



# CENTER FOR PROFITABLE AGRICULTURE QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT



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## A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

It's great to be back in the swing of things full time here in the Center for Profitable Agriculture. I strongly appreciate the opportunity to serve in the role of interim assistant dean for extension agricultural programs for the past eighteen months, and I am thrilled to fully support Justin Rhinehart as our new assistant dean. The interim role provided me with many new perspectives, challenges, and opportunities to hone some skills and grow. Thank you to Troy Dugger for the countless ways that he took on new leadership roles in the interim period and to the entire Center for Profitable Agriculture (CPA) team for their continued energy and forward progress in the work we do. I also extend my appreciation to Extension administration, colleagues across the state and our partners at the Farm Bureau for the tremendous support that I felt during the interim period. As I now settle back into my role with CPA, I am pleased and excited about the programs and opportunities that we are pursuing including:

- Continued collaboration with UT Southern and the Turner Center
- Expanding programs and efforts with value-added dairy
- Specialty crop marketing
- Filling vacant positions and adding new positions in the Center
- New programs and efforts for value-added meat marketing
- Enhancing and growing our outreach in sustainable agriculture, AgrAbility and new enterprise development

I am certainly looking forward to the spring growing season and occasions to interact with farmers, county Extension agents, and colleagues across the state. I hope our paths cross soon.



## Another Southern Risk Management Education Center's Outstanding Project Award Winner

Hal Pepper with the Center for Profitable Agriculture and his team of colleagues from the University of Tennessee and the University of Kentucky and other specialists were selected as the 2022 Extension Risk Management Education (ERME) Outstanding Project Award winner for the Southern region. Pepper led the multi-state project “Managing Risk by Improving Farm Business Management Skills” and was one of four winners—one from each region.

The project included the development of two monthly webinar series over seven months — “Seven Habits for Effective Farmers” (2019) and “Seven Secrets of Effective Farmers” (2020) —that provided training on farm business management, marketing, and planning topics. Ten, day-long “Got Farm Records . . . Now What?” workshops conducted in Tennessee and Kentucky and three “Advanced Got Farm Records . . . Now What?” virtual workshops, each consisting of three online sessions, taught producers how to create, analyze, and use spreadsheets in making farm business management decisions.



The award recognition took place at the ERME National Conference in Omaha, Nebraska, on March 29-31, 2022. Megan Leffew with the Center won this award in 2021.

## Grain Bin Safety/ Rescue Awareness Training Sessions in Three Counties



During 2021, the Tennessee AgrAbility Project, UT-TSU Extension and the Tennessee Association of Rescue Squads (TARS) collaborated in hosting three Grain Bin Safety/Rescue Awareness Training sessions in Smith County, Maury County, and Gibson County. These sessions targeted participants in twenty-five Tennessee counties. More than 130 rescue personnel, row crop farmers/producers, and UT Extension educators were trained (ninety-five rescue personnel, seventeen farmers/producers and nineteen Extension agents). The sessions also instigated the purchase of \$88,243 in modernizing grain bin rescue preparedness in local communities. The educational sessions focused on overall grain bin safety, proper rescue techniques, and the role farmers play if an accident or entrapment occurs on their farm.

## Reaching Local Farms Workshops and Webinars

During December 2021, we teamed up with UT Southern's Turner Center to plan, sponsor, and host four outreach educational workshops on the UT Southern Campus in Pulaski. The workshops were aimed at farmers and farm families and promoted under a series titled “Reaching Local Farms.” A total of sixty-two people attended all four workshops, and forty-three workshop evaluation forms were returned by participants. When asked if they would attend another agricultural educational workshop on the UT Southern campus, 100 percent of participants said yes. The four sessions addressed carbon markets and carbon credits, considerations for growing various specialty crops, a review of how technology has changed farming, and considerations for direct marketing meat and live animal sales for custom harvest. More recently, the same sessions were conducted via webinar on four separate nights during March and attracted 116 participants for the live sessions or access to the recorded webinar. Special appreciation is extended to Extension specialists Aaron Smith, Mike Buschermohle, David Lockwood and Megan Leffew for their instruction during the sessions and to Rebecca Cronin and Allen Stanton for their collaboration from UT Southern.



