Direct Line

It’s good to be working with John Jensen, interim dean of the College of Agriculture at Auburn. Most of you know him as an enthusiastic Extension aquaculture specialist and head of the Fisheries and Allied Aquaculture department. (See January Extension Connections for more information.) He is the second of the deans at Auburn to have close ties with Extension. Richard Brinker, dean of the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, came through the ranks as an Extension specialist in forestry. So, they both know and value Extension programs. Of course, we also continue to work with the other deans at Alabama A&M and Auburn to seek out and develop program partnerships and collaborations.

We recently appeared before U.S. District Judge Harold Murphy, who presides over the Knight vs. Alabama case, to update him on the status of the unification of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. Virginia Caples, 1890 Administrator at Alabama A&M, and I reported that we are operating a unified system both in programs and organizational structure.

We also reported that issues of unification have been resolved, with one exception that the System is continuing to work on. Overall, the reports to and the feedback from the Court were quite positive. We expect a written response soon and we will share that with you as well.

Thanks to President John Gibson of Alabama A&M and Interim President William Walker of Auburn University for their guidance and support in the operation of the unified Extension System and the hearing before Judge Murphy!

As you are aware from media reports and other communications from Montgomery and Washington, D.C., our budget status from state and federal sources remains uncertain. We’ll share details when there is something definite to report. In the meantime, I encourage you to work with decision-makers and opinion leaders to ensure they know about Extension’s successes and impacts in your local area. Each of us must work on this task.

Substantial efforts are focused on other methods of generating support and funds for Extension programs. Through the efforts of many of you, grants and contracts to Extension have grown significantly over the past several years.

Currently, 19 percent ($9.8 million) of our total budget comes from a wide variety of sources including grants and contracts. This compares to $1.5 million in FY 97 that accounted for 4 percent of our total funds.

Thanks to each of you for your successes in this area! Let’s use these successes for motivation to keep us moving ahead in seeking these types of resources to further our mission. They can provide the dollars needed to expand vital programs that meet local needs and yet have statewide impact.

Another area of excitement is the potential for new resources to be generated through a capital development campaign. Beth Atkins, assistant to the director for development, is leading our team to gear up a campaign to seek contributions to support our 4-H youth programs and then later in a similar effort for other program areas. More details and information on this important effort will be available as the campaign strategy is finalized.

The 2001 Annual Report is expected soon. It will provide an excellent overview of the many diverse programs that Extension provides to the people of Alabama. Copies will be available for you to share with local and state leaders and decision-makers. It will also help each of us in Extension know and understand the breadth and depth of our total program efforts.

While we are talking about programs, let me offer my thanks to all of the county Extension agents, specialists and volunteers whose hard work make the many youth livestock events that will be held this month a success. February and March are always busy for those of you with

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youth livestock responsibilities, but the young people gain so much as a result of your efforts. Not just the premiums and the ribbons but the lessons they learn about responsibility, time management and personal ethics are the truly valuable rewards of the program.

Kudos to Kent Stanford, St. Clair County Extension agent, for his efforts with the livestock judging team! Two 4-H’ers from the team have been offered full scholarships to Allen County Community College in Kansas. One St. Clair 4-H’er is already on scholarship at a junior college in Oklahoma.

As always, let us hear from you with your comments and concerns.

Program Highlight: Extension Team Project Changes Producers’ Mind-Set

It wasn’t so many years ago that by the middle of April, farmers in the Wiregrass were crisscrossing their fields planting peanuts. These days, farmers in the Wiregrass are still hard at work during April, but one thing they are not doing is planting peanuts.

Dallas Hartzog, Extension peanut agronomist at the Wiregrass Regional Extension and Research Center, says that the change in planting time can be traced to Extension’s efforts to help farmers battle tomato spotted wilt virus (TSWV) in peanuts.

“A multi-disciplinary Extension team has been working for the past several years to help the state’s peanut growers battle TSWV,” says Hartzog. “TSWV is a devastating disease that can wipe out a field of peanut plants or can ruin a farmer’s budget buying chemical treatments to battle the disease.”

Moving the planting start date from mid-April to early May was one portion of the integrated approach advocated by Extension. Moving the planting date helps young peanut plants avoid damage from insects called thrips. Thrips are considered the primary way TSWV is spread.

