

Lodge ProLogic Pizza Pan (#779437) is a seasoned 14-in. cast iron baking/pizza pan with loop handles. This all-around cooking tool is right at home in the oven, on the stove, on the grill, or over a campfire. The large cooking surface and generous handles make it perfect for homemade pizza, baked goodies, or roasted vegetables.



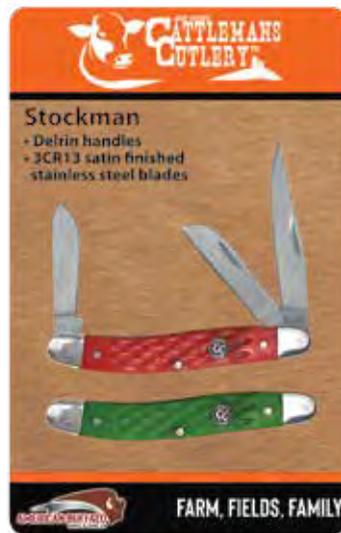
## Melissa & Doug Farm Tractor Wooden Vehicle Play Set

It's time to harvest some fun with Melissa & Doug Farm Tractor Wooden Vehicle Play Set (#1351218). This action-packed play set has animals to tend, hay to pile, and a tractor to keep it all moving. With a wooden tractor, trailer, and six play pieces, this durable wooden set offers kids lots of ways to play. Sit the farmer in the tractor seat to pull the loaded trailer, or rearrange the pieces so the trailer rail is a barnyard fence and the bales are in the scoop!



## Stealthcam 12 Megapixel Game Camera Pack

The Stealthcam 12 Megapixel Game Camera Pack (#2132493) will take up to 12MP per triggering and can also record up to 15 seconds of video to get a great idea of what is in your target area. Each image will display the time, date, and moon phase to give you an idea of the conditions for each image. Burst mode is featured to let you capture up to three images at preset intervals to get the perfect angle on your target. Includes 8 AA batteries and an 8 GB SD memory card.



## Stockman 3.5" Cattleman's Cutlery Combo Knife

Stockman 3.5" Cattleman's Cutlery Combo Knife (#6833426) was designed to be the right utensil for all your cutting requirements. Developed by using highly resilient materials, these knives from the expert knifemsmiths at American Buffalo Knife will maintain an edge for extended periods of time before needing to be honed. The handle on the American Buffalo Knife Cattleman's Cutlery Green/Red Trapper 2-pack promo can provide the ultimate grip in practically any condition.





### Kat's 12V Interior Heater

Kat's 12V Interior Heater (#6833232) provides extra heat in your car, truck, boat, or RV. Plugs easily into a 12-volt accessory outlet. Produces 300 watts of heat energy with dimensions of 7" wide x 7" tall x 3-1/2" thick. Visit your local Co-op to see the complete line of Kat's heaters.



### Heavy Duty 2-Ga. Booster Cables

Heavy Duty 2-Ga. 20-ft. Booster Cables (#168305) are manufactured to be used in and survive extreme climates. These booster cables are made from highly flexible bonded cable and will maintain that flexibility when used in the most challenging climates and situations. These heavy-duty 2-gauge booster cables are rated up to 500 amps. Each of the heavy-duty jumper cables is equipped with heavy-duty cable clamps that are color-coded for easy identification. These cable clamps work with any top or side post battery.

With these and many other options, a Christmas shopping stop at the Co-op is about as stress-free as it gets.



