Season 5 Episode 5 — Spring Planting Prep

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Announcer

The Alabama Crops Report Podcast, your trusted information source for Alabama agriculture.

Scott Graham
Hey, everybody, welcome into the Alabama Crops Report podcast. Guess we're in the roaming studios today where we're live from the, Prattville, Agricultural Research Unit in Prattville, Alabama. How about that? So with us today, we've got of course Simer Virk, Blake Lanton, and then first time guest, Miss Katie Nichols from Alabama Extension Communications team. Katie, how's it going?

Katie Nichols
Hey, guys, I've never done this before, so it's kind of exciting. And I feel, like I'm part of an elite group now. So, thanks for letting me join.

Scott Graham
As you know, for all first time guests, we have to ask them a question because I'm sure you're a long time listener. I saw this on on the internet the other day. I thought would be a perfect question. How many Rhode Island's can fit in the state of Texas?

Katie Nichols
Oh, that's a tough one. Um.

Scott Graham
And we'll let we'll let the guys take a stab at it to.

Blake Lanton
At least 40.

Katie Nichols
I don't even know how to guess. I'm going to go higher than Blake and say 45.

Simer Virk
I gotta look up a map of the US to see how big Rhode Island is.

Scott Graham
Yeah, Simer's got it pretty good.

Katie Nichols
That's a bad disadvantage.

Simer Virk
Yeah.

Scott Graham
More than 40. More than 45.

Blake Lanton
Probably double that then.

Scott Graham
Two-Hundred and 21.

Simer Virk
Jeez.

Katie Nichols
(Gasp) Well, okay then.

Simer Virk
Wow.

Scott Graham
That's how big Texas is.

Simer Virk
That's how big Texas is.

Scott Graham
Or how small Rhode Island is.

Simer Virk
I've driven through it a few times. It takes about a whole day to get through.

Scott Graham
Yeah, just about.

Blake Lanton
I was about to say, it takes like 12 hours to get through Texas, if you go across the longest part. So, maybe 45 minutes going across Rhode Island.

Scott Graham
And you can comfortably drive like 85 (mph) through the entire state of Texas.

Simer Virk
Oh, there are signs that says the speed limit is 85 (mph).

Katie Nichols
That's my kind of place.

Simer Virk
Yeah.

Scott Graham.
Yeah.

Katie Nichols
Burn it up.

Scott Graham
All right. Well, so I think today, we want to talk about, maybe, you know, as we're recording, it's March the 5th. So, we're probably, some corn maybe getting ready to go in the ground if it hasn't already in South Alabama, and certainly will be by the time that this comes out. But we thought it may be a good time to talk, particularly with Simer about, you know, planning, preparation, making sure all the equipment is ready to go and those types of things.

Simer Virk
Yeah. There was, talking about corn planting, Seminole County in Georgia is the very first one. And I saw pictures on Monday. They're planting corn.
Scott Graham
Yep.

Blake Lanton
Yep.

Scott Graham
Yep. That there last year, I think there was some corn planted in February in Baldwin County. We were down there for peanut meetings, they were rolling. So, we're, we just had a basically the whole state last night had 40, 50 mile an hour winds and strong thunderstorms. So that might might put some folks out for a while, or it may help.

Scott Graham
We've gotten pretty dry in some places too. So it's about that time.

Blake Lanton
Yeah. So basically, you know, as Steve Spurrier would always say it's talking season. So we've been doing our county regional production meetings and I figured it was a good time just for those people that haven't been able to make it out to those to kind of talk about, what y'all had been presenting on and I know it's probably a little late for soil samples, but, Doctor Virks had some real good data on best soil sample management strategies.

Blake Lanton
You know, talking about grid sampling and everything. I think most of your research has shown that the two-and-a-half-acre grid is probably the best way to go in most cases.

Simer Virk
Yeah. And it kind of goes to, a lot of that research was driven in when I was in South Georgia because we had a lot of growers doing five-acre grids or higher. So that started there. Interestingly, going across the state at all these meetings, you know, our first question I ask is how many for all the soil sampling and what size grid? Good thing that most growers who are doing grid sampling in Alabama are kind of in that two-and-a-half-acre grid size, you know, I've heard some five acres, but that's where I kind of put them as a caution.

Simer Virk
Hey, you just may want to spend your money a little bit more wisely in a way that you may want to skip one year, but I'd rather do a two and a half.