Other portions of the total plan are selecting resistant peanut cultivars (Georgia Green), establishing a good plant population of at least four plants per foot of row, increasing plantings of strip-till and twin row peanuts, and using phorate for thrips control. The adoption of these combined management practices into a single IPM system has had dramatic and immediate effects on the incidence of TSWV and has brought increased yields.

Extension professionals realized that the state’s peanut growers were looking for ways to optimize their production management programs for peanuts in an effort to survive. Poor weather and low commodity prices had battered many growers’ financial situations, and they needed a cost-effective way to battle TSWV.

In this time of new technologies, Hartzog says effective use of some of the most tried and true Extension methods was the real key in getting farmers to change their ways.

The field tours of on-farm demonstrations and research trials conducted on peanuts in the Wiregrass counties over the last several seasons have helped make growers aware of the recommended integrated approach to managing this major peanut pest.

Hartzog says growers have increased plantings of the resistant cultivars to 95 percent of the 197,000 acres planted in 2001. They have increased seeding rates to acquire at least four plants per foot of row plant population on more than 80 percent of the planted acreage.

Finally, he notes that growers have made a conscious effort to avoid unusually early planting. The majority of peanut acreage in 2001 was planted from May 1 to May 25 to avoid heavy thrips damage.

As a result of growers changing some basic practices, Hartzog says TSWV was reduced to less than 1 percent average infection in 2001 as compared to 30 percent in 1997. Based upon research results, this level of TSWV reduction in Alabama peanuts increased yields 400 to 500 pounds per acre, providing growers an estimated $13.5 million in increased income.

Nominations Being Accepted for Conservation Achievement Awards

The Alabama Wildlife Federation is currently accepting nominations for the 2002 Governor’s Conservation Achievement Awards, considered the most prestigious conservation awards in Alabama.

For more than 30 years, the awards have been presented to individuals and organizations that make great contributions to the conservation of wildlife and other natural resources. In addition to the recognition component, the program is designed to promote leadership and to foster greater knowledge and awareness of conservation practices and projects.

Over the years, a number of Extension person-
nel as well as many individuals and organizations that partner with Extension have won Conservation Achievement Awards.

For more information on nominations, contact your state program leader, your district Extension coordinator or the director’s office for a complete list of award categories and guidelines. You can also call the Alabama Wildlife Federation at (800) 822-9453. The nomination deadline is May 1.

**Walk! Alabama Returns**

Walk! Alabama is back again this year by popular demand. The program will run from March 4 through April 27.

Physical activity has been shown to help reduce the risk for chronic disease. Walk! Alabama was developed as an eight-week program to address change in behavior of attitude and action toward walking and physical activity.

“The program is a fun and risk-free way to burn fat, lower blood pressure, lose weight, ward off heart disease, strengthen your bones and muscles, prevent certain cancers, boost your mood and add years to your life,” says Suzette Jelinek, Extension specialist, network and marketing, and Walk! Alabama coordinator.

Last year, more than 345 teams and 8,000 individuals participated in the program. Teams were formed in 29 Alabama counties. On average, each participant lost 2.3 pounds and many walked more than 100 miles. More than 402,000 miles were walked during the eight-week program.

How does Walk! Alabama work? In each county, teams of eight friends, neighbors, family members and/or coworkers compete to see which team can walk the most miles and be the first to reach 850 miles. That’s the equivalent of walking across Alabama — from Houston County to Lauderdale County and from Baldwin County to DeKalb County.

Team members can walk as a group or individually, says Jelinek. Each team member keeps a log of his or her miles and reports the total to a team captain each week. The team’s total mileage is tracked weekly on an official Walk! Alabama map posted in each county Extension office.

If you are interested in signing up for this program and you are located near a county office, please contact your county agent for further details.

If you are on campus at either Alabama A&M or Auburn University and wish to sign up, contact Jelinek at sjeline@aces.edu or at (334)844-5355.

New T-shirts, listing “The Reasons I Walk,” and pedometers to gauge the amount of steps you take each day will be available for purchase.

**2002 4-H Congress**

Four-H Congress returns to the campus of Alabama A&M University this summer on July 14-17. At this point in Congress planning, all activities will take place on campus and all participants will be housed on campus as well.