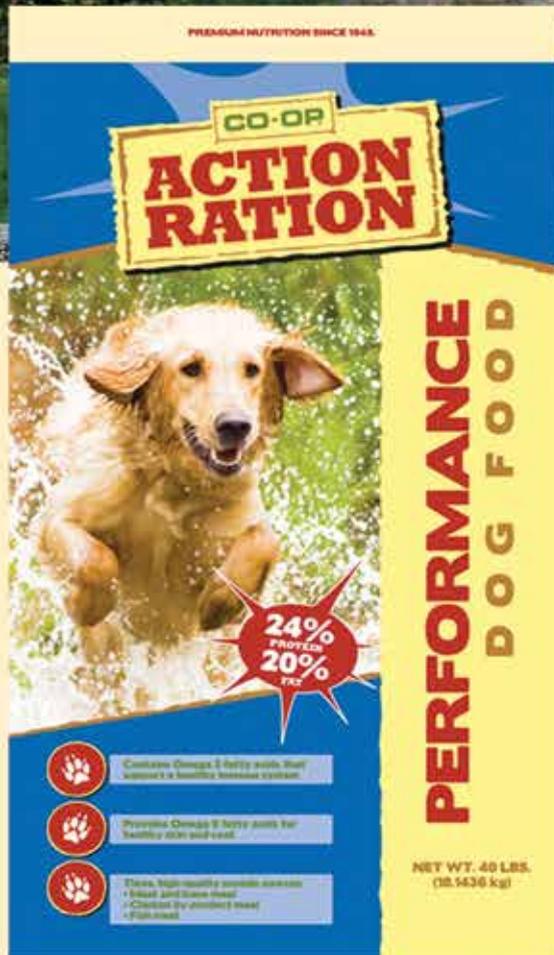
*Happy holidays!*



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# Double trouble

## Wisecarver twins served in U.S. Army together

*In the last issue of **The Cooperator**, we introduced “Stories of Service,” reader-submitted profiles of veterans who bravely served our country. We’re pleased to feature two more stories in this issue as a continuation of the series.*

**M**y daddy, Coy Wisecarver, was drafted into the Army on Jan. 6, 1954. His twin brother Roy volunteered for the service so they could serve together. This left their mother and elderly grandfather to take care of the family farm alone. They did basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C., and then stationed at Fort Lewis, Wash. When the brothers would come in to ask for their mail, the unit’s postman would fret about who was who. It got to be pretty discouraging when he would guess wrong almost every time. Unable to beat them, when one of the identical soldiers came to get his mail, the mail clerk simply handed him the mail for both brothers. The mail clerk wasn’t the only soldier confused by the carbon copy infantrymen. Both of the Wisecarvers were squad leaders in the 75-mm. Recoilless Platoon of the 44th Infantry.

Coy and Roy had an unusual and memorable experience during their time of service when they were in a scene of the Audie Murphy movie, “To Hell and Back.” Murphy was one of the most decorated soldiers in World War II who went on to become a famous actor. The filming of the movie was in the desert area of Yakima, Wash., but some scenes were filmed at Fort Lewis. The filmmakers utilized the troops there as extras. Taking part in the movie meant extra work for the soldiers. For one scene, the screenplay called for it to be muddy around a little white house, and the troops had to haul water for two weeks to create the desired conditions.

During the scene that the twin brothers took part in, hundreds of troops marched



**Pfc William Coy, left, and James Roy Wisecarver, identical twins from Whitesburg, were double trouble for the company’s mail clerk, Pfc Hugh O. Miller of Fullerton, Calif. As the picture shows, Miller had a tendency to get confused in the matter of who is who between the two. — Photo submitted by Vicky Wisecarver.**

across the parade deck while Murphy was being presented the Congressional Medal of Honor.

“We were in that one scene, and it took us two days to get it right,” Coy said.

“It didn’t take that long, but it felt like it,” said Roy.

There were so many troops in the scene that the brothers were never really able to see themselves in the movie.

“We were wearing steel pots and we could see where we were, but there were so

many companies going by so fast on the screen it was hard to tell,” said Coy.

Roy and Coy Wisecarver were honorably discharged from the Army on Jan. 6, 1956, after obtaining the rank of Corporal. They returned to the family farm and raised dairy cattle, hogs, and tobacco for many years. They raised hay and cattle for the next 60 years. Coy still lives on the farm, but Roy passed away a few years ago.

