

# News from the Georgia State Senate

Since the state's founding, agriculture and agricultural-related industries have always been a strong component of Georgia's economy and is essential to the economic viability of the United States.

Recognizing the vital role that agriculture plays in the state's economy, the General Assembly passed a comprehensive tax reform plan to provide additional incentives for businesses to invest in Georgia's agricultural industry.

This landmark legislation will adjust our agriculture tax policy for consistency and extend three major tax exemptions to the industry.

Overall, these tax policies are estimated to save the industry about \$17 million annually, a major incentive to invest in agribusiness in this state.

According to this legislation, farmers will not have to pay sales taxes on goods they buy to feed animals or grow crops. These are referred to as agricultural inputs and are vital to the final product, which are then sold to distributors. They may include: machinery; commercial animal feeds, commercial fertilizers, agricultural and vegetable

seed; hay products. Further, farmers will be sales tax exempt on the energy consumed in agriculture production.

Currently, agriculture exemptions have been cobbled together over the years and lack a sense of consistency. For example, the energy used to heat and cool poultry houses is exempt from state sales taxes however the energy used in other livestock facilities such as dairy and swine are not exempt. The tax policies that were adopted by the state legislature were a step in the right direction toward addressing inconsistencies in Georgia's tax code and are highly indicative of the state's ongoing commitment to create a more streamlined process for the state's key industries, such as agriculture.

Last year alone, the agricultural industry in Georgia supported the economy to the tune of \$107 billion, providing employment for hundreds of thousands of Georgians statewide. In 2009, Georgia was ranked in the top ten nation-

ally in estimated value of exports for seven different agricultural commodities. Of those seven, we ranked first in export value for poultry and peanuts. Georgia ranked second behind Texas for cotton and cottonseed. The three other commodities are fruit and preparations, unmanufactured tobacco, and tree nuts, for which Georgia ranked third behind California and Oregon.

In two-thirds of Georgia's counties, food and fiber production represent the largest or second largest segment of all goods and services produced. In fact, food and fiber production/processing generated a total economic impact of \$65 billion for the state and created more than 351 thousand jobs in 2008.

Since agriculture is one of the single largest components of our state's economy, the Georgia legislature allocated \$40.7 million to the Dept. of Agriculture with total funds (included federal funds and agency retained fees) accounting for \$51.3 million of the state's total budget.

FY 2013 Budget for the Department of Agriculture and Attached Agencies

· Added \$150,000 for

personnel to assist farmers with implementing the federal H1B/H2A Guest Worker Program.

· Added \$600,000 to the Agricultural Experiment Station for specialized crop scientists to address new threats to crop production.

· Restored \$362,657 to the Cooperative Extension Service in order to preserve the current level of personnel and services for county extension efforts and the state's 4H program.

As you can see, supporting this multi-billion dollar industry is critical not only to our state's long-term economic growth and development, but also to the 51st Senate District's overall success. Our prime location within the heart of North Georgia's mountain country and rich availability of resources such as land and farming equipment makes this area the perfect location for the continued growth and expansion of Georgia's agriculture industry.

State Sen. Steve Gooch represents the 51st Senate District which includes Dawson, Fannin, Gilmer, Lumpkin, Pickens, and Union counties and portions of Forsyth and White counties. He may be reached at (404) 656-9221.

## Butterfly...continued from page 1A

Meschell Rigsby, Kathy Denton, One Goal, Vernon McIntyre's Appalachian Grass, and Blairsville's very own Georgia Highlanders.

The Butterfly Bluegrass Festival features music originating from old-time music, folk music, country, and a pinch of the Blues. Visitors are treated to a range of musical styles on a variety of instruments including acoustic guitar, banjo, fiddle, mandolin, and the upright bass.

Vendors also were a big part of the festival with an amazing display of wood carvings by Brian Ledford. The food was old-timey and included slow cooked barbecue; honey glazed pecans, ice cream, fresh pork skins, hamburgers, and hotdogs. It served the purpose of keeping hunger pains at bay.

