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APRIL 2021

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A good thing

PAGE 8 Manchester's McBride family has grown a small herd into a high-quality, purebred Angus operation



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Creative tradition

Repurposed feed bags find new purpose



Glen Liford

Editor

There's a long tradition of repurposing Co-op feed bags. Back in the early days of the system, Co-op feeds were packaged in fabric bags in assorted prints. After the feed was emptied, many customers used the material to fashion clothing for women and children. The cloth came in different colors and patterns, and former managers have related how often wives would come in to help their husbands pick up feed and would search through stacks of bags to find a favorite color or pattern.

Knowing this history, Grainger Farmers Cooperative Manager Burl Matthews was not entirely surprised when Co-op customer Frank Godwin told him of a local craftsman creating tote bags from recycled modern poly plastic feed bags. Pam Willis, who lives in New Market, sells the creative bags at a booth at the Great Smokies Flea Market, just off I-40 Exit 407 on Dumplin Valley Road in Kodak. Many of the modern Co-op feed bags are colorful creations with attractive images of the intended animal — sheep, goats, cattle, horses, etc. — and Pam had found an eager audience who appreciated the designs. Burl was intrigued by the possibilities.

"I thought they were really neat," says Burl, who is always on the lookout for unusual and useful items to stock at the Co-op. "I figured our customers would really like them."

His mind immediately went to a blank wall that he thought would be the perfect showcase for the hand-crafted bags.

Pam was eager to share her story with Burl.

A retired realtor, Pam had been working at a store in the Tanger Outlets in Sevierville when COVID-19 struck, and she was laid off from her job. By early summer, she was bored and came across a birdseed bag that struck her as attractive. Although Pam says her

only true experience with anything similar was learning to use a sewing machine in high school home economics class, she admits some folks call her creative. She enjoys creating oil paintings on canvas, and it wasn't long until the idea of adapting the seed sack for a tote bag came about. She sewed in a fabric lining, attached web handles, and added a decorative charm. Not bad for a first attempt, she thought.

Her niece keeps goats and chickens, and Pam asked her to save the feed bags for her projects. She crafted a few more samples and then showed the bags to a friend who has a local produce business. That friend was impressed, too, and decided to try selling the bags at her own business. The idea took off from there. The novelty bags were a hit, and soon Pam was selling them at the flea market as well.

"A lot of the folks who stop in there are from out of state, and they seem to like these locally made items," says Pam.

The colorful Co-op bags appeal to a wide range of customers, says Pam, who adds that the bags featuring goats and the mineral supplement bag decorated with a scenic red barn are her most popular versions.

"It seems nearly everyone can relate to that red barn," she says.

Burl has had the bags on display at Grainger Farmers Co-op for a couple of months now.

"They certainly have eye appeal," says Burl. "We're always looking for something different. That's the reason many people shop with us. Every Co-op is different, and you never know what you might find here."



The handcrafted tote bags made by Pam Willis of New Market (left) caught the attention of Grainger Farmers Cooperative Manager Burl Matthews (right). The bags are now prominently displayed at the Co-op in Rutledge.



On Dec. 5, 2020, Discovery Park of America opened a new exhibit called “AgriCulture: Innovating for Our Survival” in the museum and heritage park’s Simmons Bank Ag Center. This exhibit showcases the role technological, scientific, and genetic innovation in agriculture plays in society and culture around the world.

Innovation in agriculture on display

Discovery Park of America’s latest exhibit focuses on the importance of modern farming

Story by Allison Farley

Photos submitted by Discovery Park of America

The latest exhibit at the the Discovery Park has been called a mind-blowing, myth-busting exhibit that will change the world. Its focus: modern agriculture.

It’s almost impossible to drive any distance in northwest Tennessee without seeing advertisements for Discovery Park of America. This 100-million-dollar facility in Union City

is a state-of-the-art, 100,000-square-foot interactive museum and heritage park that features exhibits on famed Tennessean Col. David Crockett, an 1800’s log cabin, dinosaurs, vintage automobiles, Native American Studies, the military, and more.

“Since Discovery Park first opened its doors on Nov. 1, 2013, our staff has strived to create a place where inspiration would happen every single day,” says the facility’s President and CEO Scott Williams. “Our goal is to spark a desire in our visitors to learn, grow, and consider new ideas beyond

wherever they are in life, regardless of age or education.”

To accomplish this goal, Discovery Park staff continues to develop new exhibits and learning centers throughout the venue. The most recent addition is the “AgriCulture: Innovating for Our Survival” exhibit in the museum’s Simmons Bank Ag Center. The farming exhibit seeks to explore how important agriculture is to the general public and highlights the amazing innovations

(See Discovery Park, page 6)

Discovery Park

(continued from page 5)

required to feed, fuel, and clothe a growing world population.

“In 2018, the Tennessee Soybean Promotion Board (TSPB) brought to our attention the fact that we didn’t have a lot of agriculture in our museum,” says Williams. “We had a large vintage tractor collection, but that display focused on agriculture of the past.”

The TSPB observation sparked a pivotal conversation between the Discovery Park staff and leaders in the agriculture industry across the state.

“We began to hold focus groups made up of farmers in our community as well as business and industry professionals across the country to discuss modern agriculture,” says Jennifer Wildes, the park’s Director of Exhibits and Collections. “Out of those focus groups, the same message kept coming up: frustration with the misinformation the general public seemed to have about the industry. So, we became determined to grow our educational efforts until we ended up with the displays we have today.”

Williams says the staff “did their homework” to develop an experience that would

educate and inform even those with little understanding of modern agriculture, beginning with the park’s own staff.

“We were probably some of the best people to work on this project because our team knew absolutely nothing about agriculture,” admits Williams. “We knew what farming looked like in our community and from the products at the grocery store, but we didn’t know anything else about it.”

As the employees did their research, they discovered more about the vastness and complexity of agriculture than they could have imagined,” Williams says.

“We learned that the folks in the agriculture industry were really, in a lot of ways, talking to each other, but the general public that is not involved in the industry had no clue what was required to grow food, fuel, and fiber,” he points out. “Because of these findings, we chose to focus on the innovation that is a critical component of modern agriculture and to tell the story of the people working in the industry.”

Wildes and her staff worked with the exhibit design company Solid Light out of Louisville, Ky., on the design, layout, and build of the exhibits throughout the center, including the “Faces of Farming” portion. This display features more than 250 por-

traits of men and women working in agriculture today and includes a gallery of social media posts that shows examples of real-time photos and videos farmers have shared online. One of the featured personalities in the gallery is Emalee Buttrey, Ph.D., an Associate Professor of Animal Science at the University of Tennessee at Martin.

