

**2025**

# COMMODITY GROUP REPORT

PRODUCER ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING



**MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™**  
CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI RESEARCH  
AND EXTENSION CENTER





## **Dear Valued Partner,**

The mission of the Central Mississippi Research & Extension Center (CMREC) is to develop research and Extension programming to serve the needs of central Mississippi communities by improving the economic and personal well-being of agricultural producers, landowners, allied industry, and rural and urban citizens. To fulfill this mission, it is critical that we connect with our stakeholders to identify needs and work together to develop impactful solutions.

On the third Tuesday in February each year, area producers and other stakeholders come together with MSU research and Extension faculty and community partners for the Central Mississippi Producer Advisory Council (PAC) Meeting. This meeting provides an opportunity to discuss important agricultural needs, university research, and Extension programming designed to strengthen agronomic crops, horticultural crops, livestock and timber production, as well as the stewardship of other natural resources. The following pages contain the report from the 2025 PAC Meeting, which was held on February 18, 2025 in Raymond, MS. A total of 132 individuals were in attendance and six commodity groups were represented. At this year's PAC we restructured the committee session to allow stakeholders to attend multiple sessions. Our hope is the additional opportunities to provide input are beneficial and increase the robustness of our findings. This report contains summaries from each of the commodity group's breakout meetings.

If you were able to attend the 2025 meeting, I want to thank you for your time and participation. If you were not able to attend, I hope that you will find this report helpful in keeping you updated. I look forward to your participation at the next PAC Meeting on February 17, 2027.

We are grateful for the continued support of our partners Hinds Community College and Alcorn State University Extension, as well as our generous sponsors Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation and Southern AgCredit. In addition to these sponsors, we are thankful for the insight, direct and indirect support provided by the commodity associations and promotion boards that represent the products produced in Central and Southwest Mississippi. We are also grateful for the support of our university administrators in the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine (DAFVM), Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station (MAFES), and the Mississippi State University Extension Service (MSUES) for their leadership and continued support of our work. Last but certainly not least, we could not conduct the research and Extension programming that addresses the needs of our producers without our esteemed University faculty and staff from CMREC, Extension Southwest Region, and various other departments in DAFVM, MAFES, and Extension. Thank you!

On behalf of the faculty and staff of CMREC, thank you for your continued support and participation as we take care of what matters for producers in Central Mississippi.

Hail State!

Curt Lacy, Ph.D.  
Professor and Head  
Central Mississippi Research & Extension Center

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# SESSION NOTES

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## AGRONOMIC CROPS

University Chair:	Mr. Kyle Lewis
University Co-Chair:	Dr. Tyler Soignier
Producer Chair:	Mr. Kendall Garraway
Total Attendees:	23

### 2025 Priority Needs

1. Continue to evaluate deer damage across all row crops
  - Damage ratings
  - Control measures
2. Dicamba availability - to be determined if 2025 or 2006
  - Enlist availability due to the absence of dicamba
3. Seeding rates and fertilizer rate options in a low commodity price market
4. Refuge options for corn resistance management

# SESSION NOTES

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## APICULTURE

University Chair:	Dr. Jeff Harris
University Co-Chair:	Mr. Beau Varner
Producer Chair:	Mr. Don Geddie
Total Attendees:	14

### Meeting Minutes

Dr. Harris began the session by welcoming everyone and initiated introductions from the group.

Dr. Harris provided the group with some updates. The Murder hornet is officially gone from the United States. The oriental hornet is still found in Georgia. Dr. Harris and Dr. Omar provided some handouts for everyone to pick up. Last year Dr. Harris published a Mississippi beekeepers calendar over the past year. The PAC Meetings are for whoever is present, it can be commercial or small scale bee keepers. The meeting will be tailored to those in attendance. It can be commercial or small scale beekeepers. Dr. Priya Basu is no longer with Mississippi State and is carrying on her research at Washington State University.

Derwin Thrash volunteered to be the next Producer Chair and was approved by all. As new chair, Mr. Thrash lead the meeting and opened up the discussion to any issues or problems dealing with Honeybee. Noone volunteered to be the Producer-Co-Chair and was approved.

Mary Jane Boutwell made the suggestion that we need more mentors for beekeepers and the long-term future of beekeeping. Dr. Harris mentioned that you must be careful with the mentors because they will become burned out. They become overworked and burned out with all the questions. He also mentioned a Masters Bee Keeping Program. Maybe add a service program with the Master Bee Keeping Program. Dr. Harris was not sure if that would help with having more mentors. Mentoring is important but not everyone is a person to be mentored.

