

# THE COOPERATOR

JANUARY 2020

CONNECTING THE **CO-OP** COMMUNITY

## Smartt returns to TFC board

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**CO-OP**

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January 2020

CONNECTING THE CO-OP COMMUNITY



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## THE COOPERATOR

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# Co-op reaches historic milestone

## Let's get ready to celebrate 75th anniversary



**Glen Liford**

**Editor**

**T**ennessee Farmers Cooperative is turning 75 years old in 2020, and we're planning to mark this milestone appropriately. Throughout the year, we're going to feature stories in *The Cooperator* about our history and the characteristics that make this valued organization distinctive. We hope you find these pieces enjoyable and informative and that they provide you with even more good reasons to support your local Co-op.

The first story to kick off this series appears on page 26 and takes a look at the urgent need that led the innovative founders to establish this system that has served the farmers so well.

In addition, you will want to watch Co-op social media for fun and educational content as well. We have some surprises planned that you're sure to enjoy. And we expect our Throwback Thursdays to be especially popular as we dig deep into the Co-op archives for some vintage pictures. If you have images you would like to share, please send us copies. We'll take a look and see if there are places they might fit. After all, this is your business.

We will publish a special anniversary edition of *The Cooperator* in the fall that includes highlights from Co-op's rich history. The celebration will culminate at TFC's annual meeting in November, and plans are already underway for a host of special activities related to this momentous achievement. We'll announce details nearer the time of the meeting.

We're looking forward to sharing this celebration. We think it's important for our customers, our employees and, most importantly, our farmer owners to understand the cooperative difference. Current and future Co-op members should appreciate the value of their Co-op and realize the hardships that were endured and the sacrifices that have been made, all with the goal of giving farmers a secure, reliable source of products and services available at competitive prices to keep their own operations running efficiently and profitably. The Co-op system is one of the last seven regional farm supply cooperatives left in the United States, and one of the last truly federated systems. Co-op's story is unique. Our farmer members should take pride in their ownership and feel a bond with this business.

Today, there are other places to shop for farm supplies. But none are like Co-op.



The Co-op archives are full of nostalgic images like this picture of Weakley Farmers Co-op from the late 1950s. Watch for upcoming features in *The Cooperator* and Co-op's social media for more throughout 2020.



Researchers at the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture have been awarded a \$156,000 grant to examine value-added opportunities for marketing cattle using genetic information at the seedstock, cow-calf, and stocker producer stages of the beef supply chain.

# Cattle genomics could breed profits

## UTIA researchers explore value-added marketing opportunities

**A** team of researchers at the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture has been awarded a \$156,000 grant to examine value-added opportunities for marketing cattle using genetic information at the seedstock, cow-calf, and stocker producer stages of the beef supply chain. The project links the flow of cattle genetic information along the supply chain, equipping cattle producers with information to help make decisions on which characteristics may be valuable to naturally breed in their calves.

Funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service, researchers will evaluate Tennessee cow-calf producer preferences for bull genomics and physical traits, as well as evaluate cow-calf/stocker producer preferences for marketing their cattle to feedlots using newly available genomic testing. Connecting producer values of genetic information along the production supply chain can improve market efficiency, cattle sustainability, and

potentially impact producer profitability. Researchers will also examine the value that feedlots place on feeder cattle genetic testing and specific feeder cattle traits.

"A goal of this project is to enhance marketing opportunities for seedstock, cow-calf, and stocker producers and provide them with valuable information as they consider which genetic traits to incorporate into their herds," said project leader Karen DeLong, assistant professor in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics. "We hope the information obtained from this grant can be used by producers when making marketing decisions regarding whether to retain ownership of their cattle or sell them at certain stages of the supply chain."

UT Extension will assist producers in understanding the value of their cattle throughout the beef supply chain, as well as understanding the value-added possibilities of using newly available genetic

testing when marketing bulls and feeder cattle. Recognizing the demand for cattle of specific genetic merit could help producers tailor operational decisions to optimize their cattle marketing.

The Tennessee cattle industry generated more than half a billion dollars in 2017. This project has the potential to increase profitability and economic opportunities in rural communities with cattle operations not only in Tennessee but also in other cattle-producing states.

The research team is comprised of the following faculty from the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics: Karen DeLong, Chris Boyer, Andrew Griffith, and Kim Jensen.

Project partners include the Tennessee Department of Agriculture; Tennessee Cattlemen's Association; Oak Hollow Farms, an Angus breeding operation; and the Midwestern feedlot group Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity Cooperative.

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# Tennessee Cattlemen's Association to hold 34th annual convention and trade show

The Tennessee Cattlemen's Association (TCA) will celebrate 35 years of serving the state's cattle producers with its annual convention and trade show in Murfreesboro on Jan. 10-11. Attendees will hear from top livestock industry speakers addressing topics like herd health, forage systems, sustainability, and the current state of the beef business.

This year's theme, "Where heritage meets the future," will show beef cattle production's deep roots in Tennessee, while acknowledging the need for innovation and progress.

"We believe that we weave those well with our speaker lineup this year," said Charles Hord, executive vice president of TCA. "We are highlighting experts in all fields of production and also some top leaders in advocacy like NCBA President Jennifer Houston and BEEF Magazine blogger Amanda Radke."

Informational breakout sessions or "Cow Colleges" will be held on both Friday and

Saturday. This year's topics include the Asian Longhorn Tick, Bovine viral diarrhea, cattle foot scoring, global cattle market, fake meat, minerals, and more.

The annual trade show will begin at 8 a.m. on Friday, Jan. 10 with more than 100 exhibitors displaying new products, services, and the latest technology for the beef and dairy industries. Also that morning, there will be a live bull and heifer sale in the trade show area held by the University of Tennessee.

Later that day, TCA will present several scholarships to youth and honor outstanding industry leaders and members during the awards luncheon. There will also be an opportunity to hear from several candidates running in 2020 elections, followed by the TCS Delegate Session, where every member has the opportunity to vote in Board of Directors' elections.

Pre-registration is \$20 for Friday and \$15 for Saturday, or \$30 for both Friday

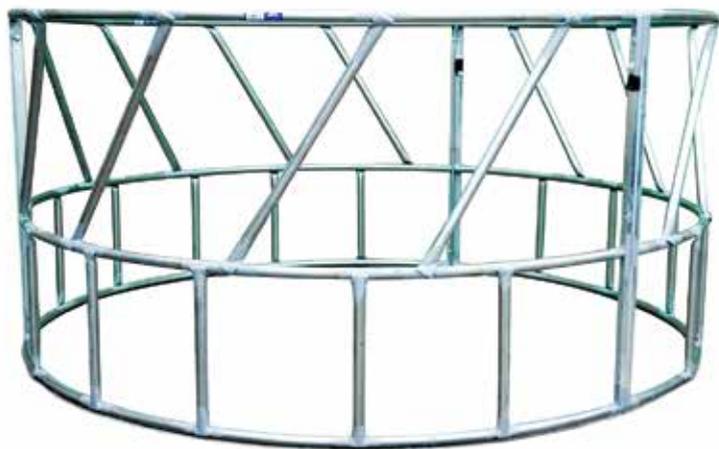


and Saturday. Lunch cost is extra. Pre-registration ends Jan. 3. Late registration and registration at the door will be an additional \$10 over pre-registration fees.

Attendees can register online at [www.tncattle.org](http://www.tncattle.org) and view the full schedule of events. To register for the TDPA sessions, contact Stan Butt at 931-698-0243. To register for the veterinarian sessions, contact Dr. Lew Strickland at 865-974-3538. For hotel reservations, call the Embassy Suites Hotel at 615-890-4464 or online: [www.murfreesboro.embassysuites.com](http://www.murfreesboro.embassysuites.com).

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# A quality partnership

Member Co-ops offer a full line of quality Co-op-branded batteries thanks to Tennessee Farmers Cooperative's partnership with industry leading East Penn Manufacturing Co.

Story by Sarah Geyer  
Photos provided by East Penn Manufacturing Co.

**P**ick your partners carefully. It's an adage mothers have used for centuries in the matters of marriage and bridge games, and one Tennessee Farmers Cooperative used a few decades back in regards to quality Co-op branded batteries.

That's when TFC partnered with East Penn Manufacturing, Co., a family-owned business headquartered in Lyons Station, Pa. Since that time, member Co-ops and their customers have enjoyed the benefits of TFC's wise partner pick, which is widely recognized today as one of the industry's leading manufacturers of lead batteries.

"I think [East Penn's Co-op-branded batteries] are the best value that TFC has ever had in my time," says Ben Porterfield, manager of Marshall Farmers Cooperative's Car Care Center and a 34-year employee. "I'm very pleased with [East Penn] and [their employees] are the best people I've ever worked with."

Founders DeLight E. Breidegam, Jr., and his father, DeLight, Sr., started East Penn in a one-room shop in 1946. Over the next several decades, they built their business on two key principles: keeping customers and employees as the top priority and never overlooking opportunities for improve-

ment. Today, in the same county where the company started, East Penn owns and operates one of the largest, most technologically advanced, single-site, lead battery manufacturing facilities in the world.

The complex — with more than 3 million square feet of building space built on nearly 520 acres — includes four automotive battery plants, an industrial battery plant, a specialty battery plant, two state-of-the-art oxide facilities, two injection molding plants, four technical support centers, a fleet repair and maintenance garage, a rail stop, an EPA-permitted lead smelter and refinery with two water purification plants, and a fully equipped machine plant with a tooling shop, electrical shop, sheet metal shop, carpenter shop, and a full-time construction crew.

