

# THE COOPERATOR

JULY 2020

CONNECTING THE **CO-OP** COMMUNITY

## Building a beefy business

**PAGE 8** Pulaski's David Merritt embraces his role as a young beef producer

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**CO-OP**

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# ENDS JULY 29<sup>TH</sup>

CO-OP

TENNESSEE  
**BEEF**  
COUNCIL

## GROW THE HERD

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- 2. HEIFERS WILL BE FULLY DEVELOPED BY THE UT HEIFER DEVELOPMENT CENTER AND WILL BE BRED AT THE TIME OF PICK UP.**
- 3. HEIFERS WILL ENTER THE PROGRAM IN JULY 2020 AND WILL BE READY FOR PICK UP IN MAY 2021.**

**REGISTER THROUGH JULY 29, 2020. WINNER ANNOUNCED JULY 30, 2020**

Employees and immediate family members of TFC and member-Co-ops are ineligible. Any local or other taxes or fees associated with a prize are the prize winner's responsibility. This Contest is open to legal residents of Tennessee who are 18 years of age or older. This Contest is void wherever prohibited by federal, state or local law. Subject to applicable law, the Contest Sponsor reserves the right to cancel, suspend, terminate or modify the Contest Rules without prior notice and with no obligation or liability. All incidental costs and expenses associated with the prizes are the responsibility of the prize winner. The chances for winning will depend on the number of entrants received during the Contest Period. Prize winners may be required to execute certain documentation in order to claim their prize. All entries shall become the property of the Contest Sponsors, and entrants understand that his/her name, residence and association with Co-op may be used for publicity or promotional purposes by the Contest Sponsors. By entering this Contest, each entrant agrees that, to the fullest extent allowed by law, the Contest Sponsor(s) shall have no liability and shall be held harmless by the entrant for any damage, loss or liability to person or property, due in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, by reason of entering the Contest or the acceptance, possession, use or misuse of any prize or prize activity. All entrants agree to comply with the Contest Rules, as may be amended from time to time. To the fullest extent allowed by law, this Contest shall be governed by the laws of the State of Tennessee, without giving effect to its conflict of law principles. No purchase necessary. Limit one entry per person. Duplicates will be removed.

By entering your email and contact information, you are agreeing to receive future email communications from the Tennessee Beef Industry Council and Tennessee Farmer's Cooperative.



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## THE COOPERATOR

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# Summer vacation options

## No need to travel far for plenty to do



**Glen Liford**

Editor

The events of the past few months have forced everyone to think creatively as they consider vacations and family gatherings. Air travel is iffy at this point, and many folks are skeptical about when it may be safe to travel again.

That's disappointing for those of us who like to travel. The last few years, my wife, Tisa, and I have made several journeys to visit some of the western national parks. With 419 parks in the National Park System, we have a ways to go to visit all of them, and we have canceled plans this summer to check off a couple of more.

Fortunately, Tennessee and our surrounding states have some great options for those who may prefer to stay close to home this year. If you are seeking ideas for vacations nearby, here are just a few options to consider.

At the top of the list, of course, is the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. This Tennessee-North Carolina treasure attracted 12.5 million visitors and led the list of most visited national parks in 2019 according to the National Park Service. At press time, some campgrounds were still closed as the park implemented a phased re-opening, but many trails and attractions are open. With 150 official hiking trails, the park offers plenty of options for all sorts of visitors from beginning day hikers to seasoned backcountry veterans. Some of the more popular trails may be crowded, but the lesser-known treks offer plenty of solitude and opportunity for social distancing.

Tennessee State parks offer a variety of attractions. Burgess Falls near Cookeville (see the In Focus feature on page 28), Fall Creek Falls, and Reelfoot Lake are among my favorites.

Of course, a trip to Reelfoot is not complete without a stop in Tiptonville at Boyette's for some tasty catfish, and that brings up another thought as there are plenty of unique locally owned restaurants in many of our areas. Take Soda Pop Junction in Lynnville, for example. You can read all about this Middle Tennessee attraction on page 18 of this issue.

I enjoy the back road drives associated with my job, and there are always beautiful rural scenic views and new discoveries around the curve or across the next hill.

Quaint towns like Jonesborough, Bell Buckle, and Sweetwater are favorite stops, and many include unique shops like antique stores where it's easy to spend hours treasure hunting.

Or if you just want to learn more about our state's rich history, there are historic civil war battlefields in Franklin, Murfreesboro, and Shiloh. The homes of Tennessee's presidents — Andrew Jackson in Hermitage, Andrew Johnson in Greeneville, or James K. Polk in Columbia — are also interesting to visit.

This is not an all-inclusive list, but hopefully, it might spur you to get outside and visit some of the small towns and attractions near you.

Whatever you decide to do, remember it might be a good idea to call ahead to verify hours and availability. Some local restaurants and shops may still be closed or be operating with alternative hours.

Stay safe and have fun.



Breathtaking mountain views like this scenic overlook along the Roaring Fork Motor Trail in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park are among the many attractions awaiting visitors who want to enjoy the beauty of our corner of the world.



# Help on the way

## USDA issues first Coronavirus Food Assistance Program payments

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced on June 4 that the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) has already approved more than \$545 million in payments to producers who have applied for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). FSA began taking applications on May 26, and by June 4 had received over 86,000 applications for the relief program.

“The coronavirus has hurt America’s farmers, ranchers, and producers, and these payments directed by President Trump will help this critical industry weather the current pandemic so they can continue to plant and harvest a safe, nutritious, and affordable crop for the American people,” said Secretary Perdue. “We have tools and resources available to help producers understand the program and enable them to work with FSA staff to complete applications as smoothly and efficiently as possible and get payments into the pockets of our patriotic farmers.”

In the first six days of the application period, FSA had already made payments to

more than 35,000 producers. Out of the gate, the top five states for CFAP payments are Illinois, Kansas, Wisconsin, Nebraska, and South Dakota. USDA has released data on application progress and program payments and will provide further updates each Monday at 2 p.m. ET. The report can be viewed at [farmers.gov/cfap](https://farmers.gov/cfap).

FSA will accept applications through August 28, 2020. Through CFAP, USDA is making available \$16 billion in financial assistance to producers of agricultural commodities who have suffered a five-percent-or-greater price decline because of COVID-19 and face significant additional marketing costs as a result of lower demand, surplus production, and disruptions to shipping patterns and the orderly marketing of commodities.

To do this, producers will receive 80 percent of their maximum total payment upon approval of the application. The remaining 20 percent of the payment, not to exceed the payment limit, will be paid at a later date nationwide, as funds remain available.

“Tennessee’s producers have had a challenging spring not only due to coronavirus, but also tornadoes, excessive rains, floods, and depressed prices,” says Mike Mayfield, FSA Tennessee executive director. “Farm Service Agency is glad we can offer help to producers through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program as well as our disaster assistance programs and farm loans that are available to farmers.”

New customers seeking one-on-one support with the CFAP application process can call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to offer general assistance. This is a recommended first step before a producer engages the team at the FSA county office at their local USDA Service Center.

Producers can download the CFAP application and other eligibility forms from [farmers.gov/cfap](https://farmers.gov/cfap). Also, on that webpage, producers can find a payment calculator to help identify sales and inventory records needed to apply and calculate potential payments. Producers self-certify their records when applying for CFAP, and that documentation is not submitted with the application. However, applicants may be asked for their documentation to support the certification of eligible commodities, so producers should retain the information used to complete their application.

Those who use the online calculator tool will be able to print a pre-filled CFAP application, sign it, and submit it to the local FSA office either electronically or via hand delivery through an office drop box. Producers should contact their local FSA office to confirm the preferred delivery method for the local office. Team members at FSA county offices will be able to answer detailed questions and help producers apply quickly and efficiently through phone and online tools.

To find the latest information on CFAP, visit [farmers.gov/cfap](https://farmers.gov/cfap) or call 877-508-8364.

USDA Service Centers are open for business by phone appointment only, and fieldwork will continue with appropriate social distancing. While program delivery staff will continue to come into the office, they will be working with producers by phone and using online tools whenever possible. All Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with the FSA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or any other Service Center agency are required to call their Service Center to schedule a phone appointment. More information can be found at [farmers.gov/coronavirus](https://farmers.gov/coronavirus).

# FENCE LINE WATERER PANELS

Co-op panels are clear coat galvanized for longer life which equals greater value.



Our water panels make installing fence line waterers easy! They allow easy access to the waterer by simply pulling four pins. No more having to build and rebuild a fence section for access. Made of 1 1/2-in. x 16-ga. galvanized tubing with a clear coat finish.

