

Center for Profitable Agriculture Quarterly Progress Report

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A MESSAGE FROM ROB HOLLAND

I hope this quarterly update finds you doing well. In addition to the many changes we have experienced this year due to COVID-19, we in the Center for Profitable Agriculture have recently undergone significant changes in our leadership and administration. On September 1, I began serving in an interim role as assistant dean for UT Extension agriculture and natural resources programs. I will continue to devote time to the Center for Profitable Agriculture, and my office headquarters will remain in Columbia at the Center headquarters. I will also be on the road and working on campus in Knoxville on many occasions. During the period of this interim appointment, Troy Dugger has agreed to provide additional leadership and direction in our Center. I greatly appreciate Troy agreeing to serve in this role.



For the past month, we have been focused on developing and implementing action steps that are most critical to transitioning new responsibilities and priorities. While dealing with these changes, our teaching, consultation, and publishing efforts have continued. As expected, our teaching and outreach activities using distance technology such as Zoom have greatly increased this year. And our involvement with externally funded projects and our connection with collaborative efforts have also increased. In the most recent weeks, we have participated in more face-to-face contacts through farm visits, meetings, and workshops. We continue to closely monitor the needs of our Extension county agents, farmers, and value-added entrepreneurs. An excerpt from the UTIA news release announcing our leadership changes follows.

“The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture has chosen a familiar face across Tennessee agriculture to serve as an interim assistant dean of UT Extension. Rob Holland will step into the role on September 1 while maintaining responsibilities as director of the UT Center for Profitable Agriculture. In his new role as interim assistant dean, Holland will assist with the management of UT Extension’s statewide agricultural and natural resource educational and outreach programs to help ensure the success of the state’s \$4.3 billion-plus agricultural industries. UT Extension works with local governments to provide educational services regarding agricultural production, natural resource management, and family and consumer sciences through an array of adult learning opportunities. UT Extension also manages Tennessee 4-H, the state’s branch of the USDA’s national youth development and leadership program. With more than 168,000 participants, Tennessee 4-H is among the nation’s largest 4-H club-based programs.

Troy Dugger, a UT Extension program coordinator with the Center for Profitable Agriculture, will be providing additional leadership and direction to the CPA on an interim basis. Dugger is a native of Maury County and alumnus of the University of Tennessee who served as county extension agent and county extension director in Hickman County for more than thirty-three years prior to joining the CPA.”

\$6.1 Million USDA Dairy Innovation Grant Approved

USDA recently announced that the proposal submitted by the Center for phase 2 funding from the USDA-AMS Dairy Business Innovation Initiatives program has been approved. The proposal will include \$6.1 million in funding to provide a variety of educational programming and subawards to value-added dairy businesses in Tennessee, Kentucky, and North Carolina. The project will run for three years beginning September 30, 2020. Liz Eckelkamp, assistant professor and Extension specialist in the UT Department of Animal Science, will assume leadership of the project and the Center will continue as a significant partner with the many collaborators and colleagues from several UTIA departments working on this project.

New “Advanced Got Farm Records . . . Now What?” Virtual Workshop Developed and Conducted



After in-person training was discontinued due to the coronavirus, a new format was developed to offer producers advanced training on how to create and use Excel spreadsheets to evaluate their records. The new Advanced Got Farm Records... Now What? Virtual Workshop was developed by Hal Pepper and conducted in September. Each virtual workshop consisted of three 90-minute online sessions, with one week between each session. The time between each session provided participants an opportunity to practice concepts taught in the class before moving on to more advanced topics. Participants chose to attend a workshop on Tuesday evenings, Thursday evenings or Saturday mornings. Each workshop with three sessions was conducted three times.

Topics included formulas, inserting and deleting rows, columns and cells, autofill, formatting, comma separated value files, creating an estimating tool and functions such as VLOOKUP.

Lamar Smith presented the training and a total of twenty-four individuals followed along on their laptops. The shorter 90-minute sessions and opportunity to participate remotely enhanced the learning experience for participants. With 17 participants completing the workshop survey, the series overall received a rating of 4.06 out of 5. Participants appreciated the free workshop being offered online, and as a result of the workshop, 100 percent of survey respondents indicated they increased their knowledge of the topics presented.