— Submitted by Vicki Brady, Whitesburg

THE COOPERATOR SHARES  
STORIES OF SERVICE



# Eye opener

## Military duty fosters greater appreciation

If you would have told me in high school that I was going to be in the military, I probably would have laughed at you. It wasn't a real consideration for me. I grew up in West Palm Beach, Fla., and after high school enrolled at the University of Florida. While I was there, a peer of mine was involved in the school's ROTC program. He said, "Why don't you come take this class as an elective?"

I took a couple of ROTC classes, and I fell in love with it. I felt like this is what I was called to do or be. It fit my disposition. After I completed my bachelor's degree in 2004, I went into active duty with the U.S. Army as an Infantry Officer. I started at Fort Benning, Ga., where I attended the Infantry Officer Basic Course, or IOBC. After IOBC, I attended Ranger School. I was assigned my first duty station at Fort Bragg, N.C., with the 82nd Airborne Division, specifically First Brigade, Second Battalion. I was an Airborne Infantry Platoon Leader and was deployed to Afghanistan until early 2006.

After returning from Afghanistan, I came down with orders for the Old Guard, 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, at Fort Myer, Va., next to Arlington National Cemetery. I was a Casket Platoon Leader, and for the next year-and-a-half helped conduct funerals in the cemetery. During that time, I was also asked to lead the U.S. Army Drill Team, which is a showcase unit. We traveled around to a lot of high-visibility events, such as NASCAR races.

During that time, I submitted my packet for the Special Forces qualification course at Fort Bragg. I was ultimately selected to become a Green Beret. When my time at Fort Myer was done, I moved back to Fort Bragg to start training courses there. I was a Detachment Commander, eventually finding my way to Operational Detachment 3231. I did two more combat tours to Afghanistan with that unit before finishing out my time in the military in 2013.

The single most important thing being in the military taught me is to appreciate what I have as an American. When you are plunged into a third world-type environment, as I was in Afghanistan, you see that not everything is as we see it through

the windshield of our cars and the comforts of our home. It opened my eyes about being open-minded about things, cultures, and people. I feel like I am a much better person because of my time in the military. I wouldn't undo any of it.

When I first separated from the service, I wasn't like "I'm going into farming. That's what I'm doing." My family made the decision to be close to grandparents so we relocated to Claiborne County. Around the same time, I had a growing interest in agriculture. I started picking up literature about it and talking to people who were already farming. Like taking

the ROTC classes in college, I realized I really enjoyed it. It's challenging. It serves a purpose. And you get to pilot your own ship, so to speak.

We started with four cows in 2014 and have grown the herd from there. We grew the herd first before we could get to production. We can only run about 30 head based off of the pasture we have. Beef is our primary endeavor right now, but we dabble in other things like chicken and honeybees. And we get to participate in this as a family, which is important to me.

— Submitted by Chad Shields, Tazewell



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## Youth In Focus



On Oct. 12, more than 150 youth gathered at the University of Tennessee for Youth Ag Day, sponsored by Tennessee Farmers Cooperative, Tennessee Farm Bureau, and Farm Bureau Insurance of Tennessee. The event began at Lindsey Nelson Stadium — home of the Vols baseball team — with fun activities such as cornhole. Here, Ashlen Bryant, a student at Jo Byrns High School in Robertson County, tosses a beanbag as her sister, Grayson, looks on. Attendees also heard from an ag careers industry panel before watching the UT football team take on Mississippi State. — **Photo by Chris Villines**

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*Peppermint*  
*for the* HOLIDAYS

Peppermint is a delightful treat that can be used as garnish or ingredient in many a wintertime dish. Peppermint teas have been known to reduce headaches, while candy or a leaf can be munched to freshen breath and clear the sinuses. In addition, this powerful herbal medicine can fight bacterial infections! Test out these scrumptious peppermint choices as the holidays roll around.