Scott Graham
What was the standard in Georgia?

Simer Virk
Five.

Scott Graham
Five. You think?

Simer Virk
Because of every year.

Scott Graham
Every year, and I would assume their fields are probably less variable than most of ours would be? I don't know that I've not spent much time in South Georgia, but.

Simer Virk
Soil type wise, those fields are pretty variable.

Scott Graham
Okay.

Simer Virk
The biggest thing, and that's why even in your meeting yesterday, I asked the guy about his crop rotation. Because of what I learned, we have growers in South Alabama who are grid sampling every year. Peanut is the big thing. That is because we don't care about P and K in peanuts.

Simer Virk
It's only soil PH. And if you fail to address soil PH in peanuts, you probably lose a crop on there, you know? So that's why they're just good at sampling every year, making sure the PH is right. So they are kind of in this loop. You know, every year same good size. But if you think about how much money is tied in soil sampling every year, I think that was one of the reasons over the years they're like, okay, I don't think we can do this one, two and a half or whatever.

Simer Virk
Five is, you know, you break a 50-acre field, that's ten samples, which is more manageable if you're 25. You know, that's a lot of samples. If you're one acre that's 50 samples. So I think that cost thing upfront kind of pushed a lot of growers over that years to just like, hey, just go ahead and sample on five acre.

Scott Graham
But what is neat is the information that you've shown is that you're pretty much spending the same amount of money. Because you're not applying…

Simer Virk
Yeah, because the mentality behind is I'm going to save money on soil sampling and soil analysis upfront. Our research also included that, what if you're doing it on a five acre? That soil sampling method is not doing a good job of picking the variability in the field. So now you're over applying in a lot of field and under applying especially over application.

Simer Virk
Now you're spending more money on lime and fertilizer. If we take that money and put it back on what you have to pay for soil sampling, you end up spending the same amount of money, right? You spend the same amount of money. But now not only your soil sampling is not doing its job, but you're also over or under applying fertilizer and lime in your field.

Scott Graham
And it's harder to put a number to it. But if you're under applying, you're also limiting your yield potential as well.

Simer Virk
Glen Harris, he always kind of got on me when we were doing a lot of this research. We know what the over application is doing because you're putting a lot of money in fertilizer, especially potash and phosphorus and all that. He's like, how do we put a value to under application? I'm like, that's something we actually got to do a lot of testing or trials on.

Simer Virk
Like if you were supposed to apply 60 pounds and you only applied 20 or 30 because you didn't sample the right way, what is the yield? But what is the economic?

Scott Graham
And that's something to study. You'd have to do it over a 5- or 6-year period.

Simer Virk
Multiple years.

Scott Graham
Because the weather in a given year can impact that so much. It's hard and you get a bole rot. And then, you know, it's hard to say.

Simer Virk
Yeah. So going back to a point, I think most of our growers are in that range, which is good. So, all of that research basic to summarize it is if you're grid sampling don't do it over two and a half acres. Now the other big thing which you know, we're trying to change some of the mindset of our growers, because right now when we're soil sampling, or rather we are working with a consultant, or whether someone's kind of doing their own.

Simer Virk
They take just that one grid size and put it across the whole farm. Every grower knows that they got some fields which are pretty highly variable and all that, and that's where we see even one acre grid could help them do a better job. And that's where we're still spending a bunch of money on one-acre grids.

Simer Virk
But then that's why we don't recommend doing that every year. It's like you, you do it the first year, and then you go to some sort of zone base, which could be a soil type or other data layer you have available. Do a zone sampling, which still helps you manage the fertilizer, but you're not spending that much money on grid sampling.

Simer Virk
And every third or fourth year you go back to that grid sampling.

Blake Lanton
Yeah, that was going to be the next question. So basically, you know, if you haven't been grid sampling, starting out, you won't know bigger than a two-and-a-half-acre grid. And then maybe a couple of years after that, you can go to zone, and maybe your third or fourth year, go back to that two and a half to keep yourself in check.

Simer Virk
Yeah. And our goal is over the years, Are we improving our nutrient levels in a way. But also doing a good job of managing, so that that going back to every third, fourth or I even say if you're doing a really good job of zone sampling, you can even push it out to the fifth year, you know, is to give yourself a check.

