

# THE COOPERATOR

APRIL 2020

CONNECTING THE **CO-OP** COMMUNITY

18

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A produce operation evolves into an agritourism destination.

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CONNECT WITH US



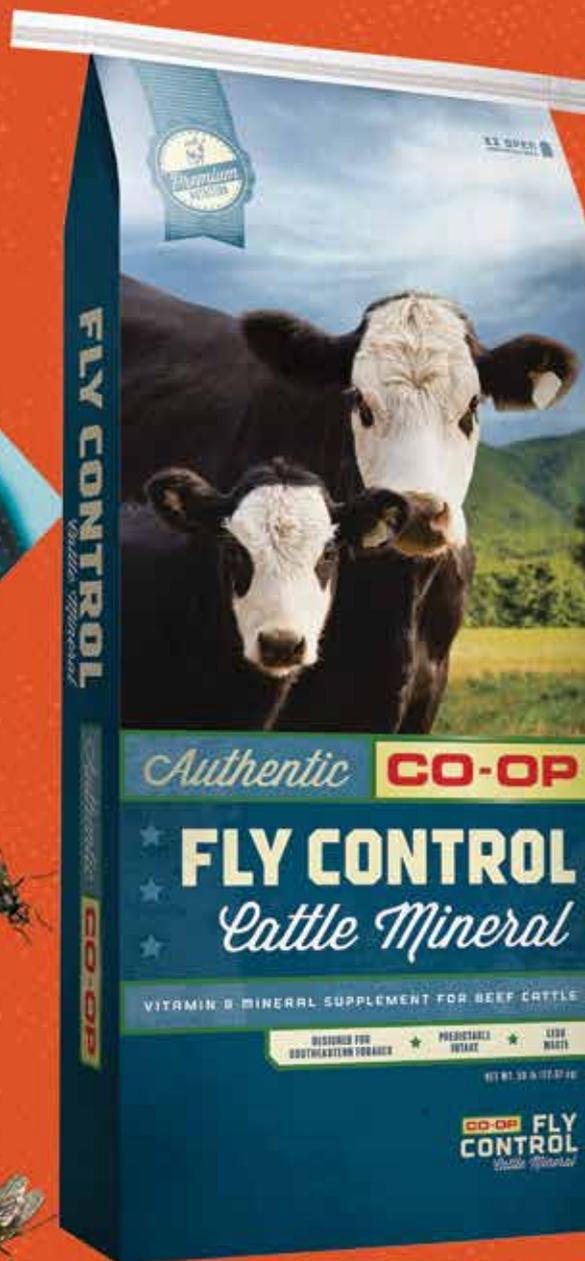
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March 2020

CONNECTING THE CO-OP COMMUNITY



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## THE COOPERATOR

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**Editor: Glen Liford**  
gliford@ourcoop.com

**Communications Specialist: Sarah Geyer**  
sgeyer@ourcoop.com

**Senior Graphic Designer: Shane Read**  
sread@ourcoop.com

**Graphic Designer: Morgan Graham**  
mgraham@ourcoop.com

**Layout & Production Coordinator:**  
Travis Merriman  
tmerriman@ourcoop.com

**Editorial Assistant: Polly Campbell**  
pcampbell@ourcoop.com

**Advertising Information: Jimmy Ogilvie**  
615-793-8453, jogilvie@ourcoop.com

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E-mail: tlewtter@ourcoop.com

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# Shop talk

## You're invited to share



**Glen Liford**

Editor

I had a minor medical procedure a few weeks ago that put me out of commission for a few days. Recuperation took more than a week of not being able to use my right hand. Somehow when you can't do something, that's the very thing that you want to do!

I have several projects languishing in the garage. Since I wasn't physically able to do much, it seemed like the perfect time to at least think about them. If you can't work in your own shop, the next best thing is to watch someone else who can, so I turned on the TV. Cable television is full of shows where a team of talented mechanics tackle the restoration of a classic car in only a few days. In spite of a looming, unrealistic deadline, they are always able to complete a beautiful resurrection just in time. The shops where the work is done on these programs are amazing! Every tool is orga-

nized, and the spaces are almost spotless.

The term "man cave" is popular right now, but the idea isn't a new concept — we just called it our "shop," "garage," or "workroom." Regardless of the name, I'm not sure how much work gets done in these places, and most seem to be spaces where buddies can hang together and watch sports or partake in other "manly" activities.

As I considered the cable shows with their unrealistic shops and the new "man cave" term, my thoughts began to turn to this column. I asked myself: "What is the difference between a man cave and a bonafide working shop?" and "Can the two be the same?"

I've visited lots of farm shops during my travels, and I've seen both cluttered and clean ones. Some are precisely organized, and others are in perpetual disarray. Some are Spartan spaces, purely functional with no bling, while others are sparkling showcases for collections or hobbies like antique tractors or classic cars. Regardless, I always found each of them interesting. And this led me to another question: "Can a hobby room and a real working shop share the same space?"

I'm thinking your answers to these questions would make a great future *Cooperator* story, so we need your input. Send us a photo or two of your own shop. Whether it's a gleaming showcase or a cluttered mess — a hobby space, a workshop, or a little of both. If it works for you, we would like to see it. Also, we'd like for you to share any workshop hacks or tips you have for tool storage or adaptations for making shop tasks easier. Farmers tend to be resourceful and talented individuals, and I would bet there are some great ideas out there.

Entries should be received by May 11. We will have a committee judge the submissions, and the best ones will be featured in an upcoming story. Our favorite will also receive a \$50 Co-op gift certificate.



In August 2019, we featured John Brown of Washington County and his demolition derby hobby. This picture was taken in John's shop with his antique tractors, demolition derby trophy collection, and neat collection of collectible oil cans in the background. What does your shop look like?



More than 400 middle and high school students participated in the third annual Ag Day with UT Men's Basketball on Tuesday, Feb. 18. In addition to learning about careers in agriculture from industry professionals, attendees were treated to a "behind-the-scenes" tour of Neyland Stadium, which included a meet and greet with Smokey.

# Consider a career in ag

Events in East and Middle Tennessee offer students opportunity to learn about jobs in agriculture from industry professionals

Story by: Sarah Geyer

Only two months into 2020, more than 700 East and Middle Tennessee students have participated in youth ag career programs featuring industry professionals and sporting events.

Sponsored by Tennessee Farmers Cooperative, Farm Bureau Insurance of Tennessee, and the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation, both events gave students, many who are involved in FFA or 4-H, the chance to hear firsthand about career opportunities in the field of agriculture from a panel of local industry professionals. The students were also given the opportunity to attend either a men's basketball game at the University of Tennessee or a Nashville Predators game at Bridgestone Arena.

The third annual Ag Day with UT Men's Basketball was held on Tuesday, Feb. 18, on the university's Knoxville campus. Approximately 450 middle and high school students, teachers, and parents braved the relentless rain to attend. The event began with "behind-the-scenes" tours of Neyland Stadium led by current UT ag students. Following the tours, attendees gathered at the Student Union to learn more about career opportunities in agriculture.

Dr. Tim Cross, chancellor of the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, opened

the panel discussion session with a welcome and an outline of the areas of study available at the UT College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources.

"We're glad to have you on campus," he said. "We hope you will consider pursuing one of our ag majors, but we believe that, no matter what your major, the University of Tennessee is a good choice."

