

# THE COOPERATOR

THE FEDERATION OF SOUTHERN  
COOPERATIVES/LAND ASSISTANCE FUND  
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



2018 SUMMER NEWS  
Cooperative Development \* Land Retention



GA Farmers Conference- Cornelius Blanding-FSC, Gary Black-GA Dept of Ag, Jim Ewing- USDA/NASS

## Georgia & Mississippi Host Successful Farmer Conferences

This year over 270 members from across the southern states attended the 35th Georgia Farmer Conference in Albany, Georgia in mid-February. Attendees were engaged in many workshops and discussions leading to an informative and exciting event. Keynote speaker, Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture, Gary Black inspired and encouraged farmers to keep telling their story. Further, Mr. Black stated, "Agriculture makes life better!" During the farm bill discussion led by Monica Rainge, our Director of Advocacy and Land Retention, members openly shared their primary concerns, issues, and interests for the 2018 farm bill.

The 2018 Mississippi Farmers Conference was a joint venture between Alcorn State University and The Mississippi Association of Cooperatives. The conference took place March 26th-28th in Natchez, Mississippi. Overall the conference was a huge success and the turnout exceeded our expectations. There were 325 small farmers and ranchers in attendance. The conference breakouts

and sessions focused on conservation. These programs were under the umbrella of USDA/NRCS/EQIP programs which are designed to promote farm sustainability.



Mississippi Farm



# The Rural Training & Research Center- Alabama



## Coop Econ: Taking Over The South

On the weekend of April 20-22, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives (FSC) along with partners such as the Fund 4 Democratic Communities, Democracy at Work, the Working World, and the Farmworker Association of Florida embarked on the 6th CoopEcon. It was held at FSC's Rural Training Center in Epes, which over the years has steadily become the standard site for the event that started in 2012.

CoopEcon has grown out of the recognized need for socio-economic transformation in the South. It addresses deeply rooted issues of class disparity and inequity by contributing to the global movement for economic justice. CoopEcon builds partnerships, networks, and ultimately cooperative enterprises that challenge prevailing notions of what it means to engage in economic development (democracy) and who is invited to the table. In the region of the United States where poverty and working class disempowerment are the keenest, CoopEcon strives to be an intergenerational, multi-racial, and gender-sensitive space that simultaneously grapples with some of the most fundamental human needs. In the years following its inception, CoopEcon has become an annual and signature feature of the FSC's work to develop cooperatives throughout the South. The idea behind it all is to create an "education and training institute geared toward helping current and future cooperators build and strengthen new community-based enterprises..." Judging by the number of people who return after attending in previous years, the event clearly provides something so special, they want to come back for more.

## Alabama Forestry Camp: An Experience of a Lifetime

The Alabama Forestry Camp ran this year from June 11th-15th in Epes. The purpose of this amazing historical camp is clear: Introduce youth to careers in natural resources and foster both appreciation and understanding of the forests, wildlife, and nature. Campers visited the mill learning about lumber, sustainability, conservation, and natural resources career paths. In every way the walk campers did through the forest was delightful and allowed campers to open about teen life challenges, educational plans, fears, excitement, and everything in-between.

None of this would be possible without amazing and dedicated volunteers, sponsors, and supporters: They included: Alabama Forestry Commission, Alabama Division of Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries, National Park Service, Tuskegee University, Extension/Alabama A&M/Auburn, University of Alabama, USDA Summer Feeding Program, Regions Bank, and United States Forrest Service. A big thank you to those who dedicated their time to nurture campers.





