

**Strategic Plan to Grow Alabama's  
Agriculture, Agribusiness, Forestry,  
and Forest Products Industries  
2015–2020**

**A Report to Governor Robert Bentley  
January 2015**

Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries  
Alabama Cooperative Extension System  
Alabama Farmers Federation



January 15, 2015

The Honorable Robert Bentley  
Governor of Alabama  
State Capitol Building  
600 Dexter Ave.  
Montgomery, Alabama 36130

Dear Governor Bentley:

With your support and encouragement, a motivated group of leaders in **agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries** has given great effort to this comprehensive long-range plan to grow the largest segment of Alabama's economy. It is our sincere belief that through a collaboration of the public and private sectors we can achieve the goals contained in our strategic plan.

Based on a 2013 Auburn University/Alabama Cooperative Extension System economic impact study commissioned by the Alabama Agribusiness Council, agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries contribute **\$70.4 billion to our state's gross domestic** product or about 40% of Alabama's economic output and **employ nearly 600,000 Alabamians**.

With annual growth since 2005 exceeding 5% in agriculture alone, a tremendous future lies ahead for agriculture, agriculture, forestry, and forest products industries. Our intent is **to ensure continued growth through the next decade**, building on successes through innovation, research, education, careful resource management, and market-driven economic policies.

It is our sincere belief that a coordinated program that includes education, market development, research, infrastructure expansion, ease of capital formation, resource management, and regulatory reform will provide the necessary underpinning for a **surge in prosperity for farmers, foresters, small business owners, and workers** in associated businesses throughout our great state.

On behalf of the members of our Alabama Agriculture & Forestry Strategic Plan Steering Committee and many others who worked and contributed to this effort, we proudly and sincerely submit this report with the hope of engaging and inspiring the leaders of Alabama to join us in putting this plan into action for a more prosperous future.

Respectfully submitted,

John McMillan  
Commissioner  
Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries

# Strategic Plan to Grow Alabama's Agriculture, Agribusiness, Forestry, and Forest Products Industries 2015–2020

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## Purpose

Increase the economic contribution to Alabama's economy and the number of Alabamians employed in Alabama's agriculture, agribusiness, forestry and forest products industries.

## Goal

Increase agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries' contribution to Alabama's economy and employment by 10% from \$70.4 billion to \$77.4 billion and employment from 580,295 to 638,324 Alabamians by 2020.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

### **Writing Committee**

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### **Steering Committee**

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The following organizations are recognized for their contribution and support:

Alabama Agribusiness Council  
Alabama Cattlemen's Association  
Alabama Cooperative Extension System  
Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries  
Alabama Farmers Federation  
Alabama Forestry Association  
Alabama Forestry Commission  
Alabama Poultry & Egg Association  
Alabama Soil & Water Conservation Committee  
Auburn University College of Agriculture  
Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences  
The Cosby Company  
PowerSouth Energy Cooperative



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### **Keys to Future Success**

**9** **Fostering capital investment**

**Recommendation:** Develop greater access to capital so to finance small business ventures for agriculture, forestry, related industries, as well as public financial resources to expand needed infrastructure improvements in surface transportation, port facilities, and broadband deployment.

**10** **Developing a quality workforce**

**Recommendation:** Develop Alabama's workforce education and skills through greater emphasis on secondary and higher education, especially regarding career development programs. Also, support federal and state initiatives for a comprehensive, pro-business reform of guest worker programs to ensure a reliable source of workers for agricultural and forestry enterprises.

**11** **Ensuring freedom to operate**

**Recommendation:** Build on local, state and federal levels long-lasting positive and reliable public policy and regulatory environment for Alabama agriculture, forestry and related industries, with special emphasis on nurturing small businesses.

**15** **Maintaining transportation infrastructure**

**15** **Expanding local, national, and international trade**

**Recommendation:** Expand agriculture and forestry-focused marketing development efforts for Alabama producers in both domestic and international markets.

**16** **Strengthening the land-grant mission**

**Recommendation:** Build a collaborative engagement with Alabama land grant universities on curriculum, research and Extension programming.

**17** **Promoting economic development with state agency collaboration**

**Recommendation:** Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries assumes a governmental leadership role in the agricultural, forestry and agribusiness industry as an avenue of economic development in Alabama.

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## **Introduction: Alabama's *Competitive Advantage* in Agriculture, Agribusiness, Forestry, and Forest Products Industries**

Alabama's agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries are projected to enjoy a golden age of sustained growth, thanks to a number of factors, not the least of which are our great state's natural and human resources. We are truly blessed with abundant fertile land, rainfall, navigable rivers, a deepwater port, and, most of all, the people of Alabama who are endowed with a strong work ethic.

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to galvanize our state's leaders in these key industries to commit to a series of goals and strategies. This long-term commitment and ensuing implementation will achieve long-term, sustained growth for greater prosperity for Alabama's working families as well as help meet the world's growing demand for food and fiber.

Moving forward, please tell us your thoughts and suggestions for making this Strategic Plan a success.