## Peppermint Ice Cream

**Betty Farrar**

Rutledge

Grainger Farmers Cooperative

- 1 cup milk
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 2 cups whipping cream
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon peppermint extract
- 2/3 cup candy canes, crushed

Whisk together milk and sugar until sugar is dissolved. Add cream and extracts. Pour into ice cream maker. Churn according to manufacturer's instructions until thick and creamy.

Add candy canes; churn an additional 5 minutes. Makes 1 1/2 quarts.

## Candy Cane Fudge

**Nancy Darnell**

Coldwater, Miss.

DeSoto County Cooperative

- 3 1/3 cups vanilla baking chips
- 1 (14 ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
- 2 teaspoons peppermint extract
- 1 1/2 cups crushed candy canes (about 50 mini candy canes)
- 4 drops red or green liquid food coloring (optional)

Line bottom and sides of an 8-inch square baking pan with nonstick foil.

Melt vanilla chips with condensed milk in a heavy saucepan

over medium low heat, stirring constantly, for about 4 minutes or until just melted. Remove pan from heat. Working quickly, stir in peppermint extract and 1 1/4 cups candy canes.

Quickly spread fudge in prepared pan. If using food coloring, make a depression in each quadrant of fudge; add a drop to each. Quickly swirl the food coloring into the fudge with knife.

Smooth the surface with a rubber spatula. Sprinkle remaining 1/4 cup candy canes over top and press into fudge.

Chill, uncovered, until firm, about one hour. Lift fudge using foil, peel, and cut into 1-inch squares.

*\*Note: Mini candy canes are easier to crush and provide more color than regular-sized ones. Remember to swirl if you want a more candy cane-like look.*

*Fudge keeps for one week, chilled and covered. For best flavor, serve at room temperature.*

## Peppermint Patties

**Wanda Powers**

Lexington

First Farmers Cooperative

- 1 (8 ounce) package cream cheese
- 9 cups powdered sugar
- 2 teaspoons peppermint extract

**Chocolate CandiQuik**

Mix cream cheese (room temperature), sugar, and extract together. Roll into a ball, then

flatten to about the size of a quarter. Chill, then dip in melted CandiQuik and cool on wax paper.

## Chocolate Chip Mint Cookies

**Mary Harvey**

Nashville

Davidson Farmers Cooperative

- 1 1/4 cups flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 stick butter, softened
- 6 tablespoons sugar
- 6 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 3/4 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/4 teaspoon peppermint extract
- 11 Thin Mint cookies, broken into pieces
- 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 350°.

Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. In large bowl, whisk together flour, baking soda, and salt; set aside. In bowl of stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, cream butter and sugars until combined. Reduce speed to low and add egg, vanilla, and peppermint extract; mix until combined. Add flour mixture; mix until just combined. Stir in chocolate chips and Thin Mint cookies until just combined.

Drop by rounded tablespoons of dough onto parchment-lined baking sheets spac-

ing 1 1/2 inches between each. Bake cookies until edges have just begun to set but centers are still very soft, 8-10 minutes.

Let cool on baking sheet for 3 minutes before transferring to cooling rack. Yields: 2 dozen cookies.

## Peppermint Delight

**Peggie McColloch**

Morrison

Coffee Farmers Cooperative

- 1 pint whipping cream, sweetened
- 1 cup miniature marshmallows
- 1 cup peppermint candies, crushed (about 1/2 pound)
- 1 cup walnuts, chopped
- 1/2 pound vanilla wafers, crushed

Whip cream; fold in crushed candy, marshmallows, and nuts. Spread half the cookie crumbs on the bottom of an 8x8-inch pan. Add whipped cream mixture. Sprinkle the remaining cookie crumbs on top. Let set overnight in the refrigerator. Cut in squares.



