CENTER FOR PROFITABLE AGRICULTURE
QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT

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National AgrAbility Training Workshop

Tennessee Extension was well represented recently at the National AgrAbility Training Workshop held in Atlanta, Georgia, on March 25 - 28.

Extension representatives Eileen Legault, Finis Stribling, Tesha Humphrey, and Rob Holland were among fifteen attendees from Tennessee with more than 250 total attendees present from across the country. The premier training event for agricultural assistive technology addressed issues for disability in farming and provided forty-four educational sessions, two general session speakers as well as local tours, a poster session, networking, and a trade show.

Members of the Tennessee AgrAbility team presented at four sessions and Tennessee farmers were featured in two sessions. During the event, Legault was one of five recognized nationally with the AgrAbility Breaking New Ground Achievement Award. She has worked for UT Extension since 2014 and a total of fifteen years the Tennessee AgrAbility Program.

Left: Tennessee Extension personnel pictured at the National AgrAbility Training in Atlanta in March 2024.

Center Programs Represented at TFBF Women’s Conference

The Center for Profitable Agriculture and Tennessee AgrAbility program were represented once again this year in Lebanon, TN at the annual Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation Women’s State Leadership Conference. The conference was held on April 27 at the Farm Bureau Expo Center at the Wilson County Fairgrounds.

Above: Extension area specialist Joetta White and Extension assistant Alaina Boyd pictured in front of respective exhibits at the TFBF women’s conference.
CPA Hosts Spring MarketReady Buyer Tours in TN

The Center for Profitable Agriculture hosted its third and fourth MarketReady Buyer Tour events earlier this spring. The first two events were held in September 2023 in Nashville and Knoxville, TN. This year’s events were held at the following locations: in Chattanooga, TN on April 25 and in Murfreesboro, TN on May 16. A total of thirty-four participants were present across both programs this spring.

The purpose of these buyer tour events is to bring small groups of direct farm marketers and value-added entrepreneurs to various food buyer locations to network and learn about the opportunities, methods, and challenges of selling products to these marketing channels. Various wholesale and retailers organizations have collaborated with the Center to make these events a success.

Tour stops for the Chattanooga event included Whole Foods Market, Mocs Dining (Aramark Collegiate Hospitality) at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga campus, and an Industry and Community Food panel discussion held at Chattanooga State Community College. Panel representatives included Mike Brown of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture; Taylor Hayes of FreshPoint Nashville; Kenyatta Ashford of Neutral Ground; Brian McDonald of Mac's Kitchen & Bar; and Tegan Alspaugh of Crabtree Farms of Chattanooga.

Tour stops for the Murfreesboro event included Rutherford Farmers Co-Op, MT Dining (Aramark Collegiate Hospitality) at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), and the Tennessee Grocers & Convenience Store Association (TGCSA) Convention & Expo. Participation in the TGCSA Convention & Expo was made possible thanks to collaboration between CPA and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture’s Pick TN Products Program and Southern Business Group, LLC.

These Tennessee buyer tours are a direct result of collaboration between the Center for Profitable Agriculture and the MarketReady Producer Training Program on behalf of the Southeast Dairy Business Innovation Initiative.

Extension assistant Alaina Boyd and extension specialist Megan Leffew coordinated and facilitated the recent events in both cities. UT Extension agent Haley Treadway of Hamilton County assisted in coordinating and facilitating the panel discussion held in Chattanooga at CSCC.
CPA Hosts Spring MarketReady Buyer Tours - Photos

Top Left: Program participants inside Whole Foods Market in Chattanooga listening to store leadership team providing presentation on the products offered and related aspects of becoming a vendor at Whole Foods Market.

Top Right: Industry and Community Food panel members during discussion at CSCC in Chattanooga.

Bottom Left: Buyer Tour participants in Murfreesboro listening to an exhibitor discussing product displays at the TN Grocers & Convenience Store Association (TGCSA) Expo in May 2024.

Bottom Right: Buyer Tour participants in Murfreesboro listening to MT Dining (Aramark Collegiate Hospitality) team discussing the foodservice distribution inside McCallie Dining Hall in May 2024.
CPA Represented at TN County Services Assoc. Conference

The Center for Profitable Agriculture’s Megan Bruch Leffew addressed nearly 300 county leaders attending the Tennessee County Services Association’s Annual Legislative Conference in Gatlinburg on May 21 on the topic of “Agritourism in Tennessee.” The purpose of the presentation was to raise awareness and understanding of the benefits and opportunities that can be reaped from agritourism; issues, laws and rules impacting agritourism; and how counties can cultivate agritourism.

2024 Farmers Market Vendor Boot Camp Webinars

The Center for Profitable Agriculture hosted a six-session Tennessee Farmers Market Vendor Boot Camp Webinar Series in March and April. With more than 180 people registered, topics included choosing the right market for you, merchandising, product pricing, and regulatory considerations for farmers market vendors.

Participation during the live sessions ranged from thirty-five to fifty-six attendees with more than 330 YouTube views of sessions at the time of publication. The teaching team included UT Extension’s own Professor Margarita Velandia (Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics), Kyla Adkins (Department of Food Science) and Megan Bruch Leffew (Center for Profitable Agriculture) in addition to industry partners with the Tennessee Association of Farmers Markets, Tennessee Department of Health, Tennessee Department of Agriculture, and the University of Kentucky.

Session recordings may now be accessed on the Center's YouTube Channel at https://www.youtube.com/@centerforprofitableagricul6484/playlists.