“I think the ‘Faces of Farming’ exhibit will help non-ag visitors feel more comfortable reaching out to farmers, ranchers, and others in the ag community because they see real people, not stock photos grabbed off the internet,” says Buttrey. “Hopefully, this will stimulate some genuine conversations and help to cultivate relationships between producers and consumers.”

Park visitors also have the opportunity to learn about the technology required to get agriculture products from the farm to the family, as well as the role of innovation in the field of international agriculture today. Hands-on elements in the center include a modern, state-of-the-art tractor from H&R Agri-Power and Case IH staged next to an early-20th-century model, so that guests can compare them. The exhibit also spotlights individuals from history who applied innovative farming practices along with those working to transform agriculture on farms and in laboratories today.



Located along the western corner of Discovery Park, the Simmons Bank Ag Center showcases the new permanent exhibit that tells the story of farming innovation in the past, present, and future in a fun and interactive way. The area around the center features a row crop exhibit, wildflower garden, and vineyard.

“The mission of our museum and heritage park is to stimulate thinking and motivate children and adults to see beyond,” said Williams. “We believe this exhibit will inspire visitors to see farming in a whole new way.”

In addition to “AgriCulture: Innovating for Our Survival,” the park has added other exhibits throughout the venue, including a beehive behind glass where visitors can watch the insects work, a pollinator garden, and traditional row crops like cotton, soybeans, and corn.

Williams says the park will continue its agricultural focus this summer by hosting a temporary exhibit titled “40 Chances: Finding Hope in a Hungry World” featuring photographs by philanthropist and farmer Howard G. Buffett. Traveling to more than 137 countries, Buffett turned his camera lens on the devastating forces that fuel hunger and poverty. The exhibit will be open to the public July 21 to September 6.

Discovery Park of America is open 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Monday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday; and 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. Sunday. The park is closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays. For up-to-date hours of operation, ticket pricing, and more details about the park, visit discoveryparkofamerica.com.



LEFT: The exhibit has many interactive pieces such as the turn-of-the-twentieth century tractor and state-of-the-art tractor that guests climb into and compare the changes the machines have had over time. RIGHT: Displays throughout the center show how food, fuel, and fiber get from the farm to families and teach about the role of innovation in agriculture today.



The exhibit includes a “Faces of Farming” section with more than 250 portraits of men and women working in agriculture today.

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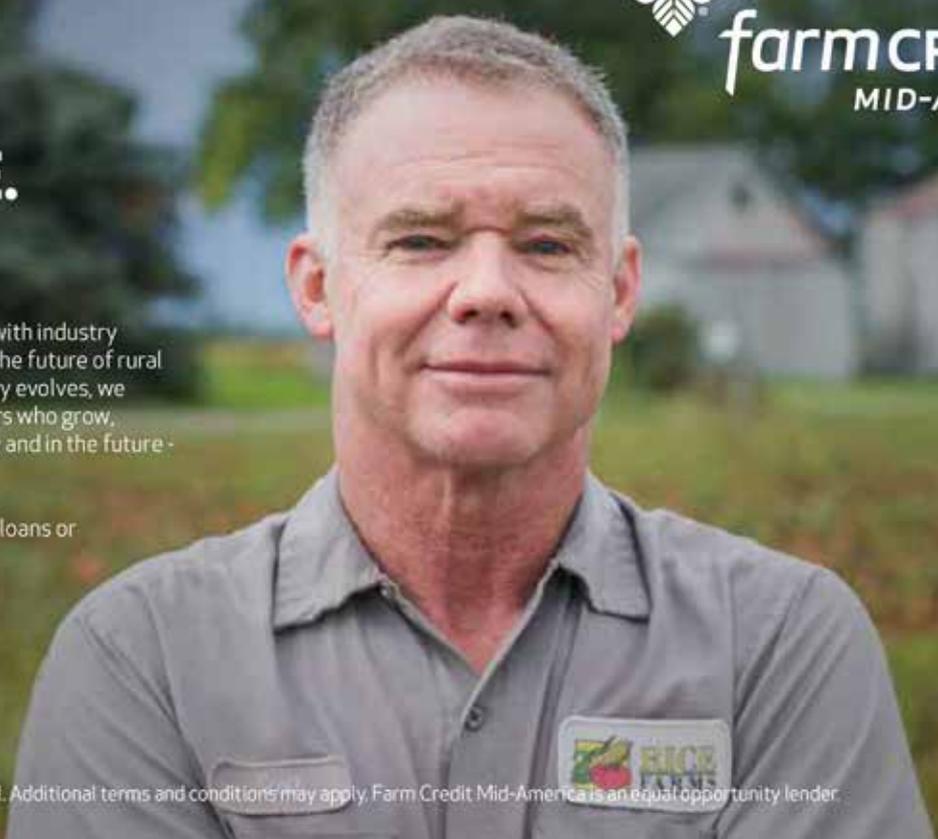
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A good thing

Manchester's McBride family has grown a small herd into a high-quality, purebred Angus operation

Story by Cara Moore

Photos by Hannah Lewis and Cara Moore

The McBrides of Coffee County have seen their wildest agricultural dreams exceeded — and then some.

Over the past 15 years, the McBride family has grown their farm from a humble show-stock project to a prosperous pure-bred cattle business specializing in high-quality bulls and productive cows. Today, McBride Angus Farms is a registered black Angus seedstock operation encompassing over 800 acres near Manchester.

Mark McBride, owner of McBride Angus Farms and patriarch of the family, says the operation is the culmination of two long-held goals.

“First, I wanted to have cattle for our children’s 4-H and FFA youth projects,” says Mark, who is the Agency Manager at local Coffee County Farm Bureau Insurance. “My second goal was to retire with a small herd of cattle just to piddle with. Now, both the farm and my retirement plan look different — and a lot better — than I ever expected. That’s a good thing!”

In 2007, the McBride family moved to Coffee County, bringing 22 head of cattle with them. After Mark’s oldest son, Matthew, expressed interest in pursuing the cattle business full-time, McBride Angus Farms grew quickly. The farm currently maintains 150 breeding cows and continues to expand into additional facets of the beef cattle industry.

“Our primary products are 18-month-old registered bulls that we sell to commercial producers, as well as replacement heifers and cows,” says Matthew. “We are also in the freezer-beef business, selling about 25 custom-cut and USDA-inspected freezer beef annually.”

Although Mark and Matthew are “driving the ship,” they are quick to point out that the entire family gets involved, with each member making important contributions.