Simer Virk
Are you going in the right direction, or are you doing the things right way in the field before you start going? You know, because zone you know, you're only pulling 8 to 10 samples max in a large field, even, so.

Blake Lanton
We'll go into that, I guess the most important thing there. You know, you can do all of this. You can do all the right soil sampling methods, but, if you're sprayers, I mean, if you're fertilizer rigs not calibrated, right, or if it's not able to…

Simer Virk
That's one thing. And I don't know, maybe you guys can help me how to address that properly in a way I think I may have, you know, offended someone at a county meeting. You know, my very first or second one. Do we need to pause it?

Scott Graham
Sounds like we got a Black Hawk about to land on us, I think.

Simer Virk
Which I can cut this out.

Scott Graham
There were some fighter jets that flew over last year. We were in the field. It was awesome.

Simer Virk
Yeah.

Scott Graham
Last sound, the bad guys here.

Blake Lanton
Yeah. That's right.

Simer Virk
So, I guess going back to the spreader calibration and it goes back to we're spending a lot of money on soil sampling or growers. All right. I have had growers who bring these books that the consultant or the companies bring in and put them on their table. And sometimes they tell me like, hey, I've got $25,000 or $30,000 in this, you know, just for soil sampling, creating maps.

Simer Virk
What do we do from here? Or how long? But the biggest thing is we can do the best job of that. But at the end of the day, all that is still being spread with a broadcast spreader, which, if it's not calibrated, then all that money spent and effort in making these good maps to understand, is still a waste, right?

Simer Virk
So, that's where the proper spreader calibration becomes important. It's a time-consuming process, but we just don't have anything else to make sure that we're doing a good job of applying that. The thing that kind of comes in becomes an issue in a way. Growers who own their, or who have their own spreaders, are usually a little more diligent about taking the time and doing it.

Simer Virk
It's the co-ops, the fertilizer retailers, all that, you know, they're running so many different blends, right? And stuff like that. Not that we're probably giving a shout out to Green Point in a way, but I've heard that they're starting to maintain a database of different calibrations with different product and stuff like that. They have performed. So that way if their operator is going out to do a certain amount or apply a certain product blend, they at least have a setting that they have tried or tested that, you know.

Simer Virk
So, I feel like something like that. But again, I don't know how many of our co-ops are really doing that too. At that time, it's not in the grower's hand. It's more of, are the fertilizer retail points, or the grower, or co-ops are making sure that the spreaders are calibrated.

Scott Graham
So next winter we're going to have calibration schools across the state. Right. And we can come in and…

Simer Virk
Eddie tells me back in the day, they used to do this all the time.

Scott Graham
Yeah.

Simer Virk
Yeah.

Scott Graham
It would be a a very beneficial and impactful program. I think.

Blake Lanton
And you do have a couple of kits with all the calibration things.

Simer Virk
Yeah so one thing, from Auburn, Alabama extension, that we're making sure that we provide to our regional extension agents so that they can help growers, who actually do not have the resources, which is a spread calibration kit or very simple process. We have kits available to us for growers to, or even co-ops, to utilize if they're interested in, you know, doing this.

Simer Virk
And we're there to support them, you know, whether that's providing them the documentation, how to do this properly or if you need to come out there and help them do it.

Scott Graham
Then you can just get out where your local county office or local county extension agent is and they can help you get that stuff.

Simer Virk
My plan is in a way, right now we only have 2 or 3 kids, but maybe by next year we're going to have, oh, we got what, 6 or 7 regions in a way, from extension.

Blake Lanton
Well, we've got, six regions and that would be seven agents. And we have all the positions filled.

Simer Virk
So let's say let's have each agent or each region have one kit. So that way it's local. It's there nearby.

Scott Graham
And you could makeshift your own right, with just some aluminum pans, I would assume.

Simer Virk
You can.

Scott Graham
It’s better than nothing.

Simer Virk
Yeah, yeah. But I think those are pretty cost effective in a way. It's just easy to get them. There standard spreader manufacturers sell them.

Scott Graham
Oh, okay.

Simer Virk.
Yeah.

Scott Graham
Well, let's shift gears a little bit and talk about planters.

Simer Virk
Yeah, so, where we are today, I guess, you know, right now, timing wise, we should be planting corn here soon. So, I usually, I've done this in the past, where even our research planters, I have taken them apart completely just to make sure we put the time and effort so they're ready to go in the field.

