



Bob Ratliff

Producer advisory meetings help set priorities

Each year, hundreds of Mississippi producers of agricultural products ranging from sweetpotatoes to beef cattle come together to discuss and voice their research and education needs.



MAFES Associate Director Marty Fuller addressed the Central Advisory Council.

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By Bob Ratliff

The 2003 producer advisory meetings were held in at the North Mississippi Research and Extension Center in Verona on Feb. 27 and at the Central Mississippi Research and Extension Center in Raymond on March 7.

“The 2003 meeting was the 50th time north Mississippi agricultural producers have met to discuss their needs,” said North Mississippi Research and Extension Center head Reuben Moore. “It is the oldest such group in the state.”

During the morning session at Verona, more than 200 north Mississippi producers divided into 13 commodity groups to discuss the research needed to support their enterprises and the Extension programs that apply to their operations. MAFES personnel and MSU Extension specialists were on hand to answer questions and participate in the discussion.

Following a catfish lunch, representatives of the various commodity groups presented a summary of their discussions.

The vegetable group presentation was made by Union County producer Ralph Hanskiewicz, who said the group would like to see more research on new varieties, additional Extension resource people and more in-depth education on vegetable growing. The turf producers were represented by Harry Collins of Lee County. He discussed the need for a sod producers association and development of a shade-tolerant sod. He also noted that the producers would like to see development of a statewide marketing program for their products.

North Mississippi swine producers want continued support for the Wiley L. Bean Swine Demonstration Unit at the Pontotoc Ridge-Flatwoods Branch Experiment Station, according to Montgomery County producer Jerry Milner. The swine producers also asked that vacant animal science teaching and research positions at MSU be filled.

The seed improvement program is a key element in north Mississippi’s sweetpotato industry, said producer representative Tim Edmondson of Calhoun County. He added that the producers also support continued marketing research.

Ornamental producer representative Gene Penick of Noxubee County said long-term evaluation of woody perennials and annuals is an important research program for the ornamental industry. He said his group also supports university efforts to educate the public about soil testing and soil amendments.

North Mississippi grain producers want evaluations of corn insecticides in no-till and conventional cropping systems, according to Lee County producer Keith Wiseman. He also stressed the need for continued soybean variety trials and research to rate soybean varieties for harvestability.

Oktibbeha County fruit producer Charles Sciple said his group needs research to evaluate the cold hardiness of peach varieties, as well as additional research with new fruit crops. The producer group also pointed out the need for a university resource person for fruit.

The need to fill university positions in their area also was discussed by the forestry group, according to representative Larry Jarrett of Pontotoc County. Additional education opportunities and economic issues also are concerns of the forestry group, he said.

The need for an Extension horse specialist was discussed in the equine group, said representative Beverly Jones of Oktibbeha County. Additional information to help horse owners be proactive in getting necessary vaccinations also is needed, she said.

Crossbreeding research for heat tolerance and other desirable traits is one of the needs of the north Mississippi dairy industry, said group representative Jeremy Graham of Pontotoc County. He said research with heel warts and other foot problems is needed, as well as additional studies with baleage versus grazing.

North Mississippi cotton producers would like to see research with seed coatings that would delay emergence until optimum conditions are present, said Lafayette County producer Don Waller.

Marketing is the key issue for the beef industry, said Tippah County producer Dale Robertson. The beef producers also discussed the need for an animal science nutrition specialist at MSU and a midseason meeting for their group at the Prairie Research Unit.

Better access to disease diagnostics services is a major concern among aquaculture producers in northeast Mississippi, said representative Jay Schmidt of Chickasaw County. He added that producers also would like to see additional research with species that would provide alternatives to catfish.

The 2003 meeting marked the seventh time the Central Mississippi Research and Extension Agricultural Advisory Council has come together.



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“The Advisory Council gives central and south Mississippi producers an opportunity to discuss their research, marketing, and education needs and to communicate those needs to the people in charge of the research and Extension programs.”

Butch Withers, head of the Central Mississippi Research and Extension Center.

Almost 200 producers, industry leaders, Extension personnel, and MAFES scientists, representing six production areas met in breakout sessions during the morning and reported the results of their discussions during an afternoon general session.

The beef cattle report was given by MAFES animal scientist Rhonda Vann, who said the group discussed the possibility of a master cattleman program. The producers also discussed how country-of-origin-issues are impacting their industry and the need for research aimed at reducing winter feeding costs.

Walthall County Extension director Lamar Adams reported on the dairy group, which discussed nutrient management and water quality issues. The group also discussed dairy research at the Coastal Plain Branch in Newton, the North Mississippi Branch in Holly Springs, and the MSU campus.

The row crops group discussed the need for more cotton, corn and soybean research in south Mississippi, according to Extension area agent John Beale. He added that the group also noted the need for additional work on reducing wildlife damage to soybeans and other row crops.

MAFES horticulturist Bill Evans said the fruits and vegetables group discussed the importance of the digital diagnostic labs that are being established around the state. The importance of variety trials and the need for purple nutsedge control research also were topics in the fruits and vegetables meeting.

The ornamental report was given by Jamie Holland, president of the Mississippi Nursery and Landscape Association. He discussed the economic value of the nursery industry to the state, noting that it accounts for more than 10,000 jobs. He added that the producer group would like to see additional research in the areas of pesticide use and energy consumption, among others.

The forestry group report was given by Extension forestry specialist Glenn Hughes, who said the group discussed the need to educate the public about the benefits of the forest industry. He added that the group emphasized the importance of marketing, especially the development of new forest products markets.