Mark and his wife, Carol, established the farm and are active in managing it. Matthew is a self-proclaimed jack-of-all-trades who handles marketing and herd genetics. The operation utilizes embryo transfer and artificial insemination, and Matthew’s wife, Amanda, is the primary AI technician, herd-health manager, and records-keeper. Matthew’s middle brother, Andrew, oversees the feeding program and is the main herdsman.

“It’s definitely hard work, but also very rewarding,” says Andrew, a retired musician. “It’s great to be able to work and live in the same area as my family.”

The youngest McBride brother, Stephen, lives in Lafayette, Ind., with his wife, Megan. Stephen is working toward a PhD in agriculture communications and education from Purdue University.

With “all hands” pitching in to help, McBride Angus Farms began hosting a bull and female production sale last year that they plan to hold each spring. Their sale this year was

held in mid-February. The sale was held online and in-person to capture a larger audience as well as serve local cattle buyers.

“The sale is a great way for people to buy valuable genetics at a reasonable price,” says Matthew. “Although we have to meet our bottom end, it’s important for the customer to know they’re getting a high-dollar bull. Hopefully, those buyers will come back next year and spend a little more money because we’ve built trust with them.”

The McBride family are members of Coffee Farmers Co-op and rely on the store and its staff for both products and services. Matthew says the family is particularly pleased with the results of a mineral program they have developed with the help of Coffee Farmers Co-op and TFC nutritionists.

The family provides cattle with Co-op mineral year round including Supreme Hi Mag (#638) and Supreme Cattle Mineral (#678).

(See A good thing, page 10)



PREVIOUS PAGE: McBride Angus Farms is a full family affair. As Mark and Carol (left) are planning for retirement, they are seeing the future generation take over to run the farm. Along with Mark and Carol are, from left, 3-year-old Levi, his father, Andrew McBride, and Amanda and Matthew McBride with their daughter, Joanna. 2. **ABOVE:** The McBride family focuses on developing high-quality Angus genetics rather than large numbers of cattle.

A good thing

(continued from page 9)

“We’ve been around Co-op for a long time,” says Matthew. “The organization has always been important to us, now more than ever. Co-op continues to be relevant, competitive, and provides the products and services we need.”

Matthew says the McBride family’s outlook on the future is hopeful, and he sees continued growth on the horizon.

“Our goal is to become the best purebred Angus seedstock finishing operation in the Southeast,” he says. “We like to think we have an opportunity to be one of this area’s most reputable seedstock operations. There is always going to be a demand for beef, and we are doing our part in providing quality cattle and meat.”

The farm is a special place for the family, says Amanda, Matthew’s wife of 11 years.

“We are so lucky to be able to raise our children here,” she says with a smile. “It’s a blessing, and it’s a privilege. On a farm, you just have ... freedom.”

Mark and Carol say they are happy to be only three miles away from their grandchild-

dren. Matthew and Amanda have two daughters — Joanna, 2, and Meredith, 6 — and Andrew and his wife, Katie, have two sons — Levi, 3, and Silas, 1 — who often visit the farm.

“Levi will come out here and farm all day with his Dad and me,” says Matthew. “We joke that by the time Levi is 10, he’ll be able to do everything that we do. And that’s a good thing!”

Mark and Carol are incredibly thankful to have their grandkids in such close proximity, and that they get to share this rural life with them.

“If I could have dreamed this, and planned this, I could not have dreamed it to turn out any better than to have all four grandkids living so close, working on the farm together,” says Mark. “I’m living the dream and loving every minute of it!”



The farm sells premier bulls and seed-stock heifers out of Manchester, Tenn. The McBrides choose top quality genetics to develop proven bulls and replacement females for their on-the-farm sale. A year-round Co-op mineral program is crucial to their operation.

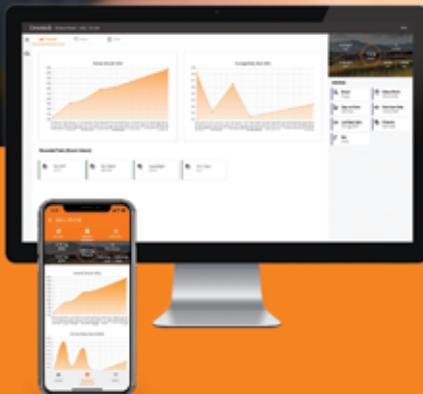


LEFT: Mark McBride, right, holds on tight to his three-year-old grandson, Levi. Mark says he is so happy to have the grandkids close to the farm where they are able to come visit and learn so often. Mark is a full time Farm Bureau Insurance Agency Manager at Coffee County Farm Bureau and helps his sons operate the farm. RIGHT: Levi, in the middle, stays in the thick of all the activities on the farm. Levi enjoys helping his Uncle Matthew, left, and dad, Andrew, right, on the farm as much as he can. You can find him checking cows or in tractors on a typical day.



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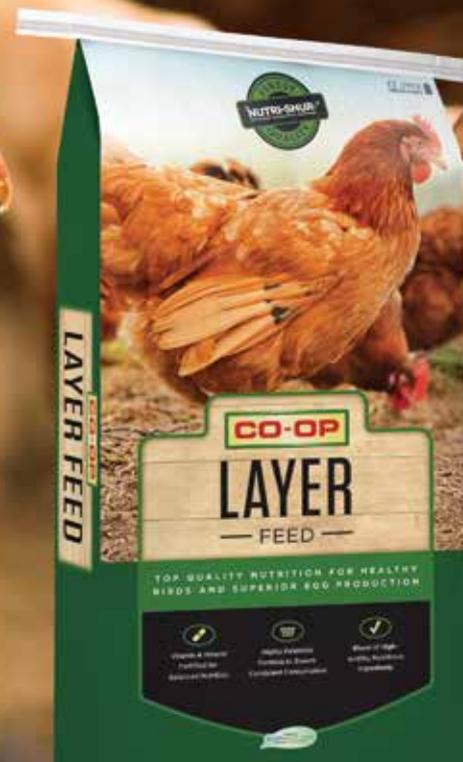
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¹Stromberg BE, et al. *Cooperia punctata*: Effect on cattle productivity. *Int Parasitol*. 2012;38(3):412-4. 291.
²Lawrence JD, Roehrs MA. Economic analysis of pharmaceutical technologies in modern beef production. Proceedings of the NCCC-134 Conference on Applied Commodity Price Analysis, Forecasting, and Market Risk Management. 2007;1-18.
³Merck Animal Health National FERT Database.
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By Grant Crawford, Ph.D., Merck Animal Health Cattle Technical Services

Remember to deworm

Don't let internal parasites steal profits from your pasture cattle

Beef producers need to look no further than their favorite cattle magazine or website to realize there are a multitude of products available that claim to add value to their animals. Of all these products, one might be surprised to find that the category adding the most value to the cow/calf and stocker operations is dewormers.