## Bless Your Heart

Love is in the air this time of year, but who says heart healthy meals can't be enjoyed year-round? Delicious recipes packed with ingredients to make your heart happy (literally) are high in fiber, as well as low in saturated fats and sodium. Berries, nuts, and lean protein such as fish support cardiovascular health and provide tastes that are sure to please in time for the Valentine's season.

Share with **Cooperator** readers your heart-healthy recipes. The person submitting the recipe judged best will be named "Cook of

the Month" for the February 2020 **Cooperator** and receive \$10. Others sending recipes chosen for publication will receive \$5, and each winner will also receive a special "What's Cookin'?" certificate.

**Monday, Dec. 30 is the deadline for your heart-healthy recipes.**

Only recipes with complete, easy-to-follow instructions will be considered. Send entries to: Recipes, **The Cooperator**, P.O. Box 3003, LaVergne, TN 37086, or email them to [pcampbell@ourcoop.com](mailto:pcampbell@ourcoop.com). Include your name, address, telephone number, and the Co-op with which you do business. Recipes that are selected will also be published on our website at [www.ourcoop.com](http://www.ourcoop.com).

## Our Country Churches



289th in a series to show where our rural Co-op friends worship

### Romeo United Methodist Church in Greene County

Romeo United Methodist Church is located at 11095 Lonesome Pine Trail in Bulls Gap. Rev. Dixie J. Miller leads a congregation whose mission is "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." Join them each week for Sunday school at 10 a.m., worship at 11 a.m., and Bible study at 6:30 p.m.

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# Enjoy Candlelight Christmas at Museum of Appalachia

The Museum of Appalachia in Clinton will hold its Candlelight Christmas Dec. 7-8. The celebration recreates a “meaningful holiday of simpler times,” say museum officials. Traditional trees and hand-made decorations, typical of austere pioneer days, transform the museum’s authentic log buildings.

Visitors to the event will be able to wander through the village and marvel at the treasures of a simple pioneer settlement. In the one-room, dirt-floored “Dan’l Boone” cabin, strings of popcorn and cotton bolls circle a dormant tree, while paper chains and other ornaments trim the tree in the Little Tater Valley Schoolhouse.

Sweet gum and sycamore balls are strung throughout the Mark Twain Family Cabin, and a traditional silver star tops a native red cedar Christmas tree in the turn-of-the-century Peters Homestead House. Apples, nuts, homemade toys, and oranges fill stockings hung in the cabins.

The Museum Gift and Antique Shop, which features everything from hand-crafted ornaments, locally made muscadine and moonshine jellies, and beautiful pottery, along with baskets, quilts, and plenty of Appalachian specialties, will be open for shoppers looking for stocking stuffers.

The museum’s onsite restaurant will be open for hungry travelers who want to enjoy a homemade Southern country lunch in front of the warm fireplace.

Sitting on 65 picturesque acres, the Museum of Appalachia is a living history museum — a pioneer mountain farm-village that lends voice to the people of Southern Appalachia through the artifacts and stories they left behind. Founded in 1969 by John Rice Irwin, the museum is now a non-profit organization and a Smithsonian Affiliate museum. The recreated Appalachian community features 35 log cabins, barns, farm animals, churches, schools, and gardens. It contains more than 250,000 artifacts in



three buildings, with vast collections of folk art, musical instruments, baskets, quilts, Native American artifacts, and more.

Regular admission rates apply for the Candlelight Christmas event.

The Museum of Appalachia is located at 2819 Andersonville Highway in Clinton. It offers self-guided tours and is open seven days a week. For more information, please visit [www.museumofappalachia.org](http://www.museumofappalachia.org), contact the museum at 865-494-7680, or email [museum@museumofappalachia.org](mailto:museum@museumofappalachia.org).

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# Since 1938

**Newbern farmer Eric Maupin is passionate about the business that has sustained his family for four generations**

Story and photos by: Sarah Geyer

**E**ric Maupin's story as the fourth generation to farm contiguous Dyer County land began in 1938, following the previous year's devastating flood.

