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GCIA News Briefs

SPRING 2020

I've Been Thinking

- Terry Hollifield, Executive Director

I've been thinking that I am tired of hearing about Coronavirus, COVID-19, shelter in place, cancelled meetings, partisan politics, finger pointing and all the negatives the media has heaped upon us over the last month. I am tired of worrying about the health and welfare of the GCIA family, our clients, my own family, friends, and the farmers agribusinesses depend on. I particularly hate "Social Distancing" because I like people. I like to have a cold beer with my neighbors on Saturday afternoon after working on my borrowed worn out Caterpillar loader and finally brining the old girl back to life.

Therefore, I announce to you that I am embracing "Spring 2020" with renewed optimism. I refuse to be depressed any longer. Spring is one of my favorite times of the year. The countryside is waking up; grass is growing and I am mowing; corn is sprouting; GCIA is inspecting turfgrass and small grains; and we're printing peanut seed certification tags every day.

I suggest that for our mental health we all need to get excited and optimistic about what lies ahead. After all, the entire agricultural community is the most optimistic in the world. We hang on to words like hope, faith, and dream. We have collectively survived hurricanes, tornadoes, low commodity prices, labor shortages, recession, depressions, local bank closings, The agriculture community has not broken and it won't this time. I will continue to practice suggested health guidelines but life moves on. That is my pep talk to both of you who read my articles.

P.S. Don't forget to wave at those first responders and nurses that we so often take for granted. You may need them later!!!!!!

GCIA Board of Directors Implements "Reserve Funds Management Policy"

The Georgia Crop Improvement Association Board of Directors accepted the Executive Committee's recommendation to refund approximately \$200,000 to seed and turfgrass producers who certified eligible crops in 2019. The credit amount issued is based on the GCIA "Reserve Funds Management Policy" and was approved by the board. The credit can be used to reduce acreage fees for 2020 applied for acres.

Buying food grown in Georgia, America more important now than ever

By: Drew Echols for The Times

The coronavirus pandemic has awakened the American public to the fact that we've become overly dependent on foreign countries for strategically important supplies. How many of us realized before this crisis that most of our antibiotics and ingredients used in pharmaceutical drugs come from China and other countries?

It's not only a threat to public health, but also a threat to our national security. As we go to war with this virus that is killing thousands of Americans and grinding our economy to a halt, we can see clearly now the danger of relying on foreign countries that don't have our best interests at heart.

This isn't news to the American farmer. We've been raising the alarm for years regarding what we consider the most strategic supply: food. While today we're focused on drugs and medical equipment, we shouldn't wait for another crisis to realize we're also overly dependent on imports for our food supply.

These imports may drive down some of the prices for consumers, but their real costs are too great to bear for our nation as a whole. Those true costs come when they force the American farmer out of business and further jeopardize our ability to feed citizens in a time of crisis.

A few cents saved at the grocery store can't be worth the toll it will take in the long run.

In agribusiness, this is particularly true of countries in Central and South America, who are the biggest sources of agricultural imports to the United States.

In 2018, Mexico sold to the United States almost \$12 billion worth of fresh fruit and vegetables alone.

That in and of itself is no outrage. International trade produces many benefits for consumers and Georgia farmers. The outrage comes when you consider that these countries share a growing season with that of Georgia for many of our most important crops. They produce food that isn't bound by the same rules and regulations that are placed on American farmers.

When you combine that with the fact that our agricultural labor is paid several times more than what foreign farms pay workers, it makes competing with their prices almost impossible for Georgia farmers. Mexico has been known to purposely dump fruits and vegetables into the American market at prices they know we can't compete with just to grow their market share and push American farmers out of business.

But when it comes to our food supply, we can't just look at market forces. Like with medical and drug supplies, we must consider the national security implications if we become overly reliant on foreign sources.

Right now, farmers and others in agribusiness — not unlike those in many other industries — are facing an existential threat from the shutdowns caused by the coronavirus.