The sessions were recorded and will be posted to the Center’s website. This training was a continuation of the Got Farm Records . . . Now What? Workshops offered in ten locations across Tennessee and Kentucky since September 2019. The training is part of the Managing Risk by Improving Farm Business Management Skills project funded by Southern Extension Risk Management Education and supported by USDA NIFA.

Agritourism Twilight Q&A Webinar Held to Address COVID-19 Operating Questions

A webinar titled *Agritourism Twilight Q&A: Operating During the COVID-19 Pandemic* was held August 6, 2020, in response to a large number of questions received by the Center for Profitable Agriculture and Tennessee Department of Agriculture staff on the subject. Topics discussed included the current market situation, developing your plan, liability considerations, cleaning and sanitation, communicating with customers, and resources from the State of Tennessee. Speakers included UT Extension's Megan Bruch Leffew and Mark Morgan and Tennessee Department of Agriculture's Kacey Troup. Amy Ladd from Lucky Ladd Farms shared her experiences from operating through the summer and plans for fall. Sixty people registered for the session with twenty-eight devices logging in the live webinar (in some cases, multiple people were participating from one device). The [recording](#) of the webinar and [slides](#) are available online. A fact sheet was developed with links to [additional resources](#), and a second fact sheet provides suggestions, information or resources for many of the [questions](#) posed before or during the session.



The webinar was hosted by UT Extension and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. The session is made possible, in part, through a Southern Risk Management Education Grant supported by USDA NIFA under Award Number 2018-70027-28585.

Tennessee AgrAbility and SARE Programs Participate in Virtual Events

Due to the changes that COVID-19 has brought about, we have made many adjustments in educational programming to continue to provide resources to producers. These innovative changes to schedules, events and programs have proven to be very successful. The Tennessee AgrAbility Project and the SARE program have participated in two recent programs with a third planned for the Tennessee AgrAbility Project.



The Tennessee AgrAbility Project conducted one of the tours for the 2020 **Milan Virtual No-Till Field Day**. The tour, "TN AgrAbility: Improving Agriculture, Improving Lives," included an overview of the TN AgrAbility Project along with an introduction of each staff member Karla Kean, Extension county horticulture/small farms agent in Montgomery conducted a session called "Revive Your Green Thumb." Philip Shelby, Extension agent in Gibson County, presented an educational video featuring cattle working facilities that focused on the idea of reducing work with this equipment while keeping the producer and animal safe. Joetta White, Western Region area specialist for AgrAbility, and Troy Dugger, project coordinator, presented information on "Handy Dandy Hand Tools," that make work easier for the homeowner in gardening and landscape projects. Dale Dobson, Kentucky Department of Agriculture Safety Administrator and Brian Robinson, state training coordinator with the Tennessee Association of Rescue Squads, presented information on "Life, Death and Reality: Safety First and Enjoy Life." The final stop on this tour was information on the "Tennessee Farmer Veterans: The Next Mission." Eileen Legault, Eastern Region area specialist for AgrAbility, developed this session along with Ron Bridges and James Artman of the Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC). The focus was on the military veterans who are now looking to farm or continue their farming career while reaching out to other farmer veterans to build a network of producers. The six sessions on this tour attracted 814 viewers, or just over 135 viewers per stop.

As part of the sixteenth annual **TSU Small Farms Expo**, which was also held virtually, the Sustainable Agriculture Research Education (SARE) program was featured. Participants at the expo learned more about the Tennessee and Southern Region SARE programs. Information highlighted in the presentation included the five grant funds the Southern Region offers to agricultural professionals and producers. These grant funds include research and education grants, on-farm research grants, producer grants, graduate student grants, and the professional development program grants. Since the inception of these grant programs in the 1990s, Tennessee agriculture professionals and producers have received fifty-nine grants totaling just under \$2.5 million. The goal of the Tennessee SARE program is to increase the number of grants applied for and funded annually. Visit southern.sare.org/grants for more information on each of these opportunities.