JOHN McMILLAN

Commissioner

Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries





## Alabama's Agriculture, Agribusiness, Forestry, and Forest Products Industries in 2014

Agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries are Alabama's number one economic sector generating \$70.4 billion dollars (40% of Alabama's gross state product) and employing nearly 580,295 residents. These industries generate 10 jobs per \$1 million in direct sales.

Alabama agriculture and forestry related industries have become the state's number one industry as the result of a favorable climate, fertile soils, and bountiful water resources combined with the strong work ethic and management skills of landowners and business entrepreneurs. Alabama's favorable tax policies and limited governmental intrusion have created an environment that has allowed agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and the forest products industries to successfully build their businesses.

The sales of agricultural commodities represent \$4.7 billion per year. The poultry industry is the largest commodity sector with 65.6% of Alabama's agricultural commodity sales. The cattle and green industries follow poultry as the next two largest agricultural industries in the state. The diversity of agriculture in Alabama is reflected in the 14 major commodity groups composing the agriculture sector. This diversity creates future opportunities. The combined leadership of Alabama's agricultural commodity groups is outstanding and unity among them has positioned the industry for future growth.

The sales of forestry and forest products in 2010 were \$11.2 billion annually. Forest products were responsible for \$10.2 billion in annual sales while commercial logging contributed \$805.8 million per year in sales. Paper and paper board mills represent \$6.4 billion in annual forest product sales (57.2% of total forestry and forest product sales).

The website <http://alabamaAgImpact.com> details the economic impact of agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries in Alabama, each county, and each congressional district. These data serve as a benchmark to establish future goals and assess growth in economic vitality and employment.

## Potential for future growth

The nexus of a growing global population, growth in the global middle class population, a global trend to protein-rich diets, increased global demand for bio-based energy sources, and an increase in house and business construction, combined with Alabama's strong forestry, forest products, and animal protein industries position Alabama well for continued economic and employment growth. Alabama's surface, river, and port transportation options provide Alabama producers and value-added product companies easy access to marketing alternatives generally not available to businesses elsewhere in the United States. The collegial culture that exists among agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products professionals in Alabama is second to none and results in synergistic business and public policy relationships within the industries. The three Agricultural Experiment Stations and an Extension system are dedicated to the economic growth of Alabama's agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries. Alabama's workforce has a strong work ethic, is well educated, and possesses the technical skills required by a spectrum of businesses associated with agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries. A favorable tax environment in Alabama has permitted individuals and companies to prosper and invest in future expansion.

## Alabama Research and Development Assets

Alabama is blessed with three land-grant universities (Alabama A&M and Auburn University, Tuskegee University cooperating) that have the common mission of teaching, research and Extension to enhance the economy and quality of life of Alabama residents. They are the primary research/development vehicle for Alabama's agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries. The three institutions prepare a common annual plan of work that capitalizes upon their individual strengths and the synergistic strength of their collaboration.

In addition to public research institutions, Alabama is the home of world-class private research organizations that are developing new technologies and commercial products for agriculture and the forest products industries. Alabama has actively recruited agricultural and forestry focused research businesses. The combined strength of public and private researchers working in concert and independently positions Alabama as an early adopter of emerging technologies.



# Keys to Future Growth

## 1. Fostering capital investment

Agriculture and forestry are capital intensive industries. Land, equipment, and facilities are precursors to production systems before recurring fertilizer, feed, equipment, seed, breeding stock, electricity, water, and fuel costs. Besides access to reasonably priced capital, agricultural and forestry entrepreneurs require lenders knowledgeable of emerging production and processing technology and a commitment to industry growth.

### Goals

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- (1) Reduce barriers for new and existing businesses that are trying to leverage capital to start or expand forestry and agricultural operations.
- (2) Reduce unreasonable barriers such as archeological, environmental, and endangered species act studies that inhibit the loan process.
- (3) Ensure that information will be readily available to guide new and existing businesses on how to raise capital to finance agricultural and forestry operations.
- (4) Ensure that Extension programs are readily available to guide farm and forestry families on successful intergenerational transfer of business assets.
- (5) Decrease the time and cost associated with obtaining agriculture/forestry financing.

### Actions

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1.a - Petition the Alabama legislature to amend the Alabama Investment Initiative to include a new zero sales tax on permanent capital investments in production and processing facilities and equipment.

1.b - Increase funding for agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products research and Extension

1.c - Alabama Cooperative Extension System will establish a Farm and Agribusiness Management Center to prepare economic assessments for farm and forestry family-owned businesses to assess the impact of potential management, enterprise, and investment changes.

1.d - The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will form a taskforce made up of FSA, agricultural lenders, and farmers to identify practices to reduce the time and cost associated with obtaining agriculture/forestry financing.

1.e - The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will seek methods to simplify the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) guaranteed loan program process, along with all government forms and applications.



## 2. Developing a quality workforce

Prosperous agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries require an educated and motivated workforce. Production/processing systems require employees with a full range of formal education, academic disciplines, and industry experience. In addition to excellence in general education, high achieving agri-science and forestry programs that target contemporary industry-based competencies are required at the high school, community college, and university level. Careers in agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries exist across the entire spectrum of education and training. Many agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries are experiencing a critical shortage of reliable, legal workers.

