



OUR MISSION:
"TO ADVANCE THE
BUSINESS OF
AGRICULTURE
THROUGH ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT,
ENVIRONMENTAL
STEWARDSHIP AND
EDUCATION TO
IMPROVE THE
QUALITY OF LIFE FOR
ALL GEORGIANS."

GEORGIA AGRIBUSINESS COUNCIL

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SINE DIE 2014!

The celebratory confetti that is synonymous with the final hammering of the gavel each legislative session also reflects our sentiments regarding **agricultural policy advancements this year**. Just a few short weeks ago, we predicted water, taxes and state budget would dominate this session – and that's what we got. Seeing the rewards of these priority issues are ones we can all take great pride. The state budget contains substantial funding for programs important to ag and other important legislative gains all made it to the finish line – **we have much to celebrate!** Please reach out to lawmakers and thank them for their consideration and action over the past 40 days.

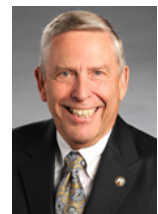
When the 2014 legislative session fired up on Jan. 13, lawmakers predicted it would be fast paced and they held true to their prognostication. **This is the earliest the legislature has abandoned the Gold Dome in two decades** – and now many have headed home to the campaign trail. Please take a close look at what these candidates offer to the advancement of good ag policy and leadership. Your help in the election cycle is essential and cannot be overstated as our industry charts a path forward that needs strong legislative leaders.



Here's a quick summary of the bills that are important to agriculture:

WATER

While there was plenty of drama and heavy doses of rhetoric the past 12 months on **SB 213, the Flint River Drought Protection Act**, our efforts paid off with important policy for irrigation rights, water efficiency and environmental stewardship. Your emails and calls of support made a big difference. **Rep. Buddy Harden** did an excellent job leading this bill and **House Ag Chairman Tom McCall** put in a lot of hours with us on the bill. You'll recall it covers only the lower Flint River basin and prescribes steps to be taken for specific, sensitive and susceptible stream segments during extreme drought. It is an important water policy because it helps limit agriculture's exposure to lawsuits regarding potential ecosystem/habitat damage resulting from extreme drought. It is important to highlight that environmental issues – especially water – are often **the battle cry of well-funded "conservation" advocates decorated with cute slogans and slick logos**. Sadly, their causes are willingly advanced by media that are short on facts. It is important to remember these battles are not fleeting - they are constant. Your engagement is necessary and there will be many more such battles ahead and we need you to be



Rep. Buddy Harden

ready. As the bill rests now on the desk of Governor Deal for his signature, we acknowledge **Rep. Buddy Harden, Rep. Tom McCall** and **Senator Ross Tolleson** and thank these great friends of agriculture.



Chairman McCall

AG TAX EXEMPTIONS

HB 983, which contains necessary revisions to the **Georgia Ag Tax Exemption (GATE) program**, passed in the Senate 50-2 this week and made its way to the Governor’s desk. **House Ag Chairman Tom McCall** did a tremendous job guiding this legislation to protect agricultural producers while taking action to prevent possible abuses. The bill specifies who are considered qualified GATE card holders by eliminating those with only CUVA or FLPA land as a qualifier for the card, and changes the definition of “livestock” to provide a better focus on agriculture production. Lawmakers were pleased to see **GAC’s GATE guidance document** as a resource for compliance and voiced interest in building more education/enforcement efforts. Many thanks to **Sen. Tyler Harper** for handling this bill in the Senate and to **Sen. John Wilkinson** for his engagement on this important issue.



2015 BUDGET

FY 2015 Budget was finalized this week and contains many benefits for agriculture & forestry. **House Appropriations Committee Chairman Terry England** walked us through some of these important items during our interview. We also thank **Senate Appropriations Chairman Jack Hill** and **Governor Deal** for their support of these funds. UGA research and turfgrass facilities, ag education, Dept. of Agriculture, Georgia Grown, water planning and forestry interests and metal theft prevention are all very well served in this final budget.

Inside Ag, Sine Die 2014 - Rep. Terry England (FY15 Bud..