The company's wire, cable, and battery accessory plant and a multiple-facility distribution center are a few miles from the Lyons Station campus. The company also owns more than 90 warehouses, distribution centers, and subsidiaries in the United States and Canada and has joint ventures in Austria, Brazil, India, and Mexico.

East Penn employs more than 10,000 people — 8,000 at Lyons Station — and has appeared on Fortune's "100 Best Companies to Work For" and most recently was listed as one of "America's Best Large Employers for 2019" by Forbes and Statista.

"I'm most impressed with East Penn's integrity and long-term vision," says Ed Robbins, product manager for TFC's Tires, Batteries and Accessories Department. "As a family-owned company, they do what is right for customers and employees instead of trying to please stockholders. They are environmentally conscious and good stewards in every aspect of the battery production process and are always forward-looking to what is next."



East Penn's battery recycling program is a model for the industry. Each day, nearly 30,000 used lead batteries are returned to the company with virtually 100 percent of each recycled. The recycled lead, plastic, and reclaimed acid are reused in new batteries. The residual sulfur that results from the lead recycling process is trapped and processed into a liquid fertilizer solution, and heat from furnaces is collected to warm buildings in winter. The wastewater treatment is also a state-of-the-art operation: a high-tech reverse osmosis process producing recycled water cleaner than pure spring water. This process reduces the company's ground water use by as much as 100,000 gallons per day.

## A glimpse into battery production at East Penn

The first step is **grid casting**, which begins with machinery specially designed to make lead strips for East Penn's exclusive compu-press, grid-making process. Lead is rolled and compressed within one hundredth of a millimeter, and the large lead strip coils are then placed on equipment that presses the strip 250 to 300 times a minute to form the shape of the grids. **1** This equipment reshapes the grip wires using patented grid reforming and texturing technology to enhance lead paste adhesion.

**Lead oxide and pasting** process starts in East Penn's modern oxide facility with the production of a very fine lead oxide powder.

This active material is then mixed into an exacting formula-specific paste using specialty equipment engineered and custom built onsite. Full-framed grids are then pasted into positive and negative plates under rigid specifications. Both sides of the plate are pasted for added durability and severe service performance. Plates are then stacked for ease and efficiency, while lugs and frames are also cleaned and brushed as they move toward the end of the line. **2** The most advanced robotic technology in the industry is used to carefully move the plates from the line onto racks.

Those racks are then moved into East Penn's modern curing chambers built to opti-

mize the controlled environment of the curing process. From the forklift's onboard computer, material handlers can check each oven's status, curing process data, and even open and close the doors.

**Plate grouping and assembling** are some of East Penn's most modern processes.

**3** Cured plates are inserted into oxidation-resistant, deep-pocket envelope separators which completely surround the plates to prevent shorts. Positive and negative plate lugs are brushed, fluxed, and automatically fused into a two-volt element.

**Battery assembly** is the next step. First, a short-testing device probes each cell in every



East Penn Manufacturing Co., best known for its Deka brand, produces a full line of top-quality Co-op batteries for truck, tractor, ag, lawn and garden, power sports, and marine. Employees at East Penn's 520-acre complex, located 65 miles north of Philadelphia, produce more than 450 battery designs for cars, trucks, boats, farm equipment, and industrial uses. They also make specialty batteries for applications such as cell phone transmitters, wheelchairs, backup power for solar and other renewable energy generators, floor machines, and alarm systems. In addition, East Penn manufactures battery accessories including battery terminals, battery cables, and booster cables, as well as general wire products such as starter cable, welding cable, and trailer wire.

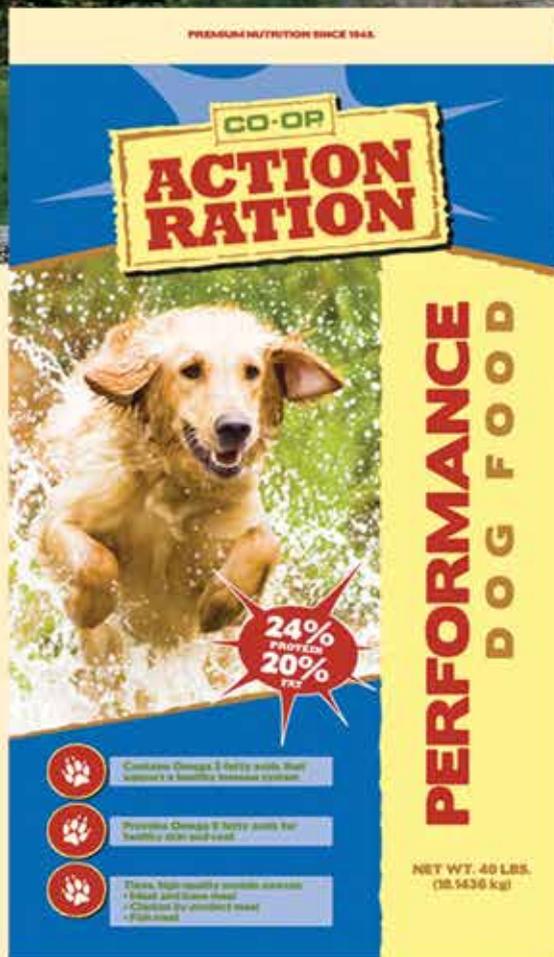
battery. In the rare case a short is detected, the battery is immediately rejected. Then, each battery element is electronically precision welded for the lowest resistance and highest cranking power possible. Next, the cover is thermal welded onto the container. The plastic welding process results in an airtight, leak-proof unit. A highly advanced process is used to build East Penn's posts. By adding molten lead and precision heat, the result is strong, solid terminal posts and forged bushings, preventing porosity, black post, terminal leakage, and corrosion. ④ The battery is then automatically pressure-tested to verify the quality of case-to-cover seal. When the batteries are ready for pallets, advanced robotic arms use a vacuum system to carefully hold the batteries until they are gently placed on the skid.



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# Surviving WWII

## ‘Crawled our way through France fighting’

*In the Oct./Nov. 2019 issue of **The Cooperator**, we introduced “Stories of Service,” reader-submitted profiles of veterans who bravely served our country. We’re pleased to feature another story in this issue as a continuation of the series.*

I grew up in Henryville, close to Summertown. My dad, John Wesley Holder, was a farmer, and he and my mother, Emma, had six children. We grew corn and cotton.

One day, I was plowing with this old mule and decided, ‘I think I’ll just join the Army.’ That was around 1940, and I was 21 years old and never had been away from home. I joined before they started drafting folks.

After I got in there, I wished I had kept plowing with that old mule! The Army was rough back then. I went to basic training in North Carolina, and the drill sergeant wanted to see how tough he could make it on recruits. He did a good job at it, too. I just toughed it out and tried to be as rough as they were.

I was part of the 30th Infantry Division, and they shipped us from North Carolina over to Normandy to be part of the D-day invasion (on June 6, 1944). I remember like it was yesterday crawling up on Omaha Beach with my M-1 (Garand) rifle in my arm. It was so heavy to drag around that I got a carbine off of the first dead American soldier I found and swapped it because I knew that person wasn’t going to be using it. The carbine was lighter and had a whole lot more firepower to it.

There were between 200 and 300 soldiers in my infantry, and we crawled our way through France fighting. If you stood up, you got shot. I got shot at a lot of times, but I made it through. A lot of my friends didn’t. For every 100 soldiers who got off the boats, 45 were killed. Bullets would fly over your head by the hundreds; those German machine guns would fire 600 rounds a minute.

I was at the Battle of the Bulge (which took place Dec. 16, 1944 through Jan. 25, 1945 in the Ardennes region in eastern Belgium, northeast France, and Luxembourg). It was one of the roughest winters they’d ever had. There were a lot of days when it was below 20

degrees, but we had warm enough clothing to survive it.

Those machine guns were firing out of the pillboxes Hitler had built. Some of them had walls three feet thick. We didn’t have any ammunition that could penetrate them. All we had were those boys who were brave enough to throw a grenade in the pillbox to get them out of there.

When the Germans surrendered, word spread like wildfire. Of course, a lot of soldiers didn’t know that it was over until it had been quiet for a good while. When we got back, we had a big party that lasted about three days and three nights.

I don’t know how anyone ever survived the war. Hitler had no intentions of people

surviving. It was rough. I don’t know if I could go through all that again or not. About 30 years ago, I went with a group back to France, Belgium, and Holland and returned to some of the places where we were during the war. It brought back a lot of memories.

After the war, I came back home and married Marie Green (now deceased) and started doing carpentry and sheetrock work until I decided to retire at 94 years old. I turned 100 on Nov. 15 and still feel as good as ever. I don’t have a single pain. I laugh a lot, and that keeps me going!

– Submitted by Knox Holder, Lawrenceburg



## ----- Priority Co-op Products



### 1. Petmate Barnhome 3 Dog House

The Petmate Barnhome 3 (#16392) is a barn-shaped dog house that protects your dog from the hot or cold outdoor elements. It features a rear air ventilation system to promote air circulation, an extended rim on the roof to divert rain, and raised interior flooring to help keep your pet dry. Improved insulation helps to keep your dog warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Available in a variety of sizes and colors to fit pets from 15" to 28" tall. Available accessories include an easy-attach door and Barnhome 3 pad for added comfort. Combine this item with Cox Cedar Shavings (#6827493) for even more added winter comfort for your furry companions.