Lee Maddox, director of communications for TFBF, served as session moderator for the discussion, which featured a panel of local ag professionals including Kristen Walker, field service director for TFBF; Jennifer Houston, past president of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association; Dr. John Sorochan, distinguished professor of turfgrass science at UT; Jimmy Ogilvie, TFC's event and sales support manager; and Shane Williams, senior financial officer at Farm Credit Mid-America.

When asked about the skills most needed for a career in ag, the speakers were unanimous: communication skills, both written and oral. They also urged students to seek opportunities for internships and job shadowing while in high school and college. One of the panelists asked how many of the attendees planned to pursue a career in agriculture, and nearly two-thirds of them raised their hands. After Dr.

Sorochan shared that his graduates had a 100-percent job placement rate, many students expressed a newfound interest in turf science.

Following the presentation, attendees were treated to pizza before heading to Thompson-Boling Arena to watch a nail-biter with the Vols pulling out a 65-61 victory over the Vanderbilt Commodores.

Ag Day with the Predators was held Monday, Jan. 27, with nearly 300 middle and high school students, teachers, and parents from Middle Tennessee in attendance.

Panelists included Lee Maddox, who served a dual role as emcee and participant; Devin Gilliam, financial service officer at Farm Credit Mid-America; Kim Holmberg, chief operating officer for Journal Communications; Stephanie McQueen, marketing director for H&R Agri-Power; and Scott Bohanon, training and education specialist for TFC.

As a first-time panelist, Bohanon says he was impressed by the thoughtfulness of the students' questions and appreciated the opportunity to share his personal story.

"When I was in high school, I wanted to be a graphic designer," said Bohannon, who holds a bachelor's and master's degree from Tennessee Technology University and Oklahoma State University respectively. "I didn't think my career path was in agriculture. But now, as part of Co-op, I work with accountants, lawyers, human resources officers, and even graphic artists, each who play an important role in the agriculture industry."

The speakers stressed the importance of becoming involved in college organizations – especially those pertaining to agriculture – and pointed out that sororities or fraternities can provide opportunities to strengthen communication, organizational, and leadership skills.

To cap off a busy day, attendees were treated to a tour of Bridgestone Stadium and a pre-game meal before enjoying the professional hockey game atmosphere. Unfortunately, the Preds were defeated by the Toronto Maple Leafs with a final score of 2-5.

"We need to encourage our students to consider a career in agriculture, and Co-op is proud to partner with Farm Bureau to provide these types of opportunities," says Jimmy Ogilvie. "The popularity of the events at UT led to the Ag Day with the Predators for Middle Tennessee students, and, with its success, the hope is to offer something similar in West Tennessee."



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First Farmers Cooperative member Harold Maners of Decaturville understands the value of feeding Co-op minerals with fly control, which is why, as a part of his year-round program, he provides the supplemental nutrition beginning early April through November.

# Stress less

## Implementing an effective fly control program is good for cattle and producers

Story and photos by: Allison Parker

**W**hen flies arrive on the farm, so does stress. Not only does the producer suffer as he or she wonders how much damage the flies will do to the herd, but, more importantly, the pesky insects create a stressful environment for cattle, which ultimately affects the bottom line.

As the cattle attempt to ward off the flies, their grazing is interrupted, and the results are often decreased weight gain and reduced milk production. A year-round fly control program built around Co-op

minerals containing feed-through larvacide can effectively reduce the impact of flies on a herd.

There are three major species of flies with potential to afflict cattle: house flies, horn flies, and face flies. Of these, horn flies are by far the most costly. They are often confused with face flies. The horn fly however, is a small, black insect about the size of a grain of rice that spend the majority of its life on the back, shoulders, and belly of its host.

Co-op Animal Health specialist urge farmers to act now to get ahead of horn fly populations. The first flies will begin to

emerge when daily temperatures reach 65 degrees for a period of two weeks, and as the spring and summer progress, limiting numbers becomes more difficult and less effective.

Harold Maners, a cattle producer Decaturville, understands the value of these minerals as they do all they can to stay ahead of the flies. Harold utilizes a year-round fly control program for the 50 commercial Angus mama cows and calves that he manages on his multigenerational family farm.

“Harold has impressed me because he is interested in every aspect of total management

of his cattle,” says Mark Bentley, Tennessee Farmers Cooperative livestock specialist. “He focuses on best management practices like rotational grazing layout, proper selection of forages, and an extensive fly control plan. He is truly devoted to having the best total package program for his cattle.”

Harold, a First Farmers Cooperative member, begins his fly control efforts in early April and provides Supreme Hi Mag Cattle Mineral with Fly Control (#96623) free choice for his cattle through May. In June, he switches to Supreme IGR Fly Control Cattle Mineral (#96622) and continues using it into November.

Providing early spring to late fall access to the IGR mineral will produce optimum results, says Mark. The insect growth regulator (IGR) prevents horn fly eggs from developing into adults by passing through the animal’s digestive tract unaffected and into the manure where it interrupts the life cycle of the fly. The extended timeline ensures the IGR is available during every stage of the fly’s lifespan — from egg to adulthood.

Beginning in late May, Harold takes the extra step to have First Farmers Co-op’s livestock team work his cattle. While on the farm, the team gives the cattle all their vaccinations and applies fly control insecticide ear tags. They also add a pour-on dewormer, like Eprinex or Cydectin, to help prepare the cattle for the worst of the fly season in the summer and fall.

“You get the best control when you do like Mr. Harold does and use minerals as part of



Cattle on the Harold Maners’ farm have free-choice access to Co-op fly-control mineral, get a fly-control insecticide ear tag, as well as pour-on dewormer, like Eprinex or Cydectin, to help prevent flies during peak fly season.

a total program,” says Mark. “There are lots of options for a total program that include pour-ons, sprays, back rubs, or fly tags. A total program really works best.”

During this entire process, Harold works closely with First Farmers livestock specialist Jeremy Jones to select the right mix of products for maximum benefit and to reduce the likelihood that the flies build resistance.

“Having the Co-op is so helpful for me because their people know what they’re talking about,” says Harold. “It’s convenient, and

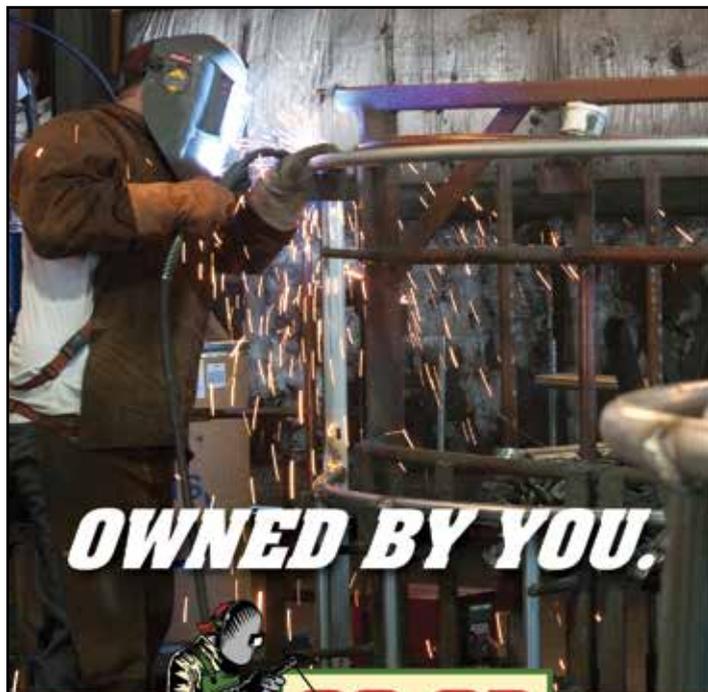
they do a good job with whatever you ask for. They have everything you need for the farm, and they have good people to work with.”