During the month of October, AgrAbility projects from nineteen states will join online to participate in an AgrAbility Virtual State Fair. The purpose of the virtual fair is to provide resources and information for farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers who are working in production agriculture with a disability, functional limitation, or health condition. Beginning on October 1, a different AgrAbility project (state) will highlight how it supports and serves this important population within each state's agriculture community. Scheduled posts will be made throughout the day on Facebook and Twitter. The Tennessee AgrAbility Project will be featured October 28. The links are twitter.com/AgrabilityVSE and www.facebook.com/AgrAbility-Virtual-State-Fair-105811844494828.

TAEP Producer Diversification—Special Requirements for 50 Percent Cost Share

Six different sectors are classified under the TAEP Producer Diversification program: (1) Agritourism (2) Fruit and Vegetable (3) Honey Bee (4) Horticulture (5) Organic and (6) Value-Added Products. Each sector features special requirements for 50 percent cost share, which are to be completed at time of reimbursement. Special requirements focus on education and include conferences, courses, events, workshops, and specific certifications. Generally, participation in educational programs or recertification is required every three years. For FY 2020, there were 161 approved applications for Producer Diversification cost share (the number following the sector title below represents the number of approved applications for that sector in FY 2020).

1. Agritourism (20)
2. Fruit and Vegetable Sector (52)
3. Honey Bee (18)
4. Horticulture (48)
5. Organics (8)
6. Value-Added Products (15)

Opportunities for Specialty Crops in Tennessee Focus on Hops for Brewing Project

The Opportunities for Specialty Crops in Tennessee: Focus on Hops for Brewing project has been a great success. Project collaborators assembled, developed, and implemented an aggressive program from initiation to completion. Overall, we estimate that more than 3,800 people received information related to the project. Here are some highlights:

- Direct contact was made with 738 specialty crop growers, potential growers, and agriculture educators.
- Materials and educational publications prepared for this project were disseminated to 563 individuals.
- Direct consultations were conducted by the primary project collaborators with an estimated 811 individuals.
- Information prepared for the project was disseminated via the project website and via email correspondence to an estimated 1,700 individuals.
- A website has been developed to highlight the information developed for this project: ag.tennessee.edu/cpa/Pages/Hops.aspx
- Thirteen fact sheets, publications, and educational materials were developed and utilized for the project.
- Overall, more than 3,800 contacts have been made with specialty crop growers, colleagues, and interested stakeholders concerning information related to this project



Beginning Farmer Resources

USDA Service Centers across the country are hearing from people who—because of the pandemic—have bought or leased land in rural areas. USDA's Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service offer programs to help these new farmers get access to capital, manage risk, improve the sustainability of their land through conservation, and recover after natural disasters.

There is a unique opportunity to reach out to those new to farming, including those who have not worked with FSA and NRCS. Two blogs have been posted that should prove helpful to new farmers:

[New to Farming Because of the Pandemic? USDA Can Help](#)

The New Farmer Academy also is a great way for those new to agriculture and farming to learn about production agriculture. Follow this Tennessee State University link to the New Farmer Academy: tstate.edu/extension/NFA.aspx

New Publications Offered by the Center

- W 910 Value-Added Agriculture, Direct Marketing and Agritourism in Tennessee: A Summary of County Level 2017 Census of Agriculture Data, Megan Bruch Leffew and Jared Bruhin, June 2020
extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/W910.pdf
- W 912 Considerations for Producing and Marketing Hops in Tennessee, Rob Holland, David Hughes, Dave Lockwood, Mark Morgan, Aaron Smith, Eric Walker and Hannah Wright, June 2020
extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/W912.pdf
- PB 1881 Manufacturing Non-Potentially Hazardous Foods for Sale in Tennessee Without a Permit, Mark Morgan, Nathan Miller and Megan Bruch Leffew
extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/PB1881.pdf



Project Update—Planning and Resources for a Niche Land Management Service

Utilizing livestock as a green alternative for land management can serve a niche market and allow some producers to diversify their operations. Developing a sizeable market for a niche agricultural service can be difficult to achieve. It is important to find unique ways to advertise and educate consumers on the benefits of a lesser known alternative to typical land management services. Scaling a livestock centric business requires additional business planning and livestock management practices to maintain year-round herd health and longevity. For the business to scale, special attention must be given to the pricing structure, labor demands and operating costs of the business.



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