Many thanks go to Ken Ensley, Phil Nichols, Jim Holzinger, Gerald Patterson, Brian Ledford, and Commis-



**Brian Ledford was one of the many crafters on hand for the Third Annual Butterfly Bluegrass Festival. Photo/Janice Boling**

sioner Lamar Paris, Union County Saddle Club, all the bands, musicians, and everyone in attendance. The Butterfly Bluegrass festival would not be possible without the vision of a few and the support of many.

New this year was a change in venue. The Union

County Arena was the perfect location for the event. All proceeds go to The Glenda Gooch House.

Glenda was a native of Blairsville, and was the recipient of a heart transplant when she was only 8 years old. The community held a prayer vigil as she under-

went surgery, and the vigil continued as she recovered. She was loved and respected, and the community watched her grow into a fine, courageous, young lady.

Early in 2008, at the age of 22, Glenda passed away from heart failure at Emory Hospital in Atlanta. Through the joint efforts of a loving family and community, the Glenda Gooch House was created as a tribute to Glenda.

The Glenda Gooch House became a reality through the generous outpouring of support and hard work of many in the community. The house is located on Wallings Road across from Union General Hospital.

Glenda's family understands the need to be near loved ones, who are hospitalized, no matter if it is for one night or for several.

The North Georgia News is proud to cover this uplifting festival each year. We look forward to No. 4. See you next year!

## BETA Club...continued from page 1A

invited 50 new members, 45 accepted the invitation.

BETA Club sponsor Mark Donahue said the event was the first of its kind. BETA Club awards are usually handed out on Senior Honors Night.

BETA Club President Cameron Schuette stepped to the podium and introduced the 2011-12 BETA Club Executive Committee.

Club Secretary Callie Dyer talked about her project that involved helping out at the Union County Primary School. The BETA members would dress up as their favorite book characters, everything from Sponge Bob Square Pants to Captain America and read to children in each class from kindergarten to second grade. Callie stressed the importance of reading and how something as simple as reading a book can affect a child's life in a positive manner.

Executive Committee members Alex Drost, Irene Payne, and Lesley Nichols spoke about the community service projects that they were involved in. Drost worked with the Thanksgiving project by serving meals to families in need. Twenty members took part in this event and 130 full, traditional meals were delivered to families in our community. He also took part in the local can drive and filled two grocery carts full of canned goods to those in need.

Irene was involved with the Christmas project that provided wrapped gifts to children during the holiday season. More than 20 members assisted with the project. Irene spoke of how great the BETA members were for lending a helping hand but how the joy of giving was even greater. The only thing she regrets is that she wasn't there on Christmas morning to see the look on a child's face who had received a gift.

Lesley would step forward and talk about her involvement with the beauty pageant at the primary school. Every girl that entered from kindergarten through second grade received a sash, tiara, and flowers.

The Union County BETA Club also sponsored a program to raise money to assist high school students with prom expenses. They were given gift certificates to res-

taurants and gas cards. The club also had students sign a pledge to not drink and drive on prom night and to provide awareness to the overall dangers of drunk driving.

The BETA Club then honored its members who had outstanding participation, attendance, and involvement in community service projects. Ward, Secretary Megan Barnett, Dyer, and Schuette handed out the awards to each member who excelled during the school year. Sponsor Donahue then presented the BETA Club chords to the graduating seniors from the club. Each senior will wear his or her gold chord over their gown during Graduation Ceremonies on May 25th.

At the end of the event, current president, Schuette, introduced the new Executive

Committee for the 2012-13 school year. Next year's council will consist of: President T Bentley, Vice President James Rowe, secretaries Jacob Cook and Lorene Irvin. The Executive Committee will consist of Marissa Akin, Jeanelle Arnold, Gloria Bowen, Taylor Burton, Austin Crosby, Emily Cummings, and Mikala Jones.

The conclusion was given by T Bentley who thanked Donahue, who is stepping down as sponsor after this year. Bentley thanked Donahue for his positive influence and welcomed new sponsor, Lauren Brown, who will be taking over as club sponsor. Bentley is looking forward to the challenge of being the new president and plans on next year being just as successful as this year.