**OPENING SIZE**  
30 1/2-IN. (H) X  
29-IN. (W)  
Item 15305

Works well with:

- Tru-Test 2-Hole #25296
- Ritchie 2-Hole #25204
- Miraco 2-Hole #GA3465
- Behlen 2-Hole #15814

**OPENING SIZE**  
30 1/2-IN. (H) X  
36 3/4-IN. (W)  
Item 15307

Works well with:

- Miraco 4-Hole #GA3350
- Miraco 4-Hole #GA3354-S
- Miraco 2-Hole #GA3390
- Ritchie 4-Hole #25205
- Behlen 4-Hole #15821

**OPENING SIZE**  
30 1/2-IN. (H) X  
48-IN. (W)  
Item 15307-TT

Works well with:

- Tru-Test 4-Hole #25297
- Ritchie 6-Hole #25218
- Miraco 6-Hole #GA3370-S

Mounting brackets sold separately. Item 15308

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QUALITY PRODUCTS BUILT TO LAST

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YOU**

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# STOCK TANK ESSENTIALS

FOR THE SUMMER SEASON

## TANKS



BEHLEN COUNTRY  
PR-928 STOCK TANK  
1000-GAL. CAPACITY  
15743



TUFFSTUFF  
KMT-300  
300-GAL. CAPACITY  
TS001



HIGH COUNTRY  
W-700 STOCK TANK  
700-GAL. CAPACITY  
16266



TUFFSTUFF  
KMT-100  
110-GAL. CAPACITY  
26952



HIGH COUNTRY  
W-155 STOCK TANKS  
155-GAL. CAPACITY  
16257



DARE FLOAT VALVE  
16074



LITTLE GIANT FLOAT  
VALVE  
16131



ROJO 3/4 FLOAT VALVE  
37859

## FLOAT VALVES

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CO-OP



ESSENTIALS



David Merritt, fourth generation Giles County farmer, began building his own cattle business 15 years ago. He started in his early 20s with stockers and then transitioned to a cow/calf operation with the purchase of his first small herd. Today, the family man raises 100 mamas, their calves, and six bulls on 1,400 acres of rented and owned farmland.

# Building a beefy business

Pulaski's David Merritt embraces his role as a young beef producer

Story and photos by Sarah Geyer

**D**avid Merritt is finally content with the size and scope of his cow/calf operation. In less than 10 years, the 32 year old expanded one small herd raised on a rented farm by tenfold. Today, his operation includes 100 mamas, their calves, and six bulls and nearly 1,500 acres of farmland, 200 planted for hay and the rest dedicated to grazing.

The fourth-generation Giles County farmer didn't break into the cattle business with the purchase of that first herd. Instead, his foray into the industry started with raising stockers. At age 21, he began purchasing cattle from Florida by the truckload, growing them to between 700 and 800 pounds, and selling them at auction. Many times over a two-year span, he pulled a double-decker aluminum trailer through three states, bought and loaded 100 newly weaned Holsteins, and transported them 800 miles back to his farm.

"The haul back was always long and grueling because I had to put her in the wind and not stop for anything," says David. "When I got them home I doctored on them for a month straight. I mean, you're going and checking on them morning and night. It was rough."

In 2011, the young cattleman happily left the stocker business behind when he was presented with an opportunity to buy his own herd.

"One of my neighbors wanted to get out of the cattle business and asked if I wanted to purchase his herd," he says. "I bought the herd, and he let me rent his farm, so I didn't even have to move them. I still have a herd on that farm today."

While much of the land David farms is rented, he also works and lives on land purchased by his great-grandfather, Adrian Merritt. David's grandfather, John "Buddy," and father, Mike, followed the elder

Merritt's lead — each settling nearby, purchasing a farm, and raising a family.

While Adrian supported his family through farming alone, his son and grandson supplemented their income with full-time, off-the-farm jobs. Buddy worked at Nabisco for 30 years, retiring in 1986 to run his own company. Mike, who serves as the minister for West Madison Street Church of Christ in Pulaski, managed a local feed store during the 1980s and 90s.

Even as a young boy, David exhibited the Merritt's trait for hard work, helping his grandfather cut hayfields by the time he was 10 and working his uncle's cattle herd at 14.

"I learned a lot about farming from Granddad, but it was Uncle Tom who really got me into cattle," says David, who as a teenager worked four years for his uncle and also showed cattle as a member of 4-H. "I realized during those years I really like fooling with cows, and I still do."

After high school, David took a full-time construction job, building log cabins in the region. Then he returned to school, earned a mechanics certification, and worked at McKay's Small Engine Repair for several years. In 2017, he was offered a better job opportunity and decided to switch careers.

"Now I'm working at a local private deer hunting reserve," he says. "I plant the food plots, bush hog, cut grass, and maintain all of the equipment."

Fortunately, the job provides David the flexibility to accommodate the demands of his farming operation.

"I worked it out up front with [my employer] to be able to take care of hay or cattle getting out," says David. "I'm very thankful that I'm able to handle things like that come up at the farm."

In addition to working full time and raising cattle, David, along with his brother, Michael, who lives in Birmingham, oversee the operation of Merritt Popcorn Co., a company their grandfather started in 1984. The company provides popcorn to foodservice distributors for use in concession stands, restaurants, parks, and fairs across the Tennessee Valley.

David credits the support of one person with his ability to successfully "keep so many irons in the fire" year after year – his wife, Stephanie. The licensed cosmetologist and hair salon owner met her future husband more than a decade ago when both were just teenagers. The couple married on the Merritt family farm in 2011.

Although the Lynnville native wasn't raised on a farm, she jumped in to help out from the beginning of the relationship. Today, David says his wife is a seasoned pro, cutting hay alongside her husband and



**ABOVE:** Pulaski beef producers David and Stephanie Merritt, second and third from left, take a few minutes to "talk shop" with Rick Syler, far left, feed specialist for Tennessee Farmers Cooperative, and friend and fellow farmer, Celena Williams, manager of Giles County Cooperative. Celena, along with the entire Giles County staff, says David are valuable resources for advice, especially about time savers like spreading dry fertilizer that has been impregnated with DuraCor herbicide.

raking while he bales. She also feeds and checks on the cattle in the morning and occasionally again in the evening if David can't do it, and always with the couple's 2 ½-year-old son, Andrew, by her side.

"I never considered whether or not I should help on the farm," she says. "He was out there working, and I wanted to be there with him because I love him."

David has also found ways to be more efficient with his farming practices. One of his time savers is providing one feed, Custom Beef 14-RUM (#94470) to all of his cattle, from newly weaned and growing to lactating mamas, dry heifers, and bulls.

"It's easier to just deal with one feed," he says. "Also, I creep feed all of my calves because I feel like it gives me that bang for my buck."

David markets his cattle through Blue Grass Stockyard's Internet Auction Sales, and Billy Wallace, owner of Pulaski Stockyards, serves as the broker for regional farmers.

"He works with several local farmers who have similar cattle, vaccination programs, and that sort of thing," says David. "We can coordinate our marketing and all benefit by putting the cattle together to make load lots and get better pricing."

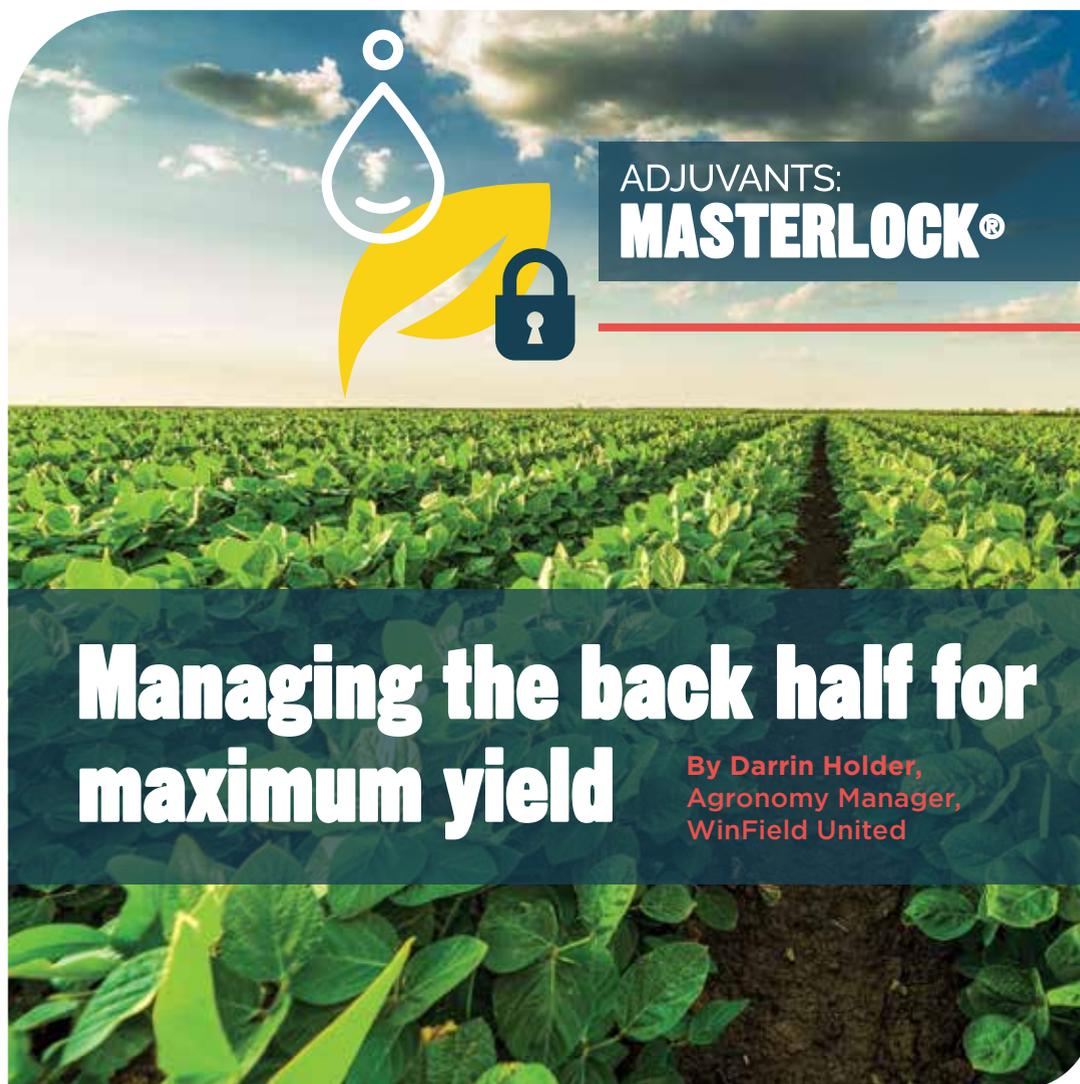
The young cattleman says he first heard about the video marketing opportunity from Jason Williams, a friend of David's who works with Billy at the stockyard and also raises his own cattle. Jason's wife, Celena, is the manager of Giles County Cooperative, where the Merritts are members. These two couples, along with many other farming friends, such as Giles Co-op's Brandon Jones, have created their own community support system.

