DOWN TO EARTH

AGRICULTURE SUSTAINS ALABAMA

FAST FACTS

→Sustaining for the Future

Farmers work with the future in mind. They use forward-thinking practices that reduce inputs, protect the land, produce healthy and sustainable products, and ensure the next generation of their family has the resources needed to farm.

FACT **97%**
OF ALABAMA FARMS ARE FAMILY OWNED.

→Carbon Emissions

U.S. agriculture contributes just 10% to overall greenhouse gas emissions. Thanks to farmers' dedication to conserve natural resources, that percentage drops to negative 2% when factoring in additional carbon-absorbing practices.

Cattle-generated gases are completely natural, are on the decline and are different from gases stemming from fossil fuel emissions. Between 1961 and 2018, the U.S. beef industry reduced emissions per pound of beef produced by more than 40% – while producing more than 66% more beef per animal.

Plus, Alabama forests have a "sea" of stored carbon that's approximately 1.16 billion metric tons.

→Animal & Plant Efficiency

Over the last 70 years, U.S. farms nearly tripled in production while resources used (including land, energy and fertilizer) remain stable.

In 1990, farmers would have needed almost 100 million additional acres to harvest the same amount of corn, cotton, rice, soybeans and wheat produced in 2018.

Thanks to improved genetics, nutrition and better management, more beef is produced per head of cattle in the U.S. Genetics improved the quality of U.S. poultry, too. Chickens are humanely and efficiently grown in houses that reduce inputs, such as electricity and water.

→Data & Technology

Technology is integral to farmers: think smartphones, computers, GPS and more.

Farmers can remotely manage operations through phone apps – whether turning on irrigation pivots or controlling temperatures in a poultry house.

Row-crop farmers use precision agriculture to reduce environmental impacts, conserve water, reduce fuel usage and prevent soil compaction. Tractors with auto-steer use GPS technology to ensure precise planting, fertilizer application and harvest.

→Conserving Natural Resources

Farmers and landowners participate in voluntary conservation programs, which preserve green spaces (grasslands, forests and wetlands) that absorb greenhouse gases.

For example, Alabama ranks third in the contiguous U.S. in timber acreage, and timber growth has exceeded the removal rate since the 1950s. Sixty percent of Alabama's surface water flows through private forests. Alabama's 23 million acres of timberland produce enough oxygen for 214 million citizens to breathe every year.

→Smart Land Use

Farmers are stewards of the land. They're smart with how they use, care for and protect the resources that have been entrusted to their care.

For example, cover crops (planted in the winter between growing seasons for crops like cotton) improve soil biology, reduce weed competition, improve water filtration and increase organic matter.

Crop rotation (alternately planting crops like peanuts and cotton or strawberries and other produce) reduces soil erosion and improves water quality.

Cattle are routinely moved to different pastures – a practice called rotational grazing– so forages, their primary source of nutrition, can naturally regrow.

Sources:

Alabama Forestry Commission
Forest Landowners Association
2017 Census of Agriculture, USDA NASS
The Beef Checkoff
American Farm Bureau Federation