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The Future of Rural America Is in Good Hands

The next time you hear someone criticize today's youth, invite them to your local junior livestock show. Stock show season will soon be here, and there is no better time or place to see rural America's future leaders in action.

Every animal represents months of hard physical work and time invested by a young person in the show ring. While developing an appreciation for agriculture, that same youngster or teenager has gained self-confidence and learned about sacrifice, perseverance and responsibility — the building blocks of character.

Alabama Ag Credit is proud to support rural youth. This winter, we'll be at the stock shows, cheering on our young neighbors, purchasing sale animals and presenting awards. In addition, we're supporting our future production agriculturalists by serving, along with Alabama Farm Credit, as the title sponsor of the annual Alabama FFA Convention. We know these young folks are the future of our industry. We're committed to supporting our college-bound students as well. We presented a total of \$5,000 to students pursuing degrees in agriculture and related fields and we intend to give even more this year.

As part of our mission, Alabama Ag Credit also supports young farmers and ranchers who have chosen careers in production agriculture. Every fall, we sponsor one young farmer or rancher to attend the Farm Credit Young Leaders Program in New York and Washington, D.C., to learn about the Farm Credit System and the legislative process. Along with Alabama Farm Credit, we also support the Alabama Farmers Federation's Outstanding Young Farm Family each year by providing the grand prize of a John Deere Gator. Through our young, beginning and small (YBS) farmer loan program, we try to go the extra mile to help young and beginning producers obtain financing for their operations.

At year-end 2013, 17.6 percent of Alabama Ag Credit loans were to young farmers, defined as age 35 and under, while beginning farmers, those with 10 or fewer years of experience, accounted for 55.1 percent of all association loans.

More than 62 percent of U.S. farmers are age 55 or older. As these producers retire, new farmers will be needed to take their place. At Alabama Ag Credit, we are pleased to partner with FFA, 4-H, commodity groups and agribusiness organizations to help develop the next generation of farmers and ranchers — a generation with the leadership ability, technical skills, business knowledge and strong work ethic that are characteristic of those who work in agriculture.

Remember those benefits the next time you see a youngster leading a steer around the show ring at your county fair. It's not just about the steer — it's about young people and the future of agriculture.

See you at the show!

Douglas Thiessen
Chief Executive Officer



Association Sponsors Two Couples to Attend Co-op Conference

Alabama Ag Credit was pleased to sponsor two of the 28 couples who attended this year's Co-op Couples Conference, hosted by the Alabama Council of Cooperatives. The couples were Kristy and Keith Mullenax of Wilmer, and Bradley and Isaac Robertson of Waverly.

The conference, held July 21-23 at Hampton Inn and Suites in Orange Beach, Ala., was the organization's 39th annual conference for young couples. The event included seminars to educate the delegates about the impact cooperatives have on their everyday lives, as well as social activities in which participants could get to know each other.

"This conference provides an ideal opportunity for young couples to learn more about co-ops in a setting that is relaxed and fun," said Andy Grant, vice president and branch manager of Alabama Ag Credit's Gulf Coast office. Grant is a board member on the council and helps organize the conference each year.

"We're proud to have had the opportunity to host the Mullenaxes and the Robertsons, as they are shining examples of our valued customer base," he said.



Kristy and Keith Mullenax



Bradley and Isaac Robertson

Spencer Swan Named 2014 Distinguished Cooperator



Spencer Swan, right, receives the Distinguished Cooperator Award during the Alabama Council of Cooperatives' annual meeting in July. Pictured with him is Alabama Ag Credit Vice President Andy Grant.

Spencer Swan, retired chief executive officer of the Federal Land Bank Association (FLBA) of South Alabama, was honored as an Alabama Council of Cooperatives' 2014 Distinguished Cooperator.

Alabama Ag Credit, formerly the FLBA of South Alabama and a current member of the council, nominated Swan for the honor. The co-op council's board of directors voted to name him the recipient, and he was recognized at the council's annual meeting on July 22 in Orange Beach, Ala.

The Distinguished Cooperator program recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions to agriculture, cooperatives and other related areas.

Swan served the FLBA of South Alabama for nearly 40 years. He was president of the FLBAs of Gadsden, Montgomery and Enterprise; regional vice president of the FLBA of Jackson; and divisional vice president of Farm Credit Services' central Alabama division.

He retired from the Land Bank as president and chief executive officer in 2007, but continued to serve as a consultant to the board of directors for some time after retirement.

During his career, Swan was active in the Alabama Council of Cooperatives.

Three New Analysts Join Credit Team

John Dorrill *Senior Credit Analyst*

John Dorrill comes to us after more than 20 years with the Farm Service Agency, where he last served as the farm loan manager in the Coffee County FSA office, which services the Wiregrass area of Alabama. John works in the credit department of the association's administrative branch.