FORESTRY



HB 790, by **Rep. Chuck Williams**, awaits the signature of Governor Deal. This timber theft prevention update carries stiffer penalties for timber theft and allows Georgia Forestry Commission foresters and firefighters, along with investigators, to issue citations with substantial penalties for cutting or carrying away timber of another landowner. **The bill also states the following penalties for timber taking and damages as follows:** triple the Fair Market Value of the trees cut as they stood, triple the diminished Fair Market Value of the trees incidentally harmed, costs of reforestation activities, attorney fees and expenses of litigation (and punitive damages if the trespass was willful). Finally, the bill would remove liability from land owners who employ a third party timber harvester that takes timber from an adjacent property when the owner clearly marks boundaries and trees to be taken. Congrats to the **Georgia Forestry Association** for their great work leading this effort.

HB 755 provides a mechanism to reset the 2008 fair market value of forest land. **This new fair market value will be used in the calculations of local assistance grants - reimbursements to counties for tax revenue lost to enrollment in the Forest Land Protection Act (FLPA).** County and city governments will be required to reimburse the state for local assistance grants that have been granted based on inflated fair market values. Also, the Department of Revenue Commissioner will not approve any digest of any county when the assessed value that is in dispute for any property or properties on appeal or if arbitration exceeds three percent of the total assessed value of the total taxable digest of the county for the same year. This bill received unanimous support in the House a few weeks ago and passed the Senate late Thursday evening to advance to the desk of Governor Deal.

SOLAR POWER

HB 757 failed the Senate on the final day of the session by a vote count of 16 - 36. This bill had interest from several GAC members as it would allow for solar panels to be added to conservation use land in CUVA or FLPA without facing a breach penalty as long as the land occupied by the panels is removed from the covenant. The solar market has the interest of several in agriculture and we look forward to seeking new avenues to support those that are looking to move this economic opportunity to their back 40 in the near future.



WILDLIFE PROTECTION

SB 322, passed House on Tuesday and is on the Governor’s desk. This bill by **Sen. Tyler Harper** removes the exemption in state law that allows individuals to use chemicals, smokers, explosives, and



that allows individuals to use chemicals, snares, explosives, and other devices to get rid of poisonous snakes on their property. Gopher tortoises are a vulnerable species, and if they become endangered, **Federal agencies will be anxious to expand rules that will affect landowners and farmers in Georgia.** This bill takes a step in the right direction to protect landowners from federal action and court measures.

FARM WINERIES

HB 825 by Rep. Penny Houston would allow for licensed on-farm wineries to produce fortified wines and distilled spirits with fruit grown on the farm. More specifically, it would allow the fruit grower to manufacture these wines and distilled spirits for sale exclusively through a licensed wholesaler, as long as the farm winery only has a tasting room on the premises. Several farm wineries have expressed interest in this bill and other fruit Growers could also benefit as it would serve as an outlet for leftover fruits without a market. Sen. Dean Burke handled the bill as it passed the Senate Tuesday and was sent to the Governor's desk.



LANDOWNER PROTECTIONS

SB 125 will protect landowners from certain liabilities should trespassers get injured on their property. Exception to this trespass protection would include when landowners intend to cause injury to or create conditions that attract children who are too young to understand the danger associated with coming close to unguarded conditions. There are numerous court cases that support these landowner liability protections, but having it clearly stated in Georgia law is a big benefit. It is on to the Governor's desk awaiting signature.

SB 117 is a bill that updates to the Georgia Utility Facility Protection Act or "Call before you dig" law. We started following this issue last year and worked to include an exemption for farming and defines "farming activities" as the tilling of the fields related to agricultural activities but does not include other types of mechanized excavating on a farm. This bill now awaits the Governor's signature.



CAPITOL HISTORY MUSEUM

SB 274, Senator Valencia Seay's bill charges the Capitol Arts Standard Committee with developing an area in the Georgia State Capitol to establish a "Georgia Capitol Agricultural History Museum." This project will help showcase Georgia's strongest industry to the thousands of visitors each year under the Gold Dome.

Issues for the 2015 Legislative Session:

HUNTING/SHOOTING



Rep. Tommy Benton authored **HB 821** to clarify that skeet shooting facilities are not a CUA breach and thus subject to the associated tax penalties. A North Georgia skeet range was recently told by county tax assessors that their facility was in violation of the covenants and it forced the owner to shut down.

Unfortunately this bill did not pass, but we will work with Rep. Benton on this important issue so we can avoid similar taxation rulings in the future.