Co-op minerals with IGR are the cornerstone of Harold’s fly control program, but he says the addition of other control methods like insecticide ear tags and a pour-on enhances his coverage.

“You have to do everything possible to get rid of flies,” he says. “Flies will cost you pounds per day, and ultimately hurt your bottom line more than you ever realized.”



LEFT: A year-round fly control program effectively reduces the impact of flies on a herd. RIGHT: Angus producer Harold Maners, right, discusses his cattle fly-control strategy with Jeremy Jones, a First Farmers Cooperative livestock specialist. Harold relies on Co-op products such as the Co-op Super Heavy Duty Mineral Feeder to execute a plan that makes flies sparse for his 50 mama cows and calves.



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Lewisburg, WV from a Drovers' profit tips article.

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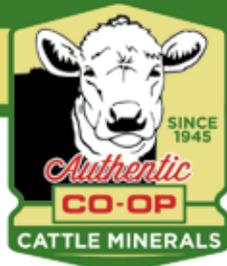
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# USDA invests \$9 million in broadband for rural Tennessee communities

Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced on Feb. 14 the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has invested \$9 million in four high-speed broadband infrastructure projects that will create or improve rural e-Connectivity for 3,744 rural households, 31 businesses, 41 farms, and a critical community facility in Tennessee. This is one of many funding announcements in the first round of USDA's ReConnect Pilot Program investments.

"Our core mission at USDA is to increase rural prosperity through boosting economic opportunity in rural America," Perdue said. "We know that rural communities need robust, modern infrastructure to thrive, and that includes having access to broadband e-Connectivity. Under the leadership of President Trump, USDA is proud to partner with rural communities to deploy this critical infrastructure because we know when rural America thrives, all of America thrives."

Ben Lomand Holdings Inc. will use a \$2.2 million ReConnect Program grant to deploy a fiber-to-the-premises (FTTP) network to rural northeastern Cumberland County. The funded service areas include 222 households, six pre-subscribed businesses, and three pre-subscribed farms which encompass more than 100 square miles.

North Central Communications Inc. will use a \$1.4 million ReConnect Program grant to provide broadband service to residents and businesses in rural Smith County. The funded service areas include 164 households, 10 pre-subscribed businesses, and 21 pre-subscribed farms spread over 22 square miles.

Peoples Telephone Company, dba TEC, will use a \$1 million ReConnect Program loan and a \$1 million ReConnect Program grant to provide broadband service to residents and businesses in rural Houston, Henry, Stewart, and Montgomery counties. The funded service areas include 642 households, two pre-subscribed businesses, and five pre-subscribed farms spread over 38 square miles.

United Communications Inc. will use a \$3.3 million ReConnect Program grant to provide broadband service to residents and businesses in rural Wilson, Rutherford,

Williamson, and Maury counties. The funded service areas include 2,716 households, 13 pre-subscribed businesses, 12 pre-subscribed farms, and a critical community facility covering 48 square miles.

The "ReConnect" Pilot Program grants, loans, and combination funds enable the federal government to partner with the private sector and rural communities to build modern broadband infrastructure in areas with insufficient internet service.

In December 2019, Secretary Perdue announced USDA will be making available an additional \$550 million in ReConnect funding in 2020. USDA will make available up to \$200 million for grants, up to \$200 million for 50/50 grant/loan combinations, and up to \$200 million for low-interest loans. A full description of 2020 ReConnect Pilot Program funding is available on page 67913 of the Federal Register, published Dec. 12, 2019.



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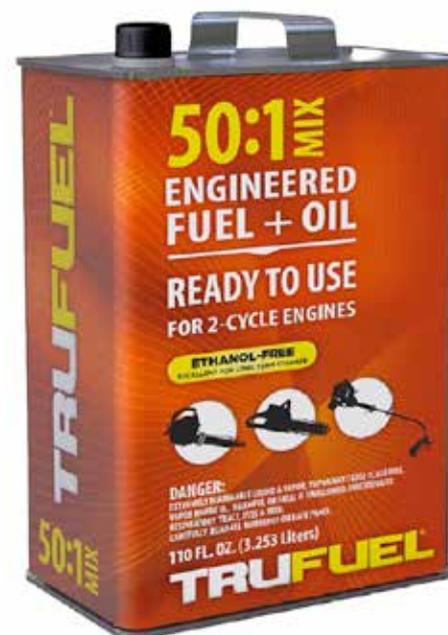
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## NEIGHBORLY ADVICE



Royce Towns, TFC Nutritionist

# Fly-control mineral is foundation for effective control

**T**he pesky little thieves don't show up wearing lone ranger masks and carrying six-shooters. But these sneaky varmints are stealing from you in just as brazen a way as any bank robber on the six o'clock news.

They seem like such little things. But it doesn't take many to make cattle miserable and rob you of profits in terms of lost production, treatment costs, and disease transmission. I'm talking, of course, about the nuisance flies that will soon be flocking to your cattle herd. Fly season begins shortly after the last frost of spring and lasts until just after the first frost.

The three major species for concern are houseflies, face flies, and horn flies. Of these, horn flies are by far the most costly and are often confused with face flies. The horn fly can be identified as a small, black fly, about the size of a grain of rice, spending the majority of its life on the back, shoulders, and belly of its host, feeding in a head-down position.

Horn fly pupae overwinter in manure pats and emerge in the spring when average daily temperatures reach 65° F for a period of at least two weeks. Having only a 10-20 day life cycle, the adult female leaves her host only long enough to lay eggs in warm, fresh manure. Each female can lay up to 500 eggs during her lifespan, allowing populations to increase at a rapid pace. Around 200 horn flies per animal is the documented economic threshold, and when left uncontrolled, as many as 4,000 per animal may be observed when numbers peak in early summer. Each horn fly takes 20-30 blood meals per day by inflicting a piercing bite through the animal's hide. The ensuing pain and irritation cause cattle to alter their grazing patterns and expend valuable energy attempting to dislodge the flies. This behavior translates into reduced rates of gain in stocker cattle and decreased milk production and lower calf weaning weights in brood cow operations.

In terms of total production losses, USDA research estimates the horn fly costs U.S. cattle producers nearly \$1 billion per year. Fortunately, stockmen have several effective

options for controlling horn flies and minimizing their associated losses. Insecticide ear tags, pour-ons, back rubbers treated with insecticides, premise sprays, and feed-through insect growth regulators (IGRs) can all be of use in keeping fly numbers in check. The most convenient of these is a cattle vitamin-mineral supplement containing an IGR. This method eliminates the stress, labor, and expense of handling cattle, while allowing them to spread the horn fly control as they graze.

Feed-through IGRs control horn fly populations by preventing the eggs from developing into adult flies, therefore greatly decreasing the numbers. The compound is consumed and passes unaffected through the animal's digestive tract, ending up in the manure pat where it interrupts the life cycle of the fly, preventing development into the adult stage. For optimum fly control, these products must be consumed daily in adequate quantities such that all manure contains effective levels of the IGR.