"We try to help one another all we can, whether it's sharing information or offering a helping hand," says David. "I don't know how some of us, me included, would survive as farmers if we didn't have each other."



**LEFT:** It's no wonder the cows come running when they see Andrew and his bucket of feed. The Merritts feed one of Co-op's most popular and versatile coarse-textured options, according to TFC Nutritionist Royce Towns, which has a properly balanced combination of protein and energy that works well for growing bulls and replacement heifers and provides efficient gains in stocker cattle as well as supplementing brood cows. **RIGHT:** David enjoys some family time with wife, Stephanie, and their 2 ½-year-old son, Andrew, on their front porch, which overlooks land once farmed by his grandfather. The young family moved in their new home on Jan. 15, 2019, just 21 months after David began digging its foundation.





## Managing the back half for maximum yield

By Darrin Holder,  
Agronomy Manager,  
WinField United

It's the time of year when soybeans are determining a great deal of yield, and growers should take a couple of extra steps to promote more yield and protect it. This begins with applying fungicides and insecticides at the right time. The past two years of internal Winfield United research trials have shown fungicide applications — even in low-disease fields — can return a statistical and economical benefit.

Many research trials during the last couple of decades have shown that the best, most consistent time to apply those products to soybeans is during the R3 growth stage, which is beginning pod development. On the law of averages, I agree with that. Depending on the maturity of the variety and whether it is a determinate or indeterminate variety, R3 can last up to four to five weeks with good weather. Most fungicides and insecticides will give roughly three to four weeks of protection so spraying at the beginning of R3, the protection from diseases and insects will have run out by the time the last pods are formed on the top few nodes of the plant, which is late R3 to early R4.

To eliminate protection running out, scout your fields before you pull the trigger. Walk fields at late R2 or early R3 and look for insect pressure and disease presence. Keep up with the university extension websites from Tennessee and surrounding states to see what insect and disease levels are doing around each location. Use all that information to determine when the most efficient time to spray your fields.

Don't forget to use the appropriate deposition and drift adjuvants to ensure your spray gets to the target, which helps the insecticides and fungicides do their job while having minimal impact on the environment. The same adjuvant discussed last month with corn fungicides should be used with soybean fungicides and insecticides, MasterLock® by WinField® United. MasterLock optimizes droplet size to reduce drift potential and helps ensure more product penetrates into the canopy. Effective disease and insect control depend on good fungicide and insecticide coverage. It's not about the ounces of product per acre that is sprayed — what's important is that the active ingredient is actually reaching the target. Much of the

initial contract research done on MasterLock was in soybeans and showed economical bushel gains above the fungicide and/or insecticide alone.

The other step to consider in maximizing soybean yields is the nutritional status of the fields. Even the most advanced genetics can't deliver a payback without the nutrients to thrive. Adequate soil levels of all nutrients must be the starting point for any crop plan. Often our crops do not have access to all the nutrients in the soil because factors like too much or too little moisture, compaction, and other environmental conditions. Over the past few years, nearly 80 percent of all soybean tissue samples have been deficient in one or more nutrients. MAX-IN® helps address those deficiencies, especially the secondary and micronutrients, with well-timed foliar applications. MAX-IN nutrients are available in precise formulations to help crops hit each growth stage with exactly what they need to achieve their full genetic potential.

MAX-IN products include patented CornSorb® technology, which greatly increases movement of nutrients through the leaf cuticle to internal leaf structures (figure 1). This makes the applied nutrient more available to the plant. CornSorb technology increases droplet spread, droplet coverage, and humectancy, meaning more of the nutrient is available for plant metabolism and is less subject to loss through evaporation and other environmental forces. It also offers flexible applications by mixing easily with other crop nutrients and most crop protection products, including glyphosate-based herbicides.

Increased Uptake with MAX-IN® Technology	
Boron	40%
Zinc	26%
Manganese	16%
Copper	52%
Sulfur	11%
Iron	18%

Source: 2004, Patent Data. Winfield Solutions, LLC.

Figure 1. Patent data showing the increased uptake of various nutrients with MAX-IN® technology versus the same nutrients without MAX-IN® technology.

## – FROM THE FIELD: Mark Davis • Sparta, TN

Sparta native Mark Davis grows almost 3,000 acres of soybeans, corn, wheat, and canola spread throughout White, Putnam, and Van Buren counties. Mark, along with his father, Wayne, and two brothers, Matt and Andy, use fungicide across all their crops but see the real difference on the 1,400 acres of soybeans.

“We work closely with White County Farmers Co-op and David Simmons to determine the best plan for our crops each year,” says Mark, a third-generation farmer. “David is the first call when we have crop questions. We’ve shopped with the Co-op since the early ‘70s.”

Mark applies fungicide during the middle of the R3 stage to help extend the application protection into the early R4 stage. Applying fungicide at this time allows the last pods to form on the plants’ top nodes resulting in a higher yield.

To maximize the nutritional state of his fields, Mark rotates his crops from year to year. To maximize bean yields, he will plant soybeans behind corn to ensure each crop receives proper nutrition.

“While we try to maximize our fields the best way possible, we also rely on MasterLock adjuvant to help boost the effectiveness of our fungicide application,” Mark says. “MasterLock seems to help the fungicide stick to the plant and allows it time to utilize the full potential of each application,” Mark says.

**“We also rely on MasterLock® adjuvant to help boost the effectiveness of our fungicide application.”**



Mark Davis checks early-planted soybeans to ensure he sprays at the correct time, which will maximize the fungicide application. Davis says his first call when he has crop questions is to White County Co-op Agronomist David Simmons.

**CO-OP**

**WINFIELD  
UNITED**

# UT announces revised 2020 field day lineup

University of Tennessee AgResearch has updated its 2020 field day schedule. In light of COVID-19 concerns and efforts to continue social distancing, all field days scheduled through July have been delayed or moved to a virtual format. Additionally, some field days scheduled for August and beyond will be delayed or offered online only.

“While it is unfortunate that many of [our centers] will have to delay or forego their traditional onsite field days, the health and safety of our employees and visitors is our top priority,” says Barry Sims, executive director of UT AgResearch and Education Centers. “However, we are still committed to sharing research and providing educational opportunities in 2020. The change in date or format will help us accomplish this while still maintaining our focus on health and safety.”

More changes may be forthcoming. For the most up-to-date information on UT AgResearch 2020 Field Days, go to <https://agresearch.tennessee.edu>.

As of June 1, the complete AgResearch field day schedule is as follows:

July 23 - **Milan No-Till** will be virtual with presentations recorded and available to view at the [milan.tennessee.edu/](http://milan.tennessee.edu/)

Aug. 4 - **Steak and Potatoes** will be onsite at the Plateau AgResearch & Education Center (Crossville)

Aug. 25 - **Fall Gardeners’ Festival** will be onsite at the Plateau AgResearch & Education Center (Crossville)

Sept. 2 - **Cotton Tour** will be onsite at the West Tennessee AgResearch & Education Center (Jackson)

Sept. 10- **Horse Management** will be onsite at the UTIA Brehm Animal Science Arena (Knoxville)

Sept. 15 - **Horse Management** will be onsite at the Middle Tennessee AgResearch & Education Center (Spring Hill)

Sept. 17 - **Horse Management** will be onsite at the West Tennessee AgResearch & Education Center (Jackson)

Sept. 19 - **UT Arboretum Butterfly Festival** will be onsite at the Forest Resources AgResearch & Education Center (Oak Ridge)

Oct. 1- **Organic Crops Field Tour** will be a virtual series with presentations

recorded and available to view at <https://easttn.tennessee.edu>

Oct. 1 - **Summer Celebration (now Fall Celebration)** will be onsite at the West Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center (Jackson)

Oct. 6 - **Tobacco, Beef and More** will be onsite at the Highland Rim AgResearch & Education Center (Springfield)

Oct. 8 - **Northeast Tennessee Beef Expo** will be onsite at the AgResearch & Education Center (Greenville)

Oct. 15 - **Woods and Wildlife** will be onsite at the Forest Resources AgResearch & Education Center (Oliver Springs)

Oct. 22 - **Beef Heifer Development School** will be onsite at the Middle Tennessee AgResearch & Education Center (Lewisburg)

First Tuesday of the month through October - **Turf & Ornamental** will be a digital learning series with access to presentations at [www.tennesseeturfgrassweeds.org/Pages/TurfTuesday](http://www.tennesseeturfgrassweeds.org/Pages/TurfTuesday).