The continued growth of Alabama's agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries will rely upon the next generation of leaders who possess a passion for agriculture and forestry. The federal H2A program fills fewer than 60,000 jobs nationally out of a total of more than 3,030,000 jobs in agriculture. The H2A program is temporary and seasonal, thus not suitable for many sectors of the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries. Nationally, only 1.9% of farm jobs are currently certified for H2A workers.

### Goals

- (1) Increase the number of young people seeking a career in the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries at all levels of educational training.
- (2) Increase the number of agri-science programs in Alabama high schools and FFA youth.
- (3) Increase the number of youth enrolled in Alabama 4-H agriculture and forestry programs.
- (4) Eliminate unwarranted bureaucratic barriers that discourage business expansion and effectiveness of labor programs such as H2A/H2B.

### Actions

2.a – Recommend that the State Board of Education assure that work force development programs include information to increase career awareness in agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries among public school students.

2.b – Ask Governor Bentley to petition Alabama's congressional delegation and state legislators to enact common sense legislation and regulatory reforms that ensure a reliable source of seasonal laborers under an efficient and fair H2A/H2B program.

2.c – Recommend the Alabama Department of Education and school districts increase the number of agri-science programs by 15% by 2020.



2.d – Propose legislation requiring universities and community colleges to develop 2 plus 2 programs in forestry and agriculture.

2.e – Land-grant universities will engage agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industry leaders to ensure that educational programs teach skills that are relevant to contemporary industry needs.

2.f – Extension will provide youth career awareness programs to increase youth passion for careers in the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.

2.g – Establish private sector internship programs for high school, community college, and university students interested in agriculture and forestry careers.

2.h – Fund a multipurpose livestock exhibition and educational center to encourage youth involvement in agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.

2.i – Work with the Alabama Community College System to offer agriculture and forestry programs that include “earn and learn” programs or other on the job programs.



### 3. Ensuring freedom to operate

Unreasonable regulations that are not science-based restrict industry growth by limiting options, preventing the adoption of emerging technology, and increasing costs. Inconsistencies among regulatory agencies at the local to federal level result in industries being controlled by the most restrictive regulation. Growth in agricultural and forestry industries requires priority access to water, land, energy, transportation infrastructure, and digital technology. The importance of agricultural and timber products will grow with the increased global population and demand for food and shelter. Alabama must position itself to capitalize upon local, regional, and global markets. Unreasonable regulations will limit the viability of the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.

#### Goals

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- (1) Ensure that laws and regulations impacting agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries are reasonable, affordable, and coordinated at the municipal, county, state, and federal levels.
- (2) Encourage a statewide “pro-growth” culture for agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries that fosters expansion and product diversification among existing businesses, attracts allied industries, and encourages local entrepreneurs.



## Water access regulations impacting livestock operations

Large livestock and poultry confinement operations need access to readily available sources of potable water. Some new poultry farms require more than 20 gallons per minute per house for watering of birds and evaporative cooling needs. Some poultry company contracts require that two sources of potable water be accessible to the farm.

### Actions

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3.a – Provide economic incentives to utilities to encourage adequate and reasonable cost of service to agricultural customers.

## Water access regulations impacting irrigation

Alabama is blessed with plentiful rainfall for most agronomic and horticulture production. Unfortunately, the rainfall distribution is not uniform throughout the year and seasonal droughts are common. The distribution of surface and groundwater resources are not consistent across the state. Reliable and affordable irrigation would increase Alabama crop yields and remove much of the year-to-year variability currently affecting agricultural profitability and the ability to attract food processing plants.

### Actions

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3.b – Ask Governor Bentley to petition the Alabama legislative, congressional delegations, and regulatory agencies to consistently ensure that public policy and regulations are supporting agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries access to surface and groundwater resources.

3.c–Require the Alabama Geologic Survey to provide landowners information on ground and surface water resources to support responsible irrigation development.

3.d – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will keep representatives of the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries informed of the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group (AWAWG) process and recommendations to ensure that agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries can capitalize upon Alabama water resources.

3.e – Agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest, products industry leaders will be involved in the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group process to encourage building and use of environmentally safe agricultural runoff, storage, and retention structures to support irrigation.



## Energy access and conservation regulations

Livestock operations, paper mills, food processing facilities, irrigation systems, feed mills, and grain handling facilities require reliable, accessible, and affordable sources of electricity, natural gas, and/or propane. A disruption in electricity, water, or gas in confinement livestock operations can result in a massive loss of animals or birds. Energy access and affordability are precursors to expansion of Alabama's agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.

### Actions

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3.f – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will form a task force composed of the Alabama Public Services Commission (PSC), Alabama Power Company, PowerSouth Energy Cooperative, and Alabama Rural Electric Associations to facilitate planning for future energy needs of the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.

3.g – Agricultural Experiment Stations and Extension System will conduct research and Extension programs to improve energy efficiency and develop energy saving technology for farms, food, and forest product processing plants and agribusinesses.

3.h – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will form a working group comprised of Alabama's energy providers and leaders in agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries for the purpose of achieving affordable energy for farms and businesses, especially at a rate consistent with industrial and manufacturing customers.

3.i – Provide tax incentives to foster adoption of energy conservation practices and technology.