Left: Modified promotional image used to promote Farmers Market Vendor Boot Camp program in 2024.
Boyd Named TAAA&S Communicator of the Year

Members of the Tennessee Association of Agricultural Agents & Specialists (TAAA&S) who submitted winning entries for this year’s National Association of Country Agricultural Agents (NACAA) Communications Awards were recently recognized at the Galaxy Conference, a joint association conference for UT Extension employees, held in Franklin, Tennessee, in May.

Extension Assistant Alaina Boyd was named the 2024 Fletcher Sweet Communicator of the Year. The Sweet Award is given each year to a TAAA&S member and is named in honor of Fletcher Sweet, a former communications specialist who began his career with the University of Tennessee in 1943 before retiring in 1974.

At the state level, Boyd earned three first-place communications awards. Winning category entries include:

1. Program Promotional Package for an entry including promotional materials developed for the “Developing Your Value-Added Marketing Strategy” program.
2. Bound Book for an entry featuring a program booklet developed for participants to use as a guide during the SDBII Wisconsin Experiential Learning Course.
3. Newsletter for an entry featuring two issues of the Center’s Quarterly Progress Report (notably including the 100th issue released in April 2023).

Boyd placed second at the state level in the Website and Online Content category and third in the Published Photo category.

Her newsletter entry was chosen as the Southern Regional winner in the Newsletter category for NACAA. NACAA’s Southern Region consists of thirteen states including Tennessee.

Right: Boyd pictured with the Center’s Extension specialist Megan Leffew, 2015 Sweet Award winner.
Vols and Dawgs Urban Agriculture Update

The UT & UGA Urban Agriculture Update was held on June 6 - 7 in Chattanooga, TN, in partnership with the UGA Center for Urban Agriculture and the UT Horticulture Team. This collaborative in-service training allowed thirty-six Extension agents and specialists from both GA and TN to exchange resources and expertise among peers.

With a focus on urban needs, this program included an “urban ag discussion panel” featuring UTIA Associate Professor Natalie Bumgarner and Extension agents Amy Dunlap (Davidson County) and Haley Treadway (Hamilton County). A riverfront urban tree tour was later led by Knox County UT-TSU agent, Lee Rumble, followed by a visit to Crabtree Farms of Chattanooga.

Above: Urban Agriculture panel discussion representatives seated in front of the crowd. Panelists include Rolando Orellana, Paul Pugliese, and Joshua Fuder (all from UGA) as well as Natalie Bumgarner, Amy Dunlap (Davidson County), and Haley Treadway (Hamilton County).

The event was generously sponsored by the TN SARE Program, affiliated with Southern SARE, along with Hamilton County Farm Bureau and the UGA Center for Urban Agriculture.

Center Recognizes Dan Wheeler Conference Room

As part of the Center’s twenty-fifth-anniversary celebrations held in 2023, the Center’s staff conference room located inside the Ridley 4-H Center was officially named the Dan Wheeler Conference Room.

This dedication honors the Center’s first full-time director, Dan Wheeler, who filled the role at CPA from 2002 through 2007. Prior to his role in the Center, Wheeler had served as CEO of the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation and then as the 32nd Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture.

Weeler and his wife, Carol, were able to join CPA staff during our June Staff Meeting for a small celebration. The plaque displayed outside of the conference room was first unveiled during CPA’s twenty-fifth-anniversary event held in September 2023.
Dan Wheeler Conference Room Recognition - Photos

Top: Dan and Carol Wheeler pictured outside the Dan Wheeler Conference Room at the Ridley 4-H Center in Columbia with current director Rob Holland, administrative specialist Kim Giorgio, and Extension specialist Megan Leffew in June 2024.

Bottom: Wheeler pictured at the Center’s 25th-anniversary event in September 2023 with current Center director and Extension specialist Rob Holland (right) and Extension specialist Megan Leffew (left) who worked closely with Wheeler during his tenure at CPA.
Positions Open at the Center

The Center is currently hiring for two full-time positions:
- Extension Specialist - Value-Added Agriculture Marketing
- Extension Specialist - Value-Added Financial Analysis

To learn more about these positions and view the job announcements, please visit https://tiny.utk.edu/JoinCPA.

Above: Flyer advertising two open job positions at the Center for Profitable Agriculture.
Admin Specialist Giorgio Retiring After 21 Years at CPA

Kim Giorgio has served as the administrative specialist for the Center since November 18, 2002.

Giorgio is set to retire from her career with the Center on July 12 after serving both UT Extension and Tennessee’s producers for more than two decades. While she will be retiring from full-time work, Giorgio will return to UT Extension in a post-retirement capacity in late fall 2024.

Kim exists as a vital part of the Center’s ongoing educational programs and value-added projects. She assisted in many of the outreach programs, seminars, and workshops conducted across the state through the years. Kim also provides overall administrative support for the entire Center.

Giorgio was named the 2018 Charles and Patricia Goan Excellence in Customer Service Award winner and was recognized in 2020 as a University of Tennessee President’s Award nominee for non-exempt support staff. Giorgio has also maintained the Certified Administrative Professional (CAP) distinction since 2005. In addition, her submission entered in the call for names for UT’s new administrative program arriving in 2025, known as DASH, was chosen as the namesake of the program set to replace UT’s previous administrative software known as IRIS.

We wish Kim all the best in her future endeavors and are very appreciative of all the hard work she put in during her time with the Center.
Questions?
Contact Alaina Boyd at acboyd@utk.edu or visit us at tiny.utk.edu/cpa!