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



### 1. UWS 100-Gallon Steel-Aluminum Combo Transfer Tank

UWS 100-Gallon Steel-Aluminum Combo Transfer Tank (#160800) is a heavy-duty tank designed to transfer non-flammable liquid to on-site vehicles and equipment. It includes optional chests to integrate with the tanks providing added storage without reducing truck bed space. This transfer tank also combines liquid tank and storage chest into one space-efficient design. Features include:

- Steel-aluminum combo weighs less than full-steel models
- Unique smooth finish offers a sleek look
- Heavy-duty 14-gauge steel tank is 100 percent pressure tested
- Tool box thickness is .080-inch aluminum; lightweight/non-corrosive
- Transfers diesel/non-flammable liquids to vehicles/equipment
- RigidCore foam-filled lid; maximizes strength/prevents binding
- Lockable, commercial-grade vented cap



### 2. Behlen Round Poly Stock Tank PR928 1,000 gallon

Behlen Round Poly Stock Tank PR928 1,000 gallon (#15743) is a one-piece, molded, all-poly tank designed to take abuse. These tanks are available in both round and round-end sizes. All tanks have an extra heavy-duty, molded rim for additional strength. Round tanks have a “formed open” rim, while round-end tanks have a “sealed” top lip for easy dumping. New heavy-duty, molded-in aluminum drain fitting and 1/4” poly drain plug ensure a longer life than ever before. The poly used in these tanks is FDA food-grade approved, tested to -20° corrosion-free, impact-resistant, and recyclable. Each tank contains the proper amount of UV inhibitor to prevent deterioration from sunlight.



### 3. Spartan Mosquito Eradicator

Spartan Mosquito Eradicator (#6832791) allows you to take back your outdoor space this summer. As soon as the weather begins to warm, simply add water to the Spartan Mosquito Eradicator, shake it, and hang it about six feet above the ground. These vials emit the same attractant that draws mosquitoes to people and animals. As soon as mosquitoes feed on the water solution, they die before they can breed again. Product details:

- Easy to install - hang along the property perimeter
- Does not require power - just add water and shake
- Provides continuous, long-range protection
- Contains 11.48% sodium chloride
- Provides 95 percent mosquito control for up to 90 days



### 4. Melnor XT Metal Rear-Trigger 7-Pattern Nozzle

Melnor XT Metal Rear-Trigger 7-Pattern Nozzle (#1842892) is a heavy-duty metal construction hose nozzle with seven spray patterns. Twist nozzle provides a choice of patterns to meet all your watering needs. Slip-resistant, rubberized grip, trigger, and head.

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## ----- NEIGHBORLY ADVICE



Christie Hicks, TFC Product Specialist

# ‘Do you have your helmet?’

“Do you have your helmet?” This is a question that many of us don’t ask ourselves — or our loved ones — before we get on the back of a horse.

During July, we celebrate National Helmet Safety Month. This designation serves as a reminder to us of the importance of wearing a helmet before we saddle up.

According to the U.S. National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health, an estimated 100 deaths each year result from equestrian-related activities, with 10 to 20 times as many head injuries occurring for each fatality.

While you might think that these accidents happen when the equestrians are racing or doing trick riding, the mishaps actually more often occur during pleasure riding.

No one wants to think about falling off a horse, but it is important as equestrians that we are prepared in case the worst does happen.

It is important to select the correct helmet to wear during riding. A bicycle helmet will not adequately protect a human head in a fall from a horse. When people fall off a bike versus a horse, it will happen at

very different angles. Manufacturers have conducted research to help them produce helmets specifically designed to protect human heads in equestrian accidents. So, be sure to choose a properly fitted, ASTM/SEI-approved riding helmet.

Also be sure to encourage other riders to saddle up with their helmet. If one person in a group chooses to wear a helmet, often the others will too. Set a good example and make helmets an expected part of every ride — every time. You may help to save a fellow equestrian from serious injury or even death.





Royce Towns, TFC Nutritionist

## If you can't stand the heat...

Neither can your livestock

**T**he stresses of summer heat can be challenging to both man and beast. When temperatures soar, we begin to implement strategies to protect our own health; likewise, as good stewards, we also need to think about the effects of heat stress on our livestock. Cattle and most other domestic species cope well until environmental temperatures exceed about 68 degrees Fahrenheit. Beyond this comfort limit, they begin seeking shade and water and can be observed panting in an effort to shed excess body heat. What may not be as obvious are the problems related to lost production due to decreased forage intake, depressed milk production, and lower reproductive rates. Some simple common sense strategies can help your livestock deal with the effects of summer heat.

Cattle have a limited ability to sweat and rely mainly on panting to increase evaporative heat loss through their lungs and nasal passages. This, along with dilation of blood vessels near the surface of the skin to increase radiant and convective heat loss, results in a significant increase in daily water needs. Make sure ample fresh water is always available and easily accessible by the herd. Stagnant ponds are not recommended, as cattle will wade, defecate, and urinate in the same water they drink. Such ponds soon become reservoirs for bacteria, increasing the occurrence of mastitis and other infections. If no other alternative exists, use temporary fencing or physical barriers to limit access to ponds so that drinking is the only option.

Shade in the form of trees or manufactured shelter can reduce solar radiation gain by cattle as well as the ground they stand on. Cattle tend to congregate in the most comfortable spot, and this can lead to the accumulation of mud, increasing the potential for foot rot and other hoof problems. Use portable panels or electric fencing to exclude cattle from an area until it has time to recover.

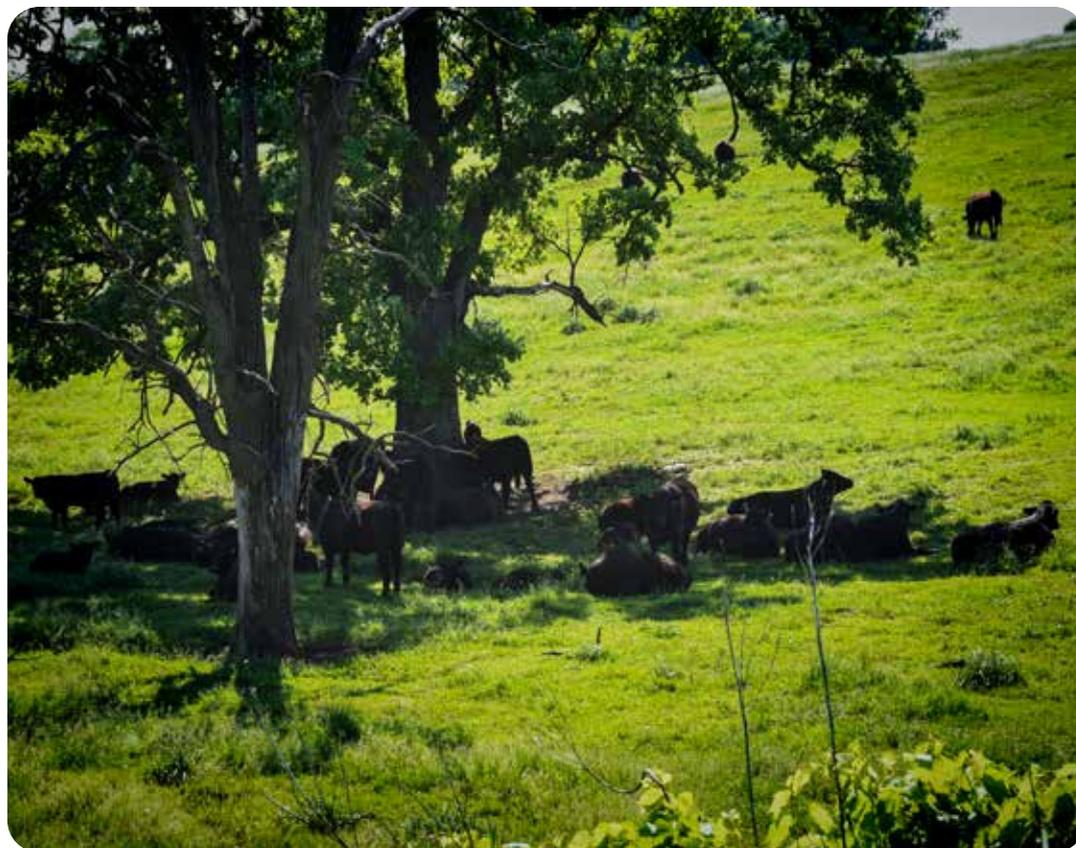
If you are providing supplemental feed, offer the ration in late afternoon so the heat of digestion occurs overnight when temperatures are lower. Avoid working or moving cattle on the hottest days when possible. When unavoidable, plan the activity in the early morning hours, move animals slowly and calmly, and avoid overcrowding. Decrease load density when transporting cattle, and minimize the time the animals must spend in the trailer.