In addition to fly control, a complete vitamin-mineral supplement containing a feed-through insecticide provides additional nutrients necessary for grazing cattle to get the most from pastures. Forages can be deficient in several essential minerals regardless of season. Phosphorus, copper, zinc, and selenium all play vital roles in growth and reproduction of beef cattle and Co-op fly-control minerals help bridge the gap between the animal's requirements and those provided by the forage.

For most effective results when using Co-op fly-control minerals, begin feeding before flies appear in the spring. Offer minerals in covered feeders and monitor consumption throughout the summer, adjusting placement as needed. And finally, when beginning an IGR program mid-season, use an appropriate spray or pour-on to quickly reduce the number of adult flies.

For more information about effective fly management programs, visit with your local Co-op feed specialist.



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April 2020 17



# Strawberry Jam

A produce operation evolves into an agritourism destination

Story and photos by: Glen Liford

On the third weekend of the month on Saturday, May 16, throngs of visitors will converge on the farm of Nate Darnell, his sister, Afton, and their dad, Jeff, along the Tuckasegee River at Bryson City, N.C. The visitors, many of them from nearby Asheville or Waynesville, will come to the idyllic setting to stroll the fertile river-bottom fields, enjoy bluegrass music, peruse various vendor booths, pick their own strawberries, and perhaps purchase other farm-fresh produce.

They'll also get to see how farming was done in the old days — watching local enthusiasts plow with mules — and visit with Nate and Afton or other farm employees while taking a hayride around the acreage.

This experience is not what the farm set out to be, stresses Nate, a customer of Smoky Mountain Farmers Co-op in Waynesville, but it's the way the operation has

evolved to stay competitive and profitable in the changing agricultural landscape.

Jeff moved his family from neighboring Macon County in the 1970s due to pressures from developers. Farmland, at the time, was a bit easier to come by in Swain and Jackson counties, Nate explains. It wasn't long before the Daltons' commercial produce operation included acres across the three counties. Today, the operation encompasses around 80 acres.

"Dad had a little bit of you-pick products, but it was mostly a commercial operation," says Nate. "Sometime in the early 1990s, he opened up a fruit stand here on the farm because people kept coming down here. It was such an open place. We were always playing music and just picking for the fun of it, and people would stop in and hang around with us."

The family's hospitality drew repeat visitors, and the seed for the family's agritourism venture was born.

In less than a decade, the simple fruit stand grew into a larger produce store,

and in early 2000, the family hosted their first "Strawberry Jam." The event offered customers a chance to pick strawberries during the peak of berry season while enjoying performances from the Darnells and other talented local musicians.

"I always say we were at the beginning of agritourism," says Nate with a laugh. "It just kind of happened by accident. We were already doing it. We love talking to people. We love playing music. It just worked well."

The farm's location on the river helped, too, as the scenic property was a magnet for folks who enjoyed the outdoors.

In addition to a commercial produce operation focused on primary crops like tomatoes, strawberries, and pumpkins, the Darnells also grow cucumbers, squash, hot and sweet peppers, and sweet corn. The corn has been doing well, Nate says, so they've increased the acreage of the cash crop over the last few years.

(See Strawberry Jam, page 20)



LEFT: The mountains around Bryson City are filled with talented musicians, says Nate Darnell. The Strawberry Jam hosted on the Darnell Farm in May got its start as the Darnell family, who also enjoy playing music with friends and family, realized the entertainment would draw visitors to the farm. RIGHT: All sorts of produce is available at the Darnell Farms produce stand, which is open throughout the growing season. Pick-your-own strawberries are the highlight of the May gathering, but the family also hosts a popular fall pumpkin event held throughout October as well.

# Strawberry Jam

(continued from page 19)

Nate and Afton each have their own farms that they operate, and they work together to run Darnell Farms. Today, approximately 75 percent of the enterprises' income comes from the agritourism events. In addition to the popular spring event, the Darnells also capitalize on the fall pumpkin craze that has become so popular in recent years. The Darnells offer pick-your-own pumpkins coupled with intriguing corn and sunflower mazes for visitors of all ages. They also offer hosted hayrides driven by informed, friendly employees who answer questions about the farm's operation and answer questions from inquisitive visitors. The fall activities are more popular than the spring events, says Nate.

"During the Strawberry Jam, we probably have 5,000 people here," he says. "On a normal weekend, we might get 500 to 1,000,

but in the fall, we are bombarded. It doesn't stop between the last weekend in September through Halloween. We will have 2,000 to 3,000 people per day."

Each of those visitors offer an opportunity for the Darnells to tell agriculture's story and share their love of farming.

"They enjoy talking to us during the hay wagon ride," says Nate. "We try to treat our customers like family. When we get to the field, we say, 'You've got eight acres of pumpkins to choose from. Have at it!' We tell them we're in no hurry and to take their time, that we're happy to wait on them. Some of them are like, 'Are you sure?'"

The whole process is a learning opportunity for both sides. The visitors are often experiencing something for the first time — the reality of a working farm.

"Some of them will leave and say, 'I was kind of scared of that place, but now I'm not so scared,'" says Nate. "I can see a difference in many of them when they leave."

The exchange is important on the farmer's side, too, says Nate, as producers embrace new opportunities to promote agriculture.

Nate frequently participates in seminars to teach other farmers how to make agritourism work and create a successful experience.

Topics like managing migrant labor, working with all sorts of people and personalities, and economic concepts like supply and demand and working in a competitive environment are vital business skills, he says.

"The first thing I tell people is you must have an appreciation for farming," he stresses. "That doesn't mean you need to be an expert, but you need to respect how difficult it is. Then, I tell the farmers, 'You might want to learn how to talk to people.'"

"There are a lot of farmers I know who might be the best farmers you will ever meet, but when you get them in front of people, they can't seem to get a word out. They don't want to change their ways, but these days, a little change might be necessary to have a successful farm."



Jade Samuel and Daniel Williams drove down from Asheville to pick strawberries during the spring 2019 Strawberry Jam.



If visitors don't want to pick their own berries, there are plenty already picked and packaged to be found at the Darnell Farm produce stand alongside the Tuckasegee River in Bryson City, N.C.



LEFT: Throughout the event, visitors can learn more about farming and how their food is grown. Exhibitions of plowing with mules show the history of farming. MIDDLE: Three-year-old Luca and 1-year-old Leo visited the Strawberry Jam with their mother Crystal Minick of Franklin, N.C. RIGHT: Nate Darnell enjoys the wholesome farm life with son Fletcher, left, and nephew Eli.

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Volunteers assisting with the Washington County Cattlemen's Association Fall Sale in November were, from left, Jacob Goode, Jackie Fleenor, Kimberly Brocklebank, Robert Monin, John Brown, Ben Brinkley, Landon Gray, Grayson Rader, Jimmy Shipley, Kelly Glass, Nichole Garst, Bo Shadden, Phil Booher, manager of Appalachian Fairgrounds, and Billy Joe Lewis.

# Neighborly gesture

Community cooperation leads to improved equipment for cattle producers

Story and photos by: Glen Liford

After the Washington County Cattlemen's Association (WCCA) staged their 2019 Spring Heifer Sale at the Greene County Fairgrounds last April, the members were envious.

The Greene County Angus Association allowed the WCCA to use the W-W Livestock System that the group had purchased in the spring of 2017 to help advance its sales, and the Washington County producers were impressed with how well the sale went.