Dallas Jordan *Credit Analyst*

Dallas Jordan recently was hired as a credit analyst for the association, working out of the Gulf Coast branch. A CPA and Troy University graduate, Dallas comes to us after working in the public accounting sector for two years. She is originally from Frisco City, Ala., and has family ties to agricultural production.



Trip Strickland *Credit Analyst Associate*

We welcome Trip Strickland as credit analyst associate, working with the credit staff in the administrative branch. An Auburn University graduate, Trip holds a degree in finance. After graduation, he worked for Starke Agency, an insurance brokerage and risk management firm in Montgomery, as a commercial lines producer. He and his wife, Crystal, reside in his hometown of Montgomery.



The 2014 Farm Credit Association Leaders program participants. Dale Williamson is pictured fourth from the left.

Main Street Goes to Wall Street Selma Branch Manager Participates in Farm Credit Leadership Program

In the well-funded Farm Credit System, the funds we lend to farmers and ranchers follow a unique path. This past summer, participants in the Farm Credit Association Leaders Program actually met some of the bond dealers, financial experts and policymakers responsible for the smooth and continuous flow of funds from Wall Street to farms and ranches served by Alabama Ag Credit.

Dale Williamson, vice president and Selma branch manager, was Alabama Ag Credit's representative in the program this year.

Hosted by the Farm Credit Bank of Texas, the program took Farm Credit employees to financial and policy organizations in the New York City area and Washington, D.C., for four unforgettable days.

"When you meet the people at the Federal Farm Credit Banks Funding Corporation who issue our Farm Credit bonds and send the money down the pipe to our association, and then hear the bond traders explain why Farm Credit is a sound investment, you realize that rural America is fortunate to have the Farm Credit System," noted Williamson.

On Capitol Hill, he visited with Sens. Richard Shelby and Jeff Sessions and with Rep. Mike Rogers, and also met with Rep. Terri Sewell's staff.

"But what impressed me most was seeing what the national Farm Credit Council is doing every day, staying on top of issues and telling the Farm Credit story to protect our lending abilities," Williamson said. "They do a great job of looking out for our customers' best interests in the legislative and policymaking process."

A Break From Cattle and Catfish

Hale County Couple Attends Young Leaders Program

Early autumn is a busy time on most farms, and 3 Generation Farms near Greensboro, Ala., is no exception. With thousands of catfish to feed daily and a sizable herd of cattle to manage, owner and operator Luke Smelley — the second of the three generations — doesn't have much down time.

Still, the young farmer and his wife, Lana, an architect, didn't hesitate when they were asked to represent Alabama Ag Credit at the Farm Credit Young Leaders Program in New York and Washington, D.C., this fall.

"We were honored to be asked," says Luke. "This is my second year to do business with Alabama Ag Credit, and I was looking forward to meeting other young farmers and learning more about how Farm Credit works."

Luke, 30, has been farming full time since 2005, when he started his own farm.

"I always wanted to be farmer," he says.

Today, he operates a total of 3,000 acres, of which 700 acres are devoted to catfish and 2,300 acres to cattle production. Lana, who grew up in a military family and graduated from Auburn University with a degree in architecture, owns and operates SoWA Designs in Greensboro.

"She was over here working on the new Hale County Animal Shelter, and I tricked her into marrying me," Luke says.

He and his father, George Smelley, operate their cow-calf business together under L&G Operations, running primarily Brahman cows with Charolais and Angus bulls. In addition, they graze stocker cattle most years.



Lana and Luke Smelley and their family

The farming partnership, which extends to part of the catfish business, has its benefits. George, who is also an Alabama Ag Credit stockholder, offers a lifetime of farming experience. And when Luke and Lana participated in the Young Leaders Program, George kept the farm running at home.

"Luke and Lana are the type of energetic young farm couple who are the lifeblood of rural communities and the future of agriculture."

– Jason Abrams

The leadership program, hosted every fall by the Farm Credit Bank of Texas, is offered to young producers from five states to expose them to the farm policymaking process and educate them about the Farm Credit System. As part of the program, they visited the New York financial district,

the Federal Farm Credit Banks Funding Corporation and Capitol Hill, where they met with their elected representatives.

An added benefit, as Luke notes, was the opportunity to connect with young farmers and ranchers from other regions. This year, 16 young Farm Credit customers from Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico and Texas participated in the program.

But for the Smelleys, who have two children, Levi, 4, and Violet, 2, it was also an opportunity to get away from the farm before their lives become even busier: They are expecting their third child this winter.

"Luke and Lana are the type of energetic young farm couple who are the lifeblood of rural communities and the future of agriculture," says Jason Abrams, association vice president and Demopolis branch manager. "Alabama Ag Credit is proud to be their financial partner."