

LEADERS IN AGRICULTURE

CALS alumni lead at state and national level

By Vanessa Beeson

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF AGRICULTURE WITHIN THE state of Mississippi is vast. In 2015, the farm-gate value of agricultural and forestry production in the state totaled \$7.4 billion and agricultural and forestry production resulted in \$16.1 billion value-added to Mississippi's economy. Agricultural research expenditures at Mississippi State University totaled \$99 million, ranking the university eighth in the nation. The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has its finger on the pulse of agriculture throughout the state and beyond. In 2015, several alumni of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences went on to serve in leadership roles at the state and national level. The leadership of these alumni plants seeds of economic viability and community prosperity throughout Mississippi and beyond.



Glenn McCullough, Jr., was appointed as the executive director of the Mississippi Development Authority.



Sledge Taylor was elected as chairman of the National Cotton Council.



Allen Eubanks was selected as the Mississippi Farmer of the Year.



John Gordon Campbell was designated as the Deputy Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce.

Glenn McCullough

GOVERNOR PHIL BRYANT appointed Glenn McCullough, Jr., 1977 agricultural economics alumnus, as the executive director of the Mississippi Development Authority in summer 2015.

“Our goals at the Mississippi Development Authority are accelerating growth, strengthening the economy, and attracting more and better career opportunities, which can enable Mississippians to achieve a higher quality of life,” McCullough said. “Economic development is a team sport, and our job at MDA is to work with partners across the state.”

Currently, McCullough oversees 250 team members focused on supporting communities, industries, and businesses throughout the state to achieve their goals. He explained the Mississippi Development Authority works in tandem with multiple organizations in order to achieve those goals. Partners include the state’s economic development professionals, the Mississippi Department of Transportation, the employment security commission, and others.

“We also rely on community colleges, research institutions, planning and development districts, and government at all levels,” McCullough said.

He spoke specifically to collaboration with the state’s public universities.

“While I graduated from Mississippi State and I am forever maroon, I am proud of all our institutions of higher learning,” McCullough said. “Mississippi has eight public universities, all distinct in their roles and advantages. It’s a unique opportunity to work with all of them.”

McCullough’s economic development experience is vast. He is a former chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority, or TVA, one of the largest regional economic organizations in the country, which provides energy across seven states. Prior to his tenure at TVA, he was mayor of Tupelo, Mississippi. McCullough currently serves on two corporate boards.

He’s proud to have been a part of

the Fair Park District and the Pontotoc, Union, Lee Alliance – just two points of pride in his long list of achievements.

“I’ve been fortunate to work with talented leaders. Many public and private leaders in Tupelo were visionary in their support of the Fair Park District, which created a new face for the city,” McCullough said.

He discussed the team effort of the Pontotoc, Union, Lee Alliance, which helped make the dream of the Toyota Motor Manufacturing Mississippi plant a reality.

“The TVA played a leadership role working with local, regional, and state leaders to help make Mississippi the only state in the country with both Nissan and Toyota automotive plants,” McCullough said. “Today, the Toyota plant in Blue Springs, Mississippi, produces a Toyota Corolla every 72 seconds. The team there assembled 500,000 Corollas faster than any other Toyota plant in the country.

“When Mississippians set their sights on a goal, it will happen,” he continued. “I have great faith in the people of my home state.”

McCullough said his time at MSU offered a great opportunity to learn and expand his horizons.

“Agricultural economics is a great gateway to business, and how business relates to agriculture, a major target sector of the Mississippi economy,” he said. “It was a fairly diverse major. Being exposed to a lot of different segments afforded me opportunities down the road, including working for an international company as well as in my family’s business, McCullough Steel Products, based out of Tupelo.”

McCullough appreciates his former professors.

“I am forever grateful for my professors, Dr. James Hamill, Dr. Verner Hurt and Dr. Warren Couvillion,” McCullough said. “They had my best interest at heart, and as I look back, I appreciate even more how much they tried to guide me down the right course.”



ABOVE: Glenn McCullough (far right) with Governor Bryant (center) and others at the grand opening of the Yokohama Tire Company in West Point. The group broke open a cask of sake to commemorate the occasion. **BELOW:** Campbell speaks to EPA officials about cotton production in Mississippi.



John Gordon Campbell

JOHN GORDON CAMPBELL, 2001 agricultural pest management graduate, was designated as the Deputy Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce in 2015.