"We knew we wanted to do something similar for our [future sales]," says Chad Fleenor, who was a member of the WCCA board at the time.

The WCCA knew they could benefit from such a system for their own sales, as the sturdy panels, hi-pole gates, and

other equipment allowed animals to be penned in a way that buyers could easily view them, and volunteers could efficiently move them through the sale process. Plus, it was safer for all involved.

"Safety is always a priority," says Chad. "And it's no exception at these sales. We want to do everything to keep our workers, the buyers, and the cattle safe and secure."

To that end, the WCCA followed a similar approach to sourcing a strong, portable system that could be easily set up and installed for the sales events.

Funding for the project came from a variety of sources, says Chad. The association staged a membership fundraiser for the sales facilities, and top donors included the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Farm Credit Mid-America, and Washington Farm Bureau. WCCA Members John McGinn of

McGinn Angus Farm and John Abe Teague of Mire Creek Angus also donated heifers to the organization with proceeds from the sale of the heifers going to the fund.

The group then worked with Washington Farmers Co-op in Jonesborough to get the project rolling. Co-op Manager Tim Smithson, who retired in November 2019, called on Tennessee Farmers Cooperative Hardware Specialist Will Phillips and Home Lawn & Specialty Specialist Daniel Menge, who previously worked at the Jonesborough Co-op, to specify and design a system to meet the WCCA needs and provide flexibility for future use.

"We started with just the concept last spring," says Will. "We just started drawing out our idea of an ideal system on paper. Then we worked with different manufacturers to get quotes."

After selecting W-W Livestock Systems as the preferred vendor, they worked with company officials, including Keith Trimble, W-W Livestock Systems territory manager, to create a detailed list of equipment to fit the expected space at the Appalachian Fairgrounds where the 2019 fall sale would be held. They knew the equipment would be installed in the existing livestock barn, and the plan would have to accommodate existing walls and doorways.

The resulting system filled a semi-truck load of equipment and encompassed more than 300 pieces. It offers the flexibility to be configured in a number of different ways.

The equipment system made its debut at the fall sale in November. The setup for the event included around 30 pens for holding cattle, an alleyway leading to the head chute, and a spacious work area around the chute.

New Washington Farmers Co-op Manager Todd Stone, who took the reins of the Co-op in November, says he was impressed with the way the group worked together to meet the association's needs.

"Everybody just pitched in to get the work done," he says.

The Fall Heifer Sale in November marked the association's return to the Gray Fairgrounds after a long absence. The first WCCA heifer sale was held at the fairgrounds in 2010. Subsequent events were held at the Kingsport Stock Yards before last year's spring event was at Greeneville.

"It's a dream come true to come back home [to the fairgrounds] after 10 years," says



Joseph Redman, left, and Grayson Rader put the new W-W cattle handling equipment squeeze chute to work as they get animals ready for the next sale.

Chad. "We sold about 45 head at that first sale, and ever since each of our sales have reached more than 100 per sale. It's been 10 years in the making, and we didn't understand how we would ever get to this point."

The sales are an important event for the region's cattle producers, says Chad, noting that the events attract buyers from the entire region, including neighbor-

ing areas in Virginia and North Carolina. From the start, the association has worked diligently to find cooperative ways to promote the industry in the region and to help local cattle producers tackle issues of importance to all those involved.

They also strive to be good neighbors and to give back to their communities. They award annual scholarships to two outstanding youth involved in or interested in agriculture. Concessions are sold by local FFA chapters, and the proceeds from those sales go toward the scholarships.

The WCCA's 11th Annual Spring Heifer Sale will be held on Saturday, April 18, 2020, at the Appalachian Fairgrounds in Gray. The sale will begin at 4 p.m. WCCA officials stress that producers should note the date, time, and location change from the Appalachian Fairgrounds. Producers are encouraged to come early to view the cattle and register for a buyer number.

The sale will feature 116 heifers that are either bred, open, or have a calf by side, and most of the heifers are commercial. The cattle have been screened and are excellent heifers for anyone interested in improving his or her herd, say officials. The heifers will be pregnancy checked the day of the sale by a licensed veterinarian. All cattle will need to be paid for and loaded out on the day of the sale.

For more information or for a sale brochure, contact the Washington County Extension Office at (423)753-1680.



The Washington County Cattlemen's Association purchased over 300 pieces of W-W cattle handling equipment to make their sales easier to manage and safer for all involved.

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## 2020 AgStar leaders

These farmers and agribusiness representatives are 2020 graduates of the AgStar leadership development program. Front row, from left, are Carrie Joyner, Gibson County; Sarah Harris, Fayette County; Becca Faulkner, Chester County; and Emily Pope, Gibson County. Middle row, from left, are Jake Mallard, Gibson County; Michael Gooch, Madison County; Nathan Hopkins, Tipton County; and Chris Couch, Madison County. Back row, from left, are Spencer Stewart, Weakley County; Ryan Fisher, Dyer County; Rhea Taylor, Fayette County; and Zach Bryson, Fayette County. The annual program is sponsored by some of Tennessee's top agricultural organizations including Tennessee Farmers Cooperative.

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The LaVergne feed mill opened for production in February 1958 and later added a second mill in 1970. These mills operated separately until the mid 1990s when the facilities were completely renovated and expanded with additional storage.

# 75 Years in the Making

## Extensive Co-op infrastructure provides efficiency in serving farmers

Story by: Morgan Graham

Service has always been at the heart of Tennessee Farmers Cooperative (TFC). Since its inception in 1945, TFC has focused on developing and maintaining a network of facilities to efficiently service the member Co-ops and their farmer-owners.

While striving to provide the highest quality products available, TFC strategically built and bought facilities in East, Middle, and West Tennessee to provide feed, fertilizer, and seed and to efficiently distribute items to their customers.

“These facilities and the vital role they play in providing products for our customers are key components of the value of Co-op to its

members,” says TFC Feed, Farm, Home and Fleet Division Manager Joe Huffine.

With feed mills in each of the state’s three grand divisions, Co-op has developed facilities that allow for the production of rations for multiple species, including swine, dairy cattle, equine, poultry, beef cattle, sheep, goats, wildlife, and other species as requested. Through the years, the feed mills have been expanded, modified, and remodeled as customers’ feed demands have changed and as technologies have become available. The feed mills once produced 75 percent bulk feed, whereas today the plants are producing a 50-50 mix of bagged and bulk feeds for customers across Tennessee and seven adjoining states.

In the center of the state, the LaVergne Feed Mill, built in 1958, was the first of the TFC mills to be constructed. A second mill was added at the location in 1970. Even though these mills are within 110 feet of each other, they operated separately for more than 20 years. In the mid-1990s, TFC’s board of directors approved renovation of both mills that took nearly eight years to complete. During the renovation, the facilities were connected via the installation of metal storage bins. New production equipment, conveyors, elevators, and distributors were also installed. The added storage increased efficiencies, and use of modern technologies vastly changed the mills’ processes.

The Tenco Feed Mill, located at Rockford in East Tennessee, was built in 1961. A second mill was added in 1973. The smallest footprint mill, located at Jackson in West Tennessee, was established to assist the LaVergne facility by producing an additional 30,000 tons a year. The West Tennessee plant was constructed in 1966. The following year, the facility manufactured 50,000 tons.