Mr. Thrash asked how to turn around the viruses that are killing bees by varroa mites? Beekeepers are reporting the biggest losses over the last year from the mites. He asked what is being done to control viruses and what are the next steps. Mr. Thrash asked for a publication on how to properly transport bees and the availability of queens in the fall and how to make queens for the fall.

John Kilman talked about mite treatment and the cost of the treatment. He talked about what treatment he uses and how effective or non-affective the treatments are. He also talked about how hard it is to begin beekeepers when they lose their bees the first year, and how most

# SESSION NOTES

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## **APICULTURE** *continued*

beekeepers want to give up or do give up after the first year. He discussed treatment for mites the first year and suggested to not try to go by the numbers because most of the time they are not sure what they are looking for. Mr. Kimlan also talked about where bees come from because some bees arrive with mites already on the bees. Some attendees asked about how to get start-up prices for beginner beekeepers and know what equipment they need or do not need.

The grouped developed the 2025 priority needs. Mr. Thrash concluded the meeting by reading the priority needs.

### **2025 Priority Needs**

1. Encourage experienced beekeepers to become mentors for new beekeepers. Use local beekeeping clubs or couple mentorship to a service component in a master beekeeping program.
2. Develop better and more cost-effective techniques for varroa mites. Develop better economic thresholds to prevent huge colony losses that we are seeing this winter.
3. Improve management and/or pheromone trapping for small hive beetles.
4. Develop an extensive publication for proper and safe way to transport honeybees.
5. Techniques for fall re-queening in a written extension publication.

# SESSION NOTES

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## BEEF, FORAGE, & EQUINE

University Chair: Mr. Shelby Bearden  
University Co-Chair: Dr. Brett Rushing  
Producer Chair: Mr. Jeff Wilson  
Total Attendees: 41

### Meeting Minutes

#### Rocky Lemus

- Late maturing clovers u/ ryegrass
- MS Cattlemen's newsletter
- Bracheria species for drought tolerance
- Forage and Grazing Conference in Meridian, MS

#### Josh Maples

- Risk management
- CRP options/marketing protection
- Forage budgets

#### Brandi Karisch/Libby Durst

- BCIA March 6
- Youth Stockmanship Contest
- Summer Webinar Series - YouTube Channel
- AI School merch
- Weaning health protocols/vaccine response/stress
- Chicken breeding supplementation
- Stocking density impacts on forage
- High risk cattle receiving protocol/resistance
- Calving school/CVM (late April/early May)

#### Adam Barilloux

- Gain on forage test
- IIS bulls; majority angus
- 39th year

#### Jessica Halfen

- Youth interaction - Farm Family Days
- Social media

# SESSION NOTES

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## **BEEF, FORAGE, & EQUINE** *continued*

- Extension articles on vaccination programs

Byron Williams

- Planning processing certification programs

Brett Rushing

- Integrated crop livestock/grazing cover crops
- Stocking density on soil health
- Variety trials
- Hay production programs

Dr. Martin

- Stockpiling impacts on nutritive value

H. Trussell

- Tall fescue stock piling; requires supplementation

S. Unitfield

- Southeast Hay Contest
- Hay quality
- Slow passage rate on cool-season species; roughage
- Large animal veterinarians
- Ration development/formulation

### **2025 Priority Needs**

1. Strategies for farm to table marketing (publication)
2. Business planning for economic sustainability - long-term business planning
3. Economics on establishment methods of animals
4. Farm to table enterprise budgets
5. Increased hay quality
6. Increase cool-season grazing opportunities
7. Roughage supplementation

# SESSION NOTES

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## **BEEF, FORAGE, & EQUINE** *continued*

8. Ration development and formulation
9. Funding for research

# SESSION NOTES

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## FORESTRY & WILDLIFE

University Chair:	Dr. Curtis VanderSchaaf
University Co-Chair:	Dr. Adam Rohnke
Producer Chair:	Mr. Jack Stephens
Total Attendees:	19

### Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order by Dr. VanderSchaaf, followed by staff and attendee introductions.