# Conservation Now

BEN BURKETT

MISSISSIPPI STATE COORDINATOR

As the debate continues on the new 2018 farm bill, farmers such as myself, know the value of conservation. It is important that the conservation services within the farm bill are preserved. Many farmers both large and small depend upon these. These services have been a very useful resource on many farms and ranches. Programs such as EQIP, (environmental quality incentives program), conservation reserve, wildlife incentives, wetland protection, small farms imitative and others, have been a valuable resource to many. When the soil conservation service began in 1932, many African American farmers were denied participation. However, now many minority farmers participate in various programs offered by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). This is why it is very important that we preserve our natural resources of air, water, and soil, for future generations. It is our responsibility to present them with a better earth. Clean air, fresh and healthy water and soil, carrying them into the millennium

Several farmers within the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, have taken advantage of the conservation services that NRCS offer and benefit greatly from them. With the aid of irrigation on the farms, they are able to produce healthy and better quality crops. Fencing has assisted in the reduction of loss including livestock and soil erosion. For fifty years the Federation has worked on conservation issues and has played an integral role by providing many farmers/ranchers with vital information for the programs. The 1890 institutions have been helpful in providing technical assistance for many in installing systems, fencing, application assistance, and networking opportunities at workshops, conferences, and town hall meetings to make sure that the people who seek assistance are given the best possible care.



Burkett's Granddaughter, Denver Winston

# HOW WILL AGRICULTURE ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE?

Agriculture is critically dependent on climate and as this variable shifts, it directly impacts the productivity of crops nationally and globally. USDA reports show there are many independent lines of evidence that indicate global warming and climate shifts. In the United States, there is evidence of continued warming compared to past records that prove to be a result of human activity. There is also a continuing increase in extreme weather events such as heavy precipitation and extreme heat. Many reports illustrate a steady decline in summer Arctic sea ice as well. Climate change directly affects the quantity of produce available; however, there are effective proven strategies and adaptation techniques that the agriculture sector is using to aid in maintaining sustainable crops. Some effective strategies currently being utilized consist of crop rotation, pest management, altered planting times, genetic selection, improved water management, fertilizer management, and shifts in areas of crop production.

As climate changes, its impact on agriculture commodities for both domestic and international markets and food prices increases. The strategies for adapting to the average temperature and precipitation include:

- continued technological advancements
- expansion of irrigated acreage
- regional shifts in crop acreage & crop species
- adjusted inputs and outputs
- changes in livestock management practices

The agriculture sector also has to address the indirect impacts of weeds, insects, and diseases that accompany extreme weather shifts as well. The USDA states, "Agriculture has been able to adapt to recent changes in climate; however, increased innovation will be needed to ensure the rate of adaptation of agriculture and the associated socioeconomic system can keep pace with climate change over the next 25 years." For assistance with climate change mitigation and adaption contact your local USDA NRCS or organizations such as The National Farmers Union.



RTRC, Epes, AL



# The Federation Leads Research and Advocacy to Address Heirs Property and Eligibility to Participate in USDA Programs

The Federation, in collaboration with the Alcorn State University Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center recently completed a research study entitled, "Land Loss Trends among Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers in the Black Belt Region." The primary goal of this study was to better describe the impact of heirs property on Black farm and land loss and recommend policies that could slow loss and improve access to USDA programs for heirs property owners.

A key policy recommendation from the study was that the USDA's program eligibility standard should be control or possession of land. Further, the study recommends that USDA should expand the forms of documentation that may be accepted in each state as evidence of control of the land, and require FSA and NRCS in each state to accept the same documentation, including but not limited to 5 years of tax returns or agricultural receipts and self-certification of control of the land to operate a farm or ranch for the purpose of securing a farm number and qualifying for USDA programs and services. FSC's Regional Heirs Property and Mediation Center is focused on providing direct assistance to heirs property owners, while advocating to ensure that there are state and federal policies which enhance their ability to secure their land tenure.