## Digital technology access regulations

Access to reliable and affordable high-speed digital services will continue to grow in its importance to agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries as precision agricultural/forestry equipment, environmental monitoring and remote switches, and communication technology are developed.

### Actions

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3.j – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will encourage digital service providers and Alabama PSC to ensure that reliable and affordable high speed digital services are available to all rural communities by 2020.

## Nutrient management regulations

Livestock and poultry production operations (Animal Feeding Operation/ Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations–AFO/CAFO) in Alabama are required to obtain a nutrient management permit from the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM). The ADEM program is overseen by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Nutrient



management plans are designed to prevent nonpoint pollution contamination of Alabama surface and ground water resources and to minimize off-site odor concerns. Producers are committed to the stewardship of Alabama natural resources. An Alabama AFO/CAFO permit system that meets minimum federal standards and that does not impose unreasonable cost or burden on producers will foster continued growth and profitability of livestock feeding operations.

### **Actions**

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3.k – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will form a cross industry task force to review the nutrient management permitting process and standards. The task force will suggest constructive administrative changes to the AFO/CAFO permit process.

### **Production and processing facilities siting regulations**

Growth of agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries will require expanding current production and processing facilities and locating new facilities. Farmers and business owners face a gauntlet of local, state, and federal permits and fees when locating new facilities. The State of Alabama should encourage local entrepreneurs to grow their current operations while recruiting new agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries to locate in Alabama.

3.l – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will seek methods to streamline the process for site assessment and permitting.

3.m – Land-grant universities will develop and verify reliable methods of measuring storm water runoff from agricultural and forestry operations.

### **Protection from extremists**

Radical individuals and organizations have been responsible for actions that have damaged agricultural production and processing and research facilities across the country. Some of these actions have been violent and criminal; others have focused on misleading the American public, while others have intimidated farm families, agribusiness employees, and researchers. Agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries deserve to operate within the laws and regulations of Alabama without fear of individuals and organizations intent on doing damage to our businesses.

### **Actions**

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3.n - Work with the legislature to pass legislation making it a crime for a member of the general public to apply for and gain employment under false (deceptive) pretenses in an effort to gain knowledge of intellectual properties, trademark secrets, internal strategy and policy, and workforce practices.



## 4. Maintaining a transportation infrastructure

Transportation of inputs to Alabama and finished products out to markets is a prerequisite for sustaining agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries. Alabama is blessed with natural access to an ocean going port and river waterways. The rural nature of agricultural and forestry industries requires a quality transportation infrastructure throughout the state. Many of these locations are not in areas of population or traffic concentration. Transportation of agricultural and forestry commodities is controlled by the least developed road or bridge with the lowest capacity bridge along a route. The weakest link in the transportation infrastructure chain controls the movement of inputs and products. Public/private investment partnerships will be required to capitalize upon these transportation systems. Rail, air, and ground transportation infrastructure serves the needs of not only the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries but also the entire state.

### Goals

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- (1) Encourage Alabama's legislative and congressional delegation to maintain the current transportation infrastructure and make critical improvements to facilitate the efficient movement of agricultural, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products.

### Actions

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4.a – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will modernize the Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries petroleum testing facilities and protocols. Financing for these upgrades will be provided by updating the department's fee structure.

4.b – The Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries will coordinate an aggressive educational program for federal, state and county public policy makers on the transportation needs of the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.

4.c – Enact legislation to prioritize ALDOT funding to repair or replace weight-restricted or functionally obsolete bridges.

4.d – Support the Alabama Port Authority System to adequately address export needs of Alabama's agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.

## 5. Expanding local, national, and international markets/trade

The demand for agricultural and forest products will be driven by a growing global population and expansion of the middle class throughout the world. Alabama is well positioned to serve markets from local direct consumer sales, such as farmers markets, to global exportation of food and high-value wood products. Economic optimization of agricultural and forestry production requires that processing and wood product plants be located close to production locations. Failure to develop processing capacity while expanding production will result in other locations capturing the economic stimulus of value-added processing. Growth in the production of perishable products such as dairy, vegetables, and fruits, will be limited by Alabama's processing capacity.



## Goals

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- (1) Expand the Alabama Farm to School Program as a catalyst for growing market demand for Alabama-grown produce.
- (2) Increase the number of Alabama-based food processing facilities for meat, aquaculture, seafood, vegetable, and fruit products.
- (3) Increase marketing options for modest-sized capacity producers.
- (4) Increase third-party certified forest land by 10% by 2020.



## Actions

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5.a – Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries will oversee the development of freezing facilities in areas of significant fruit and vegetable production.

5.b – Alabama Forestry Association and Alabama Forestry Commission will develop an educational program for building professionals to promote increased use of Alabama lumber.

5.c – Alabama Agricultural Experiment Stations will continue research efforts to develop cost-competitive biomass liquid fuels technology from Alabama forests and farms.

5.d – Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, Alabama Forestry Commission, and Alabama Department of Commerce will actively promote Alabama agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products to domestic and international markets.

5.e – The Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries will encourage all state agencies to aggressively promote the “Made in Alabama” brand and preferentially purchase from “Made in Alabama” companies.