Simer Virk
So I think that would be one thing. We really want to make sure that the growers are taking the time right now to look at their planters. And I'm talking about when I said research planters, we only were doing one 4 or 6 row planters. We got a lot of total planters across the state. In fact, Blake told me he's got a 24 row planter.

Scott Graham
You've got one Blake?

Blake Lanton
Well, I don’t.

Simer Virk
In his region.

Blake Lanton
There is one over in the Black Belt.

Simer Virk
So, if you think about, you know, spending time and effort. But if you think about it, we only make one planter pass.

Scott Graham
Hopefully.

Simer Virk
We either are happy with it or we got to live with the consequences or we come back. Second plan to pass is costly, right? Every time.
Scott Graham
Yep.

Simer Virk
So, we always emphasize you better make sure that everything's working right and properly when you make that one planter pass.

Scott Graham
Yeah. You know, I told you this yesterday, but of all the cool stuff that you've got, the pretty maps with hot zones and whatnot, to me, the coolest thing that you have is the data on how variable row unit one can be on seeding depth versus row unit three, sometimes over an inch of difference. You know, Steve Brown always jokes, but it's kind of true that a corn agronomist wants a corn seedling to pop up.

Scott Graham
How far apart? Every 15 seconds is what he says. And of course, it's not really that close, but still making the point that with corn in particular, or they do need to be very uniformly planted, and that information just really opened my eyes of how important it is to check every single unit at some point.

Simer Virk
Yeah, and even Doctor Smith, mentioned yesterday, about thrips and everything. And that’s not my area.

Scott Graham
Yeah. Even in cotton, if you've got seedlings coming up over 3 or 4 days, sometimes some of them get all the thrips movement and some of them completely miss it. And that can complicate decisions for foliar sprays and those kinds of things. So it is important and other in cotton as well. Yeah.

Simer Virk
Yeah, so what Scott's referring to there, the seed depth variability, you know, and maybe Katie that's where we can do an article on planter checklist. You know different things to go through and all that. But is how common it is to have a seed depth variation across the planter, because our work kind of focused more on the top of the planter.

Simer Virk
Just making that one setting same across the whole planter where we're trying to actually make sure that our seeding depth is consistent, which is under the soil. So, we got some recommendations on, you make sure you check every row unit, and then your setting could vary.

Scott Graham
Two and two, aren’t, two and two across the whole thing.

Simer Virk
Yeah, exactly. So, and that's funny. Especially our 12 row planter guys, when you ask them how many rows they're digging to check your depth, their first answer is 12. And I'm like, well, how many are we really checking? They're like, well, maybe 3 or 4. You know.

Scott Graham
Yeah. Which is what I would do too.

Simer Virk
Which is a good thing. They know we should be checking 12.

Scott Graham
Yeah, yeah.

Simer Virk
You know, so well that's why you don't want to get out in the field and start doing this on the day that you want to plant. And that's why the emphasis right now, this is the time to get on that planter and make sure that it's ready to go two weeks from now, when you're ready to roll.

Scott Graham
That's right.

Blake Lanton
Yeah. So, the next thing, to look at. You know, we're talking about seed. So I think one of the things you mentioned is one of the most cost effective things that you can do, is have a seed monitor.

Simer Virk
Oh yeah. That's a no brainer in precision ag technology. If, I had to even and it don't matter if you are a 100-acre farmer or if you're a 3000 acre farmer, you know, planter mistakes, even if we do our best job, are pretty common, especially when we go from one field to other, or even when the soil type or stuff changes.

Simer Virk
If you don't have a seed monitor in the cab with you telling you what that planter is doing, you know you're losing money. I usually say the minute you make a pass in the field, the very first pass, that planter monitor starts paying for itself.

Blake Lanton
Yeah, going on from there. Actually, like you said, knowing how much seed you're putting out, especially these days, that's one of the…

Scott Graham
Well, that's the greatest cost we have.

Simer Virk
Yeah. Well, seed cost is one of the big costs, right? Corn, cotton especially. And even we start to emphasize a little bit more using this technology in peanuts, because right now we may be okay with our peanut seed cost because it works a little bit differently, you know, than our corn and cotton. But how long do we have it?