According to an Iowa State University analysis of beef cattle production technologies, using a dewormer in the cow/calf herd can add \$201 per head to the profitability of the cow. This added value is due to improved weaning weight on the calf and improved pregnancy rate on the cow. For stockers, the added value is \$24 per head. This is due primarily to added weight gain.

The impact of worm infection in cattle begins on grass they graze. Cattle consume forages that are infested with worms as soon as they are turned out to green grass. Worms on grass are resilient, and they can survive cold winter temperatures as well as hot, dry conditions in the summer. Once consumed by cattle, worms damage the gut lining and cause alterations in nutrient digestion. The primary effect is a decrease in feed intake. Nutrient absorption can also be negatively affected by parasitic infections. Therefore, not only is food intake affected, but the absorption of nutrients is decreased as well. This can lead to deficiencies in weight gain, milk production, and reproduction.

Worms also affect cattle health. The immune system recognizes worms as a parasitic invader and will work to protect the animal from this attack. When this happens, immune resources usually available to fight viruses and bacteria are redirected toward fighting the parasitic infection. It is a good idea to ensure that cattle are worm-free prior to vaccinations to allow vaccines to properly immunize cattle against viruses and bacteria.

In a study published in the *The Bovine Practitioner* to assess the health and performance benefits of deworming cattle on grass and at feedlot entry, stockers that were strategically dewormed with Safe-

Guard dewormer prior to grass turnout and again at 28 and 56 days post-turnout were, on average, 53 lbs. heavier after 118 days than steers that were not dewormed. Upon feedlot entry, steers were either dewormed again with Safe-Guard or were not dewormed. Cattle that were dewormed on pasture as well as upon feedlot entry were, on average, 130 lbs. heavier at the end of the feedlot phase (an additional 121 days) than cattle that were never dewormed. Cattle that were dewormed were healthier as well. Cattle that were dewormed on pasture and prior to feedlot entry had 2 percent morbidity and no death loss, while cattle that were not dewormed had 18 percent morbidity and 2 percent death loss.

For these reasons, deworming should be considered the foundation of any health and nutrition program. It is best to strategically utilize dewormers to stay ahead of the worm's life cycle. In mature cows, it takes 6–8 weeks for worms that are ingested from grass to begin to shed eggs back onto the pasture. If cows were dewormed after a killing frost in the fall or winter, they should be worm-free until they are exposed to green grass again. Therefore, the best time to deworm is 6–8 weeks after green-up. For stockers, the life cycle from worm ingestion to egg shedding is 4–6 weeks. Therefore, stockers should first be dewormed

prior to grass turnout, and then again, 4–6 weeks later. In some cases, a third deworming treatment 4–6 weeks after the second treatment may be necessary.

Safe-Guard 0.5% pellets (Item #6419) are a safe and highly effective option to deworm without having to gather cattle for processing through a chute. Safe-Guard pellets can be mixed with feed and fed at a rate of 1 lb. per 1,000 lbs. of body weight. One 25-lb. bag of Safe-Guard pellets will treat 25,000 lbs. of cattle.

One way to ensure dewormer efficacy is through a Fecal Egg Count Reduction Test (FECRT). These FECRTs analyze egg counts in feces as a measure of worm load in that animal. A FECRT can help producers determine if their cattle need to be dewormed, and if their deworming program is effective. To order FECRT kits, contact your local Co-op livestock specialist or Merck Animal Health representatives Justin Hull at (541) 419-3021 or justin.hull@merck.com or Kevin Johnson at (903) 681-5893 or kevin.johnson11@merck.com.

Deworming is not only important; it is the most important thing we can do to enhance profitability in cow/calf and stocker operations. To best utilize these tools, be sure to use a quality dewormer and work with the worm life cycle to keep cattle productive through the entire grazing season.





By Todd Steen, TFC Nutritionist

The most important ingredient

Tips for producing top-quality forage

Forage is the most important ingredient in all herbivore diets. As animal breeding has produced higher-performing genetics, proper rations start with the most optimum forage quality that can be grown. That quality is ultimately determined by its digestibility, and the animal will always be the final determiner as to how good the forage is.

Remember, the better the forage, the less a producer must rely on additional, purchased feed supplementation. There are multiple factors affecting forage quality, including environment, plant species, and soil fertility, just to name a few.

Below are a few points to keep in mind as forage production time nears.

- Producing top-quality hay begins with planning, and it is always wise to properly evaluate and maintain equipment prior to both seeding and harvest.
- The greatest variable with forage production is weather. While it is common to have 3–4 days without rainfall with no significant impact, extended dry periods can pose challenges.
- Be aware of plant moisture before harvesting. As a general rule, the drier the plant, the greater the maturity and fiber concentration. Generally, forage should be

12–16 percent moisture before attempting to bale.

- If conditions prevent forage from drying to the desired moisture content, additives/inoculants can protect against extreme spoilage and loss. Remember: rake while moist, bale when crisp.
 - As plants mature, indigestible fibrous portions can cause the animal to take longer to digest which, in turn, will result in lower consumption. That's why you want to begin to mow and bale hay before the forage is too mature.
 - The leafy parts of the plants provide better digestibility than stem portions, and vibrant, green leaves provide better nutrition than brown, dead leaves, so it is better to rake and bale hay before it dries out too much. Raking dry hay can exacerbate leaf loss.
 - How a producer cuts, harvests, and stores forage plays a significant role in preserving high-quality leaf content regardless of plant species. Bale wrappers or storing hay under cover preserves quality.
 - Set a goal of harvesting forage at four weeks of regrowth.
 - The general recommendation when dealing with more mature hay crops is to utilize a conditioner which will crimp and crush stems of the newly cut hay to promote faster and more even drying.
 - Laying hay in wide swaths will maximize sunlight and wind exposure and may reduce drying time. If the forage is too dry, begin cutting in morning while it is still damp from the dew.
 - Nitrogen fertilization is useful to increase crude protein for the most part, but has little significance on energy, vitamin, or mineral content of forage.
 - Observing forage as it grows is critical to identifying problems related to pests, mold, etc., but for an in-depth analysis of overall forage quality, consider having your fields professionally assayed.
- As always, your Co-op Feed and Animal Health professional can assist you with questions concerning your feed and forage program.