## Tennessee Young Leaders Conference

The Tennessee Young Leaders Conference was held February 18 and 19, at the Drury Plaza Hotel in Franklin. The event is hosted annually by the Tennessee Council of Cooperatives and the Tennessee Young Farmers and Ranchers. This conference gives an opportunity to the cooperatives throughout Tennessee to educate young leaders about the benefit of cooperative businesses. Nearly 200 leaders and guests attended the 2022 conference.



Highlights of this year's conference included local farm tours on Friday afternoon and a keynote speech from David Kohl, professor emeritus of agricultural finance and small business management and entrepreneurship, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg. Saturday morning was filled with informative presentations: Issues updates from Laura Leigh Harris, Tennessee Farm Bureau; Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA) Resources Available to You, Will Freeman and others from TDA; Making Time, Chuck Yoest; Farm Credit of Mid-America Growing Forward, Luke Fries; and Connections that Count, Todd Blocker.

The Saturday afternoon session included the Special Recognition Award presented to Charles Curtis, for his service to Tennessee Council of Cooperatives as special program director for Tennessee Farm Bureau for many years. The keynote address was given by Major General (Retired) William B. Hickman, as he spoke of the value of leadership in relation to his military career.

The conference concluded on Saturday night following a motivational speech by Jerry Barlar, News Channel 2, the county Young Farmer and Rancher Activity Awards and the John Willis Memorial Scholarship and Ag in the Classroom Auction.

## Sustainable Agriculture In-Service Training for Extension Agents

This February, twenty-six Extension Agents participated in 12 hours of in-service training to learn more about sustainable agriculture practices. This event featured classroom training, a local farm tour, and participation in four hours of sessions at the 2022 Pick TN Conference. The classroom training took place on February 16 at the Central Region Extension Office at Ellington Center in Nashville. Jason De Koff, associate professor at Tennessee State University, spoke on the use of drones in agriculture; Dan Strasser, Tennessee Farm Bureau, addressed the agents about the Environmental Stewardship

Award, provided by Farm Bureau, with some recent changes and encouragement for producers to apply for this award; Adam Watson, Extension agent in Washington County, presented information on "Organics, the basics of what Extension Agents should know," and Jennifer Tsuruda, assistant professor and UT Extension specialist, spoke on the Honeybee Stewardship/Field Watch. The farm tour was held late on the afternoon of February 16 as the group traveled to Rutherford County to visit Bloomsbury Farm, a GAP and Organic Certified produce operation. The next morning, Extension agents participated in the Pick TN Conference by attending various educational meetings/seminars and interacting with producers and industry representatives.



*Jason De Koff presenting information to the Extension agents on drones and their use in agriculture.*



*High Tunnel Production of spring greens and broccoli at Bloomsbury Farm in Smyrna, Tennessee.*





## Value-Added Dairy Producers and Extension Specialists Participate in NAFDMA Convention

The Center's Megan Leffew and Hal Pepper coordinated a scholarship program for value-added dairy producers to attend the 2022 NAFDMA Agritourism Convention and Expo. Six value-added dairy producers, two each from Tennessee, North Carolina, and Kentucky, received a \$2,000 reimbursement of registration and travel funds to participate in the conference. Shep Stearns, UT

Extension value-added dairy specialist joined Leffew, Pepper, and the producers for the convention February 3-7 in Stone Mountain, Georgia. The event included educational sessions, behind-the-scenes visits to agritourism and direct marketing operations, a trade show, and a multitude of networking opportunities. Leffew and Pepper coordinated a special meeting at the conference for the value-added agriculture attendees and service providers from the three states to network and to discuss what they had learned so far and additional needs for information and assistance. Attendees will share lessons learned during an upcoming webinar. Funding for this professional development opportunity came from the USDA Dairy Business Innovation Grant program. Leffew and Pepper will be coordinating a similar opportunity for value-added producers to participate in the 2023 convention February 3-7 in Austin, Texas.