He serves as deputy to Commissioner Cindy Hyde-Smith and helps oversee the management of the agency’s divisions, including administrative services, development and implementation of policy and budgets, marketing of agricultural products, regulation of agricultural industries, and investigations of agricultural-related crimes.

“These functions are aimed at providing efficient and effective services to Mississippi’s consumers, farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses. In addition, I always strive to fulfill the Commissioner’s vision of supporting and advancing agriculture in Mississippi,” Campbell explained.

He says he looks forward to building on the Commissioner’s successes since taking office in 2012 and credits his predecessor, Andy Prosser, former deputy commissioner and MSU alumnus, as laying a solid foundation of accomplishments that allowed for a

smooth transition into his current role.

“As a personal challenge, I’ll work to foster teamwork, encourage professional development, and provide career opportunities to our employees thus increasing our productivity, ensuring the best use of taxpayer dollars, and delivering better services to the citizens of our state,” he said.

Specifically, he has set his sights on the Mississippi State Fairgrounds and the Mississippi Agriculture and Forestry Museum.

“Both of these facilities are invaluable because, whether it is for a 4-H or Future Farmers of America livestock show or one of the many other agricultural events, both venues attract thousands of children each year allowing our next generation of leaders to witness the story of agriculture and its impact on the state,” he said.

From an overall agricultural perspective, he looks forward to continuing his work opening new markets for Mississippi’s agricultural commodities as well as addressing the many issues producers currently face.

“In light of today’s regulatory climate, I plan to dedicate significant time on issues impacting agriculture. I believe in order to be effective on policy issues, it is important for Mississippi to have a seat at the table ensuring our voice is heard when decisions are being made on agricultural policy,” he said.

His advice to current students is to take advantage of a unique time in the agricultural industry.

“With a growing world population and fast-paced technological advancements, it is the ideal time to pursue a career in the agricultural industry. The opportunities are endless in traditional and non-traditional agricultural fields such as precision agriculture and incorporating unmanned aerial vehicles into the industry, which lead to other areas such as software development, law, and engineering just to name a few,” he concluded.

Sledge Taylor

SLEDGE TAYLOR, 1974 AGRICULTURAL engineering, technology, and business graduate, was elected as the National Cotton Council chairman for 2015.

“The chairman is the top industry leadership position. There are seven industry segments: producers, cotton ginner, the cottonseed industry, warehousing, marketing cooperatives, merchants, and textile manufacturers. Although I am also a producer, my involvement in the NCC developed through the cotton ginning segment,” Taylor explained.

Taylor serves in the position for one year. The National Cotton Council represents the industry before lawmakers in Washington.

“We work on funding for priority programs of the cotton industry through the appropriation process. Our goal is to make sure our priorities are funded,” he said.

This year, Taylor worked on Farm Bill implementation and education, including addressing technical details of the Stacked Income Protection Plan (STAX) program.

“We are hoping to split irrigated and non-irrigated cotton acreage in STAX next year,” he said.

He also provided testimony for the House Agricultural Committee, Conservation and Forestry Subcommittee on the Environmental Protection Agency’s The Waters of the United States ruling.

When he is not in the nation’s capital, he attends meetings around the country, visiting leaders from various cotton industry segments. One such meeting was the Annual Conference of the International Textile Manufacturers Federation, held in the U.S., in San Francisco, for the first time in nearly 20 years.

“The NCC has a dedicated and professional staff, including a president who is the chief staff officer, to carry out our priorities, but it also takes active participation by members in the cotton industry,” he said. “I like to travel as much as I can to different industry segments to listen to any concerns. I also feel that I need to communicate what the NCC is doing and keep people



Taylor meets with congressional members during a trip to Washington, DC.

updated on our issues and achievements.”

He says this role has helped illustrate how important it is to educate the general public about cotton.

“It amazes me the number of people, who do not understand agriculture. As each generation gets farther from the fields where families may have once lived and farmed, it is increasingly critical to try to educate the public on what we do as farmers and as the cotton industry,” Taylor said. “There are a lot of misconceptions out there. It’s vital to communicate the good things we do, both as producers and within different segments of the industry.”

“The NCC works on a broad range of issues within the cotton industry and agriculture,” he continued. “It has been a busy year and I am proud of the staff and all that we have accomplished and the proactive attitude between staff and industry leadership.”

Taylor is also president of the Como Consolidated Gin Co., Inc. in north Mississippi and owns Buckeye Farms, in Como, Mississippi, where he grows cotton, corn, soybeans, wheat, peanuts and raises cattle.

