

AgFocus

June 2022

A Special Supplement to

The Expositor

**Farming in Sparta
and White County**

FFA Updates





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Tennessee Agriculture

- Total farms: 69,983
- Average farm size: 155 acres
- 41% of the land in Tennessee is farmland.
- Economic impact: \$81 BILLION
- 342,000 people in Tennessee employed by agriculture and forestry.
- Farmers markets: 129
- Top commodities: soybeans, corn, cotton, hay, wheat, tobacco, cattle & calves, broiler chickens, fresh-market tomatoes and dairy products
- Production value: \$3,500,000,000
 - 60% crops & 40% livestock



FFA lives across the generations

RACHEL AUBERGER

contributor

Some families hand recipes down from generation to generation. Some families pass jewelry and heirlooms from grandparents to parents to children. Some families instill a love for a certain college athletic team in their children. Some families make memories visiting their favorite vacation spot year after year.

The Stocktons, however, have been passing a love for farming, making memories in the fields and the barns on their land, and instilling a love for the Future Farmers of America across three generations.

Mike Stockton, his son Paul, and Mike's grandchildren, Mackenzie and Will, are all members of the White County Chapter of FFA, with the youngest, Will, getting his blue jacket and continuing the family tradition, this fall.

Both Paul and his father Mike have earned Greenhand Degrees, Chapter Degrees, and the coveted Tennessee FFA State Degree during their time in the organization, and, while Mike has become limited in his involvement in the local chapter recently because of his age, he still loves to teach his grandchildren and pass along all the family knowledge of agriculture. Paul, on the other hand, is still heavily involved in FFA, volunteering his time to help with any of the local chapter events and coaching the livestock judging team in judging cattle.

"Agriculture has been a big part of all our lives since we were young," Paul ex-

plained about the family tradition. "Being involved in FFA gave us the opportunity to make connections with others who live the same way of life we do, learn and expand our knowledge within our desired fields, and also allows us to teach others and advocate for the importance of agriculture."

While helping the local FFA chapter is a passion for the Stockton family, teaching begins at home, and both father and grandfather wanted to teach the next generation the importance of hard work and responsibility. Mackenzie and Will grew up riding the family tractor and feeding cows with their dad, while also spending time in the garden, planting vegetables with their grandfather.

"We wanted them to know that they would get back whatever they put into their work," Paul said about having his children working in the fields at early ages and added that the agricultural work is year-round. "Training show calves, showing our cattle, and starting a garden usually starts out our year in the winter and spring. Summer is a lot of work as we start the major shows of the circuit, maintain our garden and prepare for harvest, and cut hay to prepare for the coming winter. Fall and winter at the end of the year consists of our final harvest in the garden and feeding our calves hay through winter."

And, as if that wasn't enough to keep all three generations of White County FFA members busy, Paul and Mackenzie are busy throughout the entire year selling the calves they raise and working with Mackenzie's horse.

While the work is hard and the hours



Family tradition. L-R: Will Stockton, Mackenzie Stockton, Paul Stockton, and Mike Stockton

are long, you won't find the Stocktons, even the youngest generation, complaining.

"My favorite part of farming is reaping the rewards of all my hard work. Buying and raising animals with potential and seeing them improve over time as I work with them," Mackenzie, who is a senior at White County High School, said while her brother, Will, a freshman this year, said that studying ways to improve the crop yield and quality of plants in both his flower and vegetable gardens are his favorite parts of working on the farm.

Working on the farm, whether in the fields or the barns, is a family tradition, but so is participating in the White County chapter of the Future Farmers of America, where each of the Stocktons said they have learned more about themselves and connect with like-minded individuals who will aid them in their futures.

"Getting to learn more about agriculture and applying what I've learned on my own farm is something I took away from all of my years involved in FFA," Mike said, while his son, Paul, said making new friends who share your interests and values and being able to stand with them, and them with you, through the highs and lows of both farming and life itself is something he will always cherish.

"FFA has allowed me to find my place in school as well as helped me to find what my interests are," Will, the last of the Stocktons to have been able to put on the Blue Jacket, said explaining the importance of the organization to him, while his sister said meeting new people from across the state and sharing a collective knowledge of agriculture with them is what makes being an FFA member important to her.