Simer Virk
You know, right now our guys may set their planters at six and seven seeds to the foot, but it's putting out eight and nine. They don't care too much. I bet you, they don't have the same mentality when it comes to corn and cotton. They want, you know, two seeds to a foot or a seed and a half to a foot.

Simer Virk
They're making sure. By doing that. That's what's happening in corn or cotton. But the other thing I emphasize, the importance of planter technology, even becomes more important, because now we're planting a lot of lower seedings. We're right on those seeding rates where we can't afford to have large skips or doubles anymore. Right? I remember five years ago when I was doing all my PhD research on planters and stuff, and I actually in North Alabama, we have growers, very high seeding rates, 38, 40,000, 43,000 on cotton.

Simer Virk
You know, at that, I think we're not as worried about is that seed is spaced well or not. But right now, we're more towards that 28, 29,000, where okay, you miss one seed in a row, certainly you have a gap that is more than a foot. Now you're talking about having a yield effect in cotton.

Scott Graham
Yeah. I've seen 19 five, 19,500 plants per acre pick 1,200 pounds. But it was perfect there. There was a stalk everywhere you put your foot, there's a stalk on your heel and on your toe. But that's hard. And they did not intend to do that. It worked out. But that's hard to do.

Simer Virk
Yeah, yeah.

Blake Lanton
So, the biggest thing there is, you want to watch each plant or foot or seed meter you want, to have a, you know, a little bit of an estimate on each seed meter and not the whole planter across the board.

Simer Virk
Yeah, well, so that's where we say you almost want to treat each row unit as a planter, right.

Scott Graham
Yeah.

Simer Virk
Which means you're doing the best job of setting the row unit and treat it as that, you know, this is the planter I'm working with. And if you have a 12-row planter now, certainly you got 12 planters you're working with in a way.

Simer Virk
Because when we look at an average seeding rate across a planter, those 12 rows, guess what? Six of them could be under seeding and six of them could be over seeding, which means your average population is still the same, which we want. But what we want to emphasize is your view. And that's why I usually say you better have a quality seed monitor, which means that's telling you what is your seeding rate simulation and all that.

Simer Virk
For each row. Because even on a 6, 8, or 12 row planters, I bet you there's always 1 or 2 row units that are just not doing what they're supposed to be doing. And that seed monitor helps you catch that, let you stop, fix it before you go ahead with planting the whole field.

Scott Graham
Yeah, having three extra plants in three feet on row one doesn't help you overcome having a three-foot gap on row two. So, you need to make sure down the row you've got what you're supposed to have.

Simer Virk
Exactly, each row has our target seeding rate.

Scott Graham
Right.

Simer Virk
You know right in there.

Blake Lanton
Well I'll push towards since we're talking about seed and everything. You had some pretty good data with peanuts, Scott, about in-furrow treatments.

Scott Graham
Yeah. That, we see a very consistent yield response in peanuts regardless of the app plant insecticide, in April, whether we used: Imidacloprid, Vydate, Ag Logic, Pymet. It didn't matter. We saw a very consistent 4- or 500-pound increase from having an app plant insecticide because we got into, you know, mid-May and into June, much less consistent.

Scott Graham
But in April, we need to have something go out. And even if you're not worried about tomato spotted wilt virus, we just still see from delayed maturity and the damage from thrips feeding them themselves. We still see yield responses pretty consistently from having app plant insecticides.

Blake Lanton
So, planting April, especially April.

Scott Graham
April through the first couple days of May. If it was mine, I would have something out there. For sure. And in cotton, you know, seed treatments this year are not where we need to cut cost. We had some information there, too, about a little over 100 pounds of lint. In five years of research trials in multiple locations, again, regardless of what we used, as long as it was, I recommended app plant insecticide, seed treatment or in-furrow.

Scott Graham
We averaged about 100 pounds of lint over our fungicide only check, because you can get a basic seed treatment, which has just a very small rate of the Imidacloprid seed treatment on it, for storage. But that is not enough. You want at least the standard seed treatment rate on there.

Blake Lanton
Yeah. I think that was the point that, Doctor Ron was trying to make yesterday, some of those delayed emergences, a lot of the treatment has kind of broken down or worn off by the time the plant comes up.

Scott Graham
Yeah.

Blake Lanton
You know.

Scott Graham
Once the seed bobs or absorbs water to start the germination process, your clock starts on that seed treatment and you've got, I mean you've got 21 to 28 days. But that clock is started. And if it's five days delayed getting all the way up to, you know to the soil, well that's five days you lost that seed treatment.