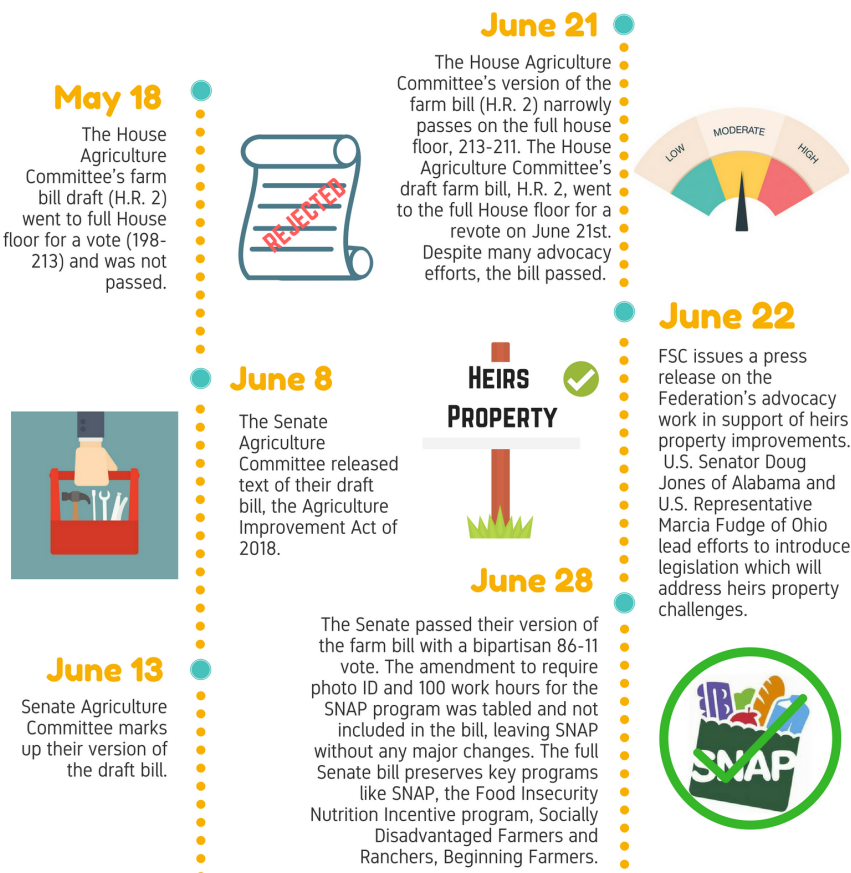
The Federation, along with its key partners, Arkansas Land & Farm Development Corporation, Land Loss Prevention Project, Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, Rural Coalition and National Family Farm Coalition has advocated that USDA should expand its eligibility requirements to allow heirs property owners to be eligible for more USDA programs.



Farm bill discussion at GA Farmers Conference, Monica Raigne & John Zippert-FSC staff

## FARM BILL 2018 :

### Advocacy, Activism, and Advancement



**NOW THIS**

House and Senate Agriculture Committee leaders to form a conference committee to draft a farm bill combining the Senate and House bills in July - August. We support the passing of a bill most similar to the Senate, hopefully before the 2014 farm bill expires on September 30, 2018.



## **Resolution to Celebrate the Life and Legacy of Ralph Paige**

**Whereas, Ralph Paige worked with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund for 46 years from 1969-2015, the last thirty years, 1985-2015, as Executive Director.**

**Whereas, Ralph Paige led building the Federation into the premier organization representing Black farmers and low-income rural people in the South.**

**Whereas, Ralph Paige organized 70 cooperatives and 18 community development credit unions during his tenure as Executive Director. He supported the development of the Federation's unique Rural Training and Research Center in Epes, Alabama, including an agroforestry component and forestry demonstrations.**

**Whereas, Ralph Paige spearheaded efforts from the mid-1990's forward to file suit against USDA for discrimination in credit, conservation and rural development. These efforts led to the historic Pigford I and Pigford II class action cases, which yielded \$2.5 billion in payments to thousands of Black farm families.**

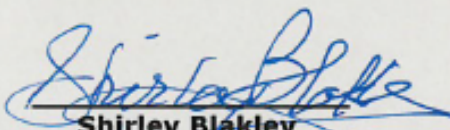
**Whereas, Ralph Paige worked on legislation to reform farm and rural policies to allow for the formation of the National Co-op Bank, creation of the Section 2501 Outreach and Technical Assistance Program for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers, expansion of farm credit to include Micro-loans; and the creation of the Rural Cooperative Development Programs.**