While each of the Stocktons got their

start in FFA in the halls of White County High School, and while Mike and Paul have continued their involvement through their adult lives and have shared a love for agriculture and instilled the importance of working the land in Mackenzie and Will, the future for the youngest two is still theirs to make what they want out of it, but there is no doubt that FFA will play a part in helping them determine what that future looks like.

"I hope that my experience in farming and FFA has given me the knowledge I need to one day become a successful large animal veterinarian and to help me better run my own farm in the future," Mackenzie, who will graduate in a few short months, said.

Then, she will start the next leg of her agriculture education as she builds on the foundation that her father, grandfather, and FFA have given her.

And Will, while he has a few more years as a student member of the White County FFA chapter, is looking toward the future as well, saying he hopes the skills he has learned on the farm and the knowledge he will gain over his next four years in FFA will help him decide what his future will include.

"Having my family involved in agriculture has made them into more responsible and well-rounded individuals," Amanda, Paul's wife and the mother of the youngest generation of Stockton FFA members, said. "It also makes me happy to see them engaging in things that they are passionate about that will have an impact on their communities."

Four members. Three generations. Countless hours. Unmeasurable amounts of work. But for the Stockton family, FFA and agriculture is their heritage.



White County FFA Update

DANIEL D. AUSTIN

FFA Reporter

The word "Tennessee" was stitched across the back of thousands of FFA member's jackets and was proudly displayed at the 94 th annual Tennessee FFA State Convention. The convention was held in Gatlinburg from March 28 th to the 30 th . FFA members from all over Tennessee flocked to Gatlinburg to see

old friends and celebrate another proud year of being a part of Tennessee FFA.

The White County FFA Chapter was among the hundreds of chapters represented at the convention. The Chapter won three awards while at convention, the Superior Chapter Award, a 10% Increase in Membership Award, and the Platinum P.L.O.W. Award. White County's member, Mackenzie Stockton, won a State Proficiency Award in Veterinary

Medicine.

White County also had seven senior members to receive their FFA State Degrees. The seven members are as follows: Keena Anderson, Alexis Hatmaker, Kassidy Hubert, Katie Hutchings, Keely LaFever, Abigail McCulley, and Mackenzie Stockton.

This convention was the first for many, yet the last for some. Laughter could be heard across the convention

hall at times, yet other times tears were shed for the thought of losing friends. This convention is definitely one for the books and will be engraved in every corduroy jacket forever. The White County FFA Chapter is extremely proud of its members and their hard work.

The chapter would also like to thank all of its dedicated parents and sponsors for making this historic trip possible.



Not Just a Dumb FFA Kid

ABBY MCCULLEY

WCHS FFA President

Have you ever stopped and asked yourself, "How do people see me?" Here recently I have been asking myself that question. Some of the questions that I have been asking myself are, "Do people see me as smart, caring, understanding, or do they see me as dumb, stuck up, and rude?" The one question that really stands out is, "Do people think I am smart?" Just because I have a background in agriculture do people think I am not as smart? Yes, I have a background in agriculture. Yes, I am an FFA member. I was actually the president for my chapter. I care about my grades and along with many of our members, I try hard in school. When you take a minute and look at the GPAs of the members of the White County FFA Chapter, you will find some of the highest GPAs in White County High School. While you will find some high GPAs, you will also find some low GPAs. However, those students can tell you anything you want to know about fixing a vehicle, building a house, planting crops, welding, or taking care of livestock.

Even after looking into the GPAs of our chapter, people may still believe that FFA members are not intelligent because those were just the grades of one chapter. However, according to the national FFA website, in 2019 the average GPA of students that applied for scholarships was 3.78, and the average class rank was 23rd out of 261 students. This just proves that it does not matter if you come from a vocational or agricultural background. You can still be as smart or possibly even smarter than students who do not have

the same background. With this being said, it is important to me that we share our knowledge with the younger generations to show them they can be successful as well. According to Carlota Nelson with Unicef, "Children pick up on everything they see you do." This is why our chapter does different activities with the elementary school students to help encourage them to care about their future; however, we have to better ourselves as leaders to do so.