### 2. Tru-Test WaterWell 2

Water is one of the most critical elements to an animal and its overall health. Animals that drink clean, contaminant-free water are generally less prone to illness and disease, gain more weight, and produce more milk. With this in mind, look to the Tru-Test WaterWell 2-hole energy-free waterer (#25296) for your needs. It features:

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### 3. Kat's 1190 Magnetic Block Heater

A magnetic heater is an electric heater that heats the engine or transmission of a vehicle to give quicker starts and protects your engine from damage that can occur during cold weather starts. Warmed engines also deliver better fuel economy with improved oil flow to provide better lubrication to the engine, which reduces wear and increases engine life. Oil and transmission fluids thicken and do not circulate well at cold temperatures. Magnetic heaters transmit heat continuously to keep oils fluid, giving you instant lubrication when starting your engine. Kat's 1190 Magnetic Block Heater (#6830085) features two powerful magnets and an expanding heating surface. Its larger size makes it ideal for use on trucks, diesels, and farm machinery.



### 4. Chapin 8705a Hand Salt and Ice Melt Spreader

Take a bite out of winter with the Chapin 8705a Hand Salt and Ice Melt Spreader (#6828118). It features a rugged poly scoop with a serrated edge for cutting through salt, making scooping easy. The thumb-controlled gate adjustment and trigger gate control are designed to handle the various sizes of salt- and ice-melt smoothly, and enclosed gears keep debris out. The impeller is designed to provide an even spread pattern. Great for steps, sidewalks, and areas a larger spreader can't go.



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# ANNUAL MEETING 2019

**E**ngagement is the foundation of the business Co-op's farmer members own. It means to be involved. To care. To commit. To pledge support in making the Co-op system viable for years to come. With these things in mind, "Engage" proved to be a fitting theme for the 2019 Tennessee Farmers Cooperative annual meeting.

The two-day event was held on Sunday, Dec. 1 and Monday, Dec. 2 at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Nashville. More than 650 directors, managers, employees, spouses, and special guests from the Volunteer State and beyond were in attendance.

It was another solid year financially for the Co-op, but both TFC Chief Executive Officer Bart Krisle and Board Chairman Mark Thompson stressed that with the changing dynamics of agriculture, there's no time for complacency. Going forward, the Co-op must "Engage" opportunities to grow and diversify to remain relevant. It's a formula that has kept the cooperative going strong as it turns 75 years old in 2020, and during his annual meeting address Krisle encouraged the audience to "continue to engage with your Co-op business as we lay the foundation for the next 75 years."



ANNUAL MEETING IN REVIEW

# Engage opportunities, Thompson says

## From the Chairman of the Board



Playing on the 2019 annual meeting theme of “Engage,” TFC Board Chairman Mark Thompson began his remarks with an example of the importance of engagement taken straight from the most famous American Civil War battle, Gettysburg.

“Had General Robert E. Lee engaged more with his commanders and been willing to listen to their input, the Confederates could have won Gettysburg, possibly in as little as one day,” Thompson explained. “But he didn’t, and his troops paid a huge price. There were more than 25,000 Confederate casualties at Gettysburg — more than a third of Lee’s army.”

Correlating the Civil War story to the Co-op system, Thompson stressed that engagement — with one another and with other cooperatives — is crucial to the long-term health of Tennessee Farmers Cooperative.

He shared how TFC is already taking steps in that direction with the recent alignment of the Hardware, Home, Lawn and Specialty, and Tires, Batteries, and Accessories departments into Faithway Alliance, a 50/50 joint venture with Alabama Farmers Cooperative and Faithway Feeds.

“Faithway Alliance allows everyone involved to benefit from greater purchasing volume, increased inventory efficiency, and stronger vendor relationships that will reduce costs and improve product selection,” he said. “The result is a competitive pricing model and continued income back to the member cooperatives.”

This example of growth, Thompson said, is one component of a four-pronged strategy

developed earlier in 2019 by TFC’s board and management to “pinpoint what we can do to engage opportunities that will even further strengthen your cooperative going forward.”

The four strategies are:

- (1) Support Member Cooperatives
- (2) Growth
- (3) Staff Recruitment and Development
- (4) Financial Performance

To gain clarity that this strategy was headed in the right direction, TFC’s board and management engaged with member and associate member Co-op managers via a short survey to gain their feedback. The answers to the four-question survey, Thompson said, confirmed the strategy was indeed on the proper path:

- (1) Should TFC be pursuing joint ventures? 90 percent agreed or strongly agreed.
- (2) Should TFC look for new services or new markets? 81 percent agreed or strongly agreed.
- (3) Should TFC be looking for business outside Tennessee? 80 percent agreed or strongly agreed.
- (4) Should TFC offer and create a means for member Co-ops to have full online sales capabilities? 70 percent agreed or strongly agreed.

“If there’s an opportunity out there, don’t wait to see if it works for everybody else first,” said Thompson. “If we do that, everybody else will grab the business. Let’s embrace the exciting times ahead. Let’s share ideas together. Let’s engage to excel.”

# Another year of big-hearted bids



TOTAL RAISED: **\$17,215**

ALL PROCEEDS GO TO BENEFIT LOCAL



Friendly competition and generous hearts led to a third year of big-hearted bidding for the “Co-op Auction Barn.” Monies raised through the live and silent auctions totaled \$17,215, funds that will benefit Tennessee’s FFA and 4-H programs. This year’s live auction featured two custom pieces: a framed, limited-edition TFC 75th anniversary print and a one-of-a-kind TFC 2019 Annual Meeting knife from Case. Unique items in the

silent auction included tickets to the Vols bowl game, a Predators fan bundle with an autographed hockey stick and jersey, and a weekend getaway at Dollywood Dream Resort. Some of the most popular items included a DJI Mavic Quadcopter, UT men’s and women’s basketball tickets, a set of Mastercraft tires, Sony wireless earbuds, and themed baskets from Stockdale’s.

*From the CEO*

# Transitioning to meet a new reality

## Krisle explains strategic plan to membership



“We’re still going to be Tennessee Farmers Co-op. We’re still going to provide services that the members expect and need.”

– Bart Krisle

In his address to membership at the 2019 Tennessee Farmers Cooperative annual meeting, TFC Chief Executive Officer Bart Krisle emphasized that the Co-op is in a strong position financially with impressive sales volumes from the last several years, a solid balance sheet, and stable working capital, making now a good time to pursue the strategy laid out in TFC Board Chairman Mark Thompson’s preceding speech.

“We want to adjust so that we continue to stay relevant to our members and our farmer members,” he said. “The industry is changing and the pace of that change continues to increase.”

As examples, Krisle cited trends in agriculture that are reshaping the marketplace. Farmer demographics are changing. Their average age is now around 60 years old, and many are getting out of the business. There are fewer farmers, and remaining operations are getting larger. Consolidations like the high-profile Bayer-Monsanto merger and the Dow-DuPont agreement that produced Corteva are expected to continue, and experts expect them to spread to ag retailers as well.

He cited Sevier and Cocke Farmers Co-ops combining to form Smoky Mountain Farmers and the merger of Overton and Putnam Farmers to create Ag1 Farmers Co-op as examples of that trend.

“TFC is facing the same situation,” said Krisle, noting that the strategy developed by the board and management is an effort to “transition to meet this new reality head on.”

“We’re still going to be Tennessee Farmers Co-op. We’re still going to provide services that the members expect and need. We’re going to pursue alliances for our operating divisions that ensure we’re competitive on prices in the future through scaling into a larger organization.”

Those strategic alliances are yet to be determined, though Krisle said he expects them to take the form of joint ventures. Most recent is the Faithway Alliance business announced in 2019 that will be equally owned by TFC and Alabama Farmers Cooperative. The venture will allow TFC

and AFC to grow market territory, increase the customer base, and gain operational efficiencies by collaboratively working together to reduce risk.

The concept is not new to TFC, and Krisle mentioned several examples of strategic alliances that the cooperative system has initiated and benefited from, including:

- ADI, a wholly owned subsidiary that provides bulk and bagged crop nutrients across the Southeast.
- Alliance Animal Care, a wholesale animal health distribution company equally owned by TFC and MFA Incorporated.
- Allied Seed, LLC, a provider of quality forages, legumes, cover crops, and turf grasses, equally owned by TFC, Southern States, and Growmark.
- Mid States Ag, a joint venture equally owned with Waterway Ag that distributes fertilizer in Kentucky.
- GreenPoint Ag, a joint venture providing ag inputs, with equal governance by WinField United and TFC.

“These are all strategic alignments we made to our business over the years to better serve a changing marketplace, enhance operational efficiencies, and improve profitability for our Co-op system,” said Krisle.

He concluded by cautioning that “not every company is willing to embrace change like our cooperative system has done,” citing Kodak as an example. The well known and respected company was the market leader in film and cameras when it developed the first digital camera back in 1975. Kodak leadership, however, was focused on the traditional film business and felt the new technology would cannibalize their traditional film business and negatively impact profitability, so they sold the digital camera technology.

“I think we’re facing a similar crossroads in our part of the agriculture industry, and we should not, and quite frankly must not, allow ourselves to become complacent,” said Krisle. “We have invested a lot of time this past year developing the strategy that Mark [Thompson] outlined earlier, and we’re going to aggressively pursue it.”