#### Forestry Extension Updates – Dr. Curtis VanderSchaaf

Dr. VanderSchaaf presented a summary of Forestry Extension related activities and issues from 2024. He provided an overview of his statewide program focused on pine silviculture/income improvement which includes reducing reforestation costs and providing market opportunities, examining growth and yield modeling to develop and improve Timber Decision Support Systems to help forestry stakeholders better achieve their management objectives, and improve the accuracy, precision, and timeliness of decision-making regarding forest resources in Mississippi.

Specific programmatic updates from 2024 included:

- Ips pine beetle outbreak and Emergency Forestry Restoration Program (EFRP) education and technical assistance
- Casualty and non-casualty loss and income taxes for non-industrial private forest
- Continuation and updates to changes in the carbon sequestration markets
- Pine reforestation and mid-rotational studies for future educational events
- Hinds Community College logger training program
- Provided overview of his related metrics including around 300 site visits and in-person conversations, 45 professional presentations, training and workshops, 70 publications including newsletters, peer-reviewed articles, radio show/podcast appearances, videos, news postings, and participation and contributions to professional societies.

#### Forestry Department Update - Dr. Don Grebner

Introduced the new forestry Extension faculty at NE and Coastal R&E. He announced four forestry faculty positions that were currently open and actively searching. Lastly, he noted that undergraduate enrollment had increased in 2024.

# SESSION NOTES

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## **FORESTRY & WILDLIFE** *continued*

### Other Forestry Related Updates

Mr. Jon Auel with MS Forestry Association (MFA) provided brief details on the upcoming 2025 MFA Legislative Program.

Mr. Jeff Bein (retired USFS and private consultant) provided more details on the EFRP program on the ground as a follow up to Dr. VanderSchaaf's educational efforts.

### Wildlife Extension Updates - Dr. Adam Rohnke

The Wildlife & Fisheries Extension program within the Dept. of Wildlife, Fish and Aquaculture continues to lead nationally on many historical and emerging issues including feral swine management and Chronic Wasting Disease in white-tailed deer, water quality, and much more.

Dr. Rohnke briefly highlighted key elements of his growing Urban Wildlife Research and Extension Program:

Development of interactive StoryMap® and early research into the development of a statewide wildlife interaction reporting system. Website:<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/f129757a6b6d427ba1472d161dcc8df4>

Continued success of the MS Master Naturalist program and its contribution to urban wildlife field research through trained volunteers assisting with data collection and processing. Volunteers are being trained via an online program and related extension publications authored by his team.

Drs. Beth Baker and Rohnke announced they have partnered through an EPA grant to conduct needs assessments of urban communities towards the development of the Urban Stewards workforce development curriculum.

Initial contact with Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC) Urban Forestry program about potential collaboration within the programs at the encouragement of the commodity group in 2024.

### MSU Deer Lab Update

A written update was provided by Drs. Eric Michel ([eric.michel@msstate.edu](mailto:eric.michel@msstate.edu)) and Jacob Dykes ([jacob.dykes@msstate.edu](mailto:jacob.dykes@msstate.edu)) the new co-directors of the MSU Deer Lab.

# SESSION NOTES

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## **FORESTRY & WILDLIFE** *continued*

### Deer Lab Research Focus:

- Movement and behavior
- Nutrition
- Management strategies & harvest regimes
- Habitat management
- Food plots
- Damage management – deer crop depredation
- Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)
- Herd health & antler growth
- Predator management/ feral hog management

### Notable Research Plans:

- Comparing conventional and regenerative management in wildlife food plots and old fields
- Assessing CWD dynamics in the presence and absence of supplemental feed
- Evaluating deer crop depredation and mitigation strategies
- Rebuilding of the captive deer facility will start in summer 2025. The facility will include cutting-edge animal husbandry and research equipment. There will also be an on-site outreach hub dedicated to bridging the gap between deer research and management on private lands.

### Outreach:

Deer University Podcast - <https://extension.msstate.edu/deeruniversity>

MSU Deer Lab TV - <https://www.youtube.com/@msudeerlabtv5058>

### MS Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, & Parks Updates - Mr. Russ Walsh

State Parks continue to make upgrades to cabins, campgrounds, and infrastructure across Mississippi.

MDWFP is launching a new license system on February 18, 2025. This new system should improve customer experience for license purchases, draw hunts, boat registration, permits, and much more.

Multiple Mississippi Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund and other extraneous grants (>\$7 million) in recent years have been secured to conduct habitat management and other management activities on public and private lands.