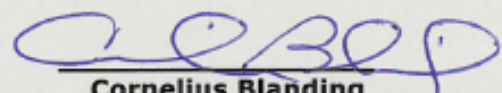
**Whereas, Ralph Paige In the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Federation implemented a comprehensive Relief and Recovery Project (RRP), which provided assistance to thousands of farmers, fishers, families and individuals displaced and affected by the hurricanes.**

**Whereas, Ralph Paige despite obstacles, financial problems, and many times a hostile and racially charged environment, Ralph maintained the Federation and a staff of 30 or more trained specialists around the South, for half a century.**

**Therefore, be it resolved, that the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, honors the life and legacy of Ralph Paige by inscribing this resolution into the books and records of the organization, plant a tree in his honor in the Memorial Grove at the Federation's Rural Training Center at Epes, Alabama, as well as other memorial remembrances.**

**Signed this 6th day of July, 2018.**

  
**Shirley Blakley**  
Board Chairperson

  
**Cornelius Blanding**  
Executive Director



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER



## **We Celebrate the Life & Legacy of Ralph Paige**

**There was a huge hole left on June 28, 2018, with the passing of Ralph Paige. Ralph was many things to many people. He was a husband, father, grandfather, son, brother, uncle, cousin and a friend - among many other things. He was my predecessor, mentor, and friend. Ralph was also a teacher. He taught me things when I didn't know I was being taught. He taught me things when I didn't even want to be taught. He taught me how to serve the Federation based on many things he learned from his predecessor and mentor, Charles Prejean. He also taught me life lessons based on what he learned from his father. Ralph would always say to me, "A heap sees, but only a few know." That was Ralph teaching me to look and dig deeper because things are not always what they seem to be. That was also Ralph teaching me that people will judge you and what you do based on what they see and hear and not what they understand.**

**The Federation will miss its servant. The Federation will miss its leader. I will miss my predecessor, mentor, and friend. At the Federation, we will continue to celebrate and honor the life and work of Ralph Paige.**

**This year, we will honor Ralph's legacy and work by posthumously awarding him with the 17th Annual Estelle Witherspoon Lifetime Achievement Award. Furthermore, as we roll out our Capital Campaign this year, we also plan to create the Ralph Paige Memorial Fund in his honor as part of our Endowment Fund.**

**Cornelius Blanding  
Executive Director**



**Mr. Ralph Paige, 1943-2018**

# Attend Our Grandest Celebration of the Year

We are swiftly approaching the 51st Anniversary Celebration and Annual Meeting which will take place in Epes, Alabama on August 17<sup>th</sup> & 18, 2018. The 17th Estelle Witherspoon Lifetime Achievement Award Dinner will take place on Thursday, August 16, 2018, in Birmingham, Alabama. This year, the Estelle Witherspoon Award will honor the legacy of Ralph Paige

We are excited about this momentous occasion and invite you to participate in the celebration of our organization. If you have not renewed your \$25 membership, please do so at your earliest convenience before the annual meeting. If you have any questions about the 51st Anniversary celebration or membership, please feel free to call the office at 404-765-0991



**Invest in change**

**JOIN the 50th-year CAPITOL CAMPAIGN**



**In this jubilee year, we launched the campaign to raise 5 million dollars over the next two years to support valuable infrastructure improvements and program expansions**

**[www.give2federation.org](http://www.give2federation.org)**

**Become a sustaining member, corporate donor, or individual donor  
Funding will support improvements to the Rural Training & Research Center,  
The Endowment Fund, and general infrastructure improvements.**



Photo 1- Gary Black Keynote, GFC Photo 2-Bobby Wilson speaking on farm bill GFC, Photo 3&4 Metro-Atlanta Urban Farm April 27th Field Day



Photo 5 &6- John Zippert at the Poor Peoples Campaign, AL. Sharing Inc-Good Friday Walk- Cornelius Blanding, Kay Doherty, John Z

Donna DeCaille, Director of Communications & Member Relations  
FSC/LAF 2769 CHURCH ST. EAST POINT, GA 30344 TEL:(404)-765-0991 FAX: (404) 765-9178