## DEFINED:

*Engage: To participate or become involved in. Fully occupied or having full attention.*

# Your operations REPORT



## What is driving us to success?

### What are some of the ag retail trends for 2020?

- Growing in-store and online competition for market share
- New rules and regulations for truck drivers and increase in demand for trucks
- Tariff uncertainty and effect on product costs
- Strategic management decisions as farm incomes projected to decrease up to 20 percent
- Continuing uncertainty in dairy industry
- Tennessee's beef cattle projected to increase by 1.5 percent this year

### What are some growth opportunities for Co-op in 2020?

#### AGRONOMY

- Turf business — new department in Agronomy Division devoted to expanding turf sales
- Cover crops — increasingly important with higher yields of last few years to help replace nutrients
- AgSolver technology — new program from WinField United that identifies areas of a field that are the most profitable and those that present problems
- Grazon applications — with two million acres of pasture in Tennessee, there's an opportunity to reach new customers with weed control products and applications
- Continued partnership with WinField United

#### FEED, FARM, HOME, AND FLEET

- New TN Ag Enhancement Program (TAEP) hay equipment program — New TFC-manufactured 10-foot poly bunk feeder is now included as option; expect greater demand for bale wrap, and TFC offers full line of options and member Co-ops benefit from system's buying power with twine
- New TAEP herd health program — Planned roll out with veterinarians statewide of script drug business through a partnership with Alliance Animal Care.
- Toll milling manufacturing — With all TFC feed mills meeting government compliance, opportunity for new ventures like TFC's two-year agreement with Mossy Oak to manufacture a full line of wildlife products stocked in Walmart's 2,600 stores
- Feed Department — New promotion where prizes are found inside bags of Co-op Cattle Mineral
- Continued partnership with Orgill
- Hardware Department— Arrowquip brands adds to Co-op's full portfolio of livestock equipment and our continued partnership with Orgill
- Fuel Department — Opportunity for growth as supply and prices are expected to remain steady this year
- TBA sales — New line of lubricants from LuMax; new supplier EDS truck boxes; promotion of partnerships with S&S Tires and East Penn Manufacturing, which produces full line of Co-op-branded batteries
- Apparel and footwear — New brands including Twisted X and Dryshod boots
- Pet merchandise — With 88,000 tons of dog food consumed each year in Tennessee, TFC and member Co-ops have opportunity for growth in pet food and products

- 2019 Consolidated Gross Sales were \$705 million, an increase of \$44 million over last year.
- Net Margin for the year was \$26.5 million.
- \$21 million was paid in patronage, \$15.8 million in cash, \$5.3 million in allocated reserves.

#### BY THE NUMBERS:

- The consolidated gross sales amount of \$705 million includes over \$244 million or 35% in fertilizer sales, \$97 million or 14% in animal nutrition sales, \$93 million or 13% in crop protection sales, \$92 million or 13% in seed sales, \$86 million or 12% in fuel sales, \$40 million or 6% in hardware sales, \$30 million or 4% in home, lawn, and specialties sales, and \$14 million or 2% in tires, batteries, and accessory sales.
- In 2019, 717,000 tons of fertilizer were sold. This is an increase compared to 2018 of nearly 67,000 tons.
- 2019 Feed tons sold were 250,000, a decrease of 12,000 tons.
- 2019 Fuel gallons sold was 37 million. Fuel gallons have remained fairly constant and it is important to note that around 70% of the fuel gallons sold is diesel fuel.
- Over the past 10 years, TFC has returned over \$149 million in cash to member cooperatives, \$4.7 million in member programs, \$110.3 million in cash patronage, and \$34.7 million in redeemed allocated reserves. That is an average of almost \$15.0 million per year. In 2019, TFC paid \$21 million in patronage, \$15.8 million or 75% in cash as well as retiring \$5.3 million in allocated reserves.

**Your commitment as owners and customers makes this possible and we thank you for it!**



The Keynote Speaker

PHILLIP FULMER

## UT great addresses annual meeting group

Student-athlete. Coach. Administrator. Phillip Fulmer has worn all these hats during his 50-year affiliation with the University of Tennessee.

Now the school's Director of Athletics, Fulmer, a Winchester native who played football for the Vols from 1969-73 before coaching them to a national championship in 1998, felt right at home as he addressed TFC annual meeting attendees who hung on his every word.



## Miles mesmerizes members

In a little more than 30 minutes' time, Frank Miles juggled the following:

- machetes
  - apples while simultaneously eating them
  - a bowling ball and ping pong ball as a brave volunteer laid directly beneath him
  - police tasers
  - flaming torches while riding a unicycle.
- Crazy? Maybe. But done with a message behind it? Absolutely.

Miles' performance in front of the TFC annual meeting audience blended his brave juggling acts with sharp comedic interludes

for an unforgettable, fast-paced show full of laughs, "oohs," and "ahs." The clear takeaway for attendees — and, not coincidentally, the title of his presentation — was to "Laugh at Fear."

"Fear is what you feel when you're expecting that something bad will happen," he told the crowd. "The expectation causes tension. But sometimes what's waiting with the unknown is amazing. Your industry is filled with change — the future is bringing new challenges but it will bring solutions right along with it. So laugh at fear."

### OUR ANNUAL 4-H & FFA KNIFE DONATION

# \$36,100

ALL PROCEEDS GO TO BENEFIT LOCAL



Representatives from Co-op's regional managers association and W.R. Case & Sons Cutlery present the \$36,100 donation from the sale of Co-op's 2019 commemorative knife to the state's 4-H and FFA programs. In front, from left, are Savannah Jones, State 4-H All-Star Chief from Union County; Maury Ford, W.R. Case & Sons Cutlery; and Taylor Campbell, State FFA President from Washington County. Back row, from left, are Lewis Jones, Knox Farmers Co-op; Kenny Kingins, Henry Farmers Co-op; Scottie Sadler, Macon-Trousdale Farmers Co-op; and Brian Ladd, Marshall Farmers Co-op.



**CO-OP**  
**CERTIFIED**  
**DIRECTOR**  
**PROGRAM**

Tennessee Farmers Cooperative congratulates the following board directors who completed the Certified Director Program in 2019. The program requires a minimum level of continuing education related to the agriculture industry and best business practices.

**Bedford Moore Farmers Co-op**

Anthony Allen  
Virgil Beasley  
Rocky Dacosta  
Samuel Davis  
Tim Farrar  
Drew Harris  
Sloan Stewart  
Barry Stone  
Brad Vincent

**Benton Farmers Co-op**

Jerrold Allen  
Kevin Berry  
Jack Garland  
Wayne Jackson  
Stacey Tubbs  
Elton VanCleave  
Terry Waters

**Carroll Farmers Co-op**

Brooks Blacketter  
Jeremy Fowler  
Gerry Hilliard  
Ricky Lone  
Phillip Moore  
Brad Smith

**Coffee Farmers Co-op**

Mike Bryan  
Chris Davis  
Tim Morris  
David Rhea  
Jimmy Spears  
A. J. Teal  
Robert Wiser

**Davidson Farmers Co-op**

Steve Baltz  
Ray Harvey  
Jackie McCrary  
Bob Strasser  
Joe Willis

**Dickson Farmers Co-op**

Mike Adams  
Jeff Batey  
Todd Berry  
Beth Dawson  
Mike Henry  
David W. Matlock  
Teddy Pruett  
Cole Reagan  
David Wall

**Fentress Farmers Co-op**

Cory Collier  
Tim Criswell  
Derek Gernt  
Fred Moody  
Chris Smith  
Willard Stephens

**First Farmers Co-op**

Tim Bishop  
Jeff Douglas  
Larry Paul Harris  
John Allen Moore  
Gary Shelton  
Marty Tolley  
Ronald White

**Franklin Farmers Co-op**

Richard Atkinson  
Mike Bean  
William Henley  
Jared Hill  
Gary Horton  
Kurt Johnson  
Dusty Matlock  
Kelly Moore  
Eddie Vincent

**Henry Farmers Co-op**

Jerry Bomar  
Grant Fridy  
Tim Hammond  
Billy Hendon  
Grant Norwood  
Andy Paschall  
Leon Rogers  
Gary Story  
Jamey Tosh

**Humphreys Farmers Co-op**

Damon Brown  
Claude Callicott  
Wayne Grimmett  
Josh May  
Johnathon Proctor  
Nate Pulley  
Lee Rushton

**Lincoln Farmers Co-op**

Randy Ashby  
Michael Dempsey

Hugh Dickey  
David Good  
Charlie Jobe  
David Kidd  
Richard Lyon  
Gary Phillips  
Kevin Steelman

**Macon Trousdale Farmers Co-op**

Larry Cato  
Scott Cothran  
Chase Eller  
James Fishburn  
James Fisher  
Terry Martin  
Stanley Miller  
Spencer Shrum  
Dewey Swindle

**Marshall Farmers Co-op**

Will Gold  
Bo Jackson  
Ken Jordan  
Patrick Jordan  
Lavoy Ledford  
Sam Smith  
Richard Upton  
Tony White  
Rex Whorton

**Maury Farmers Co-op**

James Bratton  
Ken Cecil  
Larry Chunn  
Neil Delk  
Jerry Gardner  
Vicky Ingram  
John Moser

**Mid-South Farmers Co-op**

Alex Armour  
Drew Bailey  
Paul Bond  
Jesse Hall  
Jared King

Barry Redmon  
Hal Swann  
Ken Taylor  
Clyde C. Woods  
John H. Willis

**Montgomery Farmers Co-op**

Danny Askew  
Will Barnett  
Chester Black  
Richard Davis  
James H. Head  
Johnathan E. Moseley  
Al Slate

**Obion Farmers Co-op**

Blake Cheatham  
Jason Crabtree  
Marshall Fennel  
Daniel Huey  
Darryl McGuire  
Tim Partin  
Clint Workman

**Overton Farmers Co-op**

Nathan Elder  
Herbie Groce  
Tony Krantz  
Doug Maynard  
Scott McDonald  
Cory Norrod  
David Reid

**Perry Farmers Co-op**

Steve Averett  
John Carroll  
Garry Culp  
Mike Hickerson  
Daniel Merriman  
Mike Smith  
Robbie Tucker

**Putnam Farmers Co-op**

Gary Bush  
Rusty Chilcutt  
Tony Kennedy  
Roger Medley  
Steve Medlin  
Wayne Moss  
Perry Nash  
Kelly Stockton  
Patrick Stout