# SESSION NOTES

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## **FORESTRY & WILDLIFE** *continued*

Chronic Wasting Disease continues to advance in Mississippi. MDWFP remains dedicated to addressing this significant threat to the white-tailed deer resource. 9,628 samples have been submitted this sampling year (July 1 through June 30). 125 positives have been detected this year (443 total since 2018). The 2024-2025 season has witnessed multiple positive detections outside in counties outside of Benton and Marshall. Please visit the CWD Dashboard at the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks for more information.

### Other Wildlife Related Updates

Dr. Beth Baker gave a brief update on the MS Water Stewards, Land Stewards, and her Climate Smart programs including upcoming training. Website: <https://extension.msstate.edu/natural-resources/water/mississippi-water-stewards>

Dr. Mark Woodrey with Coastal R&E provided a brief synopsis of his ornithological work both on the Mississippi Coast and working lands in the delta using MOTUS technology.

### Open Discussion of 2024 priorities - Mr. Jack Stephens

1. Awareness and programming on the pros/cons of disturbance management activities for wildlife/forestry related invasive species encroachment post-disturbance.

Need still exists to make sure the landowner understands the pros (e.g., improved stand health) and cons (e.g., encroachment of invasive species) of active management like timber harvest and prescribed fire.

2. Relook/revisit updating the procedure and MS timber pricing system to better inform landowner base for decision making.

The historical loss of mills adds to the growing backlog of forest products in Mississippi and will continue to be a serious challenge well into the future that will affect landowners' income and land management. This was a follow-up to a detailed discussion in the 2024 meeting on timber pricing transparency as one of the many issues compounding the problem. The room agreed that the renewed Quarterly Pricing Report that Extension Forestry has started publishing again is meeting this specific need addressed in 2024.

# SESSION NOTES

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## **FORESTRY & WILDLIFE** *continued*

3. Continue to develop & update programming to recent realities of carbon sequestration (pine and hardwood mgt.) and other markets education programming for CFA's forestry professionals, etc.

Brief discussion covered upcoming informational meetings on the future of carbon sequestration programs. A comment was made that NCX is looking into layering cost-share programs and carbon sequestration to make it more attractive for landowners.

4. Continued encouragement to keep the Christmas tree disease resistant cultivar project moving forward.

Mr. Kazery provided an update on this effort. Initial MSU nursery trials resulted in poor success rate on initial cuttings (100/1500 survived). A second round of trials is on its way and looks more promising. If successful, this effort will move to an outplanted field trial.

5. Continue to support partnership between MSU Forest Products Lab and Dept. of Architecture with the main focus of being to support the effort of hiring a Forest Products Extension Specialist related to mass timber products.

Dr. Grebner stated he needed an update on the status of the joint bio-product and architecture position that was previously discussed. Mr. Auel added that a Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) mass timber awareness program would be beneficial along with MSU Extension publications and programming including a continuing education for architects (Mr. Kevin Regan).

6. Continue to backfill Extension Forestry positions; broaden the search for candidates to potentially include non-PhD applicants to fill these positions with quality professionals that are focused on landowners and producers.

Dr. Grebner addressed in his updates that Forestry searching for additional faculty and more coming in the future. Dr. Rohnke also noted the hiring of Drs. Eric Michel and Jacob Dykes for the MSU Deer Lab.

# SESSION NOTES

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## **FORESTRY & WILDLIFE** *continued*

7. Refocus energy and potential collaboration with MS Forestry Commission, MDWFP, and MSU Extension urban forestry and wildlife programs and staff.

Drs. VanderSchaaf and Rohnke reiterated their continued commitment to fostering these collaborations.

Jack Stephens was nominated and elected to serve as the producer chair for 2026.

### **2025 Priority Needs**

1. Retool/novel approach to research & programming on the pros/cons of disturbance management activities for wildlife/forestry related invasive species encroachment post-disturbance.
2. Continue to develop & update programming to recent realities of carbon sequestration (pine and hardwood mgt.) and other markets education programming for CFA's forestry professionals, etc.
3. Continued encouragement to keep the Christmas tree cultivar project moving forward.
4. Continue to support partnership between MSU Forest Products Lab and Dept. of Architecture, particularly supporting the effort of marketing (MDA) & continuing education for architecture professionals' policy makers related to mass timber products.
5. Continue to fill these Wildlife/Forestry Extension positions w/ quality professionals that are focused on landowners and producers.
6. Continue to support collaboration among?? MFC, MDWFP, and MSU Extension urban forestry and wildlife programs and staff.
7. Support a feasibility study of using forest products for future fuel production as potential new market & rural community development.