## Center Staff Contribute to Successful 2022 Pick TN Conference

The Pick TN Conference was back bigger and better than ever in 2022 after a hiatus in 2021 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. With a record-breaking registration of nearly 750 people, the conference was held February 17-19 in Franklin, Tennessee. Amy Tavalin, executive director, led a board of representatives from eight producer associations and advisory members from the Tennessee Department of Agriculture and UT Extension. Participating associations include the Tennessee Christmas Tree Growers, Tennessee Agritourism Association, Tennessee Association of Farmers Markets, Tennessee Beekeepers Association, Tennessee Organic Growers Association, Tennessee Flower Growers Association, Tennessee Fruit and Vegetable Association, and Tennessee Farm Winegrowers Association. UT Extension was a Sunshine Sponsor for the event.



*David Kohl discussed megatrends impacting agriculture in 2022 and beyond in a Pick TN Conference keynote address.*

In addition to sharing information about Center resources through a trade show exhibit, Center staff contributed to the conference in multiple areas:

- Megan Leffew served on the Pick TN Conference Board as the program committee chair and assisted in coordinating the new Business Essentials track of sessions and the conference evaluation.
- Hal Pepper coordinated and taught three Business Essentials sessions on Grant and Loan Opportunities and Grant Management.
- Troy Dugger partnered with the Pick TN Board to allow sixteen Extension agents participating in a Specialty Crop In-service to join in conference activities for the first day. Dugger also coordinated a panel of Extension agents and specialists to offer a lunch and learn session about how Extension can help producers.
- In his role as interim assistant dean for agriculture and natural resources and community economic development, Rob Holland offered comments as part of Friday morning's General Session and coordinated with Charley Martinez, who shared resources from UT Extension to help participants with the financial challenges of 2022.

The 2023 Pick TN Conference is scheduled for February 16-18 at the Cool Springs Marriott. Learn more about the conference at [PickTNConference.com](https://PickTNConference.com).

## Specialty Crop Meetings



*David Lockwood discusses the production of tree nuts to producers in attendance at the Greene County Specialty Crop Meeting.*



*Following the Specialty Crop Berry meeting in Smith County, David Lockwood gave a fruit tree demonstration at a farm in Jackson County.*

A series of ten specialty crop meetings were held in March for Tennessee producers. These meetings focused on berries (strawberries, blackberries, and blueberries), vegetables (asparagus, pumpkins, sweet corn, and tomatoes), tree nuts (pawpaw, pecans, persimmons, pomegranates) and hops. Approximately 200 producers attended these educational sessions. The berry meetings were held in Montgomery, Smith, and Anderson Counties; the vegetables meetings were held in Lawrence, Lincoln, Van Buren, and Blount Counties; tree nut meetings were held in Greene and

Perry Counties, while the hops meeting was also held in Perry County. UT Extension experts David Lockwood, Annette Wszelaki, Aaron Smith, and Les Humpal served as instructors for the meetings. Troy Dugger, program coordinator for the Center for Profitable Agriculture, worked with Extension agents in each county to facilitate these sessions. Participants were given information on each of the above crops along with a jump drive of all presentations. A Specialty Crop Block Grant through the Tennessee Department of Agriculture funded this series of meetings.

## Third Annual Mid-South Agricultural Trade Conference Held

The third annual **Mid-South Agricultural Trade Conference** was held at Agricenter International in Memphis on March 3. The event was planned and hosted by representatives from the Center for Profitable Agriculture, UT Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, UT Martin, and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture and sponsored by fifteen industry partners. More than fifty industry leaders, educators, and farmers attended the event, networked among ten educational and industry exhibits, and learned from five presentations emphasizing the agricultural trade outlook, legal aspects of trade, emerging trade issues, exports, and the causes and consequences of global supply chain issues.



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