**Robertson Cheatham Farmers Co-op**

Michael Bejma  
Troy Head  
Jonathan King  
Billy Joe Riley  
Buddy Sneed  
Jimmy Underwood  
Jeff Yates

**Rutherford Farmers Co-op**

Fred Adams  
Bobby Boyce  
Jeff Dismukes  
Howard Eades  
George B. Lamb, Jr.  
Allan Pack  
Terry Young

**Scott Morgan Farmers Co-op**

Steve Armstrong  
Ronnie Duncan  
Dudley Hurst  
C.A. Kelly  
Charles Spradlin  
Steve Stanley  
Robbie L. Terry

**Sequatchie Farmers Co-op**

Charlie Barker  
Gene Barker  
Lavon Carlton  
Ben Condra

Bryan Gray  
Charlie Housley  
Wayne Reese

**Smith Farmers Co-op**

Jere Andrews  
Billy Clay  
Daniel Gregory  
Mark McCall  
George McDonald  
Jimmy Owen  
Jackie Wayne Russell

**Southeastern Farmers Co-op**

Dale Hale  
Charles Hannah  
Perry Massengill  
Kim L. Millican  
Howard Moore  
John Moore  
Charlie Wattenbarger

**Tipton Farmers Co-op**

Robert Baskin  
Clay Kelley  
David McDaniel  
Ray Sneed  
Michael Turner  
Danny Waits  
Keith Wilder

**Warren Farmers Co-op**

Donna Bartlett  
Justin Bouldin  
Robert Hennessee  
Marvin Lusk  
Gary Martin  
George Smartt  
Gordon Wade  
Tim Wilcher  
Justin Woodlee

**Weakley Farmers Co-op**

Kenny Caldwell  
Chris Fowler  
Gary Hall  
Ty McConnell  
Scotty Ogg  
Billy Scarbrough  
Jason Yarbrow

**Williamson Farmers Co-op**

Tim Barnhill  
Ron Dennis  
Jeff Green  
Eric Law  
Dustin Noble  
Eddie Sanders  
Dusty Sauter

**Wilson Farmers Co-op**

Melinda Forbes  
Isabell Hall  
Kevin Harvey  
Chris James  
Mack Moss  
Pal Neal  
Terry Poston  
Jack Pratt  
Donnie Steed

**Tennessee Farmers Co-op**

Johnny Brady  
Benjie Daniel  
Keith Fowler  
Amos Huey  
Donald Jernigan  
Tim Luckey  
Stephen Philpott  
David Sarten  
Mark Thompson



## Giving Back To Our Future

### MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY



**Britney Brown**  
Bradyville



**Rhiannon Overcast**  
Shelbyville



**Kayley Stallings**  
Murfreesboro



**Lillian Steed**  
Laguardo



**Morgan Vickers**  
Liberty



### TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY



**Kalie Ellis**  
Ashland City



**Nakana Morton**  
LaFollette



### TENNESSEE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY



**Mattie Hinch**  
Crossville



**Emily Johnson**  
Loudon



**Matthew Parker**  
Shelbyville



**Allison Rison**  
Tazewell



**Rhett Willis**  
Lebanon



### UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT MARTIN



**Erika Brown**  
McEwen



**Justin Foulks**  
Memphis



**Emily Nave**  
Woodbury



**Kailey Orrand-Hill**  
Lebanon



**Abigail Bartholomew Sartain**  
Lexington



**Makenzie Stewart**  
McEwen



### UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT KNOXVILLE



**Olivia Berrier**  
Knoxville



**Chloe Ford**  
Jonesborough



**Megan Hawkins**  
Big Rock



**Megan Mills**  
Loudon



**Ryan Melton**  
Clarksville



**Keary Nease**  
Parrottsville



**Ethan Niles**  
Loudon



**Jayme Ozburn**  
Lewisburg



**Jessica Pearson**  
Fayetteville



**Gracie Pendergrass**  
Pikeville



**McKenzie Sharp**  
Sharps Chapel



**Kortney Stringfield**  
Knoxville



**Cole Williams**  
Fayetteville



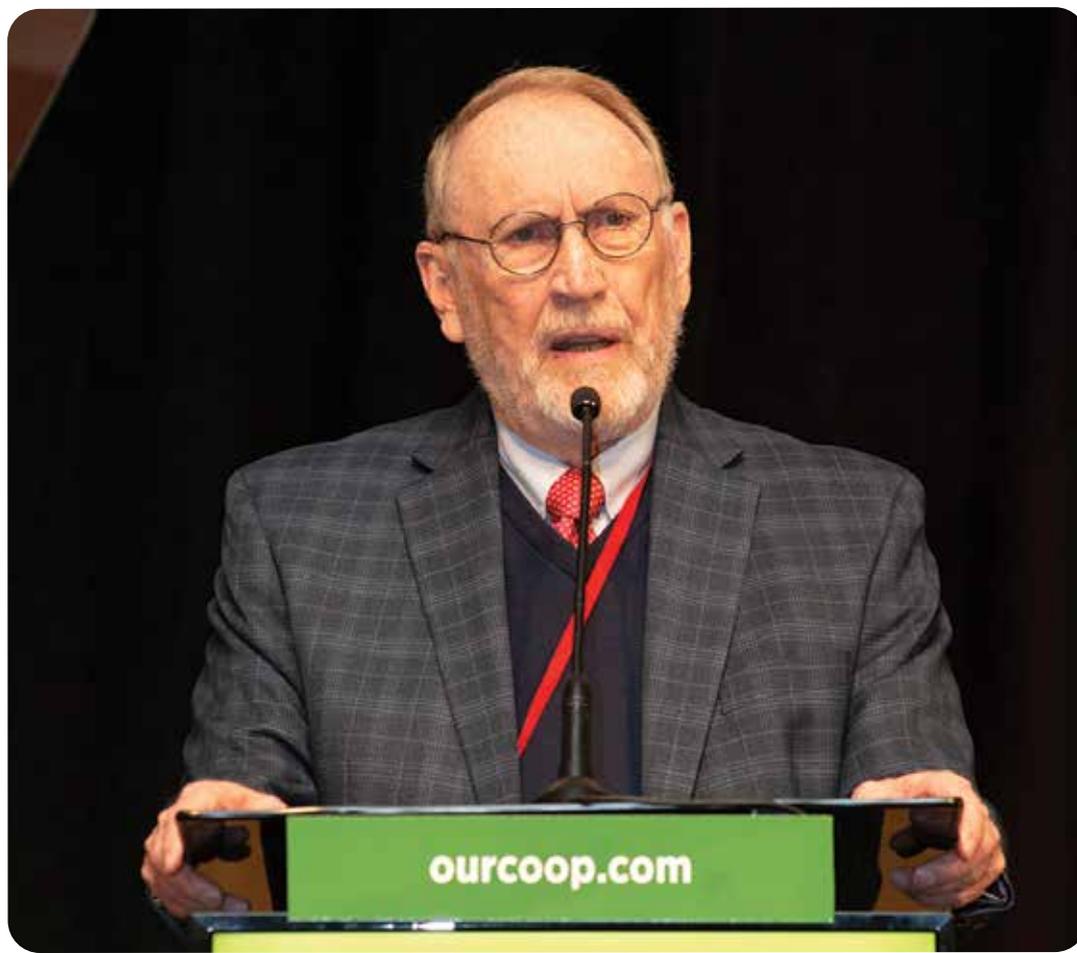
## Information and how to apply:

Tennessee Farmers Cooperative proudly salutes recipients of the 2019-20 Co-op Scholarships.

These young people represent the best and the brightest in the future of Tennessee agriculture, and many of the recipients are already making valuable contributions to our cooperative system as employees of local Co-ops and even as full-time farmers.

TFC offers 32 scholarships — each worth \$2,000 — to qualified agriculture students at six state universities: UT Knoxville, UT Martin, Tennessee Technological University, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, and Austin Peay State University.

Applicants must be from families of Co-op members and satisfy the requirements established by TFC's scholarship committee. For more information, call Paul Binkley at 1-800-366-2667 or email him at [pbinkley@ourcoop.com](mailto:pbinkley@ourcoop.com).



# Advocating the Co-op way

## Charles Atkins is the 2019 Cooperative Spirit Award Winner

Story by: Glen Liford

In recognition of the role he played in the advancement of the Co-op system, Charles Atkins has received Tennessee Farmers Cooperative's highest honor — the James B. Walker Cooperative Spirit Award. The award has been given every year since 1999 to an individual whose contributions have had a positive and enduring impact on Tennessee's farmers, our state's agriculture, and our cooperative system.

The honor was presented at the business luncheon of TFC's annual meeting on Monday, Dec. 2 at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Nashville.

A Monroe County native, Charles, or Charlie as most know him, was a branch manager at Monroe Farmers, managed Smith and Blount Farmers Co-ops, and was

later a TFC employee. During his steady rise through the ranks, he started on the Co-op training program and later accepted assignments as general fieldman, director of field services, vice president of corporate and member services, and finally as vice president of sales. Through the years, he consistently and passionately played the vital role of advocate for the cooperative way of business.

Charlie was born Sept. 28, 1940 to Ernest and Hazel Atkins. He was the fifth youngest of six boys born to the couple. The Atkins family had a small, hillside farm located just outside of Madisonville where they raised a few cattle, hogs, and a small crop of tobacco and grew corn and some cotton — unusual for East Tennessee, says Charlie, noting that the family's 28-acre cotton base was one of only three in the county at the time.

His earliest memory of the Co-op occurred about 1945 as Monroe Farmers Co-op was just getting started. Five-year-old Charlie was in the tobacco patch with his dad when two men came by trying to sell stock to start up a Co-op. They were trying to raise \$3,000 worth of stock by soliciting \$30 from 100 different farmers.

