

from the
DIRECTOR



One of the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station's stated goals is to conduct research that addresses real-life problems. In practice, this has meant being responsive to the needs of our clients and shaping our research programs to meet these needs. MAFES research programs are constantly evolving to help keep Mississippi producers viable and competitive.

Each year brings new challenges as well as opportunities for our producers. In recent weeks, House and Senate Farm Bill conference attendees reached an agreement on the terms of a new Farm Bill, which will undoubtedly have an effect on producers in Mississippi and elsewhere in the nation. The six-year deal will increase agricultural spending by 70 percent and should help producers who have been faced with record low prices for the past five years.

In Mississippi, the effects of the new Farm Bill will mean equitable payments for our cotton and rice producers. Cotton and rice production is very capital intensive, and cotton and rice farms are usually larger than Midwest corn and soybean fields to offset this large investment of capital. The payment limitations set by the Farm Bill should mean a much stronger safety net for our producers.

Counter-cyclical payments introduced in the bill will also boost farm commodities in Mississippi. Farmers will still have planting flexibility because payments will be based on base acreage and yield and not on what was actually produced, but assistance will be built in when market prices are below target prices.

Another positive aspect for Mississippi farmers is the requirement for country-of-origin labeling on meat, fish and produce in two years. This should allow our state's catfish producers to continue to provide consumers with the highest quality product that they have come to expect from Mississippi Delta farm-raised fish.

Altogether, the new Farm Bill promises something for all the farmers in our state. MAFES scientists will work hard to ensure that farmers will have the resources they need to make the most of the opportunities presented by this legislation.

This issue of *Highlights* features research geared toward effective disease and pest management, an ever-present challenge facing producers.

Millions of dollars are spent every year to control diseases and pests, and millions more are lost as a result of the damage caused by these invaders in farm plots. In some cases, these pests are old enemies that have adapted to traditional means of control; in others, the organisms involved are only now being identified. In all cases, MAFES researchers are finding ways to limit the damage to crops, meat, fish and our food supply, while keeping an eye to environmentally friendly methods.

I'm confident you'll find that MAFES research supports Mississippi farmers as they go about the business of feeding and clothing our society.

Vance H. Watson

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Director

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MISSISSIPPI AGRICULTURAL AND
FORESTRY EXPERIMENT STATION

Vance H. Watson, *Director*

J. Charles Lee, *Interim President*

Vance H. Watson, *Interim Vice President*
Mississippi State University

EDITOR

Charmain Tan Courcelle

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Robyn Hearn

GRAPHIC DESIGN & LAYOUT

Mary Howell

PHOTO EDITORS

Jim Lytle

Marco Nicovich

WRITERS

Linda Breazeale

Bonnie Coblenz

PHOTOGRAPHY

Linda Breazeale

David Winton

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Office of Agricultural Communications

Box 9625

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