"My great-grandparents were part of the share croppers who farmed the bottoms close to the Mississippi River in 1937," says Eric. "Back then, people couldn't go to the bank and borrow money without collateral. The federal government offered a program to allow people who were displaced from the flood to apply for government-backed loans to buy land."

Dewey Maupin and his family purchased farmland on higher ground in Newbern. His son, Joe Calvin, continued to build the family farming business until 1968 when grandson, Larry, took on the responsibility of running the Maupin Farms operation.

The 1970s were happy times for Larry and his wife, Joan. During that era, the couple was blessed with two sons, Stefan and Eric, and farming provided a comfortable living for the family. The next decade turned those carefree days into distant memories.

"The '80s were tough for everyone," says Eric, citing the drop of commodity prices below the cost of production and two droughts. "I remember that time vividly. Stefan and I went from everything on the place being brand

new – trucks, tractors, combine – to a period where we thought our dad was going to sell us! I can joke about it now, but those experiences were really tough. I commend farmers like my father who did whatever it took to stay in business."

Larry and Joan didn't have the opportunity to go to college, but they were determined to provide it for their sons.

"Both of us knew that we were expected to go to college, get an education, and work off the farm before we could think about coming back," said Eric. "I may be putting words in my parents' mouths, but I think they had to make farming work in the '80s because they didn't think they had a back-up plan. That's why they wanted us to have that option."

Stefan accepted a position with the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation after college. A few years later, Eric graduated from the University of Tennessee Martin and joined the Tennessee Department of Agriculture as the International Marketing Coordinator.

Three years later, in 2000, Larry shared with his sons that he had decided to semi-retire and give up his rental land. The choice was obvious, says Eric, who was a 25-year-old bachelor, while Stefan had an established career and a family.

"I figured if I was ever going to give farming a try, now was the time," says Eric. "I also

knew that if I didn't go back and give it a try, the family farm could cease to exist, and I'd regret it for the rest of my life."

Not long after Eric returned to the farm, Larry accepted a job as manager of a local agribusiness.

"He told me, 'I've farmed my whole life. Now that you're here, I want to do something different,'" says Eric. "He did that for 10 years, but I sure am happy that he's retired from there and back here helping me."

Today, Eric and his wife, Joann, have three daughters: Cara, 10, Chloe, 7, and Camille, 19 months. The farm has grown from 1,200 acres to more than 3,000. On most of the land, Eric raises corn, soybeans, and wheat, but he also has 60 mama cows, a number that at one time reached 150.

"Most people are surprised that I'm raising cattle in West Tennessee," he says. "I like cattle, but I don't raise them for sentimental reasons. Some of our land is just better suited for livestock. That's why we do it."

From day one, Eric has been vigilant in managing his farming business.

"I pay myself a salary, and I do that on purpose to keep my business separate from my home," says the Gibson Farmers Cooperative member. "As a farmer, I have to always know what my consumers want, what the market is doing, and be ready to change accordingly. I can't get comfortable or set in my ways if I'm going to keep this farm running into the next generation."

Eric is passionate about sharing the role farmers play in the local business community, and he proudly serves on the Dyer County Chamber of Commerce.

"Our chamber is one of the few in the state of Tennessee that sees agriculture as a viable business," says Eric. "Most chambers will do a big celebration of a small business in their county that has been in business for 30 to 40 years. My family has been in business on the same piece of land since 1938, and I'm betting that we, like the majority of family farms across the state, employ more people and pay more taxes than most little downtown shops.

"It's time we farmers get out of our offices in the offseason and scream from the mountaintops that we deserve to be seen as viable small businesses in our communities."



Eric Maupin is the fourth generation to farm the Newbern acreage his great-grandparents purchased in 1938.



*“Every dollar a farmer makes is generally spent locally and then turns over six times in the local economy. Our lenders need to know that. Our mayors and county commissioners need to know that.” – Eric Maupin*

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