

# New reports show dominant role of agriculture and forestry in Alabama

June 25 2013, by Jim Langcuster

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A newly released series of reports demonstrates the dominant and, in many cases, indispensable role the agriculture and forestry sector plays in the economic fortunes of Alabama's 67 counties.

The reports, collectively titled the Economic Impacts of Alabama's [Agriculture](#), [Forestry](#) and Related Industries, are the result of a collaborative effort of the Alabama Agribusiness Council, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Auburn University and other businesses and organizations. It is a compilation of agricultural and forestry economic data collected from all of Alabama's 67 counties.

The comprehensive county-level data is available online: [www.AlabamaAgImpact.com](http://www.AlabamaAgImpact.com) .

Deacue Fields, an Alabama Extension economist and chairperson of Auburn University's Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, directed the study.

Leigha Cauthen, executive director of the Alabama Agribusiness Council, credits the report with providing a highly detailed and comprehensive picture of the impact of agriculture and forestry on local economies around the state.

The Agribusiness Council is a statewide agricultural organization that serves as the collective voice of Alabama agriculture.

"This will be a useful tool in bringing much-deserved attention to agriculture and forestry and how critical those industries are to our local economies," Cauthen says.

The newly completed study complements another statewide study, released in February, which demonstrated that agriculture, forestry and related industries contribute \$70.4 billion to Alabama's economy, accounting for almost 40 percent of its GDP and employing 580,295 people – 22 percent of the state's workforce.

The new study, while complementing the earlier study, also illustrates how essential this sector is to the [economic vitality](#) of many Alabama counties, says Gary Lemme, Alabama Extension director.

"Alabama agriculture and forestry industries drive the economy of all our rural communities," Lemme says. "Without this sector, many of our counties simply couldn't support their populations."

Lemme says it's important for county and local leaders not only to understand this basic economic reality but also to appreciate the importance of working closely with agricultural and forestry producers and processors as they develop new strategies for economic growth.

In addition to driving home this critical economic reality to local policy makers, he says the data outlined in the report will also provide county and other municipal leaders with valuable economic benchmarks to guide grassroots economic decision-making in the future.

Fields says this was a motivating factor behind these efforts.

"My hope is that when the impact generated by agriculture is documented, it will spark additional investment in the industry throughout the state," he says.

Both Cauthen and Lemme credit the report with illustrating the diversity of Alabama's agriculture and forestry sector.

"We're reminded of the critical role the catfish industry plays in west Alabama, not only as a dominant economic player but also as major employer," Cauthen says, adding that the same could be said for poultry and row crop production in north Alabama, the green industry in Jefferson, Baldwin and Mobile counties and peanuts in the Wiregrass."

Cauthen says the increasing value of Alabama row crop farming, which passed the billion-dollar mark this year, is one of many tangible examples of how agriculture and forestry sector is evolving to keep pace with the demands of the global economy – a change reflected in the steady adoption of precision farming methods, which have enabled farmers to reduce operating costs while securing higher standards of environmental stewardship.

Moreover, Lemme credits the report with helping illustrate the important role many Alabama agricultural counties will play in helping feed the planet as the world population surpasses more than 9 billion people by mid-century.

"The world will need to double its food production between now and 2050," he says. "And Alabama's ability to produce quality protein food sources such as poultry, fish, beef and soybeans matches the growing global demands."

Provided by Auburn University

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