5.f – The Alabama Forestry Commission will cooperate with the Alabama Forestry Association to increase enrollment in the Alabama Tree Farm Program.

5.g - Increase the number of farmers markets operating in Alabama.



## 6. Strengthening the land-grant mission

Alabama agricultural and forestry industries are driven by technology. Tremendous increases in production and new products are the result of technologies developed at land-grant universities or by industry employed land-grant educated professionals. Alabama is the home to three land-grant universities with nationally recognized agricultural and forestry teaching, research, and Extension programs. Collaboration between industry leaders and the universities is required to foster the development of new technology and the delivery of relevant Extension programs. Coordinated efforts among the three land-grant universities will optimize efficiency and maximize the benefit of investments in research and Extension.



## Goals

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- (1) Foster collaboration among Alabama's three land-grant universities..
- (2) Ensure research and Extension programs are relevant to the short and long terms needs of Alabama.
- (3) Increase funding for research and Extension programs through reprioritization and new sources that are targeted to solving challenges and creating opportunities for Alabama agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.
- (4) Eliminate feral hog and wildlife damage to Alabama farms and forest lands.

## Actions

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6.a – Alabama agriculture and forestry leaders will petition the Alabama legislature to increase funding for research and Extension programs focusing on industry profitability and natural resource stewardship.

6.b – Increase research and Extension programming focusing upon eliminating feral hogs and minimizing wildlife damage to Alabama farms and forest lands.

6.c – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will work with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to adopt wildlife management policies that will help eradicate feral hogs in Alabama.

6.d – Alabama Extension System will expand Extension Disaster Education Network programming with a focus on weather disaster recovery in the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.

6.e – Land-grant leaders will identify priority research, teaching, and Extension needs and explore collaborative funding mechanisms.

6.f – Land-grant universities will increase the amount of applied research and Extension programming at experiment station field locations.

## 7. Promoting economic development through state agency collaboration

The Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries in partnership with the Alabama Forestry Commission and other agencies must assume the leadership to recruit agricultural and forestry product processing and manufacturing companies to Alabama and to expand market opportunities for existing businesses. Land-grant universities are the primary research/development institutions supporting continued growth of agriculture and forestry industries. Alabama's public research, Extension, and regulatory infrastructure that support agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries are suffering from decades of neglect. Modernization of research, Extension, and regulatory facilities is essential to develop industry-shaping technology and ensure public food safety.



## Goals

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- (1) Continuously evaluate existing public policy and regulations to optimize growth of Alabama's agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.
- (2) Make market development a priority for the Department of Agriculture and Industries and the Alabama Forestry Commission.
- (3) Integrate the strategic plan for enhancing agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries into the State of Alabama's economic development strategic plan.
- (4) Ensure that public facilities and equipment critical to successful research, Extension, and regulatory programming for the benefit of agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries are available to researchers, Extension educators, and regulators.



## Actions

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7.a – Alabama Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will formalize the Alabama Agriculture & Forestry Strategic Plan Steering Committee as a permanent entity with the mission of implementing, monitoring, and updating the Alabama Agriculture and Forestry Strategic Plan.

7.b – Alabama Forestry Commission, Alabama Forestry Association, and Alabama Farmers Federation will form a task force to evaluate private and public forest protection assets that include staffing levels, resource allocation, equipment needs, response times, and partnerships to ensure protection of Alabama forest assets and personal property.

7.c – The Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, the Alabama Forestry Commission, and the land-grant universities along with stakeholder participation will assess the equipment and facility needs of research, Extension and regulators whose efforts directly impact the agricultural, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries and produce a prioritized list on a biannual basis for the Governor of Alabama.

7.d – The Alabama Department of Commerce, the Department of Agriculture and Industries, and the Alabama Forestry Commission will collaborate on the recruitment of agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.



## 2015–2020 Industry Goals

Industry Sector	2020 Goals
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<b>Beef Cattle</b>	
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- Increase productivity and profitability of the beef cattle industry by 10%.
- Increase cattle numbers by 150,000 from 429,350 to 579,350 by 2020.
- Increase the number of days of grazing to reduce winter feed costs.
- Improve profitability of cattle producers.

<b>Catfish</b>	
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- Increase the amount of research being done to combat diseases facing catfish and other species of fish. Of primary concern at the current time is *Aeromonas hydrophila* in the areas of disease transmission, vaccine development, and probiotics investigation.
- Develop export markets for our aquaculture products and expand ways to level the playing field for Alabama raised/processed products versus imported seafood.
- Continue to develop Alabama’s coastal oyster aquaculture expansion while developing a diverse marine aquaculture program in our coastal zone.
- Support development of indoor recirculating aquaculture systems to produce tilapia, rainbow trout, marine shrimp, and other high-value seafood species.
- Develop profitable value-added products to reach more consumers who demand convenience and quality.
- Continue the study and implementation of new production systems, called in-pond raceways, to make these systems profitable and more efficient for multiple aquatic species.