This past summer, I was part of a leadership summit through Tennessee Tech University with some amazing leaders. They taught me how to use the strengths that I already have to be the best leader that I can, I then took the things that I learned back to my chapter. We have now taken our leadership skills and created our PLOW program. PLOW stands for Passing Literacy Onward. With this program, members of our chapter visit the elementary schools in our area and read books to the children. This helps show those children that no matter what kind of background they come from, they can still get up in front of other people and share their love of reading. This program also allows our members who love to read and are really good at it to share their passion with the younger children. I know what you are thinking. "Are there really FFA members who love to read?" Yes, there are, and this encourages a love of reading in younger students.

Another program that our chapter helps with is an event called Farm City Day. During this event, our agriculture community comes together at one of the local farms and teaches elementary school students what we do. The students

are grouped and FFA members lead them around to different stations; such as, a local beekeeper, local row crop farmers, beef farmers, dairy farmers, and many more. Some of these stations are even run by FFA members. For example, we have members who bring beef and dairy show cows and explain the differences between the two. They talk about what each type of cow is used for, what to look for in a good healthy cow, and how to take care of them. We also have members who talk about their chickens and how to care for them. Our row crop farmers explain how the different types of crops get from the farm to our table. The best part of the day is when we get to answer any questions that the students have. Now I am not going to lie, sometimes we get asked questions that we have no clue what the answer is. When a student asks us a question that we are unsure of the answer, we are proactive in finding an answer for them. We want the students to get as much information as possible and for them to be informed about the world of agriculture.

My advisors have always encouraged our FFA members and our agriculture students to ask questions. One of the best ways to learn is to ask questions. Whether it is about something in the classroom, in the greenhouse, at the barn, or even about a competition or event, they want us to ask questions. Our advisors want us to leave their classrooms with more knowledge than we had going into their classes, which helps us to better our education. This does not mean we are always going to be the smartest individuals, but we definitely try to be the best we possibly can while also helping to shape the younger generations. With all of this being said, just because I have a background that involves agriculture does not mean that I am any less intelligent than someone who has a background that involves medicine. My FFA chapter works to show everyone in our community that we are more than just country rednecks who love to work on a farm. It does not matter what you grew up doing, you can still be intelligent and do not let anyone tell you otherwise.



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Cattle Farming

ABBY MCCULLEY

WCHS FFA President

Everyone loves to eat, right? Of course they do! Whether you like to chow down on a juicy cheeseburger or would rather munch on a nice salad, you have to have a farmer to eat. If we did not have farmers who raised cattle, you could not enjoy a nice juicy cheeseburger at your family cookout. Without cattle farmers, we would be stuck eating pork or chicken and drinking goat milk or milk from a coconut. There are two types of cattle farming. There is beef production and dairy production. Each operation is run differently but both are essential for us to get to enjoy the foods we love. There are also different breeds of cattle used for each type of cattle farming.

In beef production, the most common breeds of cattle used are Black Angus and Hereford. There are more than 700,000 beef farms and ranches in the United States, and 91% of those are family-owned or individually operated. We have several beef farms here in Sparta. We also have a few slaughtering houses and local meat selling places in our little town. It is a good thing that there are so many beef producers in the United States because 76 million Americans eat beef everyday. Beef producers raise their cattle on the best sources of food so they gain the proper amount of weight with the proper amount of fat to create the perfect marbling in their meat. Marbling refers to the fat within a cut of meat. The fat within the meat gives it flavor and tenderness. Beef producers come up with the best way to

feed their herd so they produce the best meat. They also have to determine when to take them to the slaughtering house to be able to get the most meat out of the animal. In 2019, the United States consumed 27.3 pounds of beef.

In dairy production, some common breeds of cattle that are used are Holstein and Jersey. Without our dairy farmers, we would not be able to enjoy milk, ice cream, or cheese. While dairy producers are very important, less and less cow milk is being consumed so dairy producers are having to shut down. In 1996, Americans drank around 24 gallons of milk a year; however, in 2018 that had dropped to 17 gallons. Even though some are having to shut down, there are still over 40,000 dairy farms in the United States. We used to have several dairy farms here in Sparta, but all of them but one have shut down. Dairy producers have to work just as hard to figure out what food works best for their cattle to help them produce the most amount of good milk. These cows are milked a couple times a day and have it made. After they have been milked, they get to lay in nice, comfy beds under fans and eat.