“The mills are placed strategically across the state,” says Huffine. “That allows us to provide product to a large number of our stores and farmer-owners within a 125-mile radius.”

All mills have undergone renovation and upgrades to help them stay updated with the current technologies and regulations, says Huffine. With updates, TFC has taken food-grade measures to ensure safe, dependable products. TFC feed mills follow strict precautions and procedures to ensure safety and quality of Co-op feeds. To maintain these safety protocols, all Co-op feed mills are registered with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and fully comply with the FDA’s Food Safety Modernization Act. In addition, Co-op mills are certified as Safe Feed/Safe Food facilities.

“As a part of these food safety measures, we monitor the integrity of inbound feed ingredients,” says Feed and Animal Health Sales Manager John Houston. “All ingredients are inspected, tested, and screened for foreign materials before being unloaded.”

Drivers delivering ingredients must verify what they last hauled. If the substance isn’t conducive to food safety, they must prove where proper protocols were taken to clean the trailer before hauling TFC ingredients.

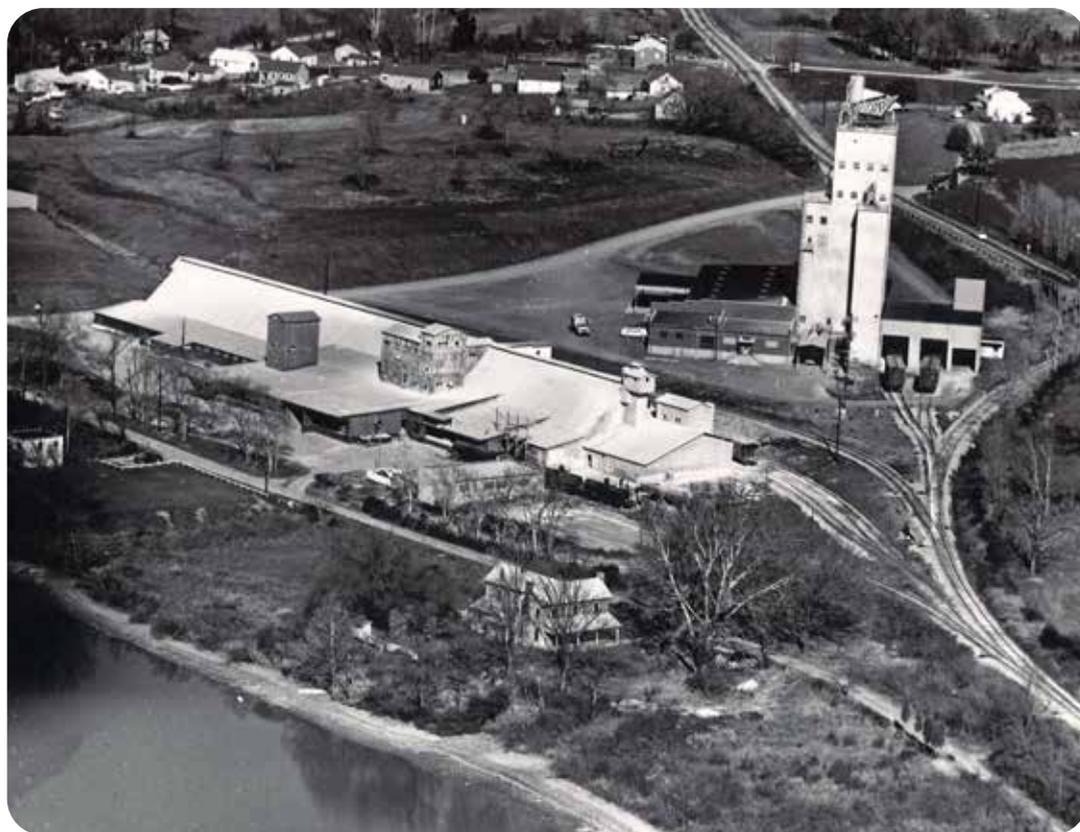
“All medications used in Co-op feeds are strictly calculated, monitored, and reconciled each day. This ensures medicated feed is produced with the exact amount of medication required,” says TFC Mills Operation Manager Randy Henley.

A sample is retained of ingredients and finished manufactured products for accountability. All Co-op feed products can be tracked back to the ingredients used in each batch. This tracking system saves valuable time and creates accountability.

As the Southeast’s livestock diversity evolved, so did the TFC feed mills. Dairy, poultry, and swine feeds once dominated production. Today, beef feeds hold the top tonnage spot.

In recent years, the Co-op facilities have utilized available capacity to produce feeds for other companies to allow the feed mills to grow their footprint and to become more efficient.

While growth and efficiency are important, feed mill employees have been pivotal in TFC’s success, Huffine stresses.



The Tenco Feed Mill opened in January 1962, initially serving East Tennessee and mainly the dairy and poultry industries.

“The only thing better for our mills than updates and renovations is maintaining and continued education of our employees,” Huffine says. “When you take those key components and blend them with standard operating procedures, it makes us attractive to other companies to manufacture their feeds. This is why Co-op feeds are well known for their high quality.”

He credits the high quality of Co-op’s feed to the research initiative it has with partners at the University of Tennessee and Cooperative Research Farms (CRF). TFC has been a long-time member of CRF’s shared research group. TFC collects data from these research trials that allows continuous benefits to the species being fed. In some cases, the result is increased milk production, average daily gain, or improved consumption. In each case, the CRF research has allowed Co-op to add more science in every ton of feed manufactured.



Jackson Feed Mill was the third TFC mill to open. The mill opened in 1966. The Co-op elevators handled 2.7 million bushels of grain before it was renovated in the 1990s.

The final key to the success of our mills has been a continual investment for maintenance, improvements, and safety from TFC board and management. If investments and preventative maintenance aren’t made, then the machines’ lives are shortened.

“We have a tremendously dedicated and talented group of employees at all of our mills,” says Henley. “In the last six years, the Tenco and LaVergne mills have been recognized as national feed mills of the year.”

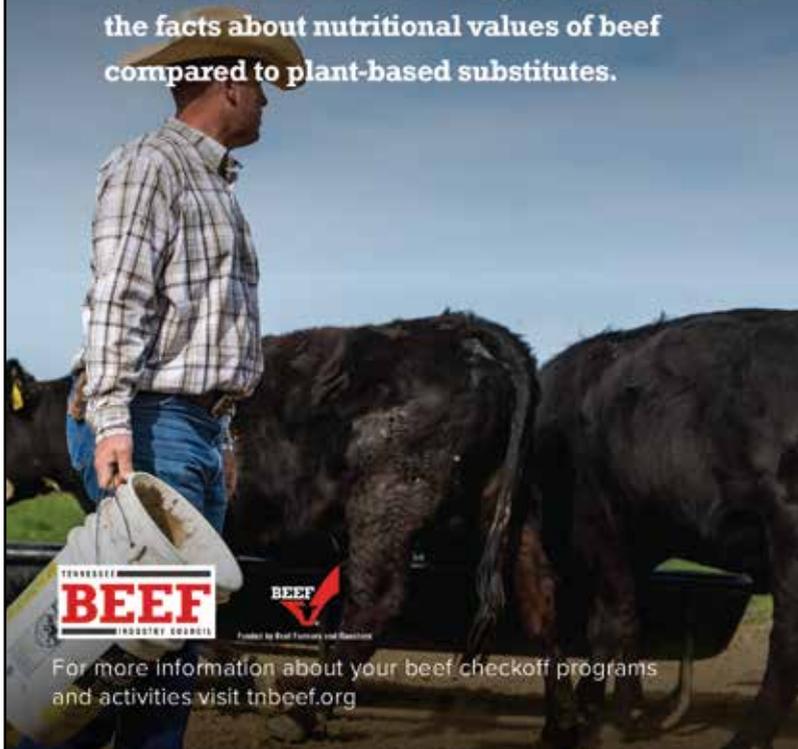
## Youth In Focus



Tennessee FFA State Officers made a stop by Tennessee Farmers Co-op Feed Mill and headquarters during their Goodwill Tour. (Back row): East TN VP Travis Stewart, Middle TN VP Nathan McClard, Treasurer John Ryan Scarlett, and Sentinel Austin Wattenbarger; (front row): Secretary Emily Nave, President Taylor Campbell, Reporter Erika Brown, and West TN VP Caroline Gurton. These outstanding individuals will retire their offices in March at state convention in Gatlinburg.