Scott Graham
And so, you want them to come out. And again, the timing of when the thrips flight is, I mean just a day or two can totally change stuff there as well.

Blake Lanton
Well, I also had a grower ask yesterday, across central Alabama, especially in some of our reduced teal or no teal situations, we have grasshopper problems and he's starting to burn down pretty soon. But he said, you know, it may be a month before he comes back with the planter. So, what could he do in his burn down, to maybe help with the grasshopper populations?

Blake Lanton
And I know we do have migrating adults that can still come back. But, you know, one of the cheap options that I told him, you know, was Dimilin.

Scott Graham
Yeah. So, grasshoppers are a challenge because they're very sporadic, both where they are and when they feed. Right. Sometimes you may go out there and it's like the ground's moving. There's so many grasshoppers hopping around, they don't really touch the cotton that much. Sometimes they'll eat 5 or 6 acres. You don't know when it's going to be.

Scott Graham
And so, one of our recommendations is in fields with historic problems with grasshoppers is to throw in Dimilin at burndown. Now another complication with grasshoppers is they start hatching out in March and they can hatch out through almost June. So, you can have new ones coming out of those egg pods down in the soil for a long time.

Scott Graham
Then once you start getting adults there too, that really complicates it. So, if we're burning down a month before we plant, I would recommend some Dimilin to try to kill those that are coming out now, because if not, we're going to have adult grasshoppers in the field when we do plant. But then I would also consider maybe looking at it, depending on how much risk I'm willing to take behind the planter, you know, within or so a week plus or minus of planting, putting out another shot of a couple ounces of Dimilin, maybe throwing in a Pyrethroid or something to get some knocked down because that Dimilin is a growth regulator. So, it doesn't kill them the day you spray it. But.

Scott Graham
Unfortunately, grasshoppers are just always going to be a risk deal. There's never going to be thresholds. It's just always going to be how many of them that you see hopping around out there, are you comfortable living with.

Blake Lanton
And you mentioned Pyrethroid. It's not going to have an effect on adults.

Scott Graham
Well it's very sporadic. It's good on the nymphs. On the immatures, but it's sporadic on the adults. If we get into a situation where there's a mixed population and a lot of adults, you have got to go with Acephate at that point. And you know, rate may depend, but half a pound up to maybe three quarters or two thirds of a pound, to get good knock down control of those adults.

Scott Graham
I'm hoping we can find the field somewhere nearby this year that we can do some more spray demos in and just try to, you know, see, but yeah, grasshoppers are tricky. And for some reason, Blake, it's like we're the only state that deals with them. I don't know why and every now and then Georgia talks about them.

Scott Graham
But like, when we have our meetings with all of them, just all across the belt, they're always like, all right, Scott, well, you're the only person with grasshoppers. What did they do this year.

Blake Lanton
Well, again, you know, spending 15 years in South Georgia, I never once even thought they were considered a pest.

Scott Graham
Yeah, very rare.

Blake Lanton
And then my first year in central Alabama, the first field I walked into, a farmer was going to plant and I said, well, I'll just, you know, ride over there and see if this come up yet.

Blake Lanton
I mean, I just wanted to see some cotton coming up out of the ground. And I walked out there, and they were coming up in rows in front of me. And I said, well, we may have a problem here. I don't know if they ever would have done the damage, but there was enough where they could eat the 100 acre field up.

Blake Lanton
You know, we got to do something now. And the airplane was spraying the next day, you know.

Scott Graham
And something else important. I kind of alluded to these pods that they live in, in the soil and that, you know, their overwintering is eggs, which means cold isn't going to bother them and snow didn't bother them. You know, none of that kind of stuff. The only thing that's going to impact on them is either the tillage that mechanically kills the eggs, or if we feel like it's been a really wet winter, and the soil stays saturated for a long time, it can kind of drown them out.

Scott Graham
At this point. The weather's been so different. I don't remember if it's been a wet winter or not, to be honest.

Simer Virk
It's been a snowy winter for sure.

Scott Graham
Yeah, it's that one week anyway. You know, it's freezing cold one week, and then the next week you're wearing shorts and a t-shirt outside.

Blake Lanton
January didn't seem as wet as it had in previous years. Now, we have gotten some torrential downpours. Recently and a few showers here, but, I would say we're close to average, but probably not there.