"My dad's question, of course, was, 'Well, what's a Co-op?'" recalls Charlie. "They explained what it was and what they were going to try to do."

Later, Charlie's older brother Martin went to work at the Co-op as one of the businesses' three original employees.

Charlie graduated from Madisonville High School at age 16 and attended Tennessee Tech in Cookeville for a year before returning home to attend Hiwassee College. That was a good move for the young farm boy as it wasn't long before he met the attractive Sarah Simpson, who had grown up in Ringgold, Ga. The two met at a basketball game, and Charlie was soon smitten. He jokes that he simply thought she would make a good wife.

"It wasn't quite that simple," he says, "but that's how it ended up."

The couple married in 1961, and their son Phil was born in 1962, followed by David in 1965, and finally Patrick in 1975.

Charlie was soon offered a full-time job at Monroe Farmers, and he left school to accept the Co-op position at age 18 on Feb. 1, 1958. As a fast learner and keen observer, he quickly noticed how much the farmers depended on employees like Manager Bob Scott and Branch Manager Billy Stately, both of whom Charlie admired. He began studying the products and trying to emulate the men to be another resource for the farmers.

"I thought if I could make recommendations to these older farmers, it might mean something," says Charlie.

When Billy left the Co-op to enter the Air Force, Bob asked Charlie if he would be interested in the branch manager job, and Charlie accepted.

It wasn't long before Charlie was offered another position by the owner of a local farm equipment dealership for a career move that might offer more opportunity. After Bob got wind of the move, recognizing Charlie as a future asset to the Co-op world, the Co-op manager asked TFC Fieldman Cliff Stafford if he might find Charlie a spot on the training program as a manager trainee working for Tom Phillips. Charlie joined the program and was sent to Middle Tennessee to train.

TFC was operating Smith Farmers Cooperative on a contract basis, due to financial

challenges and a devastating fire that had destroyed the store, and Phillips asked Charlie to help get things back on track. After a few weeks of hard work and tidying up, Charlie had brought in a small amount of inventory and was ready to open. He even bought spots on the local radio station and staged a grand opening.

The grand opening, though, turned out a bit less than grand. By 4 o'clock that Saturday afternoon, the phone had not rung and not a single soul had walked through the door.

"I was standing in the door by myself," Charlie says. "I was a bit blue about the whole situation. I thought that this might not turn out too well."

Finally, a man came walking down the alley in front of the Co-op and Charlie struck up a conversation. The man was headed to Gore Supply, a local hardware store, to purchase a pound of nails.

"He said, 'The preacher is coming tomorrow, and my wife wants me to fix the steps,'" says Charlie. "I said, 'We have nails.' Only one kind of nails did he need, 16 commons – 10 cents and a penny tax. That was the total sales that day."

After such a banner opening, Charlie was still offered the position as manager. He set about rebuilding the community's trust in the Co-op and getting to know the county's farmers. The business grew slowly with Charlie carefully cultivating relationships with customers, calling on dairies, poultry growers, and hog producers. The Co-op eventually got a good chunk of the feed business and opened a tire shop at the store.

"After about four years, we were No. 1 [in the Co-op system] in tires," says Charlie.

Charlie remained as manager of the store until 1968 when the opportunity to move to Blount Farmers Co-op in Maryville came up.

Blount Farmers was a different setting. The Co-op was one of the largest in the state and was in a strong financial position. It was one of those places featured when tours or dignitaries came through the state, like the time Charlie and the Co-op hosted President Suharto of Indonesia when he visited the area.

Charlie continued as manager of the Co-op until 1972 when he accepted the position of general fieldman. In a few years, Charlie was promoted to director of field services, a role which he held until he was promoted to vice president in 1992.

Under his leadership, the field services group helped develop many of the programs and financial management tools which evolved into the modern methods today's Co-op leaders use to effectively manage their businesses.



The 2019 James B. Walker Cooperative Spirit Award recipient Charlie Atkins, center, along with wife, Sarah, is joined by sons, David, left, and his wife Trena, both left of Charlie, and Patrick with friend Cathy Thrasher, at the TFC annual meeting.

For example, when Charlie started as a fieldman, the Co-ops were still writing tickets by hand. Later, the field staff would be instrumental in helping move the Co-ops to the first automated point-of-sale program. Accounts receivables in those early years were maintained the old-fashioned way — by hand — and the interpretation of information for business decisions was difficult.

While Charlie was still managing Smith Farmers Co-op, he first met the engaging James Walker, who had taken over the position as director of training in 1962. Charlie points to Walker's placement as a pivotal time in Co-op history, noting that it was under his leadership that the system began to focus on recruiting and training the high-caliber employees for which the Co-op has become known.

Charlie certainly fit that mold throughout his career. He retired on March 22, 2002 after 44 years of devoted service to the Co-op system.

Since retiring in 2002, Charlie and Sarah have moved twice — once back to Charlie's hometown in Monroe County and later back to Maryville. Their boys have blessed Charlie and Sarah with five grandchildren, and the doting grandparents spend as much time as they can with them.

The couple volunteers at Blount Memorial Hospital at least one day each week. And with a home in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains, Charlie spends hours hiking favorite trails in his beloved mountains with friends. He estimates that he has hiked more than 500 miles over the last year or so.

In recent years, Charlie and Sarah have spent most of their winter months in Phoenix, Ariz., at a senior park where they enjoy socializing with friends from all over the country.

Even though Charlie has been away from the Co-op system for almost 18 years and is an outside observer now, his perspective on the system is still informed and filled with an insider's intimate knowledge.

The success of the system, he says, has been driven by the fulfillment of the farmers' needs and loyal people who committed themselves to the cause.

"You really get to know people," says Charlie. "You get to know people you work with. You get to know the directors. When you're working in the field, you get to know a lot of people. You find that they have a lot in common. That's what makes the organization go. The people. The need is there. The people develop the products, the programs, the services, and everything to fill the need. It is that simple, and it's that complicated. That's what this is all about."

## Charles Atkins is 21st Walker Award Winner

Past winners of the James B. Walker Cooperative Spirit Award are James B. Walker, 1999; Kenneth Michael, 2000; John Wheeler, 2001; J. Franklin Nix, 2002; Thomas H. Ward, 2003; Billie O. (Bill) Sparkman, 2004; W.E. Bailey, 2005; James M. Wright, 2006; Dan Smith, 2007; Philip Buckner, 2008; Allen Pogue, 2009; Vernon L. Glover, 2010; Franklin D. Black, 2011; Jerry Kirk, 2012; Johnny Daniel, 2013; David Lancaster, 2014; Sammy Young, 2015; Larry Paul Harris, 2016; Fred Brewster, 2017; and Kenneth Nixon, 2018.

# Smartt returns to TFC board

A familiar face has returned to represent Zone 3 on the Tennessee Farmers Cooperative board of directors.

George Smartt of McMinnville, a TFC director from 2006-14, was unanimously elected to a three-year term on the nine-member board during TFC's 2019



annual meeting Dec. 2 at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Nashville.

Smartt replaces Johnny Brady of Riceville, who was not eligible for re-election.

"I'm flattered that the farmer members decided to re-elect me and look forward to the opportunities ahead," said Smartt, a longtime member of Warren Farmers Cooperative whose 400-acre operation includes poultry, wine grapes, and beef cattle. "I enjoyed the eight years I previously spent on the board so much with some of the finest, easiest-to-get-along with people I'd ever been around. We made progressive moves such as creating Co-op Financial Solutions and partnering with WinField to form GreenPoint Ag. TFC is a great organization, and I'm excited about what the future holds."

Smartt resides with his wife of 34 years, Tammy, on the McMinnville farm where he was raised and where his great-great-grandfather, William Cheek Smartt, created a homestead in 1804. The Smartts have four children — Alex, 31, Jac, 28, Madison, 23, and Will, 19.

# Thank you, Johnny

Johnny Brady, a committed dairyman from Riceville, served with effectiveness and grace as a member of Tennessee Farmers Cooperative's board of directors for nine years. The 2019 annual meeting marked the end of his long tenure as a Zone 3 director on the nine-member board.

During his time as a TFC director, Johnny served as vice chairman in 2014 and 2015, and his fellow directors elected him chairman in 2016. He was outstanding in his service as chairman of the board, going the extra mile many times to represent farmers and other Co-op patrons from not just East Tennessee but other parts of the state as well.

Ever the humble servant, Johnny told the 2010 annual meeting audience upon his election that "I don't feel like I'm worthy of this, but I will do the best job I can." Those who served alongside him the preceding three years on the board of Valley (now AgCentral) Farmers Cooperative thought otherwise. AgCentral Chief Executive Officer John Walker witnessed Johnny's poise and sound decision-making firsthand, saying Johnny was "a good fit" for the TFC board.

"He has an ability to remove what's good for Johnny in favor of what's good for the Co-op," said Walker. "We will all benefit from his judgment and decision-making on the TFC board."

For the next nine years, the dedicated McMinn County dairyman, whose 500-acre farm with son Scott includes a 100-head Jersey dairy, registered Angus cattle, Bermudagrass, and silage corn, helped guide TFC through a period of sustained financial strength. And in doing so, he was able to interact with, and gain feedback from Co-op farmer owners throughout the system.

"It's an eye-opening experience to meet employees and boards of the local Co-ops and hear how they are trying to reach people beyond the boundaries of everyday agriculture," said Johnny. "I always leave impressed by their knowledge and understanding of why the Co-op system exists."

We thank Johnny for the countless hours he has devoted over the past nine years in furthering the Co-op cause in Tennessee. Our entire system will continue to reap the benefits of his efforts and contributions.