Fescue endophyte tends to compound problems associated with heat stress by causing constriction of blood vessels near the skin surface. Grazing summer annuals or other grass species during the hottest months can eliminate this issue. Other solutions include feed additives designed to bind toxic alkaloids and/or dilate blood vessels to increase blood flow under the skin.

Flies cause cattle to generate more heat as the animals crowd together and try to dislodge the insects. Insecticide ear tags, pour-ons, sprays, and feed-through insect growth regulators (IGR) are proven control methods. The most convenient approach is a free-choice vitamin/mineral supplement with IGR.

Finally, even though cattle do not sweat as much as humans, heat stress increases the need for electrolytes to maintain sodium and potassium balance. Free-choice vitamin/mineral supplements designed specifically for supplementing fescue can address these needs, as well as deliver fly control and an ionophore to improve feed efficiency.

Healthy, comfortable animals tend to be productive, profitable animals. Take steps now to ensure your herd is ready to deal with summer's heat.



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# Soda Pop Junction

Step back in time with a visit to historic Lynnville

Story and photos by: Morgan Graham

**W**ith its 19th century buildings, railroad museum, and small-town atmosphere, it's no wonder downtown Lynnville has been described as something "straight out of a John Wayne Western." Soda Pop Junction, an old-fashioned soda shop with nostalgic décor and a reputation for providing one of the best burgers in Tennessee, is a key attraction of the quaint location.

Located in the historic pharmacy building, the Giles County restaurant began serving customers in 1998 when owner Johnny Phelps decided he wanted a new vitality back to the small town. At that time, there were only two stores located on the downtown strip — Grandma's Market and Mr. Hickman's Variety Store.

"City Hall, like most of the buildings downtown had deteriorated," says Johnny. "I remember the day I bought this building. It was raining, and the roof was leaking so bad I had to use an umbrella inside."

Johnny spent a year and a half repairing the building while maintaining its heritage and value. He first opened Soda Pop Junction as a simple, small sandwich and ice cream shop, and he is quick to acknowledge it was a rough start for the new business.

"I'll be honest, for the first five to six years, I had to put money into it to keep it going," says Johnny. "But I wanted to see the town flourish again, so I stuck with it."

Johnny credits one of his original employees, John "Big Johnny" Hewitt, for successfully transforming Soda Pop into the restaurant it is today. "Big Johnny," says the restaurant owner, created a secret recipe for their hamburger that has continued to earn rave reviews. Nashville's Channel 2 News and Tennessee Magazine have both recognized Soda Pop Junction as one of the "Best Burgers in Tennessee."

Jason Counts, a cook at Soda Pop, can attest to the burger's popularity, noting

he prepares more than 1,000 each week. The most requested versions, he says, are the one-third and half-pound burgers with cheese and double bacon.

While Soda Pop Junction is regionally renowned for its burgers, the restaurant's milkshakes are also award winning and were voted second best in the state by Channel 2 News. Other menu items, such

(See Soda Pop Junction, page 20)



ABOVE: Visitors to the quaint town of Lynnville are often lured to Soda Pop Junction for its signature "Big Johnny's Burger," which has been recognized by Nashville's Channel 2 News and the Tennessee Magazine as one of the "best burgers in Tennessee." OPPOSITE PAGE: The establishment's nostalgic décor complete with retro lunch counter and contrasting stools contribute to the authentic atmosphere.

# Soda Pop Junction

(continued from page 19)

as chicken salad, steaks, salads, and onion rings are customer favorites, too.

“Just about everything we serve is somebody’s favorite,” says Soda Pop Manager Alvie Spencer. “We have almost anything you can want.”

While the fabulous food is what brings most customers through the door, the authentic décor leaves them feeling like they have traveled back in time. Each piece tells the rich history of Lynnville, Giles County, and Tennessee. While some of the displays are personal items handed down to Johnny from family, many are heirlooms donated by customers and community members.

“Unlike other restaurants that have new decorations that look like antiques, ours

are truly old and the real thing,” he says. “Each piece in here is part of the history of Lynnville and Giles County.”

As if the antiques inside the restaurant aren’t enough to create a yesteryear ambiance, Johnny also displays his restored ’46 Dodge pickup outside the store. Once a year, Johnny fires up his beloved truck for the town’s Christmas parade in a quick trip around the square.

Nearly a dozen regulars, like the town doctor, Elizabeth Louie, gather at the Junction each morning before work for breakfast and fellowship. Lunch is also a popular time for locals to meet and share a meal.

“If it’s lunch time and I’m with a customer, you can bet we’re coming to Soda Pop for lunch,” says Larry Dickey, outside salesman for Giles County Cooperative, which is located nearby. “Good food and comradery, you just can’t beat that.”

Most of the restaurant’s traffic is on the weekend, especially for the Sunday buffet. On any given Sunday, several hundred people will enjoy a selection of three meats, 12 sides, and a multitude of desserts.

When asked what the biggest change for the restaurant has been over the years, Johnny quickly answered: COVID-19. While the restaurant never fully closed during the pandemic, the take-out-only restrictions slashed business by 80 percent.

“We are thankful we could still serve our regulars because we have many who depend on us for three meals a day,” he says. “Not only are they customers, they are like family, too.”

The dining room at Soda Pop Junction is back open for business, and the restaurant is keeping its regular summer hours of 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Next time you’re in the mood for great food in a nostalgic atmosphere, visit Soda Pop Junction at 141 Street in Lynnville.



Located in the historic pharmacy building, Soda Pop Junction served its first customer in 1998. Its menu features many tasty options.



From left, Manager Alvie Spencer, waitress Jessica Crabtree, and cook Jason Counts warmly greet customers with a welcoming smile and traditional Southern hospitality.



ABOVE LEFT: Early morning regulars, like, from left, Giles County Co-op outside salesman Larry Dickey, Dr. Elizabeth Louie, and owner Johnny Phelps gather at Soda Pop Junction for breakfast and fellowship to jump start their day. CENTER AND ABOVE RIGHT: Antiques inside the restaurant contribute to the historic ambiance. From the comfortable red vinyl seats in the dining booths to the genuine juke box, each piece of the restaurant’s collection helps document the history of the small town.

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The Tires, Batteries, Accessories and Petroleum/Fuel Department was created by TFC in the 1950s to supply member Co-ops with product offerings beyond the basics of feed, seed, and fertilizer. After nearly 70 years, the department remains committed to providing local Co-ops with quality automotive products.

## Beyond the basics

For more than half a century, TFC's Tires, Batteries, Accessories and Fuel Department has provided farmers with industry-leading products and services

Story by: Sarah Geyer

**B**y the mid-1950s, most of Tennessee's farmers owned at least one automobile and many had traded in their horse and plow for a tractor. As the farmers' needs were evolving beyond the basics, Tennessee Farmers Cooperative evolved, too, developing departments like Tires, Batteries, Accessories (TBA)/Petroleum that could provide new product offerings and services to member Co-ops. Today, the department offers the gamut of quality automotive items, including tires, lubricants, accessories, antifreeze, and fuel.

With his 20-plus years as TBA manager, Gene Carr is largely considered the driving force behind the department's success. Gene's nearly 40-year Co-op career began in 1953 at Tenco and included a few years at LaVergne's warehouse before joining TBA, first as assistant to manager Howard Herr

and later as manager. As author Forrest Bailey notes in *The Tapestry of Success*, Gene was "instrumental in the establishment of the one of the most efficient (automotive) departments of any regional cooperative."

One factor that contributed to the department's success was the production of proprietary, Co-op-branded products. In 1972, TFC gained that competitive edge in the tire market when the Co-op joined eight others to form Universal Cooperatives.

"Together, we had the leverage and volume, meaning we could buy molds and produce our own tread designs," says P.O. Florida, who was hired by TFC in 1959 to create LaVergne's new recapping plant and, a few years later, named Gene's assistant. The two men worked together until both retired 14 years later. "We had enough power in the tire industry to get the products we wanted, along with the pricing and volume we needed."

As an extra selling point, the TBA/Fuel Department offered a plan-to-please warranties on passenger and light truck tires and road-and-field hazard warranties on farm tires, which no competitors provided at the time.

"We got what the farmer wanted, a darn good product at a very competitive price, along with second-to-none service," says William Lawson, who began working for TFC in 1964 in the LaVergne Distribution Center until he transferred to TBA in 1969 as an outside salesman. "Local farmers knew what the Co-op brand stood for, and that's where we had an easier way to get our foot in the door and earn that farmer's business."

By the time Butch Gilley joined the department office staff in 1974, he says most of the products sold through TBA had a Co-op label or carried the Co-op name.

"All of our tires, our grease and oil, batteries, lubricants, tri-fire spark plugs, and shocks, you name it, we had the Co-op label on it," says



**RIGHT:** While Murfreesboro was the first to open a car care center in 1970, many soon followed suit, including Maury Farmers Co-op, pictured above. As the number of centers grew across the state, so did the TBA/Fuel Department sales. At the time of his retirement in 1992, P.O. Florida says the department had reached sales of \$300,000 in tires and tubes, 45,000 batteries, 500,000 pounds from lube oils, a million pounds of grease, and 40 million gallons of fuel. **LEFT:** Maury Farmers Co-op's newest store includes an impressive automotive department with a six-bay car care center and an expansive reception/waiting stocked with a large selection of products.

