

PROSPERITY IN POULTRY

CALS alumnus finds fulfillment in poultry industry

BY VANESSA BEESON



Steve McLaurin holds a baby chick. Photo by Vanessa Beeson.

As a \$7 billion dollar industry, poultry is Mississippi's number one commodity. The Mississippi poultry industry, which employs nearly 55,000 Mississippians, is ranked the fifth largest nationally. Nearly all graduates of Mississippi State University's Department of Poultry Science have a job waiting for them when they graduate and it has been that way for quite some time.

Steve McLaurin, MSU alumnus, saw tremendous opportunity in poultry science when he graduated in 1979. As he seized that opportunity, he also discovered a deep sense of comradery within the close-knit community. Reflecting on a career that spans 35 years, McLaurin says it's the people that make him love what he does.

"My favorite part of my job is interacting with so many good people every day," McLaurin said. "Our company has very high standards and a caring and nurturing atmosphere that allows you to grow in your job."

AN OPPORTUNITY SEIZED

McLaurin grew up on his family's farm in Jones County on the outskirts of Laurel, Mississippi. He always knew he would pursue some kind of career in agriculture and when it came time to declare a major, he chose poultry science because of the tremendous opportunity the industry presented.

"In late 1970s and early 1980s, chicken farms were being built every day. Growth like that wasn't necessarily happening across other agricultural sectors," McLaurin said. "I saw the poultry industry expanding at a fast rate and I knew I could grow and mature with it."

THE PROCESS

McLaurin is responsible for all live operations for the Peco Foods complex in Sebastopol, Mississippi. His responsibility begins with pullets, which are the genetically superior birds that are purchased and reared to become breeders. They move to the breeder farms at approximately 21 weeks. Once the eggs are laid, they are transferred to the hatchery. The broiler chicks then go to broiler houses on local chicken farms. McLaurin oversees the entire process from pullets through to the catch and live haul when the chickens are transported to the processing plant.

Oversight of the feed mill is also a part of his responsibility. A nutritionist formulates a proper diet for all of the chickens and the grain is mixed at the mill, which is attached to a loop track.

"We try to get all of the local grain we can," McLaurin said. "Beyond that, however, the grain is shipped in via railway. Once the grain arrives, the feed is mixed through a monitored, automated process and the grain is then delivered to the broiler houses."

COMMUNITY-ORIENTED, DRIVEN BY COMPASSION

McLaurin makes giving back a priority.

"I grew up with that farmer mentality of taking care of family, neighbors, and the land," McLaurin said. "It's good to give back."

He participates in raising money for the John Herman Hickman Foundation, an organization founded by Peco Foods, which provides aid to victims of natural disasters,



Steve McLaurin at the feedmill, in front of one of the trucks that transports feed to several Peco broiler houses. Photo by Vanessa Beeson.

scholarships for employees, growers, and descendants, and grants funds to charitable organizations.

Additionally, McLaurin has been an active leader in the Mississippi Poultry Association, or MPA, for more than 20 years. As vice-chairman, he oversaw this year's auction for the MPA Foundation, which raises scholarship funds for students interested in pursuing careers in poultry.

"Steve is a very energetic and supportive member of the MPA. As vice-chairman, he helped raise more than \$26,000 for our annual auction, which is the most we've ever raised in a single year," said Mark Leggett, MPA president. "He's been on our organization's board of directors for several years and on Jan. 1, 2015, he will be board chairman for the second time."

Last year, to honor close friend Henry J. Bustin, McLaurin and his wife established the Joe Bustin Memorial Endowed Scholarship at MSU.

ADVICE TO THE NEXT GENERATION

McLaurin thinks the poultry industry is as promising now as it was when he started in the field. He says a great education combined with an open mind and steadfast work ethic will help graduates succeed.

"The degree gives you a general understanding and teaches you the basics of the industry. It's a great starting point," McLaurin said. "It's going to take long hours and a lot of experience to move up through the ranks. I have six different segments that I am responsible for. It was critical for me to move from one segment to the next and learn about each individual process in order to advance. Instead of honing in on one perfect job, be open-minded to all the industry has to offer."

ALUMNI GIVING

Establishing an endowed scholarship creates an Infinite Impact in the lives of students and creates a legacy for your family. Each individual gift carries with it the power to change a student's life forever and perhaps, through that student's career, change the world.

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences alumni impact the college and university with every dollar they give to Mississippi State. And the MSU Foundation has made it easy to give, tailoring your gift to meet your financial objectives.

Meet some of our alumni and friends who are giving back and the students they are impacting.

JOE BUSTIN MEMORIAL ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

Steve and Kay McLaurin established the Joe Bustin Memorial Endowed Scholarship at Mississippi State in memory of their friend, Joe Bustin, who passed away in December of 2013. Bustin was a 1978 graduate of landscape contracting and ran his own landscaping business called Bustin Landscape Construction in Laurel, Mississippi. He was a wonderful husband, father, outdoorsman, and friend. His legacy will live on through the physical beauty he helped to create, the lives he touched, and the endowed scholarship in his name. This is a relatively new endowed scholarship and has not been awarded yet.

BARRY AND LANA KNIGHT ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

Barry and Lana Knight established the Barry and Lana Knight Endowed Scholarship for College of Agriculture and Life Sciences students. Knight received his master's degree from Mississippi State University in 1988. He currently serves as executive vice president of Jimmy Sanders, Inc. in the Memphis, Tennessee, regional office.

Junior biochemistry major Emily McBride is the recipient of the Barry and Lana Knight Endowed Scholarship. McBride plans to attend medical school after graduation.

"I am so thankful to have the Barry and Lana Knight Endowed Scholarship. This opportunity has allowed me to fully focus on academics during my time here at Mississippi State, and I hope to eventually give back to my community through a career in medicine."

TED AINSWORTH MEMORIAL ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

Donna Ainsworth established the Ted Ainsworth Memorial Endowed Scholarship as a tribute to her husband. Ted Michael Ainsworth earned a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Education in 1976 and a Master of Education in Agricultural and Extension Education in 1978. Ainsworth was always involved with agriculture as evidenced by his participation in many Future Farmers of America functions. He was a lifetime member of the National Association of Agricultural Educators and the Mississippi Association of Vocational Agricultural Teachers. Ainsworth died in June 2007.

Two students are currently being supported by the Ted Ainsworth Memorial Endowed Scholarship, Derek Huffman and Anastasia Lankford, and both plan on becoming agriculture teachers.

Senior agricultural information science major Anastasia Lankford was honored to receive the Ted Ainsworth Endowed Scholarship.

"As someone focused on agricultural education, I felt so honored to be the recipient of such a meaningful award that has helped me financially as I finish my senior year. Supportive alumni like the Ainsworth family make me very proud to attend MSU. My plans after college include teaching high school agriculture in the state. It is difficult to think of a more meaningful job, one that provides students with a hands-on way to explore their world."

Junior agricultural information science major Derek Huffman likewise is thrilled to be a recipient of the Ainsworth scholarship.

"It was such an honor to receive the Ted Ainsworth Memorial Scholarship. Not only was he an inspiration as a person, he was a legend as an agriculture teacher, and part of the reason I chose to become an agriculture teacher. I could not be thankful enough for what he meant to everyone and what his family has done in his memory to help students further their education."



Ana Lankford



Emily McBride



Derek Huffman

These are just a few of the endowed scholarships funded through our alumni and friends. Find out how you can help create an Infinite Impact. Contact Jud Skelton at jud.skelton@foundation.msstate.edu or 662-325-0643 or Dees Britt at dbritt@foundation.msstate.edu or 662-325-2837.