<b>Cotton, Peanuts, Soybean, Wheat, and Feed Grains</b>	
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- Create public economic incentives to stimulate the capital investments in crop production, input supply chain, grain marketing, and grain processing.
- Create programs and strategies to restore the textile and apparel manufacturing industry.
- Create programs to attract capital investments in the modernization of the cotton industry equipment and facilities.
- Increase wheat and soybean yields, quality, and production acreage through a collaborative education program.
- Increase the statewide average yield of agronomic crops.
- Amend the “irrigation initiative” to the “Alabama Agricultural Investment Initiative.”



## Industry Sector    2020 Goals

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- Dairy**
- a. Work with agricultural stakeholders to review and simplify implementation of the Alabama Animal Feeding Operation/Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (AFO/CAFO) rules and regulations to ensure good environmental stewardship without the program being an economic burden to livestock producers.
  - b. Increase labor supply of well-qualified and motivated employees.
  - c. Create an Alabama Dairy Revitalization Program that will increase dairy production.
  - d. Provide options to producers on implementing environmental stewardship programs.
  - e. Obtain legislative support for water usage by agriculture as a state priority in all water use regulations and guidelines.
- Equine**
- a. Increase miles of public recreational horse trails to more than 250 miles by 2018 through funding from the Federal Highway Administrator's Recreational Trails Program and in collaboration with the Alabama Department of Transportation and the Alabama Trails Commission.
  - b. Conduct an Economic Impact Study of the Alabama Equine Industry in collaboration with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.
  - c. Finalize and publish standards of care guidelines for equine, which include protocol for police officers/state troopers responding to equine calls by 2015 in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and Industry's State Veterinarian.
- Forestry**
- a. Grow from 4th to 1st in southern states forest product production.
  - b. Increase direct employment from 38,369 to 42,205 by forest products companies.
  - c. Increase total timber harvest from 41 million tons to 43 million tons.
  - d. Increase third-party certified forest acres from 5.5 million to 6.0 million acres.
- Fruits and Vegetables**
- a. Increase labor supply of well-qualified and motivated employees.
  - b. Increase direct sales from fruit and vegetable growers to local and state school systems.
  - c. Increase the sales of value-added fruit and vegetable products sold at retail markets.
    - Develop commercial processing and cold storage facilities
    - Develop lease-fee based value-added processing facilities accessible to producers.
  - d. Increase the sales for bona fide fruit and vegetable growers at retail markets.
    - Adopt an Alabama Certified Farmers Market program.
  - e. Increase funding of land-grant universities and Experiment Station field locations.



**Industry Sector    2020 Goals**

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**Greenhouse,  
Nursery &  
Landscape**

- a. Increase labor supply of well-qualified and motivated employees.
- b. Establish an enforced Landscape Company Certification program and searchable database.
- c. Increase public awareness of the value of the green industry.
- d. Increase public awareness of the value of home and community landscaping.
- e. Create a horticulture check-off program to sponsor research, Extension education, and marketing.
- f. Establish an enforced Certified Irrigation Contractors program.
- g. Promote water education and conservation among the general public.

**Hay and Forages**

- a. Increase the number of producers using forage testing results to optimize the production of quality forages.
- b. Increase the production of high moisture hay (haylage and balage).
- c. Improve farmers' ability to differentiate green and yellow foxtail from knotroot foxtail to ensure proper weed management.
- d. Gain access to road medians and right-of-ways for commercial hay harvesting.
- e. Foster the development of 2,4-D resistant clover varieties.
- f. Increase Extension programming and research trials on emerging forage harvesting practices, grazing, and equipment at Auburn University Agricultural Experiment Station field locations.
- g. Purchase and support the use of a mobile forage testing unit with a portable NIR analyzer for forage and grain quality assessment.



## **Industry Sector    2020 Goals**

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- Honey and Bees**
- a. Implement a statewide collaborative beehive stewardship program to minimize pesticide damage to the bee and honey industry.
  - b. Obtain official recognition of the Queen Honey Bee as the Alabama Agricultural Insect.
  - c. Make Forever Wild lands available for apiary hive placement.
  - d. Obtain funding for a minimum of four full-time pollination and bee specialists at the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries.
  - e. Secure funds to support honey production, colony collapse disorder research, marketing, and Extension education. Expand the program to include other crops such as soybeans, fruits, vegetables, etc. by check-off funded commodities and land-grant universities.
- Meat Goats**
- a. Establish a graded sale for sheep and/or goats.
  - b. Attract USDA inspected processing facilities to increase retail sales in Alabama.
  - c. Establish state regulations and guidelines that maintain on-farm sales as a marketing option.
  - d. Foster communications and collaboration among Alabama A&M, Auburn, and Tuskegee Universities on small ruminant teaching, research, and Extension.
- Pork**
- a. Recruit and incentivize pork processors and markets into Alabama.
  - b. Work with agricultural stakeholders to review and simplify implementation of the Alabama Animal Feeding Operation/Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (AFO/CAFO) rules and regulations to ensure good environmental stewardship without the program being an economic burden to livestock producers.
  - c. Increase labor supply of well-qualified and motivated employees.
  - d. Provide options to producers on implementing environmental stewardship programs.
  - e. Increase Alabama-grown feed supplies.
  - f. Maintain responsible use of antibiotics as a management alternative to enhance profitability and food safety.
- Poultry**
- a. Work with agricultural stakeholders to review and simplify implementation of the Alabama Animal Feeding Operation/Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (AFO/CAFO) rules and regulations to ensure good environmental stewardship without the program being an economic burden to livestock producers.
  - b. Expand poultry production and processing to meet domestic and global demand while targeting locations in Alabama in need of economic stimulation.
  - c. Decrease operating costs of poultry production and processing.
  - d. Develop new equipment with emerging technology to optimize poultry production and processing.
  - e. Educate consumers, farmers, and public officials of the value of the Alabama poultry industry.
- Turfgrass**
- a. Increase labor supply of well-qualified and motivated employees.
  - b. Set precedence over water, combat erroneous regulations, and promote water conservation among customer base.
  - c. Increase Department of Agriculture and Industry's enforcement of green industry permit fees and inspections.
  - d. Decrease taxes on agricultural equipment and production inputs.
  - e. Increase funding of land-grant universities and experiment station field locations to improve the quality of Alabama turfgrass products.