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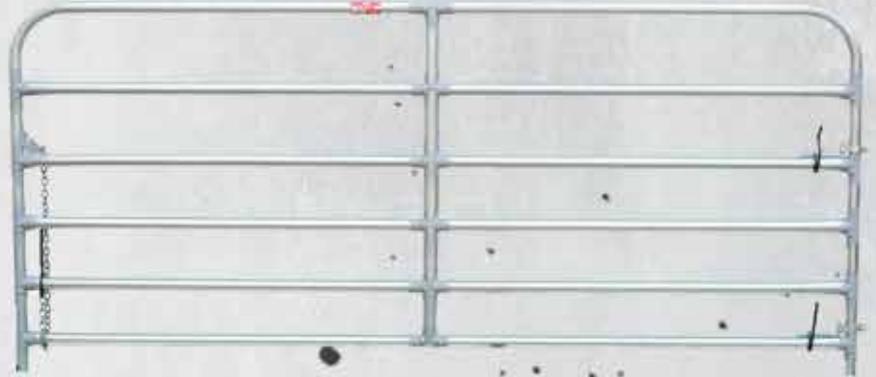
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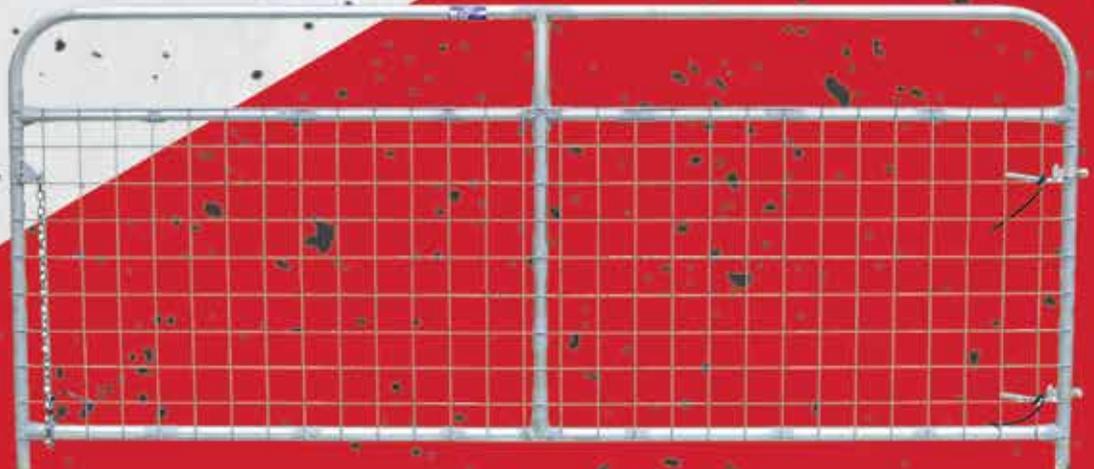
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# Heavenly HAMBURGERS



The sizzle of a burger on the grill is one of those sounds we all recognize as a signal to the start of summer. As the season for outdoor cooking arrives, these recipes will help you build the burger of your dreams!



## The Farm Burger

**Stacey Hicks**

Camden

Benton Farmers Cooperative

For slaw:

- ¾ cup mayonnaise
- ½ small onion, finely shredded
- 3 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons celery seeds
- 8 cups shredded green cabbage
- 1 large carrot, finely shredded
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

For burgers:

- 2 pounds ground chuck
- Vegetable oil
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- ¾ cup barbecue sauce
- 4 hamburger buns, split
- Sliced pickles

To make the coleslaw: In a large bowl, whisk the mayonnaise with the onion, vinegar, sugar, celery seed, cabbage, and carrot. Season with salt and pepper, and toss well. Let stand about 25 minutes.

To make the burgers: Pre-heat grill or skillet. Form the beef into 4 patties; rub with oil, and season with salt and pepper. Grill on high heat, turning once, for 5 minutes for medium-rare. Brush with ½ cup of the barbecue sauce. Grill the buns, and brush with the remaining barbecue sauce. Top the burgers with pickles.

## Mushrooms and Spinach Burgers

**Janice Leatherwood**

Dickson

Dickson Farmers Cooperative

- 1 (8 ounces) pack mushrooms
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- 3 cups spinach, finely chopped
- 2 cloves chopped garlic
- 1 pound ground chuck
- Chop mushrooms into small pieces, and add salt. Stir-fry in a small amount of oil for 10 minutes. Let cool. Add onion powder, spinach, garlic, and ground chuck, and mix together. Pat out to form burgers. Cook until done.

## Asian Pork Burgers

**Dr. Jean Lewis**

Oneida

Scott Morgan

Farmers Cooperative

- 1½ pounds ground pork
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon grated lime zest
- 1 teaspoon lime juice
- 3 scallions, thinly sliced
- ½ cup chopped cilantro
- 2 tablespoons canola or vegetable oil

Mix all ingredients except oil very thoroughly. If the mixture

is too soft to make patties, add some panko bread crumbs to make the mixture more firm.

Make 4 thick patties. Put oil in a heavy skillet and cook patties 12-14 minutes on medium-high heat. Turn once or twice until done (160° on meat thermometer).

Serve with a spicy mayonnaise (buy one or make your own with mayo plus a little Sriracha sauce).

## Black Bean Burger

**Agnes Schrock**

Monterey

Ag1 Farmers Cooperative

- 2 (15 ounces) cans black beans
- 1 onion, chopped
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 tablespoon mayonnaise, optional
- Juice of half lime
- ½ to 1 cup bread crumbs
- 1 egg
- ½ teaspoon chili powder
- Mash beans (not totally), and add all other ingredients. Mix well. Form into patties, and fry in a small amount of oil on both sides.

## Grilled Onion Burgers

**Villa Maxwell**

Hilham

Ag1 Farmers Cooperative

- 3 cups sliced onions
- 4 teaspoons oil
- ¼ teaspoon salt

- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce

- 1 pound ground beef
- ¾ cup shredded swiss cheese

- 4 hamburger buns

In a large skillet over medium heat, cook onions in 5 teaspoons oil until golden brown. Add salt and pepper. Cover and keep warm.