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By WINFIELD
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By Tim Bogy, GreenPoint Ag Interim Environment, Health & Safety Director

Safety starts with me

This planting season make safe farming a priority

This month launches one of the busiest times of the year as, weather permitting, farmers begin the 2021 planting season. This means long hours and hard days for growers as they work to get seed in the ground for this year's crop.

As the demands of this busy season begin, safety should be at the forefront of everyone's mind. At GreenPoint Ag, safety is a topic of daily discussion. It's not something we only do in the off season, or focus on this week, but not the next. Every GreenPoint Ag employee takes the pledge, "Safety starts with me."

We recommend you and your farm employees focus on safety as well. Throughout the hurried pace of the season, it's easy to focus more on just getting the job done. But a bit of preparation and consideration can help everyone stay safe.

Make sure your equipment is adequately maintained and in good working condition. Ensure safety equipment and features are in place and operating properly. Follow all laws concerning travel on roads and ensure prop-

er lighting and safety placards are in place.

Maintain your focus on the task at hand. Be aware of your surroundings and watch for children. (They are often attracted to the machinery and want to be around parents and friends.)

If you are in a leadership position on the farm, communicate the importance of safety to all workers. A brief meeting to discuss safety and the chores ahead can help everyone focus. Do this daily to ensure proper procedures are so ingrained, they become habit. You or your employees shouldn't have to think about the safest way to do something — you want it to just come naturally.

Follow label directions on any crop-protection products. Be sure adequate safety equipment is available.

Choose the right tool for the job. I remember when I was growing up on my family's farm in Wabbaseka, Ark., my uncle kept an old, worn-out monkey wrench handy on the farm. He would use that tool like a hammer or a prybar, but rarely for its intended pur-

pose. His approach was certainly one I would advise against. Instead of using an adjustable wrench as a hammer, take a few extra moments and get the proper tool. Farmers have an admirable "get it done" attitude — that's our nature — but we should always slow down and do things properly.

Often, the safest method is not the quickest alternative, but it is always the best choice. Taking a little extra time to do things properly will save you money and frustration in the long run.

Planting season can be hard on both body and mind. Growers may spend up to 18 hours in the tractor seat, and fatigue can cause us to take shortcuts and be unsafe. It's a good idea to take breaks often, get adequate sleep, and don't skip meals. If you are getting tired and starting to work unsafely, you may not recognize when it's time to call it a day. Be mindful of the dangers of fatigue, and watch out for one another.

Let's get through this challenging time safely.



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A VOICE

for students and agriculture

Eagleville High School senior Garren Hamby serves on the Tennessee Board of Education.



Story by Hannah Lewis

Each year, the Tennessee Board of Education selects one student to add his or her voice and perspective in education and school policy. This year, that voice belongs to Garren Hamby, a senior at Eagleville School. Garren was hand-picked by Governor Bill Lee from five outstanding students from across the state.

“It was an honor to be selected for this position,” Garren says. “It has already been an experience I am sure I will remember for the rest of my life.”

The Tennessee Board of Education is composed of one member from each of the nine congressional districts across the state, the executive director of the Tennessee High Education Commission, and one student-member. Each must be selected by the sitting governor and confirmed by the state legislature. Garren received his preliminary nomination from FFA East Tennessee Regional Coordinator, Stena Meadows, on Aug. 11, 2020, and was

interviewed for the position the same day. His application was confirmed on Sept. 1, 2020.

“The Tennessee Board of Education is such a high honor because it impacts students across the entire state,” says Garren. “Being part of that select group was humbling to think of the differences that I could make to help students.”

Garren was sworn in on Sept. 24, 2020, and assumed his voting seat for his one-year term for 2020–2021 as part of the 11-person voting board.

College Grove native, Garren has a passion for farming and agriculture education that runs deep. His parents, Dr. Jaye and Patricia Hamby, were both active in the industry and were FFA State Officers. Jaye is the owner of AgriLearn, and Patricia works with Novel Products, LLC.

Garren says he “came by his agricultural tendencies honestly.” In fourth grade, he began raising his own sheep and now has a flock of over 30 head and has notched several 4-H and FFA awards during his time

in the Rutherford County 4-H program and Eagleville FFA chapter.

Garren began his FFA career upon attending Eagleville School, and his wide range of involvement has earned him much respect in both youth organizations. He encourages youth to get involved as early as they can.

“Try as many new things as possible and figure out what you like,” advises the 18-year-old, who also serves as the Middle Tennessee FFA Regional Sentinel. “Once you find it, don’t hesitate to go deep into it. Both 4-H and FFA have certainly been life-changers for me and have helped prepare me for the Board of Education appointment.”

He adds that, so far, he has enjoyed bringing agriculture and rural life issues to light, especially because they are often relevant to modern education. He points to the lack of broadband access in many rural areas as an example.

“It’s important to bring up these issues and get legislation passed that will ben-

efit people in rural areas,” Hamby says. “Things like high-speed broadband are often taken for granted by those who live in urban areas — and therefore overlooked — but they are a big deal for students and farmers in rural places. Simply logging into an online textbook can be difficult, if not impossible, with a slow internet connection. And a row-crop producer may not be able to access a lot of critical technology for his farm without broadband.”

Garren says he enjoys the more technical and educational side of the meetings, three of which he has already attended.

“I’ve learned a lot already,” he says. “Just being part of the process and understanding what goes on behind the scenes has been an amazing experience.”

Representing students across the state “has been a true highlight” for Garren, who plans to attend Tennessee Tech University to pursue an agriculture business degree.

“It has certainly been a humbling experience,” he says. “Even though there are a lot of students in agriculture in Tennessee, they are not in the majority, so it’s a privilege to be able to speak for them and make sure their voices are heard.”



On hand for the appointment of Garren Hamby, center, to the Tennessee State Board of Education were, from left: Board member representing District 4, Gordon Ferguson; FFA advisor Bruce Haley; FFA advisor Emily Marshall; and Eagleville School Principal Tim Pedigo. – Photo submitted by the Hamby family.



LEFT: Garren is an active member at the Eagleville FFA chapter and serves as the Middle Tennessee FFA Sentinel. Garren uses his experiences in FFA, 4-H, and career and technical education classes to be a voice for agriculture and career focused education. RIGHT: Garren and his parents, Jaye and Patricia, run a high-quality flock of more than 30 Dorset and Southdown ewes for showing. Garren exhibits "Snooks" a favorite show ewe after she won Grand Champion at the 2020 Tennessee Junior Livestock Expo. Fellow Middle Tennessee FFA Regional Officer, Ella McLerran, stands with Garren after the big win. – Photo submitted by the Hamby family.

