

Evolving agriculture part of Albemarle past, future

Though its rich soil has long been a productive, economic treasure, the Albemarle is one of the few regions where the state's former chief cash crop, tobacco, is next to invisible. Due to some quirk in the soil, growers deemed Albemarle turf unwelcoming to the golden leaf.

Agriculture, nevertheless, took root and evolved into one of the region's economic engines during the last century. In hindsight, the absence of tobacco stimulated the diversity

of area farming ventures, from corn and soybeans to cabbage and cotton to peanuts and potatoes. These crops dominate local farming today and continue to be a transforming influence on the region's future.

This year's Progress & Review Edition celebrates Albemarle agriculture during the last 25 years, its evolution as an industry, partner to economic development and mentor of lives and lifestyles.

The tentacles of local agriculture, as our stories

illustrate, reach deep into the community's identity, coloring the focus of family life, education and human relations while strengthening the region's business connections.

Despite the whims of weather and the gyrations of a fickle global marketplace, farming has proven to be a reliable and viable source of financial sustenance.

Of course, farming alone will not deliver the region to its ultimate potential, which is why local leaders seek out new

business and industry.

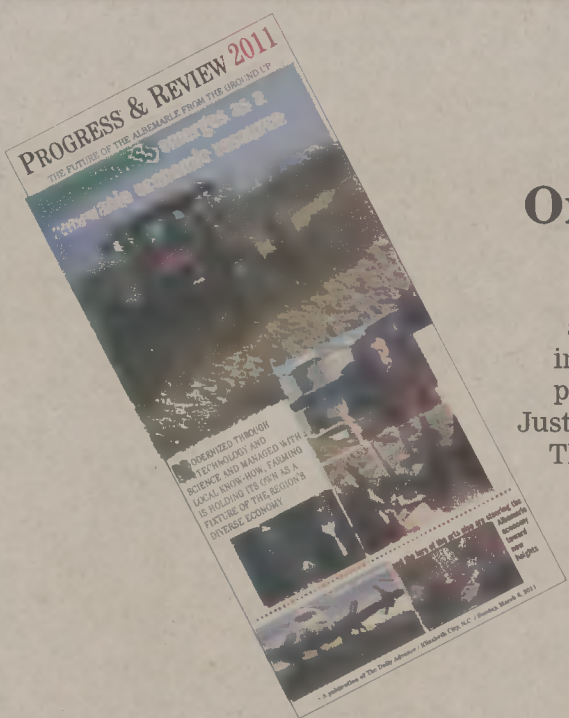
Today's economic development focus is on bricks and mortar, retail, education, science and technological initiatives to rev up the economy. The advance of technologies, which can stimulate or even transform a local community, are real and must be pursued.

Such an opportunity is just being realized at the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank commercial airport, where cutting-edge aviation technology is being implemented. The benefits are

immediate and long-term for residents and businesses: Lucrative high tech investment; the demand for employees with advanced skills to fill jobs; a trigger for stimulating local educational resources and support businesses.

Together, we see the reliability of science-driven farming merging with technical-based development and other business to produce a diversified and thriving Albemarle economy.

—Mike Goodman, Editor



On the Cover

The cover of the 2011 Progress and Review Edition includes file and staff photographs taken by Justin Falls, Brett A. Clark, Thomas J. Turney and Cathy Wilson.

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Techno-farming: More safety helps consumers

By RITCHIE E. STARNES
Chowan Herald Editor

Agriculture has benefited as much as any industry from America's revolution of technology.

Although the technological revolution started evolving over the last cen-

tury, many of the more high-tech changes have occurred over the last 25 years. U.S. Crop and animal production has gone from labor intensive to deeper capital investments, primarily due to farming advances related to the computerized age

and biotechnology. The farming revolution has gone from a plow to computerized tractors capable of doing more with greater efficiency than before. And while mechanical advancements have eliminated the roles of many farm workers, the progress of machinery comes at a higher cost.

"That's why tractors have gotten so expensive. They've gone from a four-row equipment to 12-row equipment," said Jeff Smith, a Chowan County farmer.

Not only has machinery gotten larger and more powerful, but they've become mobile offices equipped with computers and GPS systems, capable of processing vital data useful for improved yields.

"GPS and other technology improves precision and much of this has been

"Farmers have access to tremendous amounts of information from what they collect on their farm, as well as the Internet."

David Smith
Director, N.C.
N.C. Agricultural
Resource Center

and GPS technology on sprayers are fairly routine today and were just starting here 15-20 years ago. All of this has led to an explosion in information technology.

"Farmers have access to tremendous amounts of information from what they collect on their farm as well as the Internet," David Smith added. "When I started at N.C. State 30 years ago no one had a computer, Internet connection or a cell phone. Today, I don't know a farmer who doesn't have a cell phone or access to the Internet." Twenty-five years ago farmers were dependent on local information. Today they have access to global information.

"There are also many engineering advances in planters, sprayers, combines, and tractors that improve efficiency, comfort, and health," David

Smith said. "How many tractors had cabs 25 years ago? Today most do and it goes beyond increased comfort. Think about the decreased exposure to the sun and risk of skin cancer, dust and lung disease, as well as decreased exposure to noise and hearing loss."

Whereby yields used to be measured by fields, technology allows for continuous production measurements. Such precise data enables a farmer to identify soil deficiencies and their specific locations among large-acre tracts. Farmers can then work to improve nutrients in those areas, therefore, improving yields.

Like crop production, computer technology has enhanced the way farmers collect data. Farmers can better monitor weight gain and feed ratio, milk output of dairy cows, feed-to-meat ratio, and egg production.

For what technology has accomplished for crop and livestock production, biotechnology has achieved similar revolutionary advancements, especially with genetics. There is a better quality of seed and fertilizer, contributing to increased yields and better food.

"We have seen herbicide tolerance and BT (a biological insecticide) built into corn, cotton and soybean varieties," David Smith said. "All of these factors have improved yield and efficiency."

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