



# CENTER FOR PROFITABLE AGRICULTURE QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT



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## A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

I want to extend a special thank you to the entire Center for Profitable Agriculture team for all the great work they do, the collaborative efforts they develop, and the impacts they make. Our center will celebrate its 25th anniversary next year and we are preparing to use the occasion to reflect on the work, impact, and success of value-added agriculture in Tennessee. Our center is much different today than when we started twenty-five years ago, and so is the value-added agriculture industry in Tennessee. To help launch our planning for the 25th anniversary, our team (Hal, Kim, Megan, Rachel, Troy, and I) recently invested some time in strategic planning and teambuilding. We discussed past and future programs and focused largely on understanding each of our individual strengths. It was a productive, valuable, and fun experience—we laughed a lot, reflected, and refueled! While the work tasks we face seem unending, the opportunity to work with farmers, farm families, other colleagues across the state, and with each other is refreshing and rewarding. We will continue with some specific plans for celebrating our 25th anniversary next year and will keep growing in the meantime. From specialty crop marketing initiatives to dairy processing, agritourism, value-added beverage enterprises, meat marketing, and farmers market boot camps...we've got a lot of programs and opportunities to cultivate.



## Rachel Painter Joins Team as Marketing Specialist

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Rachel Painter has joined the Center for Profitable Agriculture as an Extension specialist for value-added marketing.

The Wilson County native has worked the past five years as an Extension agent in Rutherford County, specializing in residential and consumer horticulture. In 2020, she was honored with the National Master Gardener Distinguished Early Career Award for her efforts to recruit and retain Master Gardener volunteers, including reaching new and diverse audiences.

Rachel has helped to coordinate efforts to increase awareness of additional market opportunities for Tennessee farmers to connect with the craft beverage industry. The goal of these efforts is to result in more locally grown products being used when making beer, spirits, and wine in Tennessee. In her five years with UT Extension, Painter has served in many leadership roles with Extension, as the Master Gardener Workgroup chair, the Extension Visibility Committee chair, Grains for Brewing and Distilling Workgroup chair, and as regional director of the Tennessee Association for Agents and Specialists, among others.



Painter holds a master's degree in agricultural economics and a bachelor's in natural resources and environmental economics, both from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She began her new role with the center on May 2.

## Welcome Joetta White and Eileen Legault

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*Left to right: Joetta White, Troy Dugger, Eileen Legault, and Rob Holland.*

With more than thirty-five years of combined service, Joetta White and Eileen Legault have been implementing the AgrAbility program through UT Extension across the state. With Legault focused largely on the eastern part of the state and White on the west, they have worked with various teams, collaborators, and coworkers to enhance the quality of life for farmers, family members, and other agricultural workers with disabilities, so they can return to farming and continue working in their chosen field. Over the years, their work has been conducted as area specialists in their respective Extension regions. As they continue their effective work in AgrAbility in the future, both will be more closely connected with the Center for Profitable Agriculture. Their positions as Extension area specialists will continue and their office locations will remain the same with Legault headquartered in the UT Extension Eastern Region office in Knoxville and White headquartered in the UT Extension Gibson County office in Trenton. Troy Dugger has served as the principal investigator (PI) for the Tennessee AgrAbility project since January 1, 2020, and will continue in the role while providing more direct programmatic and administrative support to Legault and White and the entire Tennessee AgrAbility Project.

## Cut Flower Study Tour to Utah

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During May, a professional development study tour was conducted in Utah and Idaho by Rob Holland, Celeste Scott, and Alicia Rihn representing UT Extension. The tour was planned and hosted by Melanie Scott, assistant professor and urban and small farms specialist in the Department of Plants, Soils and Climate with Utah State University. The information learned and knowledge gained from the study tour will be used in the development of educational materials and outreach sessions and educational workshops for growers and Extension agents in Tennessee. During the study tour, sixteen farm enterprise visits were conducted with twelve part-time and four full-time cut flower growers; twenty-two total contacts



*Extension colleagues discuss field-grown production with Ali Harrison at Florage Farms in Blackfoot, Idaho.*

were made with growers; six contacts were made with florists, wholesalers and industry partners; and nine contacts were made with educators and researchers. The number of cut flower farms in Utah increased from forty-seven in 2019 to seventy-two in 2020 and to 104 in 2021. Cut flower growers in Utah tend to be younger, female growers who are new to agriculture. A survey/study of the Utah cut flower industry in 2021 showed that most growers were in business less than two years, most growers had at least two different marketing methods, and those in business for a longer period of time were more likely to supplement flower sales with events, weddings, and/or educational experiences. Most growers had 1/8 or 1/4 of an acre of production with an average annual gross revenue per acre of \$64,000. Labor costs have increased as much as 25 percent for cut flower growers in Utah in recent years and the cost of production inputs up more than 6 percent.

## Southern Region SARE Forage Field Day

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Seven Extension agents and one specialist participated in the Southern Region SARE Forage Field Day held in Columbiana, Alabama, on April 11 and 12. Seeing a strong need to deliver updated forage curriculum to Extension educators, this regional training was developed. This training provided educators with practical forage management skills and will contribute to enhanced productivity, environmental sustainability, and profitability in agricultural livestock production systems in the Southern region. Topics included in the training were: forage crop production, forage and animal interaction, farm business management, soil management and livestock production systems.