Cattle farming is a big part of our everyday life. People have been raising cattle for many years because cattle were first domesticated about 10,000 years ago. Our dependence on these animals have not changed over the years; if anything, we have become more dependent on cattle for our food. Cattle farmers work very hard to make sure their cattle produce the best products for us to enjoy.



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Farming in White County

ABBY MCCULLEY

WCHS FFA President

We all know that we could not make it without farmers. In White County, we definitely know this. If you live in White County then you either are a farmer or you know a couple of them. Here, farming is not just how we get food, it is our way of life. Everywhere you turn in Sparta you see a farm. We have been farming in Sparta for years upon years. Some people do not realize how much work a farmer puts in for them to be able to eat. We understand the hard work and long hours it requires to produce quality goods because we witness it first hand. Some of us are actually the farmers who put in the hard work and long hours.

People have been farming here in Sparta for a very long time. Around here, running a farm takes the whole family plus a few others sometimes. We have to help each other to make sure everything gets done. If a fellow farmer gets sick or injured or their equipment breaks down, the whole farming community comes together to make sure everything gets taken care of. Each farmer in White County knows what it takes to get everything done and have a successful harvest; therefore, if they see another farmer struggling they try their best to help them out. Farming in a small town can be challenging and rewarding. Sometimes to sell certain products, you

have to travel a little ways to get them sold. However, sometimes you can sell to people in our community and do just as good if you would have traveled to sell them. When you live in a town that is full of farmers who grow a bunch of different things, you can purchase goods locally and know right where they came from and how they were grown.

The farms in Sparta have been passed down from generation to generation, which means some of these farms have been here for a very, very long time. Now sometimes, farms will get passed onto the next generation and that generation does not want anything to do with farming. They then sell the land and most of the time someone will buy it and build houses one it. I understand that keeping up a farm is hard work, but if everyone sells out then where would we get our food? If you are the next generation to take over the family farm, make sure you think about how much this world needs farmers, do not just sell out because you do not want to put in the work. Knowing the work a farmer puts in to be able to feed others gives you a better sense of respect for where your food comes from. Living in a town where you get to see people put in the hard days and late nights to get you the food you need helps you appreciate those people so much more. Remember to thank a farmer and put in the work if it is your time to take over the farm.



Produce Farming

ABBY MCCULLEY

WCHS FFA President

Farmers provide us with so many things. Who knows what we would do if we did not have farmers. They provide us with more than just food. They provide the products to make gas, clothes, and many other things we use on a daily basis. These farmers are not our cattle farmers, they are our produce/crop farmers. Produce farming includes fruits and vegetables. This includes crops like corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton, strawberries, green beans, and potatoes. Our produce/crop farmers provide our country with many products. Here in Sparta, we have many crop farmers. We have people in our town who grow strawberries, corn, wheat, soybeans, and other crops we all need. Not only are there several crop farmers in our small town, there are even more all across the country. There are about 2,023,400 farms in the United States as of 2019. There are about 700,000 beef farms, which means the rest of those other 1,323,400 farms are poultry, pig, and crop farms.

While cattle farming can be hard with trying to figure out the feed for the herd, produce farming can be just as hard. Crop farmers have to not only take care of their crops, but also their soil. They have to make sure the pH of the soil is right and that there is plenty of nutrients in the soil. After their soil is right, they have to know the perfect time to plant each crop. Some plants are started from

seed and can be put in the ground using a planter. Other plants are started from things called plugs that have to be started in trays and then put in the ground by hand. Once they have planted their crops, they have to fertilize them, spray them for insects and diseases, and make sure they are growing right. In some parts of the country, farmers have to set up an irrigation system to get their crops the water they need. Then it comes time to harvest. Producers have to know when the crops are ready to harvest and how quickly they need to get them to market to sell them. In some places local grocery stores will buy produce straight from the grower and resell it in their store.

Each crop needs to be taken care of differently which gives producers a variety of knowledge. Crop farming plays a very big role not only in this country but around the world. Without crop farmers, not only would we be without many foods, but we would not be able to make many of the products we use on a daily basis. While beef producers and crop producers run very different operations, sometimes they work together. Beef producers will provide waste from their herds to fertilize the crop producers' fields. Crop producers will provide the waste from their harvests for food for the beef producers' herds. This world would not be the same without either type of farmer, so make sure to say thank you to a farmer when you see them.