# SESSION NOTES

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## SMALL RUMINANTS

University Chair:	Dr. Leyla de Rios
University Co-Chair:	Ms. Jennifer Williams
Producer Chair:	Mr. Darryl Bird
Total Attendees:	13

### Meeting Minutes

Dr. Vann provided an update on her work, including working with landscape management with the sheep grazing under the solar panels at campus. Also, there will be continued efforts to incorporate some research projects examining using lidobands for tail docking and castration in sheep.

The group discussed the 2024 PAC priority areas and progress. A summary of the discussion is provided:

1. Master Program:
  - This was a proposal from PAC 2024.
  - Currently working to identify the needs that should be addressed through the program.
  - Working on materials and how programs will be delivered.
2. Reproduction:
  - Working with a retired professor from Texas A&M on synchronization
  - Expanded from 13->50, breeder donated Spanish does
  - Present research in April at ASA
3. Marketing Information:
  - Created (draft) fact sheets for agents and farmers for Marketability of Sheep and Goat in Mississippi
  - Fine tune certified processing facilities sheet for producers

### 2025 Priority Needs

1. Mixed grazing with Small Ruminants and Cattle
2. Research on breeds of sheep that are most conducive to Mississippi

# SESSION NOTES

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## **SMALL RUMINANTS** *continued*

3. Meat markets
4. Proper preparation of small ruminant meat
5. Discussed LAP AI/Embryo Transfer and needing more vets to become involved in this field

Planning for the Small Ruminant Conference- June 13-14 @ The Mill

# SESSION NOTES

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## VEGETABLES, FRUITS, NUTS & SPECIALTY CROPS

University Chair:	Dr. Rebecca Melanson
University Co-Chair:	Dr. Qianwen Zhang
Producer Chair:	Mr. Keith Benson
Total Attendees:	43

### Meeting Minutes

Dr. Melanson welcomed attendees to the subgroup meeting. Extension faculty and staff from Mississippi State University (MSU) and Alcorn State University introduced themselves. Dr. Melanson provided updates on the 2024 priorities (see below), newly hired faculty at MSU, ongoing research and Extension projects, and recent Extension publications. Mr. Brent Breland shared updates on the organic specialty crop cultivation mentorship program led by Dr. Christine Coker, while Dr. Alan Henn provided an overview of IR-4 projects. Handouts containing information on these topics were distributed to attendees.

During both sessions of the meeting, stakeholders introduced themselves and shared their specific needs. Following this, Dr. Melanson tasked the attendees, with Mr. Michael Scheel as the lead, to discuss and rank priorities for 2025.

Mr. Scheel and Dr. Melanson facilitated a discussion on specialty crop needs and priorities. Topics were grouped accordingly and then voted on for prioritization across both sessions.

Mr. Michael Scheel was elected as the producer chair for 2026.

### 2025 Priorities

1. Develop programs and update crop budgets to support both new and experienced growers in planning for profitability and sustainability, with scalability based on production size.
2. Strengthening collaboration with Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) to enhance the farmers' market network and resources, including the development of a certification plan.
3. Conduct variety trials for key crops, focusing on production efficiency, pest management, and other critical factors.

# SESSION NOTES

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## **VEGETABLES, FRUITS, NUTS & SPECIALTY CROPS** *continued*

4. Expand public education on the importance and benefits of local produce to help farmers market their products more effectively.
5. Update publications with variety recommendations for improved, low-input, and heirloom specialty crop varieties.

### Additional Priorities Identified in 2025:

- Develop resources and provide support for home gardening programs.
- Improve direct communication with farmers.
- Explore alternative fertilizer options for pecan and other crop growers.
- Conduct research on native, herbal, and medicinal plants.



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The Central Mississippi Research and Extension Center is Mississippi State University's "southern exposure", linking residents of the central and southwest regions to the University. The Center's mission is to conduct research and educational programs aimed at developing a better understanding and use of renewable and nonrenewable resources in Southwest Mississippi. Its applied research and educational programs with biological, physical, and social systems focus on enhancing the quality of life of residents of Mississippi and other Gulf states.

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The Mississippi State University Extension Service provides research-based information, educational programs, and technology transfer focused on issues and needs of the people of Mississippi, enabling them to make informed decisions about their economic, social, and cultural well-being. The Extension Southwest Region serves 20 counties across the southwestern portion of the state.

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