AG TRANSPORTATION

HB 1087 establishes a start for the next legislative session. The objective is to increase the total weight limit from 80,000 pounds to 89,500



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pounds for trucks hauling forest products, poultry, cotton, other ag products or granite. GAC member **Rep. Chad Nimmer** has been a leader on this conversation and we look forward to moving this discussion forward over the summer. Watch for GAC info about participating in these discussions and crafting legislation for the 2015 legislative session.



Rep. Chad Nimmer

DAIRY PRODUCTION

The House Agriculture Committee held a hearing (no vote) on **HB 718**, which sought to make legal the sale of raw milk for human consumption. A label on any such products would also be required. Georgia law currently allows for raw milk to be sold and used for pets and livestock, but not humans. GAC member **Everett Williams of WDairy** and other Georgia dairymen oppose the bill and spoke to the committee about the need to keep Georgia's laws protective of consumer health. The Council agrees with the concerns they expressed. There is no doubt the debate will continue for changing Georgia's raw milk sale prohibition in the future.

LIVESTOCK LIABILITY PROTECTION



GAC is proud to work closely with many organizations including FFA, 4-H, the Georgia National Fair and the Georgia Junior Livestock Foundation and others who sponsor livestock shows and events. **HB 1063** by **Rep. Dale Rutledge** expanded liability protections already allowed for equine and llama events, along with the facilities that host them, to **include swine, cattle, sheep, and goats**. This was an issue brought by the Georgia Cattlemen's Association and even though it will not be moving forward, we anticipate it being vetted during the year. It will likely be brought back in the 2015 legislative session.

GRAPEVINE:



* **Monday was one of the favorite days at the Capitol each year – Peanut Butter & Jelly Day!** Congratulations to the **Georgia Peanut Commission** and the **National Peanut Buying Points Association** on leading the charge to put this event together. One special highlight of the event was our friends at the Georgia Peanut Commission donating over 18,000 jars of Peanut Butter to the Atlanta Food Bank (*see picture below*). You just can't beat fried PB&J sammiches...they tasted even better than they smelled!



*GAC was happy to attend and sponsor the **Georgia FFA**

AgSouth Farm Credit, ACA
Aimtrac
Destiny Organics, LLC
Dow AgroSciences, LLC
Monsanto
Patten Seed Co.



AgTechnologies LLC
Barren & Brothers International
Bill Jones Farms
Birdsong Peanut Corp.
BMO Harris Bank
CoBank, ACB
Color Burst
Dewitt Produce Company Inc.
Georgia Cattlemen's Association
Georgia Cotton Commission
Georgia Feed & Grain Association
Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Assn.
Georgia Green Industry Association
Georgia Peanut Commission
Georgia Pork Producers Association
Georgia Power
Georgia Veterinary Medicine Association
Georgia Young Farmers Association
Hays, LTI
Kelley Manufacturing Co.
NG Turf
Northeast Georgia Livestock, LLC
SafEnviron, Inc.
Sconyers Gin & Warehouse Co.
The Turfgrass Group
USA Poultry & Egg Export Council
WDairy LLC



AgFirst Farm Credit Bank
AgGeorgia Farm Credit, ACA
Agri-Business Supply Inc.
AgSouth Genetics LLC
American Peanut Shellers Association
APT Advanced Trailer & Equipment LP
 Barrington Dairies
 Berrien Peanut Co.
Calhoun Stockyard Hwy. 53 Inc.
Center for Agribusiness & Economic Dev.
 Coley Gin and Fertilizer
 CSA Farms, Inc.
 Curry Farm Supply Inc.
 DeVane Farms, Inc.
 Dixie Management Services, LLC
Dollar Farm Products Co. Inc.
 Emanuel Peanut & Grain LLC
Funston Gin Co. Inc.
Georgia Assn. of County Agricultural Agents
Georgia Christmas Tree Association
Georgia Crop Improvement Assn. Inc.
Georgia Development Authority
 Georgia Egg Association
Georgia Food Bank Association
Georgia Milk Producers Inc.
Georgia Peach Council
Georgia Pecan Growers Association, Inc.
Georgia Poultry Federation

Foundation's Blue and Gold Gala last Friday. The event was a success and we would like to thank all of those who come out in support for this great organization. Congratulations to **Katrina Jones** and her team for all they do to support FFA programs!