In a large bowl, combine Worcestershire sauce and ground beef, mixing well. Divide into 8 portions. Shape into 4-inch patties. Place cheese on each, and top with remaining patties. Press down gently, sealing the edges well. Grill patties 14 to 18 minutes. Turn halfway through. Place patties on toasted buns. Top with onion mixture, then place bun on top of onions. Makes 4 servings.

## Juicy Burgers

**Sharon Williams**

Doyle

White Co. Farmers Cooperative

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 pound ground pork
- 2 eggs
- ¾ cup oatmeal
- 2 teaspoons seasoning salt
- 1 tablespoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- ½ cup ketchup

Mix well. Grill lightly. Cover tightly and bake 1 hour at 250°. Enjoy with buns, lettuce, and tomatoes.

## Yogurt in June

Yogurt is no longer just a fruity snack in a cup. There's a whole world of cooking with "culture" that's waiting to be discovered! As a versatile ingredient in a number of recipes, yogurt can become a healthy addition to many of your favorite meals.

It's time to share with **Cooperator** readers the tastiest yogurt recipes you have! The person submitting the recipe judged best will be named "Cook of the Month" for the June **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, April 27, is the deadline for yogurt 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**. 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**.

## Our Country Churches



293rd in a series to show where our rural Co-op friends worship

### County Line Church of Christ in Lawrence County

County Line Church of Christ is located at 134 Gravel Hill Road in Lawrenceburg. This quiet country church is located near Laurel Hill Lake in Lawrence County. Pastored by Brother John Gibbs, County Line offers traditional gospel music and worship. Join them each Sunday for Bible Study at 10 a.m. with morning worship services at 11 a.m. and evening services at 6 p.m. Join them on Wednesdays for evening worship at 7 p.m.



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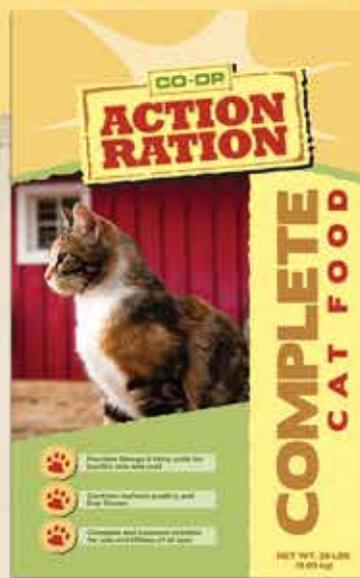
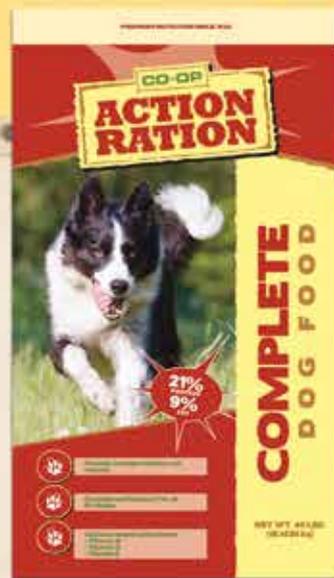


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# Change of heart

Carroll County native credits Divine guidance as he returned to his farming roots and built a family business with his brother and son

Story and photos by: Sarah Geyer

**B**obby Smith, a 70-year-old Carroll County row crop and livestock producer, made up his mind about a future in farming at an early age — it wasn't for him.

Bobby's father, J.D., who worked full time in construction, bought a farm in Westport in the 1940s with his wife, Georgia, where they raised cattle, row crops, and five children.

"One of our main jobs as kids was to chop and pick the cotton," says Bobby. "I absolutely hated it and decided that I was definitely not going to farm when I grew up because I never wanted to see another stalk of cotton."

When Bobby entered adulthood, he didn't have a choice about his first job. He was drafted into the military in April 1969, serving 18 months in Hanau, Germany, and six months in Chu Lai, Vietnam.

"They took a backwards boy from a small, country town who didn't know much of anything and threw me into something like that — I was devastated," says Bobby. "But I wouldn't take anything for that experience. I saw a lot, and I learned a lot."

He returned from active duty in 1971 and took a job at a factory in Lexington but resigned after a year.

"I saw that wasn't for me," he says. "I had a choice through the GI bill to go to school,

and I chose masonry school. I worked as a bricklayer for the next 20 years."

In 1972, Bobby married a local girl, Phyllis Hilliard, and the two began building a life together on her family's farmland in Huntingdon. In a few years, they completed their family with the arrival of son Brad in 1975.

There's another reason that year is notable for the Smith family — that's when Bobby embraced his calling to be a farmer.

"I think the idea was always buried in the back of my mind," he says. "It took me a few years, but I can see that God was working in my life to show me that farming was part of my life's purpose."

His older brother, Jerry, also served during the Vietnam War. He returned to Westport after his discharge and began cultivating the family farm as well as working full time. In 1977, Bobby and his younger brother, Donnie, purchased equipment and joined Jerry in the farming operation.

After a few years, Jerry stopped farming, but Bobby and Donnie continued the family business while both worked full-time jobs. They gradually expanded over the next decade. By the early 1990s, they were farming more than 600 acres, raising row crops, cattle, and hogs at one point.

Unlike his father and uncle, Brad embraced the farming life at a young age. As a toddler, he "farmed" the living room carpet with his toy tractors. When he started

school, he spent his spare time helping in the field and his classroom time planning his own farming operation.

After graduating from Huntingdon High School in 1993, Brad worked for Carroll Farmers Cooperative for six months before deciding to farm full time.

"There was some farmland that came up for rent," he says. "I figured if I was ever going to farm, this was my time to do it."

The three men have expanded their farming business to nearly 3,000 acres, raising corn for Tosh Farms, soybeans that go to Gaviion Grain in New Johnsonville, and running a cow/calf operation. The family has been loyal customers of Carroll Farmers Co-op since the 1970s, and Brad is the president of the board of directors.

In the past few years, Bobby has scaled back his involvement with the business, as Brad took on the primary management role. In 2015, he hired Carroll County native Daniel Hilliard as full-time help.

The Smith Farms headquarters and shop is located in Buena Vista on farmland purchased on a whim by the brothers in 1985. The family owns and rents farmland in surrounding communities. Bobby and Phyllis reside on her family's Huntingdon farm, Donnie and his son, Trevor, a regional agronomist with Tennessee Farmers Cooperative, both own farms in Buena Vista, and Brad and his wife, Rebecca, purchased land in Yuma next to her family's farm, where they live with their two children.

"It's special because a lot of what we're farming is family land," says Brad. "We farm the land where both of my parents were raised, and we also farm land owned by uncles, aunts, cousins, and my wife's family."

Bobby and his family, who are long-time members of First Baptist Church in Huntingdon, decided early on that they would not farm on Sundays unless absolutely necessary.

"I often quote a saying by Billy Graham," says Bobby. "If your ox is in the ditch every Sunday, you need to do one of two things. Sell the ox, or fill the ditch up.' There are times when farming on Sunday would make good business sense, but we look at it as a choosing between farming to live and living to farm."



ABOVE: Huntingdon's Bobby Smith raises row crops and cattle on nearly 3,000 acres with son, Brad, and brother, Donnie. Donnie's son, Trevor, also helps with the family farming operation. RIGHT: Bobby, left, with Brad on the family farm in Huntingdon.



*“I’ve had the best life. God has been good to me. I have excellent health, and I have a wonderful family. I’ve really been blessed.” – Bobby Smith*

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