## Appendix 1

### **Strategic Plan to Grow Alabama’s Agriculture, Agribusiness, Forestry, and Forest Products Industries 2015–2020**

Governor Robert Bentley, in March 2013, expressed his support for Alabama’s largest economic sector — agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products — as he announced results of a comprehensive economic impact study that reveals the four inter-related industries generated \$70.4 billion a year for Alabama’s economy and employed nearly 600,000 Alabamians.

On the heels of this study, the next logical sequence is to determine what steps must be taken to continue to grow this economic sector. Pursuant to this, Governor Bentley authorized Commissioner John McMillan to begin the process of formulating a Strategic Plan for building the long-range profitability and expansion of agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products.

Commissioner McMillan brought together representatives from Alabama’s major stakeholder groups as well as Auburn University’s College of Agricultural Sciences and School for Forestry and Wildlife Sciences and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System as a steering committee. On July 14, 2014, more than 100 leading farmers, foresters, agribusiness owners, educators, and government officials met in the Alabama State Capitol for a daylong conference.

Presenters included the following

- Deputy Under Secretary Karis Gutter, U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Aubrey Bettancourt, California Water Alliance
- Brian Kleppenstein, Protect the Harvest
- Kate Hall, Biotechnical Industry Organization
- Dean Bill Batchelor, Auburn University College of Agriculture
- Dr. Gary Lemme, Alabama Cooperative Extension System
- Brian Davis, Alabama International Trade Center
- H.S. “Smitty” Thorne, Alabama Port Authority
- Ken Muehlenfeld, Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences
- Alan Rose, New Sprout Organic Farms

Following the presentations, stakeholder groups met to identify their recommendations for the Strategic Plan based on the following criteria:

- (1) Identify five measurable production/processing/marketing goals for your commodity that will contribute to Alabama’s economy and employment.
- (2) Develop an implementation strategy to remove barriers to your success and foster success.
- (3) Identify specific public policy and regulatory changes (local—state level) necessary to allow your segment of Alabama’s agriculture and forestry industry to achieve your goals.
- (4) Identify the research and Extension issues you need addressed to achieve your goals.
- (5) Identify the communications needs you have from state agencies, commodity groups, agricultural and forestry advocacy groups, and land-grant universities (AU, AAMU, and Tuskegee University) to allow you to achieve your goals.

## **Appendix 2. Strategic Time Line**

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee will meet at least twice a year to prioritize and develop action plans to address short, mid- and long-term actions.

### **Short Term (2015)**

1.a – Petition the Alabama legislature to amend the Alabama Investment Initiative to include a new zero sales tax on permanent capital investments in production and processing facilities and equipment.

1.c – Alabama Cooperative Extension System will establish a Farm Management Center to prepare economic assessments for farm and forestry family-owned businesses to assess the impact of potential management, enterprise, and investment changes.

2.a – Recommend that the State Board of Education ensure that work force development programs offered by the Alabama Department of Education include information to increase career awareness in agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries among public school students.

2.d – Propose legislation requiring universities and community colleges to develop 2 plus 2 programs in forestry and agriculture.

2.f – Extension will provide youth career awareness programs to increase youth passion for careers in the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.

3.d – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will keep representatives of the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries informed of the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group (AWAWG) process and recommendations to ensure that agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries can capitalize upon Alabama water resources.

3.e – Agriculture, agribusiness, forestry and forest products industry leaders will be involved in the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group process to encourage building and use of environmentally safe agricultural runoff, storage, and retention structures to support irrigation.

3.k – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will form a cross industry taskforce to review the nutrient management permitting process and standards. The taskforce will suggest constructive administrative changes to the AFO/CAFO permit process.

4.a – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will modernize the Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries petroleum testing facilities and protocols. Financing for these upgrades will be provided by updating the Department's fee structure.

4.c – Enact legislation to prioritize ALDOT funding to repair or replace weight-restricted or functionally-obsolete bridges.

6.d – Alabama Extension System will expand Extension Disaster Education Network programming with a focus on weather disaster recovery in the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.

6.e – Land-grant leaders will identify priority research, teaching, and Extension needs and explore collaborative funding mechanisms.

