

Research, Education Needs Focus of Producer Meeting

By Bob Ratliff

M.D. Phillips will celebrate his 90th birthday this year. For more than half of those years, he has been a member of the North Mississippi Producer Advisory Committee.

The committee meets annually to give input to the Mississippi State University Extension Service and the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station on the research and education needs of agricultural producers in 27 north Mississippi counties.

Phillips was at the first committee meeting in 1953 and was one of about 160 producers attending the 2005 gathering.

"We started with about a dozen people meeting under a shade tree at the Holly Springs experiment station," the Alcorn County cattleman said. "For lunch, we all went to the Wagon Wheel Restaurant in town."

The setting has changed—this year's group met in the comfort of the North Mississippi Research and Extension Center and the Lee County Agri-Center on a brisk February day and enjoyed a catered barbecue lunch—but the goals are still the same. Producers representing 12 commodities met to discuss their needs, with representatives of each group reporting to Extension and experiment station representatives at the end of the meeting.

Steve Koehn of Monroe County gave the aquaculture report. More research on ways to detect and prevent off-flavor, a problem caused by algae in ponds, was among the producers' needs. They also requested help with marketing freshwater prawns.

Forage systems research, along with programs related to health and nutrition were among the needs expressed by the beef producers, according to Monroe County cattleman Bill Darnell.

Tippah County producer Keith Morton said the cotton group discussed the need for MSU to continue its conventional cotton seed breeding program. The cotton producers also asked for some basic consumer education.

"Too many of our neighbors are not aware of where their food and fiber products come from," Morton said. "We need more of this type of consumer education."

Heat stress research was the main thing on the minds of the committee's dairy producers. Pontotoc County dairyman Jeremy Graham said producers would like to see more work to reduce heat stress, including research on the use of feed additives to reduce it internally.

Expanded education programs on horse ownership and care were among the requests from the equine group.

"We also need to increase public awareness of the economic impact of the equine industry in Mississippi," said

Prentiss County representative Dalton Garner.

The need for an energy policy that encourages the development and use of agricultural and forestry biomass fuel products was a major topic of discussion in the forestry group.

"We also would like university help with finding ways to capitalize on recreational and other multiuse opportunities for forestland," said group representative Don Whitehead of Lafayette County.

The fruit and vegetable producers discussed the need for an information infrastructure to keep abreast of new varieties and production practices. Lowndes County producer Melvin Ellis said the group also wants continued vegetable variety trials at the university's branch experiment stations.

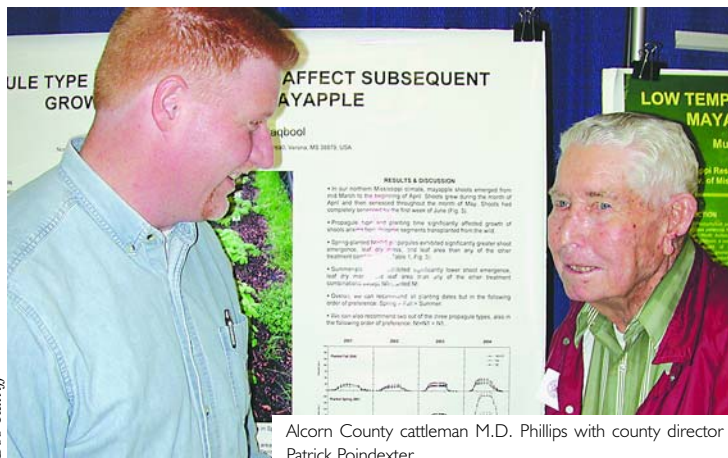
The recent discovery of soybean rust was a major topic of discussion in the grain crops group. Doug Mitchell of Alcorn County said the producers also discussed the need for a map of the state showing recommended soybean varieties, planting dates and seeding rates.

More research with energy- and labor-saving techniques in commercial horticulture operations was requested by the ornamental group. Gene Penick of Noxubee County said the group also would like to see university involvement in making more information about recommended ornamental plant varieties available to the public.

Calhoun County producer Stephen Bailey said north Mississippi sweet potato growers need continuing help with obtaining approval for pesticides to use on their crops. The sweet potato group also requested university assistance with new recipe development.

The swine producers discussed the recent repairs made to the Wiley L. Bean Swine Unit at the Pontotoc Ridge-Flatwoods Branch Experiment Station. Byron Wilson of Chickasaw County said the group would like to see the unit maintained as a demonstration site for swine production.

Turf producers requested help from the university on educating the public about turf grass management. Representative Paul Wellborn of Union County said the group also discussed the need for additional research on shade tolerance and cold tolerance of warm-season grasses.



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Alcorn County cattleman M.D. Phillips with county director Patrick Poindexter.