Scott Graham
So, the weather is probably not going to impact overwintering very much, would be my guess. But I've always told if you want to sound like an idiot, make a prediction about insects.

Blake Lanton
Yeah, that's right.

Simer Virk
All right, let's bring Katie in. She's been listening a lot.

Katie Nichols
In the hot seat.

Scott Graham
So, Katie, tell us what is Alabama Extension doing on communications? Well, you know what. Let's back that up.

Simer Virk
What's her role?

Scott Graham
Tell us what your role is with Alabama extension.

Katie Nichols
Right. So I'm the news unit manager. And that sounds like it's just a few little things but it entails quite a few. So we manage the website and we add anybody's, timely information. We write news articles, we upload podcasts. We manage web pages that talk about events. Really anything that you can fathom when it comes www.aces.edu.

Katie Nichols
So, I work with a lot of folks like y'all that are out doing work in the field to try to communicate what you're learning in a way that is both professional and easy to understand. And I think that's my favorite part of my job. So, it's never the same every day. I'm learning something new from y'all. Or maybe I'm learning from the human sciences group, but it's something that is applicable to me or others.

Katie Nichols
And so that's my primary job, is to take what y'all are learning every day and share it with other folks.

Scott Graham
And you're across all teams?

Katie Nichols
I am.

Scott Graham
One thing that I still… I've been here five years and I've been working with different extensions for longer than that, but I still struggle to wrap my head around just how big extension is, how diverse it is.

Katie Nichols
Yes, It's huge. We were at a training, telling people how to or help them better market their programs and events. A couple of weeks ago, and I just started looking around the room and trying to remember who was part of what group, and I did a pretty good job, but there were a lot of people in that room that I either don't see all the time or talked to on the phone more than see them in person.

Katie Nichols
And so, extension is huge and you know, the hardest thing to wrap my head around is that there's something for everyone, whether you're filing taxes, or planting crops, or raising kids.

Scott Graham
That's what I tell people, I'm like, you know, whether you're a thousand-acre cotton farmer or you're somebody who's interested in how to budget, for you want to go on a trip somewhere, how do I budget for that? There's somebody in extension that can help you with whatever you need.

Katie Nichols
Plant tomatoes in a bucket. I mean, fun stuff. But, there's all kinds of information. So, you know, the biggest thing that I like to do is to tell people that while they can, of course, call y'all if y'all aren't available, a lot of the stuff that you write is available online. So the easiest thing to do is to go to ACES.edu and type in what you're looking for.

Katie Nichols
And if you can't find it, then there's likely someone in your county office who can help you print that off and go home with something. And of course they can call y'all or call me, but we like to be able to send people away with something to help them take the next step. For what they are looking for.

Simer Virk
Well, today, I always call it. I call it the digital extension. The need for today, in a way, because traditional programing is still good. It works. Right? We want to we want to meet people face to face to tell them all that. But not everybody's there.

Katie Nichols
Right.

Simer Virk
And we have got to find different ways to reach all these people.

Simer Virk
And for example, this podcast is one not everybody listens to podcasts, but those who do. There's an avenue for them to get information right. And it's the same way where available through phone or other media. But the website is where if somebody doesn't want to, some days you just don't want to call anybody, and just like to go search.

Simer Virk
Hey, I want to learn about insect control, or a plant remain or something, and there if we have done a factsheet or any article or something, it kind of pulls up right there. So it's just another avenue that all the information's right there.

Scott Graham
Yeah. I always joke that because I have two kids under 3 and one that call me any time and I'm probably awake, but I'm glad we do have the website where they can actually go to and not call at midnight.

Katie Nichols
I can identify with that.

Scott Graham
Yeah.

Katie Nichols
Four under three at one point.

Scott Graham
Well alright. Katie, we appreciate you joining us today. Blake, again you. And thanks to Josh and Brady here at Prattville for letting us set up in the, in the office to do our podcast. Simer, enjoyed it. And, for all our listeners again, we always appreciate you all tuning in. And, if any of us can ever do anything to help, please don't hesitate to reach out and let us know. Or if you have any topics or things that you want to talk about or if you want to be on the podcast, just let us know and we'd be glad to accommodate any way we can.

Scott Graham
So with that, we'll sign off and be looking for another episode soon.

Announcer

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