Avoid downtime

Prepare your pull-type spreader for the job ahead

By GreenPoint Ag Agronomy

With the spring planting season underway, it's important to maximize your productivity. A good place to pick up efficiency is by keeping equipment in good working order. You may choose to rent your spreader or even contract with your local Co-op for lime and fertilizer application. But if you have your own equipment, you want to make sure your equipment is ready to go when the weather breaks.

"A little preventative maintenance can ensure your spreader is ready to go when you are," says Trey Smith, manager of Tennessee Farmers Cooperative Ag Equipment business. "You will be more efficient and get more accurate coverage while avoiding downtime and expensive repairs."

Follow these seven steps to stay ahead of the game.



No. 1 Check for any broken welds, including hopper, tongue, and sub-frame. The corrosive effects of product can take its toll over time.



No. 2 Inspect and replace broken or worn spinner fins. These spinners, shown on a spreader truck, are badly in need of replacement. No. 3 Inspect the conveyor chain for damage and adjust tension adjuster to the proper specs. Chains flex over time making adjustment necessary.



No. 4 Inspect and grease all bearings including wheel hubs. Don't forget the bearings under the spindle dishes. This is an area often overlooked because it is out of sight, out of mind.



No. 5 Check the gearbox fluid levels (if equipped). Some units have easy-to-check fluid level windows, while other models must be disassembled to check accurately. This one does not have a fluid level window. Note the proper appearance of spinners mentioned in No. 2 above. No. 6 Verify that the gate opening and flow divider are set at the appropriate position for the product being spread. No. 7 Run a spread test over pans to verify a uniform pattern. Performing the steps on this checklist, as with all preventive maintenance, can greatly reduce the cost and extend the life of your spreader.

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New look for Pick Tennessee Products

Consumer interest in purchasing local is at an all-time high, and the long-standing Pick Tennessee Products program has announced a refreshed logo for Tennessee food businesses, farmers markets, and agritourism.

“As we move into a new year filled with hope and new possibilities, we are excited to share a new look for our state marketing program,” Commissioner Charlie Hatcher, D.V.M. said. “We are confident that this strong visual representation matches the strong products from the Volunteer State.”

After 30 years of the program, Pick Tennessee Products now has more than 2,700 Tennessee farmers and farm-direct businesses in their directory.

“This program provides critical exposure and marketing opportunities to our farmers and food manufacturers,” Assistant Commissioner Keith Harrison said. “As you get groceries for your family, plants for your yard, or gifts for loved ones, continue to look for the refreshed Pick Tennessee Products logo to be sure you are purchasing fresh and local products.”

Visit www.PickTNProducts.org or use the free Pick Tennessee mobile app to find farms and food businesses near you.



Yes. Change the entire thing to this: FFA state officers visit Co-op headquarters in LaVergne each year during their Goodwill Tour. This year, TFC Event and Sales Support Manager Jimmy Olgilvie and CEO Bart Krisle were on hand to present the 4-H/FFA Case Knife donation check during the Feb. 25 event. From left are Olgilvie, FFA President Erin Welch, FFA West Vice President Mickela Mooney, and Krisle.

2021 National FFA Week

Tennessee FFA celebrated National FFA Week Feb. 20-27 with a new COVID-safe approach to the annual Goodwill Tour. State Officers took turns conducting a one-day tour of each region of the state, stopping for visits with supporters and stakeholders, including Tennessee Farmers Cooperative, Stockdale's, Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation, and several unique agribusinesses, as well as visits with several FFA chapters.

On Give FFA Day, which took place on Thursday, Feb. 25, people were encouraged to support Tennessee FFA by giving any amount. The Tennessee FFA Foundation was able to raise \$2,100 to support FFA across the state.

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A new twist on talc

SEED+GRAPHITE



Gibson County producer Ryan Sims proves the value of Verdesian's new SEED+GRAPHITE



A rare Arctic weather system dipped into the deep South in mid-February, plunging temperatures into historic lows and covering much of West and Middle Tennessee in a dangerous layer of snow and ice. While most Tennesseans hunkered down in the safety of their homes, farmers like Gibson County row-cropper Ryan Sims headed for their shops, preparing their machinery and planning for the upcoming planting season.

"Sometimes, we need weather like this to help us focus on future plans," says Sims, whose family has been farming some of the same Dyer-area fields for nearly 100 years. "For me, it means that it's time to get the planter ready."

Sims says that for the second consecutive season, he will be using Verdesian's SEED+GRAPHITE in his John Deere 1795 planter. Released in Tennessee in 2020, Seed+Graphite replaces the standard talc farmers use to keep seed lubricated as it moves through the machinery in route to the soil. Verdesian account manager, Andy Ulmer says SEED+GRAPHITE provides a clear advantage over plain talc.

"Talc accomplishes only one thing — to keep seeds from sticking together which results in either doubles or skips in the row," he explains. "SEED+GRAPHITE, on the other hand, accomplishes three things: replaces the lubrication job of talc, provides micronutrients for plant growth and development, and uses Cytozyme proprietary technology to protect the seed from abiotic stress. That includes things we can't control, like weather that's too hot, cold, or dry; disease pressure; and bad pH level in the soil."

Ulmer says that independent studies show that SEED+GRAPHITE can increase corn yields by as much as 2.4 percent, soybean



Gibson County row-crop farmer Ryan Sims put Verdesian's Seed+Graphite talc replacer through 40 trial replications on his farm during the 2020 growing season, resulting in an average 3.4-bushel yield increase in corn. Sims plans to use the product on soybean seed as well as corn in 2021.



Verdesian product manager Andy Ulmer, second from left, discusses planting strategies with, from left, Sims, Gibson Farmers Cooperative's Dyer store fertilizer manager Terry Denton, and the Co-op's Dyer store manager, Brandt Jercinovich.

yields by as much as 3 percent, and winter wheat yields by nearly 8 percent. Sims adds that in his own field trials in 2020, he experienced similar results in corn production. In one field, he compared standard talc versus SEED+GRAPHITE by using both simultaneously.

"My John Deere 1795 planter has two hoppers," he explains. "On one side, I used John Deere talc; in the other side, I used SEED+GRAPHITE. The seed variety was the same in both, but after the corn came up, the difference in plant growth and health was pretty obvious. I took some drone photos of the field, and there was a big contrast in color and vigor. When I pulled them up, the root systems in the SEED+GRAPHITE rows were much stronger as well. The SEED+GRAPHITE rows clearly contained better plants."

Sims says that stronger plants equated to increased yields. In replicating his trials 40 times over the 2020 growing season, Sim's application of SEED+GRAPHITE resulted in an average 3.4-bushel-per-acre advantage over neighboring fields treated with standard talc.