“I have been around a cotton gin for as long as I remember. We run an efficient, upgraded gin that fills a need in the community,” he said. “As a producer, we are very committed to cotton. We have 1,800 acres dedicated to cotton in northwest Mississippi. One farm is west of Como in the eastern edge of the Delta; we also farm east of Como in the Hill Region.”

Taylor explained how his degree at MSU helped him develop as an agricultural leader.

“It was a broad degree that gave me a solid background in a range of fields like accounting, animal science, soils, business law, economics, and biology. You see it at work on my farm—we have a very diverse operation.”

Taylor encourages current MSU students to select a career path they enjoy.

“I’ve gone through tough times in farming, but I enjoy it. Pick something that you love to do,” Taylor recommended. “Don’t get discouraged. It takes a long time to get enough experience to figure things out. I have been farming for 42 years and the older I get, the more I realize how much I have to learn.”

Taylor and his wife have three sons and two grandsons.

“I have a lot of good help,” Taylor said of his many endeavors and multiple hats.

“I have a son on the farm, a gin manager, and great employees. The fact that I have such good people helping me, allows me to do all of the things I do.”

“The NCC position has been a great learning experience. It is amazing how much I continue to learn about the cotton industry, within this country and internationally. There are a lot of really great people in the cotton industry and their economic impact on local communities is significant. A financially sound rural America is one of my primary goals and I enjoy working through the NCC to bring that about,” he concluded.

Allen Eubanks

ALLEN EUBANKS, 1992 AGRICULTURAL economics alumnus, was selected as 2015 Mississippi winner of the Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year award.

His operation, Eubanks Produce, is one of Mississippi’s largest vegetable farms. He has acreage across six counties and into Alabama.

In addition to Eubanks Produce, he and his wife Janice own Charlie’s U-Pik, where customers hand select their own harvest, and Farm Fresh Gourmet, an entity that provides products, recipes, and canning and preserving tips. Charlie’s U-Pik, named after his father Charlie Eubanks, is a 100-acre produce farm where customers can pick their own fruits and vegetables. Farm Fresh focuses on developing recipes and creating products, like green tomato relish, pickles, and strawberry pepper jelly.

The entire operation encompasses approximately 2,800 acres; crops include cantaloupe, watermelon, peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, sweet corn, squash, and soybeans. This past year, Eubanks planted sweet potatoes for the first time.

A farmer for more than 20 years, Eubanks is a fourth-generation farmer and the legacy continues on with his entire family.

“I’ve loved farming for as long as I can remember. My grandfather held me as a baby and told everyone I would be his ‘little farmer,’” he said. “I am honored and greatly blessed to be able to carry on the family farm tradition. My wife, Janice, and our children, Andrew, Allison, Joshua, and Jacob are all involved in the farm. Janice handles all of the accounting and office staff which is huge in our business. All of our kids are heavily involved in our U-Pik operation during

the summer. Some of them will probably carry the torch to the next generation, but time will tell.”

Eubanks and his family give back to the community in several ways. He has served on the boards of the George County Co-op and Southern Ag Credit and was a member of the USDA Farm Service Agency state committee. He’s also been recognized by the Mississippi Public Health Association and is a member of several organizations including the National Watermelon Association, Produce Marketing Association, and United Produce Association. Janice makes sure the operation is compliant with the Produce Traceability Initiative and Good Agricultural Practice. She also serves on the Ivy League Garden Club, on the board of the United Way for Jackson and George Counties, and is a 4-H volunteer. Recently, they held a farm-to-table dinner, which raised \$3,000 for St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital.

Eubanks said his time at MSU helped him prepare for a career in farming, which has evolved over the years.

“Farming has changed drastically since I began. We have many more tools available and are able to manage down to the square foot now,” he said.

Eubanks uses precision agricultural tools including GPS, precision spraying, land leveling, and drain tile installation. He also uses drip irrigation.

“My degree provided a solid base. At MSU, I learned a lot about agriculture and economics, but more importantly I learned about the world and how things flow. I learned how to get the answers I didn’t know.”

He says since then he’s reached out to MSU Experiment Station scientists and extension personnel for help multiple times with a particular problem or question.

His advice to current students is to figure out what you like to do and do it with passion.

“My favorite place to be has always been the field,” he said. “I enjoy seeing the seeds get planted in the ground and develop into crops that feed thousands.” ❖

Allen Eubanks co-owns Eubanks Produce Farms with wife Janice. Eubanks grows diversified truck crops of fruits and vegetables, as well as classic row crops and is the 2015 Mississippi Farmer of the Year.