Butch, a recent retiree who began his TFC career in 1971 at the tire center. "I think that played a big part in our department's success."

Many of those proprietary products were a result of important partnerships between TFC and manufacturers. For example, East Penn Manufacturing has provided Co-op-branded batteries since the 1970s, and Farmland Industries in Kansas City, Missouri, produced Co-op-labeled lubricants.

Farmland Industries also played an important role in TBA's petroleum business. Through one of its programs, local Co-ops added bulk delivery and retail installations.

"That meant the farmer now had one place where he could buy his fuel, tires, and oil," says Thomas Romans, who started at the LaVergne warehouse in 1963 and transferred the next year to TBA, where he handled fuel and auto accessories until retiring in 2001. "That brought in a lot of business for the local Co-ops, and soon, some had sales into the millions of gallons."

By the early 1990s, TBA had helped many local Co-ops create tire centers, an undertaking that included shipping and installing equipment, as well as training personnel at each location. Once their centers were up and running, several of the local Co-ops purchased trucks and offered on-the-farm tire service. For those centers without service trucks, P.O. purchased equipment, making the process of changing large tractor tires easier for shop employees.

Today, the TBA/Fuel Department provides local Co-ops with industry-leading products through new vendor partnerships with companies like Lucas Oil and WeatherTech.

"We haven't forgotten our heritage and that's proven by relationships like our agreement with East Penn Manufacturing," says Ed Robbins, who has worked in the department for more than 20 years. "We're also open to developing new vendor relationships so we can continue to provide products that will drive business to the stores."

In 2017, the department made an out-of-the-box distribution decision. For decades, TBA managed the purchasing, storage, and distribution of the tires. However, to better meet the needs of member Co-ops, the department ended its warehouse ownership and shifted the distribution to S&S Tire Company, allowing members to receive daily deliveries for the first time.

"Even though we've been quite successful, we are always trying to find ways to serve the member Co-ops better," says Corey Damron, current department manager who started his TFC career in 2003 in the TBA warehouse. "We're here to support their efforts; that's what it's all about."



**ABOVE:** Today, the TBA/Fuel Department provides member Co-ops with an expansive selection of automotive items, including products from industry-leading manufacturers like Lucas, UWS, Fill-Rite, Cenex, Power Service, East Penn Manufacturing, Firestone, Mastercraft, and WeatherTech. **LEFT:** For many years, nearly every item sold through TBA carried the Co-op label or name. Some of the most popular Co-op-branded products included Grip Spur and Ready Grip tires and the Tri-Fire Spark Plug featured in this throwback advertisement.



Lincoln County native and horse enthusiast Grey Parks joined the Co-op team in February 2020 as the new Tennessee Farmers Cooperative equine specialist. She will be working with horse owners and Co-op employees throughout the system to provide valuable expertise and training.

# Meet Grey Parks

New Co-op equine specialist provides valuable resource for customers, employees

Story and photos by Hannah Lewis

“I just got the gene,” says Tennessee Farmers Cooperative Equine Specialist Grey Parks. “You know, the little girl horse gene, and, much to my parents’ chagrin, I never outgrew it.”

Lincoln County native and horse enthusiast Grey Parks joined the Co-op team in February 2020. She attended Tennessee Tech University and earned a Bachelor of Science in agriculture before pursuing a graduate degree at the University of Kentucky, where she received her Master of Science in Animal Science. She returned to Tennessee to teach animal and horse science at TTU and UT Knoxville. Because of her time in teaching and educating at UT Knoxville and Auburn, Grey feels prepared for the task at hand.

“For teaching horse and animal science you have to know your stuff and be ready to answer questions,” says Grey. “I have gotten a lot of silly questions and a lot of hard questions, but

that has made me prepared for this role. There isn’t much I haven’t been asked.”

Grey now shows and raises Arabian/half Arabian working western horses but harbors a love for all types of equine and especially enjoys showing them. She looks forward to helping horse lovers in Tennessee because each individual is so unique.

“Our equine industry in Tennessee is incredibly diverse,” says Grey. “We have a lot of people who have a horse or two in the backyard and are trail or weekend riders. We obviously have the walking horses, and we have a lot of quarter horses. We have a growing sport horse segment made up of the hunter/jumper/dressage/eventing enthusiasts. We have people raising race horses. We have almost every [type of horses] you could think of — minis, drafts, and the whole nine yards.”

With the variety comes challenges in meeting the needs of horse-owning Co-op members and store employees. Grey says she is up for the task.

“To work with people in the industry you have to appreciate everything about horses,” says Grey. “I love horses, obviously, but I also love people. I love helping them and solving problems, and as a nutritionist, especially, that’s my work. It’s kind of like solving a giant jigsaw puzzle.”

As part of her responsibilities, Grey serves as a resource to help horse owners and educate Co-op employees and staff.

“The big push for me is continuing to grow TFC as an equine product and service provider, especially promoting the Pinnacle line of feeds,” she says. “I think there are a whole lot of horse people in this state that don’t come from an ag background. They may have grown up in Nashville or in Memphis or somewhere else, and they don’t necessarily think of Co-op first because it’s not a system they’re familiar with since they don’t see themselves necessarily as farmers. A priority for me, especially in this first year or two, is to let them know they are farmers, and they are our customers.”

We are here to serve them and to help them develop closer connections to those segments of the industry.”

Grey will also focus on educating horse owners about their animal’s health and nutrition needs. Providing proper care for a horse requires a total approach.

“It’s about putting together all the pieces,” says Grey. “It’s a lot of moving parts — the horse, the person, what kind of hay that owner has access to, what they’re doing with their animal, a feed that’s going to meet the horse’s needs, the owner’s needs, and any preferences. It’s really fun for me. It’s never the same, which I appreciate. Every day is different.”

To make this puzzle easier for everyone, Grey pioneered the Pinnacle Feed Finder. A series of questions to help every horse owner or Co-op store employee find the perfect Pinnacle formula for any situation.

“It can be really confusing to walk into a feed store and see seven million different products,” says Grey. “On top of that, everyone claims [their product] is the best, and every one of them looks really similar. I wanted a tool that our customers and our store staff could very easily, within just three steps, figure out where to go with a horse.”

Grey was only on the job for one month before the COVID-19 quarantine began. However, she found a way to remain productive during the stay-at-home order. She



While the COVID-19 quarantine restricted her visits during the spring, Grey has been using Co-op social media to reach out to customers. With the help of Scott Bohannon, left, from the TFC Training Department, Grey shared messages and conducted conversations with customers using Facebook Live.

began to get her message out through social media. She has used Facebook and Facebook Live to interact with horse enthusiasts and answer questions.

“The idea of doing the Equine Essentials Facebook Live was Joe Huffine’s [TFC Feed, Farm, Home, and Fleet Division manager],” she says. “I like it because it’s allowing me to connect not only with our customers, but some of our employees who I haven’t even met but are watching these videos and getting training.”

Grey is enthusiastically looking to the future and getting to work on her new assignments. She says she is most comfortable on the road, visiting stores and meeting with customers.

“Everybody in the Co-op system has been so wonderful and supportive during this weird transition for the last few months,” she says. “I think, hopefully, that comes through to our customers as well. We talk about being your hometown store, and we are.”

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## Lucky one

100-year-old Hoke Culbertson shares close calls from his Navy experience

**H**oke Culbertson enlisted in the Navy in the summer of 1941 before Pearl Harbor and America's abrupt entry into World War II. All these years later, he occasionally wonders how many like him — those serving their country before the war — remain.

"I would think there are very few of us left," he says. "I know a lot of guys enlisted in 1942 right after Pearl Harbor."

It's a rare, introspective thought for the World War II vet, a Kingston resident, who turned 100 years old on March 30.

Out of 16 million veterans who served in World War II, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates that only around 300,000 are still alive in 2020. The numbers don't include how many of those who were in service before the war began, but that's likely a small number and an exclusive group of which to be a member.

Though Hoke had a number of close calls during his historic service, he doesn't spend much time wondering why he's made it to such a notable age. He dismisses such talk as point-

less, though the sharp-witted senior, who still fits in his original Navy uniform, is quick to share details of his service. Even at his age, he continues to ponder the war which ended 75 years ago and did much to shape the rest of his life, as he put skills he honed during the war to work in the private sector.

A book on the war's Solomon Island campaigns (in which he took part) rests on the end table beside his recliner. The way he rattles off the names of islands, battles, and Navy ships makes one wonder if those details are from the book or are simply among his memories of real life experiences. They're actually probably a little of both.

Hoke's life now is quite peaceful. His tidy ranch-style house with its neat landscaping overlooks the tranquil waters of the Clinch River just above Kingston. His first wife, Mary, passed away in 1987. He married Bea in 1997, and they lived 22 happy years together until her death in April 2019. After her passing, Hoke briefly moved into an assisted living facility, says close friend, Charley Ray. But he left after a few weeks.

"He said he didn't like the food," Charley explains.

It was Charley who alerted *The Cooperator* that Hoke might have a few tales to share about his wartime experiences. A quick call to Ag Central's Harriman store confirmed that Hoke was indeed still a Co-op customer. Wayne Nelson, who works on the front counter, knew him immediately.