"The company data is a great place to start, but it's always better to conduct your own trials and see the difference with your own eyes," says Sims, who serves as president of the Gibson Farmers Cooperative Board of Directors. "Across our 3,100 acres, a 3.4-bushel advantage is a big deal."

Gibson Farmers Co-op's Dyer store manager Brandt Jercinovich adds that, at current corn prices, Sims' yield increase would result in a seven-to-one return on investment.

"Ryan is an innovative farmer who is not afraid to try new products or ideas if they are proven to increase income," Jercinovich says. "There are no shortcuts in his farming operation — only sound ideas."

For more information about SEED+GRAPHITE, and to schedule field application with participating locations, contact the agronomy specialists at your local Co-op or your local GreenPoint Ag representative. 🌱

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VERDESIAN

Nature In Focus



A southern magnolia bloom droops under the weight of thick ice during February's winter storm. The chilling blast sent unprecedented snow, ice, and low temperatures as far south as the Gulf of Mexico. The little magnolia bloom was like the glimmer of hope in spring under the crushing cold of that cold week. — **Photo by Hannah Lewis**

Washington County Cattlemen's Spring Sale is April 10

The Washington County Cattlemen's Association (WCCA) will host its 12th Annual Spring Bull and Heifer Sale on Saturday, April 10, at the Appalachian Fairgrounds in Gray. The sale will begin at 4 p.m. EST, and producers are encouraged to come early to view the cattle and register for a buyer number. Producers should note that nine TAEP-qualified registered bulls will be featured at the beginning of the event.

The sale will feature four Angus bulls, four Limousin or Lim/Flex bulls, and one Sim-Angus bull. The association will also offer 87 heifers that are bred, open, or have a calf by their side. Nearly all are commercial cattle, have been screened, and are excellent bulls and heifers for anyone who is interested in improving their herd. The bulls have passed a BSE and qualify for TAEP cost-share funds. The heifers will be pregnancy checked on the day of the sale by a licensed veterinarian, and all cattle will need to be paid for and loaded out on the day of the sale.

FFA groups will sell concessions at the event to raise funds for scholarships given annually to two outstanding Washington County youth involved or interested in agriculture. For more information about the sale or the scholarships, contact the Washington County Extension office at (423)753-1680.

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Strawberry Cobbler

Sarah A. Greenwood
Hixson

Coffee Farmers Co-op

- 1 stick butter
- 1 cup milk
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 quart strawberries

Melt butter in pan. Mix milk, vanilla, flour, and sugar in a bowl. Then pour mixture over butter in pan. Microwave sliced strawberries until warm, then pour strawberries over all. Bake 45 minutes in 325° oven.

Strawberry Bread

Patty Buck

Jamestown

Fentress Farmers Co-op

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1½ cups sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 cup lemon juice
- ½ cup strawberry jelly or jam
- ½ tsp. baking soda
- ½ cup sour cream
- ½ tsp. red food coloring
- 4 eggs
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- 3 cups plain flour
- 1 tbsp. butter
- 1 tbsp. flour

Blend butter, sugar, vanilla, salt, and juice together. Beat in eggs one at a time until blended. Dissolve baking soda in sour cream and add to

egg mixture. Fold in flour, nuts, and jam or jelly. Add food coloring and fold until blended. Pour batter into 2 large or 4 small loaf pans that have been buttered and floured or sprayed with cooking spray. Bake 40 minutes in preheated 325° oven.

Strawberry Cheesecake Stuffed French Toast

Stacey Hicks

Camden

Benton Farmers Co-op

- 1 cup fresh strawberries, mashed
- 1¼ cup sugar
- 1 tbsp. cornstarch
- 1 cup cold water
- ½ cup milk
- 3 large eggs
- 1 pinch cinnamon
- 1 8-oz. pkg. cream cheese, softened
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 loaf French bread
- 1 tsp. butter
- Whipped cream (optional)
- Powdered sugar (optional)

In a medium saucepan, heat strawberries and ½ cup sugar over medium heat.

In a small bowl, mix cornstarch and water together and add to strawberries.

Cook and stir until thickened, about 3–5 minutes. Reduce heat to low and simmer while preparing remaining ingredients, stirring occasionally.

In a shallow bowl, whisk eggs, milk, and cinnamon together. Set aside.

Mix cream cheese, vanilla extract, and ¾ cup sugar together in a bowl, until smooth.

Cut your French bread into slices, 2 inches thick. Then cut a slit in each of the slices that reaches almost to the back, but doesn't break through the other side.

Use a spatula to stuff cream cheese mixture into the bread. Repeat with the remaining bread.

In a large skillet, heat butter over low-medium heat.

Dip the stuffed bread in egg mixture, covering both sides and letting excess drip off, then place in the skillet.

Cook until golden brown on both sides, about 3 minutes per side.

Top with strawberry syrup, whipped cream, and powdered sugar, if desired.

Strawberry Twinkie Cake

Betty Rhodes

Henderson

Mid-South Farmers Co-op

- 1 large container of strawberries
- 1 large container of whipped cream
- 1 medium can pineapple
- 1 cup coconut
- 1 small jar cherries
- 1 box strawberry twinkie or any flavor
- 1 bag strawberry wafer cookies

In 9-x-12-inch dish, start with a layer of twinkies.

Then layer half of the chopped strawberries, pineapple, coconut, cherries, whipped cream, and wafer cookies (in that order bottom to top). Then start another layer of the remaining chopped fruit. Top the cake with wafer cookie crumble. Chill for one hour then serve.

Strawberry Pie

Kerri Miller

Gray

Washington Farmers Co-op

- 1 9-inch baked pie crust
- 3-oz. of cream cheese, softened
- 3 tbsp. cornstarch
- 4 cups capped strawberries
- ⅔ cup sugar
- ¼ cup water
- Red food coloring

Spread cream cheese on bottom and up the sides of the pie crust. Place capped strawberries in the pie crust over the cream cheese. Mash enough strawberries to equal 1 cup. Stir together sugar and cornstarch. Gradually stir in water and crushed strawberries. Cook over medium heat; stirring constantly until mixture thickens and then boil for 1 minute. Mix in a few drops of red food coloring, if desired. Spread mixture over berries. Chill at least 3 hours before serving.

Sour cream recipes in June/July

Sour cream is a velvety and versatile dairy product that complements so many different dishes. It is known for delivering richness and amazing tartness that helps to make fantastic dips, desserts, casseroles, sides, toppings, and more.