At my family's farm in Hall County, we specialize in fruits and vegetables. One of our biggest produce buyers is a distributor that sells to schools and restaurants. That market disappeared overnight, with no idea when it's coming back. Our family faces tough decisions on how and what we are going to do moving forward.

(See Echols at the top of page 3)

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My story is not unique. Across the country, big, bulk buyers of food, such as restaurants, suddenly stopped placing orders. Farmers and distributors are now scrambling to move their model from food service to food retail. They are desperate to find buyers of crops that are already in the ground and don't stop growing just because things have changed on our end.

Dairyman are tragically having to dump millions of gallons of milk and growers are having to mulch their fruits and vegetables. With an abundant supply of food produced here in the United States, why are we further stressing our American farmers by importing inferior products from other countries that can never meet our quality standards?

This crisis also calls for action from the American people. U.S. consumers would serve their nation well if they talked to their local grocery store managers about the urgent need to prioritize locally produced food. This creates and retains jobs in our communities, and it also helps to ensure that when the next crisis hits, America has the agricultural infrastructure we need to feed our country without relying on the benevolence of foreign trading partners.

We need your prayers, but we mostly need your purchasing power. I ask that you demand Georgia Grown when possible and American grown always.

Drew Echols is farm manager at Jaemor Farms in Alto.

Courtesy of the www.GainesvilleTimes.com.

GCIA Annual Meeting held March 10

The Georgia Crop Improvement Association's 75th Annual Meeting was held on Tuesday, March 10th at the Holiday Inn Downtown Athens. In the general session, GCIA members heard from several speakers including Dr. Sam Pardue, UGA CAES Dean; John Seymore, American Seed Trade Association; Matthew Young, Tennessee Crop Improvement Association; Dr. Adam Rabinowitz, Extension Ag Economist; and Will Bentley, Georgia Agribusiness Council.

During the commodity sessions, speakers included Dr. Clint Waltz, Extension Turfgrass Specialist; Dr. Corey Bryant, Extension Grains Agronomist; and DeeDee Smith, GDA Seed Laboratory.

At the meeting, outgoing President Ken Morrow of The Turfgrass Group was recognized for his service by John Raley of R&R Seed, Inc. Special thanks to Ken on a job well done! Also at the meeting, Blake Shepard of Mixon Seed Service was sworn in as GCIA President for the coming year. In addition, Larry Cunningham of R.L. Cunningham & Sons, Inc. was elected 1st Vice-President, and Jutt Howard of North Georgia Turf was elected as 2nd Vice-President. Congratulations to all and thank you for your service!

Another highlight was the recognition of two longtime GCIA employees. Executive Director Terry Hollifield was recognized for 50 years of service, and Organic Program Manager Johnny Luke was recognized for 45 years of service. GCIA certainly wouldn't be where we are today without the dedication and leadership of these two gentlemen. The board of directors, members and staff are grateful for their service.

Tips for turfgrass care leading into spring green up

By Clint Waltz for CAES News

As a University of Georgia Cooperative Extension turfgrass specialist, I have recently received numerous calls and emails regarding grass planting and maintenance. This is likely a result of the recent warm, dry weather, which typically activates people to begin working in their landscape, and the increased number of people currently at home.

Warm-season grasses are beginning to transition into active growth. All the rainfall this winter has resulted in wet soils, which are generally slower to warm as water is a buffer of heat. In Griffin, the [UGA Weather Network](#) has recorded nearly 27 inches of rainfall since January. That is 4.5 inches more rain than was recorded January through May last year and more than 10 inches more rain for the same time period in 2017 and 2018. In the last two weeks, air and four-inch soil temperatures have increased and are consistent with March temperatures for the past three years. Warm-season grasses will likely green-up further and begin to need maintenance.