"He was in here just the other day," said Wayne, when asked about the vet.

Hoke is still driving his 15-year old pickup nearly every day, frequently running errands like stopping at the Co-op and attending church. Even during the common routines of everyday life three-quarters of a century later, the war is never far from his thoughts, Hoke admits.



Hoke Culbertson, right, turned 100 years old on March 30. His friend, Charley Ray, contacted *The Cooperator* and suggested that Hoke's stories about his Navy service might be of interest to *Cooperator* readers. The two have been friends for more than 40 years and are members of the same Masonic Lodge.

It was the summer of 1941 when Hoke left the family farm in Surgoinsville to join the Navy. He was the eighth of nine kids raised on what he describes as “a beautiful mountain farm” where his family grew typical crops like tobacco, corn, and hay.

Hoke says he doesn't really recall why he volunteered for service.

“I probably realized I would be drafted any way, sooner or later,” he says. “I had a desire to get in the Navy as far back as I can remember. I wanted to go to the Asiatic Pacific theater, down to Singapore, but I'm glad I didn't get there. It was a rough deal.”

Instead, Hoke ended up taking his training in St. Louis, Missouri, where he learned to be an electrician, his chosen trade for the rest of his working life. After graduating with high marks, the young Tennessean got his choice of assignments. His first pick was the East Coast with a series of ships to choose from, while his second choice was the USS Juneau.

“That was the ship that the Sullivan boys were on when they were killed,” explains Hoke.

The Sullivans were five siblings who famously enlisted in the Navy with the request that they be allowed to serve together in spite of official policy forbidding the practice. They enlisted in early 1942, and all were tragically killed in November of that year when the USS Juneau was sunk by a Japanese torpedo.

“I was fortunate to not get my second choice,” Hoke points out.

The good fortune to miss that tragedy was only the first of several instances during the war where the East Tennessee farm boy narrowly avoided harm.

His first assignment was aboard a Navy destroyer, the USS Gridley (DD-380), where he honed his skills as an electrician under the stress of battle conditions. The crew of the Gridley fought their way through the Pacific, participating in the Solomon Islands campaign at Gaudalcanal, New Georgia, the Russell Islands, and Rendova Island.

“I didn't realize it at the time, but it took about as long to win the Solomon Islands as it did to win the war in Europe after Normandy,” says Hoke.

After the campaign, Hoke transferred to the commissioning crew of another destroyer, the USS O'Brien (DD-725). It was Mother's Day, 1944, when the ship joined a convoy of Navy vessels headed for Europe and the Normandy D-Day assault. While the historic battle raged on Omaha beach, Hoke was on the O'Brien just offshore.

“Those were some long hours,” he says, recalling one 48-hour stretch the crew spent at battle stations in support of the invasion force.

Then on June 25, his vessel traveled down the coast toward Cherbourg, France, where a German shore battery opened fire on the convoy, which also included the USS Texas battleship.

“They were throwing those big shells at the Texas, so we [maneuvered] to lay a smoke screen and protect it,” he says. “We took one of those shells in the bridge. I was in the engineering department, but it was close, as the ship wasn't that big.”

Some 13 crew members were killed and numerous others injured. Hoke emerged without a scratch.

After Normandy, the O'Brien returned to Boston for repairs before setting sail to take part in action in the Pacific theater. Once again, Hoke's path took him dangerously close to harm's way.

On Dec. 7, 1944, the O'Brien was alongside when the USS Ward was struck and mortally wounded by a kamikaze (a Japanese suicide bomber) at Ormoc Bay in the Philippines. A few weeks later, the O'Brien was also hit by a kamikaze pilot. Fortunately for the crew, the enemy plane struck the ship in the living compartment while all hands were at their battle stations, and no one was injured.

“We would be 40 to 50 miles out to sea with four or five ships scattered about,” explains Hoke. “We would encounter the first planes that came in, and there was nobody between you and the plane. It was a pretty serious situation.”

Sometime after the incident, Hoke was once again transferred and sent back to the states. Shortly thereafter, the O'Brien suffered another kamikaze attack that killed 50 and injured 76 of the crew.

Hoke served the remainder of the war on an AKA, an attack cargo ship, and was discharged in the fall of 1945 at Memphis. He came home to East Tennessee and went to work for Tennessee Eastman in Kingsport for four or five years, still serving in the reserves, before he



**Hoke Culbertson joined the Navy in the summer of 1941 and served for the duration of the war, surviving several close calls and witnessing a number of historic events. He was later recalled to serve in support of the Korean War before his discharge in 1952. He then went on to spend his career working as an electrician at the national security plants at Oak Ridge in support of Cold War efforts.**

was once again called to active duty for the Korean Conflict. He served 14 months working in the Navy Yard in Philadelphia helping to put mothballed ships back into service for the war. He was discharged in 1952 and went to work at Union Carbide at the Oak Ridge national security sites where he worked until his retirement in 1985.

It's been a lifetime since the war. He's had a successful career doing meaningful work. He's enjoyed life with both of his wives, and he says he has enjoyed traveling and staying in touch with family and friends. However, as talk once again returns to his longevity, Hoke is indifferent.

“There have been some long days, but it has passed by pretty fast,” he says, noting that he doesn't give his age much thought. “I try to make it a practice to never ask why. As far as I'm concerned there is no answer to why. I just try to be thankful.”

*Nature In Focus*



Abundant rainfall in May made Burgess Falls on the Falling Water River exceptionally beautiful. The spectacular falls plunge more than 130 feet into the gorge below and are a key attraction of Burgess Falls State Park, located 18 miles south of Cookeville in southern Putnam County.

— Photo by Glen Liford

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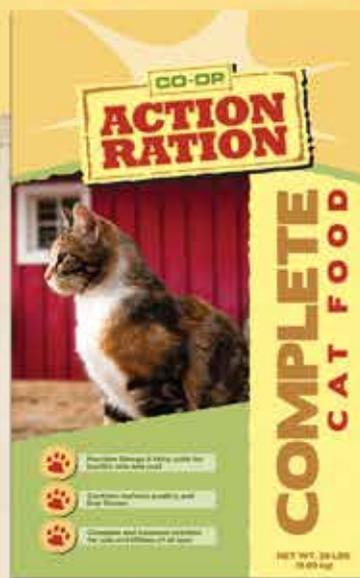
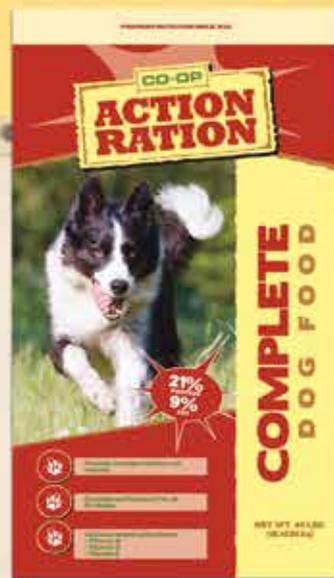


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A  
*Summertime*  
Staple

Fresh-from-the-garden tomatoes are one of our favorite things about summer. While it's undeniably delicious on its own, simply sliced and sprinkled with salt and pepper, this tangy, tasty fruit is also a perfect addition to many of our favorite recipes. From pastas and salads to casseroles and soups, tomatoes can make most any dish a little tastier!



## Tomato Juice

**Jennifer Sommers**

Yuma

First Farmers Cooperative

6 quarts, tomato juice

1½ cups sugar, scant

2 tablespoons celery salt

2 tablespoons onion salt

2 teaspoons garlic salt

Mix together all ingredients.

Bring to a boil for 3 minutes.

Then pour tomato juice in warm jars and seal. Delicious!

## Zucchini-Tomato Gumbo

**Jo Ann Hughes**

Tompkinsville, Ky.

Macon Trousdale

Farmers Cooperative

2 slices bacon

1 pint canned tomatoes

1 medium zucchini squash, sliced

1 small onion, diced

¼ teaspoon oregano

Salt and pepper, to taste

Cook bacon and set aside

(save drippings). Combine tomatoes, zucchini, onion, bacon drippings, and seasonings in saucepan. Simmer until squash is tender. Garnish with bacon.

## Cracker Salad

**Peggy S. Stricklin**

Savannah

First Farmers Cooperative

1 sleeve saltine crackers, crushed

1 large tomato, peeled and

finely chopped

3 green onions, finely chopped

1½ cups mayonnaise

1 hard boiled egg, chopped

Mix all ingredients together in a large bowl and serve immediately.

## Tomato Dumplings

**Kimberley Trail**

Beechgrove

Coffee Farmers Cooperative

½ cup onion, chopped

¼ cup green pepper, chopped

¼ cup celery, chopped

¼ cup butter

1 bay leaf

1 jar tomatoes or 2 (14.5 ounce) cans of tomatoes

1 tablespoon brown sugar

½ teaspoon basil

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon pepper

**Dumplings:**

1 cup all-purpose flour

1½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon cold butter

1 tablespoon parsley

⅔ cups milk

Sauté onion, pepper, and celery in butter then add the rest of the ingredients. Cover and simmer for 5-10 minutes.