* Georgia Farm Bureau will host a **Farm Bill Meeting on Monday, March 24**, to educate farmers and landowners about the law. It will be held in the auditorium at the GFB Building located at 1620 Bass Road in Macon. The meeting begins at 9:30 and concludes at 12:30. There is no cost to attend.

* The 2014 **Georgia Agritourism Association's** Annual Conference will be held on March 31 – April 1 at the Classic Center in Athens. The first day of the conference will feature the 2014 Agritourism Farm Tour and will close with a reception for attendees. The second day of the conference will include speakers on topics on CUVA, Food Service issues, recruitment, and marketing. For full details on the conference and registration, [click here](#). For questions or if you need more information please contact Beth Oleson at (706) 845 – 9085 or [blland@asginfo.net](mailto:bbland@asginfo.net). GAC has several agritourism members and we are pleased to be a sponsor of this conference.



* **Ag Day** was a huge success as Georgia celebrated all that agriculture has to offer. There was a huge collection of agriculture groups, agribusinesses, and enthusiasts at the Atlanta Freight Depot again this year and we are grateful for the coordination work of **GAC's own Christy Page** and the partnership of **Kelli Williams at the Georgia Department of Agriculture** to pull it off. **Governor Nathan Deal** joined **Ag Commissioner Gary Black** in presenting the Flavor of Georgia awards that recognized outstanding Georgia products and enterprises. GAC is happy to help sponsor the **Flavor of Georgia** contest and the overall winning product out of the 11 product categories was the Georgia Gold Clothbound Cheddar Cheese of Nature's Harmony Farm from Elberton. Governor Deal also presented the **Georgia Farmer of the Year Award to GAC Member Philip Grimes of Docia Farms**. Grimes grows peanuts, cotton, cantaloupes, snap beans, and broccoli in Tift County, and will now move on to represent Georgia in the 2014 Swisher Sweets/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year competition. Congratulations to Philip as well as all of the Flavor of Georgia Contest Winners on these well-earned honors.



Georgia Cotton Commission's **Chris Chammoun** entertaining some attendees at his Ag Day booth.



Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association Executive Director **Charles Hall** serving vegetable pizza during Ag Day.



GAC Member **Philip Grimes** of Docia Farms recognized as the 2014 Georgia Farmer of the Year.



Hardy Peanuts, another GAC Member, taking home a prize during the Flavor of Georgia Award Ceremony.

Georgia Seed Association Inc.
[Georgia Vocational Ag. Teacher Association](#)
[Georgia Watermelon Association](#)
 Georgia/Florida Soybean Association
 Gillis Bros. Inc.
 Growers Gin & Warehouse, Inc.
 Growers Supply Inc.
 Hattaway Farms Partnership
[International Forest Company, Inc.](#)
[J & B Irrigation Inc.](#)
 KAKEGA LLC
[Leger & Son, Inc.](#)
 Majors Electric & Mechanical Co., Inc.
[National Peanut Buying Points Association](#)
[Pike Creek Turf, Inc.](#)
 Quality Gin, Inc.
[Sanders, Inc.](#)
 Southeastern Cotton Ginners Assn., Inc.
[Southern AGCOM Inc.](#)
[Southern Crop Production Assn.](#)
[Southern Equipment Dealers Association](#)
[Southwest Georgia Farm Credit](#)
 The Produce Connection Inc.
[Triangle Chemical Co.](#)
[TriEst Ag Group, Inc.](#)
[United Egg Marketing Corp./Dixie Cattle Co.](#)
[Viridium Products](#)
[Woodruff & Howe Env. Engineering, Inc.](#)

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* This year serves as the **100th anniversary of the Smith–Lever Act** - legislation that created the Cooperative Extension Service across the country. There will be a reception honoring 100 years of Georgia Extension on **May 15, 2014** from 4:30 - 6:30 p.m. at the Hargrett Library Rotunda at the University of Georgia's Athens Campus. Georgia officials will be dedicating the UGA Extension Centennial Exhibit at this event, and the exhibit will be in place through June 2014. If you are interested in attending this event, please contact Carla Wood at 706-583-0347 or carlam@uga.edu.



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