In general, turfgrass is a resilient plant capable of tolerating numerous stresses and abuse (e.g. wear, traffic, heat, cold, drought, mismanagement, disease, insects, etc.) with tremendous recuperative potential. Turf's resiliency can be a benefit to the plant and the person managing it.

It is still early spring and warm-season species really do not need much fertilization yet. For most of the state, waiting to fertilize until mid- to late April will be fine.

The exception would be cool-season grasses like tall fescue and bentgrass. Now is the time to fertilize them and grow as many roots as possible to precondition the grass from the upcoming summer heat stress. More emphasis to maintaining recommended fertilization programs should be given to cool-season lawns.

Mowing is a routine practice to turfgrass maintenance. For most of the state, there is minimal need for mowing right now. That will change in the coming weeks. Consider raising the mowing height to the upper end of the recommended range for the turfgrass species you are maintaining. Lawncare calendars that include species mowing height ranges specific to Georgia can be found at www.GeorgiaTurf.com.

Currently, the irrigation of turf should not be a concern. This can change over the next few weeks as temperatures rise and grass begins to grow. Drought can be a factor in turfgrass loss during the spring transition. If rainfall patterns continue, it is unlikely this will be a problem, but if soil does begin to dry through the spring, then irrigation should be applied.

Pest management is the last big issue. First, spring green-up is when warm-season grasses are most susceptible to herbicide injury. The mower can serve as a weed control option. If possible, mow regularly. Many of the weeds currently in lawns are winter annuals and will be dying as temperatures rise. Mowing and Mother Nature are suitable options under these circumstances.

For more information on lawn care, call your local UGA Extension office at 1800-ASK-UGA1 or visit extension.uga.edu.

Clint Waltz is a Cooperative Extension turf specialist with the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

Joe West named interim dean of UGA CAES

By: Sam Fahmy for CAES News

Joe West, who most recently served as assistant dean of the University of Georgia Tifton Campus, has been named interim dean and director of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, effective July 1.



West is a professor in the UGA Department of Animal and Dairy Science, and his career with CAES has spanned nearly 35 years. In his 12 years as assistant dean, he oversaw enhancements to the learning environment for students, as well as growth in research activity and Extension programming on the Tifton Campus. From 2002 to 2004, he served as interim head of the Department of Animal and Dairy Science.

As previously announced, Samuel Pardue, who has led the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences since 2016, intends to step down on June 30. A national search is currently underway for the next dean and director of the college.

"I am grateful to Dr. West for taking on this important role," said S. Jack Hu, UGA's senior vice president for academic affairs and provost. "His demonstrated record of leadership will serve the college and the university well during this transition period."

Sam Fahmy is director of public relations for the University of Georgia's Office of the Senior Vice-president for Academic Affairs and Provost.

USDA ANNOUNCES \$19 BILLION CORONAVIRUS FOOD

On Friday, April 17, USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue announced the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program to assist farmers, ranchers, and consumers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) will use the funding and authorities provided in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES), the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), and other USDA existing authorities. The CFAP is made of two components: direct payments to farmers and ranchers totaling \$16 billion, and \$3 billion in food product purchases for distribution.

The direct payments will financially assist producers with additional adjustment and marketing costs resulting from lost demand due to COVID-19. The payments will be coupled to actual production and based on actual losses agricultural producers experienced in response to price declines and supply chain disruptions, i.e., sales of commodities impacted by COVID-19. To qualify for a payment, a commodity must have declined in price by at least 5% between January and April.

Of the \$16 billion provided for direct payments to producers, it's been reported that \$9.6 billion is directed toward the livestock industry (cattle, dairy and hogs), \$3.9 billion for producers of row crops, \$2.1 billion for specialty crop producers, and \$500 million for other crops. USDA has yet to confirm this distribution of funding. While these "buckets" of money are current estimates of what may be needed for each industry, if one "bucket" needs more or less, USDA will have the discretion to shift funds where most appropriate.

USDA's full press release can be read [here](#).

Source: Georgia Farm Bureau



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