Women in Agriculture

ABBY MCCULLEY

WCHS FFA President

Oftentimes, women in agriculture are underestimated and questioned why they do not do something easier. Women who are involved in agriculture made the choice to farm because it is something that they enjoy doing. These women are strong, independent, and very capable of doing their job. As a woman in agriculture and someone who is furthering their education to become an agriculture educator, I have been asked why I want to be involved in agriculture. "Abby, you are so smart you could be a doctor or a lawyer or something. Why would you want to be an ag teacher?" The reason is because it is something that I love and it is something that we cannot live without, and maybe I can encourage other women to want to get involved in agriculture. It makes me so happy knowing that there are women who have stepped up and are working to change the stigma that women do not belong in the world of agriculture.

Women have been a part of agriculture for a very long time. Women have been helping out on family farms for generations. My grannys have told me stories about when their dad would keep them home from school to help him out in the fields. My great granny has even told me about how she used to be mean to her sisters so her mom would have to watch them and she would get to go work with

her dad. Years ago, it was not uncommon for everyone, male and female, to stay home from school to help out on the farms. It would not be just the children helping their dad either, their mom would also help out on the farm while still taking care of the family and the house. Even though women have always played a role in agriculture, they could not be a part of everything that involved agriculture. For example, women were not always allowed to be a member of FFA.

FFA was founded in 1928, but it was not until 1969 that women were allowed to join. For the past four years, every president of the White County FFA Chapter has been a female, I had the honor of being one of them. In 2017, 56% of the total farms in the United States had one or more female producers responsible for making decisions about the farm's operation. In the United States, there are 1,374 Agriculture Education teachers and 53% or about 728 of those are women. Women have been a part of this industry for a very long time, and it would not run the same without us. While women have been a part of agriculture for a while, we are starting to get more involved and make our presence more known to everyone. The world of agriculture needs both men and women to make everything run smoothly. Agriculture is something that everyone can be a part of in some way no matter who you are or where you come from.



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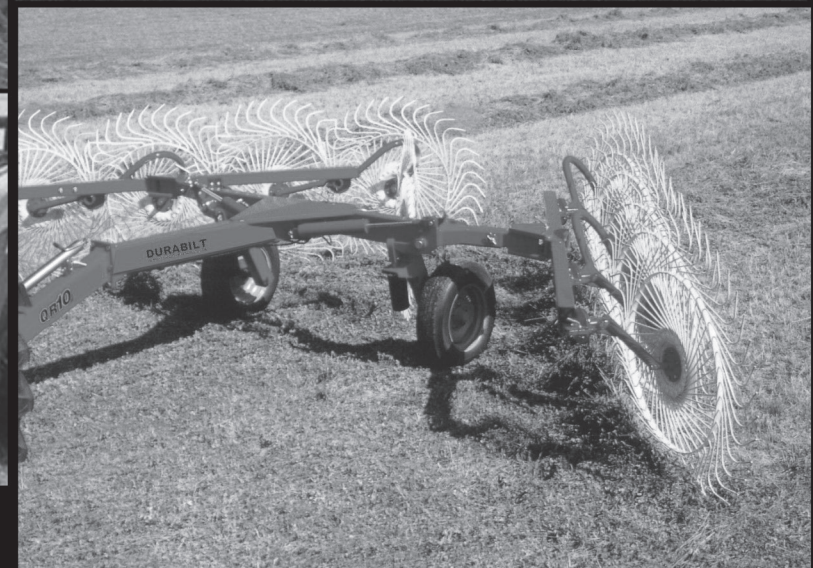
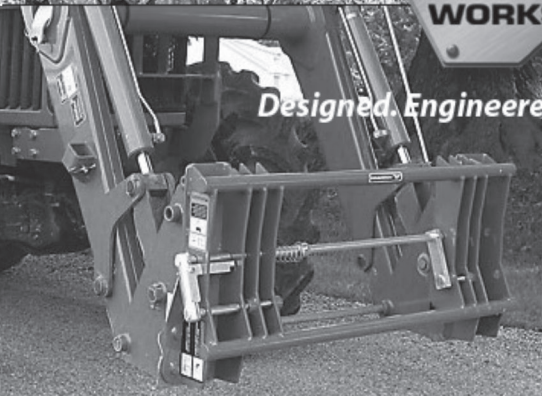


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