Help us celebrate National June Dairy Month by submitting your favorite recipes that uses sour cream. The person submitting the recipe judged best will be named "Cook of the Month" for the June issue of The Cooperator and receive \$10. Others sending in

recipes chosen for publication will receive \$5, and each winner will also receive a special "What's Cookin'?" certificate.

Monday, April 26, is the deadline for sour cream.

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 afarley@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



304th in a series to show where our rural Co-op friends worship

Dutch Valley United Methodist Church in Anderson County

Dutch Valley United Methodist Church is located at 2055 Sulphur Springs Road near Clinton. It was established in 1865 at the previous site of a Presbyterian Church. According to local lore, for a while the Presbyterians and Methodists shared the building with the two denominations entering the shared building by opposing doors at the front of the church. The congregation holds services each Sunday at 9:30 a.m., officiated by a pastor from the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church. — *History supplied by Howard Farmer*



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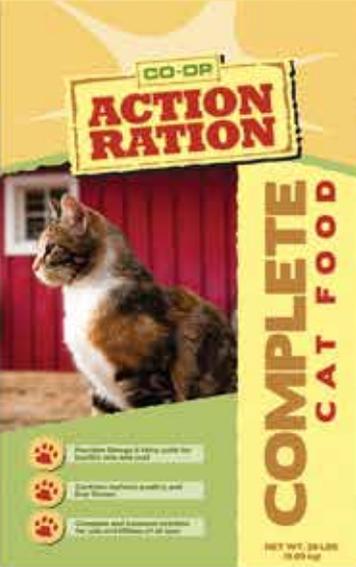
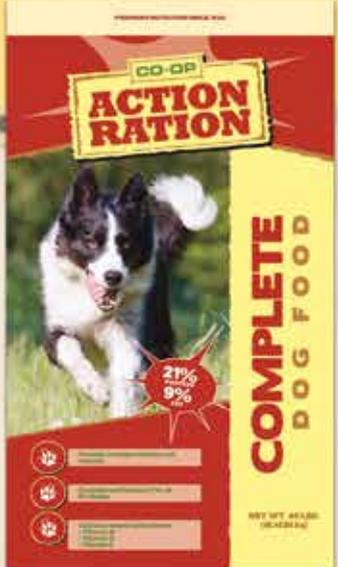


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Changing to maintain heritage

The Vannatta family adapts to continue their legacy

Story and photos by Hannah Lewis

For more than 150 years, the Vannatta family has been farming the same ground in the hills of Middle Tennessee near Bell Buckle in Bedford County.

Some seven generations have drawn their living from the fertile ground, as each one worked to leave the family's agriculture legacy in better shape than they found it.

"The Vannattas came here in 1850 to farm this land," says Tracy Vannatta. "Our family has been farming here ever since."

Tracy, a member of Bedford-Moore Farmers Co-op, is the sixth generation of his family to carry on the farming tradition. He, along with his brother, Troy, and sister, Sharon Edwards, who both live and work off the farm now, were raised by their mom and dad, Bobby and Linda Vannatta, on the picturesque property.

Bobby served as director on the TFC board from 1972 until 1980, then he became the Director at Large and served until 1983. He married Linda in 1956, and he spent his life devoted to his family, farm, and country he so loved, says Linda. He passed away in July 2012 at the age of 75.

"Bobby was dedicated to the family and worked hard to ensure the farm was profitable for the future generations," she says.

After graduating from Bell Buckle High school, Bobby served a four-year term in the U.S. Air Force where he was stationed in Colorado Springs and Lake Charles, La., before returning to the farm in 1959.

He was just as passionate about Tennessee agriculture, she stresses, stating that he tirelessly promoted the industry he loved so well by serving as he was needed on the local, state, and national levels in a variety of roles and organizations vital to the industry. In addition to his role with TFC, he served in leadership positions with the American Soybean Association, Tennessee Soybean Promotion Board, Tennessee Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers, and as Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture.

"We lived right here in this one little spot, but through Bobby's travels - Brazil, Japan, Iraq, China, and South America - and his association with all these groups, we've been lucky, I think, to have an association with people with different ideas and perspectives,"

says Linda. "We've learned a lot through those experiences, and we enjoyed that part of the farm life; the active part of it."

Today, Tracy leads the family's agricultural endeavors with assistance from his wife, Vida, and his son, Drew. Off the farm, Drew is a graduate student at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, where he is pursuing a master's degree in agriculture education.

Tracy's other son, Tyler, who is also a U.S. Air Force veteran, lives and works in Huntsville, Ala., but maintains a partnership with his brother, Drew, in their own herd of beef cattle.

The family incorporated the farming operation in 1981 as part of their succession planning, and though Tracy manages the day-to-day activities, the operation is formally governed by a board of directors made up completely of family members Tracy, Linda, Troy, and Sharon. Tracy also manages his own separate farm under the name THV Farms, and the Vannattas all work together to keep the farms growing and profitable.

"It's one operation, but two separate entities," explains Tracy. "I was fortunate to be able to stay on the farm, so I manage it all, but I only specifically own my part. It is still farmed like it's all one farm."

Between Tracy's enterprise and the family farm business, the Vannatta family practices no-till farming of corn, soybeans, and wheat. They also operate chicken barns with Tyson and run several herds of commercial cattle.

"We're pretty diverse," says Tracy. "We've been raising chickens with Tyson for 34 years now."

As the Vannatta farm has grown and evolved over the years, the surrounding land and once-little-known town of Bell Buckle has changed as well, Linda points out.

"It seems that rural Bell Buckle has grown up around us," she says. "You would always like things to stay the same, but you know they won't. We just enjoy new neighbors and new friends, and change is necessary."

The Vannatta family is proud of their long history in the community and is dedicated to future generations being able to continue the farming tradition.

"I am so fortunate to be able to earn my living doing a job that I love," says Tracy. "Each year, we work to improve our acreage to increase our crop yields and cattle productivity. It's a continuing challenge, but by using new technology and embracing change, we manage to stay ahead of the curve."

Drew agrees, noting that farming together and upholding the legacy is a way to unite the whole family through their common love for the land, crops, and cattle.

"I love seeing the land improve, and watching things grow," says Drew, the seventh generation on the farm. "I'll be learning the rest of my life. There are always interesting things to discover on a farm. It's always entertaining."



In the farm office, Drew, left, Linda, and Tracy share stories of the late patriarch of the family, Bobby Vannatta. The office is a memorial to him and his accomplishments.



“We’re always trying to make things better. If you can improve and do something good, then you’re happy in life. That’s what drives me, and I think it drives us all.” – Tracy Vannatta

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