The Extension agents participating in the training included: John Ferrell, UT Extension Franklin County; Justin Hargrove, UT Extension Benton County; Rebecca Norman, UT Extension Montgomery County; Steve Rickman, UT Extension Chester County; Cheyenne Rushing, UT Extension Decatur County; Bruce Steelman, UT Extension Lincoln County; and Vickie Witcher, UT Extension Dickson County. Katie Mason, assistant professor in the Department of Animal Science, presented information on how to use a grazing stick, forage mass, and how much livestock eat per day.

## Tennessee AgrAbility

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The month of May is recognized as Mental Health Awareness Month. Tennessee AgrAbility hosts Technology Tuesdays each quarter as an in-service for Extension agents. The featured speaker for the May session was Chad Reznicek. Reznicek is the behavioral health specialist with the Colorado AgrAbility Project and is committed to helping expand and improve behavioral health support and resources in rural communities. He has twenty years of experience as a licensed therapist with special focus in suicide prevention, trauma, mood disorders, and substance abuse. He was raised in a small farming community in central Nebraska with a deep respect for agriculture as the heart of our rural communities.



Reznicek states, "Farmers and ranchers are uniquely vulnerable to mental health challenges for a number of reasons." He also added, "[Agricultural culture] is about picking yourself up by your bootstraps; you work until the job is done. You're quick to help other people, but you don't want to burden anyone yourself. All those things are really resilient and positive qualities, but the downside is it makes it really hard to ask for help."

Reznicek emphasized the need to understand the impact of agriculture's unique challenges on the human brain. In better understanding this, the question can be changed from "What's wrong with me?" to "What's happening to me?" This will help with the steps taken to manage stress.

Read more about Reznicek's [work with Colorado AgrAbility](#) to help others with mental/behavioral health issues. The webinar recording can be found on the [Tennessee AgrAbility website](#).

## Top Six Specialty Crops Selected for Center Project

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Based on input and nominations from growers, Extension personnel, and other agriculture leaders from across the state, some twenty different growers of more than fifty different crops were recently nominated/identified for a specialty crop project in the center. A bulk of the growers and crops were identified by eleven county agriculture agents and three state Extension specialists. A special thanks is extended to the following agents and specialists for their involvement in the crop identification/nomination process:

1. Annette Wszelaki – Department of Plant Sciences
2. Dave Lockwood – Department of Plant Sciences
3. Rachel Painter – Center for Profitable Agriculture
4. Tom Rison – UT Extension Claiborne County
5. Heath Nokes – UT Extension Warren County
6. Vickie Witcher – UT Extension Dickson County
7. Tim Woods – UT Extension McMinn County
8. Melody Rose – UT Extension Greene County
9. Chris Hicks – UT Extension Smith County
10. John Goddard – UT Extension Loudon County
11. Lucas Holman – UT Extension Wilson County
12. Seth Whitehouse – UT Extension Anderson County
13. Lee Rumble – UT Extension Knox County
14. Chris Hicks – UT Extension Smith County

A list of twelve growers/specialty crops was summarized to include: blueberries, cut flowers, elderberries, garlic, lettuce, microgreens, pawpaws, peaches, persimmons, strawberries, sweet corn, and tomatoes. The final list of six crops and growers selected for further investigation and to serve as the subjects/crops for the development of grower summaries/profiles in the state are: persimmons, microgreens, garlic, elderberries, cut flowers, and blueberries. Various farm visits will be conducted soon with specialty crop growers across the state. These visits will pave the way for assembling various educational materials on the crops and scheduling grower workshops.



*Henry Jones of Jones Orchard in Shelby County recently shared information about the family farm that grows peaches, pears, apples, nectarines, plums, strawberries, and tomatoes and produces a wide range of value-added products including jams, jellies, and preserves.*

## TDA and the Center Team Up to Conduct Pilot Workshop

Since only about 60 percent of Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Project (TAEP) Producer Diversification (Application B) forms submitted to the Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA) are approved, TDA invited the center to join them in conducting a pilot workshop that would teach producers with value-added, agritourism, fruit and vegetable, honeybee, horticulture, and organic projects about TAEP and how to strengthen their applications. The pilot Producer Diversification Application Workshop was held on April 6 at Green Door Gourmet in Nashville.

Topics covered at the workshop were an overview of the TAEP program and the producer diversification sector with helpful tips on submitting a successful application. Hal Pepper with the center gave a presentation on how to write a successful business plan. Green Door Gourmet owner Sylvia Ganier shared tips for submitting a successful application and led a highly engaging question and answer period. Not only did participants enjoy an informative workshop, but they also were treated to a farm-to-table style lunch courtesy of Green Door Gourmet.



*Left to right: Grant Pulse, Sylvia Ganier, Jan Keyser, and Hal Pepper.*

There were eighteen participants and fifteen completed an evaluation. Only one had prior experience with the TAEP Producer Diversification Application process. Participants evaluated the workshop as excellent and reported that it contributed to their knowledge of the application process, business operations, and direct marketing. They intend to act on the knowledge by applying to TAEP and improving their business plans and operations.

TDA plans to conduct similar workshops in other parts of the state in the near future.



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