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# An urgent need

Co-op founded by farmers seeking dependable source of basic farm supplies

By Glen Liford

It's difficult for those who have had access to a local Co-op their whole life to fully understand what it was like before Co-op was established. In this time, when we have the world accessible via our smart phones and the Internet, it's hard to imagine an era when it was difficult to find a source for the items a farmer needed.

"There were few options in many communities," explains Paul Binkley, Tennessee Farmers Cooperative director of training and one of those key employees charged with telling and retelling the Co-op story in his educational sessions for trainees and member Co-op directors.

There are few of those who were around when TFC was established and not many truly

understand how novel the concept was at the time and how it has shaped Tennessee agriculture, he says.

In the beginning, there was only the idea that working together would work, says Paul. And the early organizers must have been pretty good salesmen to entice their farmer neighbors to invest in an unproven and unfamiliar concept, at least to rural Tennesseans.

Charles Atkins, the retired Tennessee Farmers Cooperative vice president of sales and 2019 James B. Walker Cooperative Spirit Award recipient, shared his earliest memory of the Co-op while being interviewed for the Walker Award presentation. He was a five-year-old child when neighbors came to his dad's farm to persuade the elder farmer to invest \$30 in the business they

were starting, which would become Monroe Farmers Co-op (today a part of AgCentral Farmers Co-op). That \$30 doesn't sound like much, but in today's dollars that would be asking for nearly \$450, not a paltry sum especially in those difficult times.

"Dad's first question was 'What's a Co-op?'" remembers Charlie.

As Co-ops were getting started, farmers banded together and set out to ask their neighbors to make an investment in their common future by buying stock in the business. The organizers of Monroe Farmers Co-op, for example, were seeking 100 investors who were willing to risk that \$30 to get the business started. What inspired those farmers to take the risk was an urgent need — a need for a reliable and

trustworthy source of farm supplies basic to their operations, like seed and fertilizer.

In the Co-op history book, “Tapestry of Success,” published in 1995 on the occasion of TFC’s 50th Anniversary, author Forrest Bradley cited many of the early directors and employees who experienced those times first hand.

He quoted Allen Thomas of Parrottsville, one of the early TFC directors, who recalled that the impetus for starting TFC was the fact that farmers across Tennessee could not get the supplies they needed. He explained:

“The big companies wouldn’t make fertilizer with the analysis that the University of Tennessee recommended that we use on the farm.

“Seed was in about the same situation. They just brought it in and cleaned it and sold it to you. The seed wasn’t certified. You just hoped you got what you were paying for.”

That wasn’t always the case. Charlie relates a story his mentor James Walker, then TFC’s director of sales, told about one of his early jobs as a high school student working for a local farm supply business. The business was selling lespedeza seed. The employees would run the seed through a cleaner and hold on to the debris that was left. Then, when they filled a bag of seed, they would place a stove pipe down in the center of the bag. The seed would fill in around the stove pipe, and then they would fill the pipe with the leftover debris from the cleaning process.

“They were fooling the inspectors because their sample would be from the good seed,” explains Charlie. “But the farmers would be cheated.”

When the Co-ops were getting started those unscrupulous suppliers were among the first to protest, and there was often active opposition to the organization process.

Quoting again from “Tapestry of Success,” Allen explained:

“Businesses that handled what we were buying were against us forming a cooperative here in Coker County. They called us everything but something good to eat — communists, fascists.

“We told them we would never run anybody out of business as long as they handled good stuff. It took several years before the wholesalers would sell to us, because businesses that handled what they were selling would quit buying from them if they started selling to the Co-op.”

“Dad bought into the [Co-op] idea because he recognized the need,” Charlie continues. “The farmer was at the mercy of the local mer-



Prior to the formation of Co-ops in Tennessee, farmers often had difficulty obtaining farm inputs like seed and fertilizer for their operations. This Tennessee Valley Authority photo from the 1930s depicts the organization’s efforts to promote the use of fertilizer and improve land quality in the Tennessee Valley. — Photo courtesy of National Archives; photograph No. 7130538; Record Group 142: Records of the Tennessee Valley Authority, 1918 – 2000; National Archives at Atlanta, Morrow, Ga.



After seeing firsthand his father Ernest support the formation of Monroe Farmers Cooperative, Charles Atkins eventually went on to work for the local Co-op and eventually Tennessee Farmers Cooperative. Early Co-ops sold stock to farmers to raise capital to get their business going.

chants. My dad realized that farmers needed to control their own destiny.”

As men came back from World War II, many wanted to farm when they returned home.

“The need was exaggerated at that time,” says Charlie. “The need was greater than that it was even in the 1930s.”

That need has been filled by the Co-op for now 75 years and counting.

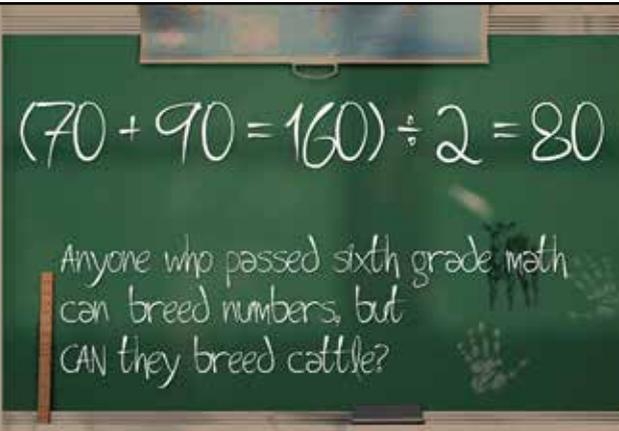
“Mr. Bailey [W.E. Bailey, former TFC chief executive officer] used to say, and it

really stuck with me, that a need fulfilled was often a need that was totally overlooked,” says Charlie. “I’ve used the example of the polio vaccine. Now that we have the vaccine, how many people don’t even talk about it being a problem anymore. In agriculture, there were all kinds of problems. There were problems with finance, with supply, with quality. And that’s what the Co-op was organized to do — take care of those needs of quality, availability, service, and know how.”

## Community In Focus



This Blue Angel F/A-18C Hornet serves as the centerpiece of the Capt. Jeff Kuss USMC Memorial, located within Lee Victory Recreation Park in Smyrna. Capt. Kuss tragically passed away flying a similar aircraft while practicing for the Great Tennessee Airshow on June 2, 2016. The Town of Smyrna officially opened the memorial with a dedication ceremony on June 9, 2018. — **Photo by Chris Villines**



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# Date for Pick TN Conference announced

Now's the time to pre-register for the Pick TN Conference on Feb. 20-22 at the Cool Springs Marriott in Franklin.

This three-day conference will offer more than 90 educational classes, an agriculture industry trade show, and networking opportunities with farmers, retailers, diversified farm operators, and industry experts.

The Pick TN Conference was created in 2016 by several state production associations to provide networking and educational opportunities for their members and other interested Tennessee farmers. Backed by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture and UT's Center for Profitable Agriculture, the conference is produced each year as a joint venture by TN

Agritourism Association, TN Organic Growers Association, TN Flower Growers Association, TN Farm Winegrowers Association, TN Fruit and Vegetable Association, TN Farmers Market Association, TN Beekeepers Association, and TN Christmas Tree Growers Association.

For registration and event schedule information, visit [www.PickTNConference.com](http://www.PickTNConference.com).



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## Honey Cornbread Muffins

**Floradine Wilson**  
Ardmore  
Giles County Cooperative

- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup whole milk
- 2 large eggs
- ½ stick melted butter
- ¼ cup honey

Preheat oven to 400°. Mix cornmeal, flour, baking powder, sugar, and salt in a large bowl. In another bowl, whisk together the whole milk, eggs, butter, and honey. Add the wet ingredients to the dry ones and stir until mixed thoroughly. Place muffin paper liners in a 12-cup muffin tin. Evenly divide the cornbread mixture into the papers. Bake for 15 minutes or until golden brown.

## Cajun Honey Shrimp

**Linda Bain**  
Bethel Springs  
Mid-South Farmers Cooperative

- 1 (48-60) package pre-cooked, tail-off shrimp
- 1 cup butter, melted
- ½ cup lemon juice
- ½ cup honey
- 1 tablespoon Cajun seasoning

Place thawed shrimp in baking dish. Mix all other ingredients together. Pour over shrimp. Bake in oven at 325° for about 20-30 minutes or until bubbly. Serve over a bed of Cajun-style rice. Enjoy.

## Honey Sriracha Glazed Meatballs

**Stacey Hicks**  
Camden  
Benton Farmers Cooperative

- 1 bag frozen home-style meatballs
- ¼ cup Sriracha sauce
- 3 tablespoons reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 3 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ teaspoon sesame seeds
- ½ teaspoon toasted sesame oil

Preheat oven to 350°. Place approximately 40 meatballs spaced apart on prepared baking sheets lightly sprayed with cooking spray. Bake meatballs for 20 to 25 minutes, or until browned and cooked through. While the meatballs are baking, combine all the ingredients for the sauce in a small saucepan and bring to a boil over medium heat, whisking continuously. Reduce heat and simmer for 8 to 10 minutes (the sauce will start to thicken) then toss with

the meatballs. Allow meatballs to rest in sauce 5-10 minutes, then sprinkle with sesame seeds before serving.

## Orange Honey Bars

**Irene Greer**  
Jamestown  
Fentress Farmers Cooperative

- ¾ cup honey
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- ½ cup cooking oil
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 teaspoon grated orange peel
- 1½ cups unsifted all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup chopped nuts

Preheat oven to 350°. Grease and flour a 9x13-inch pan. Beat honey, brown sugar, oil, and eggs until smooth. Add vanilla and orange peel. Sift together dry ingredients and stir into honey-orange mixture. Add nuts and mix well. Pour into prepared pan. Bake for 35 minutes or until done.