7.a – Alabama Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will formalize the Alabama Agriculture & Forestry Strategic Plan Steering Committee as a permanent entity with the mission of implementing, monitoring, and updating the Alabama Agriculture and Forestry Strategic Plan.

### **Mid Term (2016–2018)**

1.d – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will form a taskforce made up of FSA,

agricultural lenders, and farmers to identify practices to reduce the time and cost associated with obtaining agriculture/forestry financing.

2.b – Ask Governor Bentley to petition Alabama’s congressional delegation and state legislators to enact common sense legislation and regulatory reforms that ensure a reliable source of seasonal laborers under an efficient and fair H2A/H2B program.

2.c – Recommend the Alabama Department of Education and school districts increase the number of agriscience programs by 15% by 2020.

2.e – Land-grant universities will engage agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industry leaders to ensure that educational programs teach skills that are relevant to contemporary industry needs.

2.g – Establish private sector internship programs for high school, community college, and university students interested in agriculture and forestry careers.

2.i – Work with the Alabama Community College System to offer agriculture and forestry programs and to develop public/private partnership opportunities where students can participate in “earn and learn” programs or other on-the-job programs.

3.b – Ask Governor Bentley to petition the Alabama legislative, congressional delegations, and regulatory agencies to consistently ensure that public policy and regulations support agriculture and forest product industries access to surface and groundwater resources.

3.c – Require the Alabama Geologic Survey to provide landowners information on ground and surface water resources to support responsible irrigation development.

3.f – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will form a task force composed of the Alabama Public Services Commission (PSC), Alabama Power Company and Alabama Rural Electric Associations to facilitate planning for future energy needs of the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.

3.g – Agricultural Experiment Stations and Extension System will conduct research and Extension programs to improve energy efficiency and develop energy saving technology for farms, food and forest product processing plants and agribusinesses.

3.h – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will form a working group comprised of Alabama’s energy providers and leaders in agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries for the purpose of achieving affordable energy for farms and businesses, especially at a rate consistent with industrial and manufacturing customers.

3.j – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will encourage digital service providers and Alabama PSC to ensure that reliable and affordable high-speed digital services be available to all rural communities by 2020.

3.l – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will seek methods to streamline the process for site assessment and permitting.

3.n – Land-grant universities will develop and verify reliable methods of measuring storm water runoff from agricultural and forestry operations.

4.b – The Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries will coordinate an aggressive educational program for federal, state, and county public policy makers on the transportation needs of the agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.



- 5.a – Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries will oversee the development of freezing facilities in areas of significant fruit and vegetable production.
- 5.b – Alabama Forestry Association and Alabama Forestry Commission will develop an educational program for building professionals to promote increased use of Alabama lumber.
- 5.e – The Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries will encourage all state agencies to aggressively promote the “Made in Alabama” brand and preferentially purchase from “Made in Alabama” companies.
- 5.g – Increase the number of farmers markets operating in Alabama.
- 6.b – Increase research and Extension programming focusing upon eliminating feral hogs and minimizing wildlife damage to Alabama farms and forest lands.
- 6.c – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will work with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to adopt wildlife management policies that will help eradicate feral hogs in Alabama.
- 6.f – Land-grant universities will increase the amount of applied research and Extension programming at Experiment Station field locations.
- 7.b – Alabama Forestry Commission, Alabama Forestry Association, and Alabama Farmers Federation will form a task force to evaluate private and public forest protection assets that include staffing levels, resource allocation, equipment needs, response times, and partnerships to ensure protection of Alabama forest assets and personal property.
- 7.c – The Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, Alabama Forestry Commission, and the land-grant universities along with stakeholder participation will assess the equipment and facility needs of research, Extension, and regulators whose efforts directly impact the agricultural, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries and produce a prioritized list on a biannual basis for the Governor of Alabama.
- 7.d – The Alabama Department of Commerce, the Department of Agriculture and Industries, and the Alabama Forestry Commission will collaborate on the recruitment of agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.

### **Long Term (2019 and beyond)**

- 1.b – Increase funding for agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products research and Extension.
- 1.e – The Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries will seek methods to simplify USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) guaranteed loan program process, along with all government forms and applications.
- 2.h – Fund a multipurpose livestock exhibition and educational center to encourage youth involvement in agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products industries.
- 3.a – Provide economic incentives to utilities to encourage service to agricultural customers when such service does not ordinarily meet the utility’s service extension regulations.
- 3.i – Provide tax incentives to foster adoption of energy conservation practices and technology.

4.d – Support the Alabama Port Authority System to adequately address export needs of Alabama’s agriculture, agribusiness, forestry and forest products industries.

5.c –Alabama Agricultural Experiment Stations will continue research efforts to develop cost-competitive biomass liquid fuels technology from Alabama forests and farms.

5.d – Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, Alabama Forestry Commission and Alabama Department of Commerce will actively promote Alabama agriculture, agribusiness, forestry, and forest products to domestic and international markets.

5.f – The Alabama Forestry Commission will cooperate with the Alabama Forestry Association to increase enrollment in the Alabama Tree Farm Program.

6.a – Alabama agriculture and forestry leaders will petition the Alabama legislature to increase funding for research and Extension programs focusing on industry profitability and natural resource stewardship.