Tentative Schedule of Events

**Sunday, July 14**
- Early arrival and check-in

**Monday, July 15**
- Registration, Educational Workshops and Opening Ceremony

**Tuesday, July 16**
- Competitive Events, Awards Banquet and Dance

**Wednesday, July 17**
- Local activities as determined by county delegations

Four-H Animal Science competition will be held in Auburn July 18 and 19.

**HR Facts**

Congress passed the Family Medical Leave Act in 1993. This act provides up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to eligible employees for the birth, adoption, or foster placement of a child or the care of a newlyborn child; the care of a family member who has a serious health condition; or a serious health condition of the employee that renders the employee unable to perform the functions of the employee’s job. Basically, the law gives the employee job protection for being off work for reasons that are covered by the FMLA. For additional information, contact the Human Resources office at (334) 844-5324 or http://www.aces.edu/extconnections/3hr.html.

**PERSONNEL**

**Kudos:**
- Congratulations to Jo Ann Dunn, Blount County Extension Office Administrative Assistant. She was awarded the Spirit of Excellence Award for the Secretarial/Clerical group for February.
Appointments:

- **Themika Sims**, Jackson County Extension Coordinator, Feb. 1
- **Margaret Odom**, County Agent – NEP, Washington County, Feb. 11
- **Lisa Lightsey**, County Agent – NEP, Bibb County, Feb. 18
- **Carl Hughes**, County Agent – Urban, Tuscaloosa County, Feb. 18
- **Michelle Mobley**, County Agent, Tuscaloosa County, Feb. 18
- **Cheryl Stevens**, County Extension Office Assistant, Tuscaloosa County, Feb. 18
- **Michele Graham**, Agent Assistant I, Ft. Rucker, Feb. 19
- **Debbie Gaydos**, Agent Assistant I, Ft. Rucker, Feb. 19
- **Heather Denson**, County Agent – NEP, Winston County, Feb. 25

Retirements:

- **Peggy Prucnal**, Shelby County Extension Coordinator, effective in April after 33 years of dedicated service to Extension. Her retirement reception will be March 29 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. in the Shelby County Extension Auditorium. The Shelby County staff invites everyone to join them for refreshments and memories.

Resignations:

- **Larry Quick**, County Extension Agent at the C. Beaty Hanna Horticulture and Environmental Center at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, Feb. 28. Larry is leaving us after 16 years of service in Lee and Jefferson counties. He will be the Horticulture Program Coordinator at Jefferson State Community College. It is an exciting challenge for Larry, and we wish him the best.

Proposals Approved:

- **Marilee Tankersley**, 4-H Youth Development for Health Rocks, $5,000
- **Marilee Tankersley**, Corporate Foundation for Children for FACTS Training Enhancement Grant, $2,986

Proposals Submitted:

- **Sally Hooker**, MSU 4-H Youth Development, for Health Rocks Perry County, $5,300
- **Ken Tilt**, Southern Region SARE On Farm Research Grant Program, for Improving Christmas Tree Production, $14,562
- **Sandra Coffey**, Elba City Schools, for After School Instructional Assistance, $4,861
- **Sally Hooker**, ADPH, for Not On Tobacco, $19,005
- **Perry Mobley**, Southern Region SARE On Farm Research Grant Program, for Benefits of Incorporating Triticale/Clover Management Systems, $967
- **Leonard Kuykendall**, Southern Region SARE On Farm Research Grant Program, for Soil Quality Improvement, $2,116

ACES FAMILY HAPPENINGS

- Our sympathies to **Robert White**, Extension Agent on Special Assignment. His mother, Alice White, died Feb. 11.
- Our condolences to **W.L. Strain**, retired Assistant Director, Communications. His mother, Ora Rebecca Adkins, passed away Feb. 11.
- Our sympathies to **Jackie Ramsey**, Jefferson County Extension Coordinator, and her husband, Larry. His mother, Clella Ramsey, died Feb. 15.
- **Sarah Thomas**, retired Etowah County Extension Agent, died Feb. 19. She retired in 1977 after 30 years of dedicated service to the people of Etowah County, where she first served as a home demonstration agent and later as a county agent.

Gaines Smith, Interim Director