## The Best Pizza Crust

**Teresa Vinson**  
Union City  
Obion Farmers Cooperative

1 package of Pillsbury Pizza Crust Thin & Crispy Mix

½ cup hot water (120-130 degrees)

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons honey

Place oven rack in the lowest position; heat oven to 475°.

Spray a 12-14-inch round pizza pan with no-stick cooking spray.

Combine the above ingredients in a medium bowl. Stir about 30 strokes with a fork or until well blended. Shape dough into a ball (if dough is too sticky, add 2 tablespoons flour). Cover and let stand 5 minutes. Remove dough from bowl and add 1-2 more tablespoons flour, if needed, to form a round ball. Press dough in prepared pan. Generously prick dough with a fork. Bake for 5 minutes. Add your favorite toppings and return to oven and bake an additional 9-11 minutes.

## Broccoli & Cauliflower Salad

**Peggy Bryan**  
Hillsboro  
Coffee Farmers Cooperative

- 2 cups chopped broccoli
- 2 cups chopped cauliflower
- ½ cup sliced almonds
- ½ cup cranraisins
- 1 cup mayo
- ¼ cup honey

Mix the broccoli, cauliflower, almonds, and cranraisins together. Mix the mayo and honey together and pour over the other mixture.

## Spring Veggies

Nothing is as crisp as a lush and green spring salad or veggie wrap. The coming spring season calls for greens – fresh vegetables with plenty of crunch and snap – that offer a powerful health kick. Spring vegetables are loaded with fiber, vitamins K and C, as well as plenty of folic acid. Satisfy your spring cravings with fresh spring peas or a nice head of broccoli. Share with **Cooperator** readers the spring veggie recipes you love most.

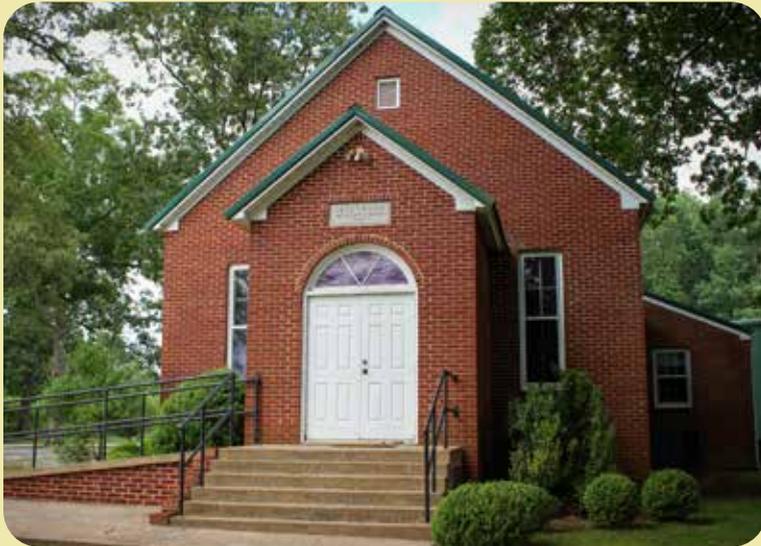
The person submitting the recipe judged best will be named “Cook of the Month” for the March 2020 **Cooperator** and re-

ceive \$10. Others sending recipes chosen for publication will receive \$5, and each winner will also receive a special “What’s Cookin’?” certificate.

**Monday, Jan. 27 is the deadline for your spring veggies 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).

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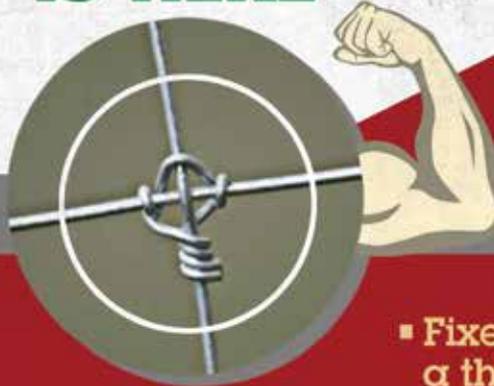
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# Plan to attend 2020 Middle Tennessee Grain Conference

Building on 14 years of success, the annual Middle Tennessee Grain Conference will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 4, at the UT Space Institute (UTSI) in Tullahoma, a new location for the annual meeting. This conference offers farmers some of the most practical insights and real-life solutions to emerging crop production issues.

The conference will begin at 8:30 a.m. with a welcome from UTSI followed by a slate of breakout sessions including “Dicamba: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly,” “The 1980’s Called & They Want Their Weeds Back,” and “Soil Testing For Precision Ag.” In addition to sessions that feature practical research-based education, the conference also features one of the area’s largest trade shows with over 30 industry vendors.

The event’s keynote speaker, Dr. R.L. (Bob) Nielson, an Extension Corn Special-

ist and professor of agronomy at Purdue University, will present “Corn Profitability: Between a Rock and a Hard Place.” Lunch will be catered by “The View” Dining Hall and is sponsored by the Tennessee Farmers Cooperative.

Registration for this conference is \$10 and pre-registration is available through UT-TSU Extension county offices. Registration fees include program materials, refreshments, lunch, and one conference hat per person.

Pesticide recertification will be offered immediately following adjournment. This recertification will include Dicamba and Gramoxone Certification for operators who use those herbicide technologies. Cost of this training is an additional \$25 per person to be paid onsite at the time of training. All current pesticide cards will expire June 30, 2020.



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# Staying power

Frosty Gregory and family run Double Century farm in Gallatin

Story and photos by: Chris Villines

**O**n March 24, 1956, a heavy frost resembling snow blanketed the ground in Sumner County. That occasion will forever be tied to a bouncing baby boy born on that day in Gallatin:

Frosty Gregory.

His given name is Foster, but you won't find anyone around these parts calling him anything other than the moniker bestowed upon him by his grandfather.

"He saw that frost on the ground and named me Frosty right then," the 63-year-old says. "And I've been Frosty ever since."

There's history to the name, and there's certainly history to the fertile land Frosty, his wife of 31 years, Lori, their son John and daughter Racheal, and Frosty's brother, Henry, care for with their family farming operation. John and Racheal are the eighth consecutive generation of the Gregory family to farm here, a lineage that dates all the way back to 1794.

The Double Century farm is the oldest remaining in Sumner County.

"There were two Double Century farms, but the other one was sold for development three or four years ago," says Frosty. "My ancestors who settled this land came out of North Carolina. They had 12 children at the time and were expecting another one."

From that beginning, through the Civil War — in which Frosty's great-great-great grandfather was a Confederate soldier — and on to the present day, agriculture has been the central focus of the Gregory farm. And this way of life was ingrained in Frosty from an early age, when he and his siblings would help their father, Homer, tend to the farm's tobacco, cattle, and hogs.

"We tried other things, too — whatever it took to make a dollar," Frosty says. "Farming in the 1960s and '70s was all about surviving. Money from tobacco was what raised us. The cattle part got bigger when I got out of high school. Daddy took me in, and we expanded our cattle program."

It was clear to Frosty that farming was to be his life's calling. He did briefly try the college route, juggling farm work with attending near-by Volunteer State Community College for two

quarters, but "when it got to spring and it was time to start plowing, I didn't go back. I knew where I belonged, and that was right here being a steward of this land."

His mind made up, Frosty, 18 years old at the time, began charting his agricultural course.

"I went to the bank and borrowed \$4,000 to buy some cattle," he says. "I bought 40 head. Those cattle made me some money, and I've never looked back."

Today, the main focus of Frosty and family's operation is on cattle backgrounding. The Sumner Farmers Cooperative members — Frosty and Henry are past directors of the Co-op and John is on the board now — have several lots of cattle around the farm. Frosty, John, and Racheal deal with most of the day-to-day management of the cattle, while Henry, a skilled mechanic, welder, and electrician, spends the bulk of his time at the farm shop keeping all the equipment humming. Lori, with assistance from Racheal, handles the farm's bookkeeping.

"Our main goal is to take mismanaged cattle and improve the value of them," says Frosty. "You go through a health curve when you first buy them. We buy a lot of bulls, and they don't have any immunity so we have to build up their health through vaccination. It's not rocket science, but you've got to really be paying attention."

"I don't have to know everything, but I do need to know one thing, and that's the phone number of the person who does know."

He counts the Co-op as part of the group he can reach out to for answers.

"We're blessed in Sumner County," he says. "Our Co-op is good. Our Extension office is good. Our Soil Conservation and Farm Service Agency folks are good. We deal with people who are really interested in helping us."

That's a bonus, for sure, one that Frosty says he hopes to take advantage of for years to come.

"People ask me, 'When are you going to retire?'" he says. "I tell them, 'I haven't ever been to work.' If you love what you do, then it's not work. My family has inherited this land from past generations, and we intend to keep it going. We've got roots in the ground as deep as any oak tree around here."



At their family's Gallatin farm established in 1794, Frosty Gregory pays a quick visit to daughter Racheal to plot out the rest of day's work before she heads off on the tractor.



*“This farm has been here more than 200 years and could have been sold more than 200 times, but there are more important things than money. We’ve got roots in the ground as deep as any oak tree around here.” – Frosty Gregory*

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Let's not beat around the bush - agriculture is hard work. It's early mornings, it's late nights. It's about getting your hands dirty to get the job done. It's about adapting to challenges, and there are many. Datamars Livestock links tools that promote animal health, enable precision animal management, and improve protein production. These tools work together, communicating with each other and communicating with you.

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