For the dumplings, combine flour, baking powder and salt, cut in cold butter and add the parsley and milk. Stir well until mixed. Drop by tablespoonfuls into the tomato mixture. Cover and simmer for 12-15 minutes.

## Tomato Pie

**Johnny Beth Nolen**

Huntingdon

Carroll Farmers Cooperative

4 unpeeled tomatoes, sliced

10 fresh basil leaves, chopped

½ cup green onion, chopped

1 (9-inch) prebaked deep dish pie shell

1 cup mozzarella, grated

1 cup cheddar cheese, grated

1 cup mayonnaise

Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 350°. Place

the tomatoes in a colander in 1 layer. Sprinkle with salt and allow to drain in the sink for 10 minutes.

Layer the tomato slices, basil, and onion in the pie shell. Season with pepper. Combine the grated cheeses and mayonnaise together. Spread mayonnaise and cheese mixture on top of the tomatoes and bake for 30 minutes or until lightly browned.

To serve, cut into slices and serve warm.

## Cucumber-Tomato Salad

**Marye E. Worrell**

Newbern

Gibson Farmers Cooperative

2 large cucumbers, peeled and sliced

2 large tomatoes, peeled and cubed

1 small green bell pepper, cut into strips

1 small purple onion, sliced into rings

⅓ cup vegetable oil

6 tablespoons sugar

3 tablespoons red wine vinegar

¾ teaspoon salt

⅛ teaspoon black pepper

Mix veggies (cucumbers, tomatoes, bell pepper, and onion) in a large bowl.

Whisk together oil, sugar, vinegar, salt, and pepper until sugar dissolves.

Add veggies to liquid, stirring to coat. Cover and chill at least 3 hours before serving.

## Tennessee Caviar

**Wanda Powers**

Lexington

First Farmers Cooperative

2 cans black eyed peas or 1 can black eyed peas and 1 can black beans

1 can yellow or white hominy or 1 can whole kernel corn

Salt and pepper, to taste

1 bunch green onions with green stems, chopped

2 large tomatoes, chopped with seeds

½ bell pepper, chopped

Cilantro, chopped (optional)

1 small bottle Italian dressing

Drain canned vegetables and drain well. Season with salt and pepper. Add green onions, tomatoes, bell pepper, and cilantro.

Mix lightly, then add dressing. It is best to refrigerate overnight. Serve with dipper chips or scoops.

## Mushrooms in September

In honor of September's designation as National Mushroom Month, we're looking for recipes featuring this delicious, woody veggie — from appetizers and salads to main dishes and sides. We know you have at least one magnificent mushroom creation your family raves about, and we'd like to try it, too.

It's time to share with **Cooperator** readers your tastiest mushroom recipes! The person submitting the recipe judged best will be named "Cook of the Month" for the September **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, July 27, is the deadline for mushroom 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



296th in a series to show where our rural Co-op friends worship

### Cedar Flat Missionary Baptist Church in Hancock County

Established in 1902, Cedar Flat Missionary Baptist Church is located at 4368 Highway 33 in Hancock County. Reverend Chris Hayes is the pastor. Services are held every Sunday at 10 a.m., and monthly on the second Saturday at 2 p.m. Visitors are welcome.

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## Your response is critical to the 2020 Census

The 2020 Census is under way and more than half of the nation has been counted. Have you been counted? It's critical to get a complete count of rural communities to ensure appropriate political representation and fair allocation of federal funding.

"We are seeing slow response [to the census] in our rural areas," says June Iljana, partnership/media specialist with the Philadelphia Regional Census Center. "This is the first census in which everyone has been invited to respond online. While that is beneficial in areas with reliable Internet access, lack of broadband service in some rural locations limits responses.

Also some rural communities have a high proportion of residences with an atypical mailing address or that don't receive mail at the residence."

The bureau intends to hand-deliver an invitation and questionnaire to those residences. But due to the bureau's pause in operations due to the COVID-19 situation, many have likely not yet been contacted. Census employees will contact those residences as soon as it is safe to do so according to federal, state, and local health authorities.

The U.S. Constitution establishes that the census results be used to redistribute federal taxes back to states based on their population. Funding for federal programs like school lunches and education, healthcare services, critical infrastructure, fire departments, and others is based on census data.

If you have not yet returned your information, please respond online at [www.my2020census.gov](http://www.my2020census.gov), by mail, or call 844-330-2020. Your neighbors are counting on you!



## UT Extension names director of 4-H youth development

A face familiar face to those in the ag education community is moving up in the ranks to lead University of Tennessee 4-H Youth Development across the state. Justin Crowe has been named director and statewide program leader for 4-H and began his new role on June 1.

Crowe was active in 4-H programs as a student holding many leadership roles. After receiving his bachelor's degree in behavioral sciences, Crowe began his professional career with 4-H in Davidson County, engaging urban youth in hands-on learning experiences for five years. Since 2008, Crowe has served as Extension specialist in the statewide 4-H Youth Development Office. Crowe also holds a master's degree in education from Tennessee Technological University.

Crowe takes the helm from Dwight Loveday, who served as interim 4-H director and statewide program leader since 2018. To learn more about 4-H Youth Development in Tennessee, visit [4h.tennessee.edu](http://4h.tennessee.edu).

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# Overcomer

## Huntingdon row crop and livestock producer Gerry Hilliard rises above adversities to continue farming

Story and photos by: Allison Farley

**G**erry Hilliard began farming with his father, Edgar, as soon as he was old enough to walk beside him.

Growing up, the 57-year-old Carroll County row crop and livestock producer recalls dreaming of being a full-time farmer like his father, who raised market hogs, soybeans, corn, cattle, wheat, and other row crops in Huntingdon.

“When I was probably six or seven years old, I started following the tractor pretending I was a farmer just like him,” says Gerry, who, along with younger sisters, Annette and Telena, were taught the values of farm life by their dad and mother, Carolyn. “I would play with my toys in the shade of his truck while he was planting with the tractor.”

As Gerry grew older, he took on more farm responsibilities, from driving tractors to feeding hogs. When he was only 10 years old and just becoming an invaluable help to his dad, Gerry was diagnosed with juvenile or Type I diabetes. Because his body could not produce insulin on its own, he had to adopt a rigid diet and insulin injection regime to control his blood sugar. He never missed a beat as his dad’s helper, despite the limitations common with this serious condition. Even as a student at Huntingdon High School, Gerry found a way to spend some of his class time on the farm.

“When I was in school, study hall was the last period of the day and packed with students,” he says. “The teachers worked it out where those of us who worked could leave at that time and go to our jobs, so I came home to work on the farm with dad.”

Gerry also took advantage of every opportunity at school to learn more about farming, so naturally he made the choice to join FFA. He was very active with the organization, which culminated in him receiving the American FFA Degree at the organization’s 1983 national convention in Kansas City. This degree is only awarded to less than 1 percent of FFA members, making it one of the organization’s highest honors.

Since his high school graduation in 1981, Gerry has never spent a day as anything but a full-time farmer. He went into partnership with his father that year, and the two continued to farm together for more than three decades until his father’s passing in 2014.

The father and son team hit the height of the farm’s production in the late 1990s and early 2000s, raising 1,200 acres of row crops and managing a 60-sow market hog operation, where they would sell between 1,200 and 1,400 hogs each year.

Gerry says farming together has been a blessing over the years as the family experienced health issues and unexpected loss. In 1975, Edgar caught his right arm in a grain auger’s PTO shaft, while Gerry received a kidney and pancreas transplant in 2006, a year after he was diagnosed with kidney failure. Then, in August 2013, Gerry’s 23-year-old son, Ross, who had plans to return home to join the family farming operation, was killed in a tragic motorcycle accident.

“Dad and I were able to take over the major farming operations when the other was recovering and supported each other while we were both grieving, too,” says Gerry. “I don’t know how we could have gotten through those times without each other.”

Despite the adversities he and his family have faced, Gerry continues to be committed to carrying on the Hilliard farming legacy. Today, he and Lisa, his wife of 11 years, raise cattle and a few row crops on their Carroll County land.

“We have around 50 Hereford and commercial mama cows in our cow/calf operation,” says Gerry. “We also grow 500 acres of white corn that goes to make corn meal, 150 acres of wheat, 350 acres soybeans, and 75 acres of mixed grass hay.”

While Gerry’s pancreas transplant means he no longer needs daily insulin, he still deals with many of the long-term effects from diabetes, such as nerve damage. Since 2017, Gerry has struggled with Charcot, a condition caused from neuropathy, which affects the bones, joints, and soft tissues of his feet or ankles.

Even with the chronic health battles, both large and small, Gerry continues to find joy each day by farming the land his father taught him to love and care for.

“It’s not a job to me; I just enjoy doing it,” says Gerry. “I have always enjoyed and looked forward to getting into the field and being around the equipment and the livestock, so it feels more like a hobby and a way to work through whatever is happening in my life.”



Gerry can always count on help around the farm from his wife of 11 years, Lisa. The couple raises Hereford cattle, 500 acres of white corn, 150 acres of wheat, 350 acres soybeans, and 75 acres of mixed grass hay on their Carroll County land.



*“There is something about being raised on a farming family that gives you a different outlook on life’s challenges, and I don’t think I’d be happy doing anything but farming.” — Gerry Hilliard*

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