



Episode One Transcription

Here We Grow Podcast

Speaker 1 ([00:02](#)):

Welcome to here We Grow, a grassroots podcast by Southwest Georgia Farm Credit, focused on education and inspiring growth down on the farm at home, and in rural communities. Whether you're a farmer or farm, her advocate, land lover, or southern dweller, we have industry experts and homegrown leaders ready to share their insights with you. Thanks for listening.

Speaker 2 ([00:24](#)):

Here We grow with the first episode of our new podcast. From all of us at Southwest Georgia Farm Credit, we are glad you tuned in. I'm your host, Billy Billings, a relationship manager, and loan officer, and with me today is the CEO and president of our Association Packs and Port event. And later today, Commissioner Gary Black will be joining us as well. Thank you. All right, Paxton, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and then about Southwest Georgia Farm Credit.

Speaker 3 ([00:48](#)):

Yeah, great. Thanks, Billy. I'm Paxton Portant, born here in Bainbridge, Georgia. I went to Bainbridge High School then attended college, and graduated from the University of Georgia. I was fortunate to be able to move back to the rural area of Bainbridge. So glad to be here and glad to be on your podcast.

Speaker 2 ([01:06](#)):

Thanks for joining us, Paxon. From what you've seen this year in agriculture, what do you see is, I mean, our area in agriculture in general, what are the, I guess, the uphill battles we have in front of us, and what you think are solutions you see coming down the pipeline?

Speaker 3 ([01:23](#)):

Well, I would say the 2022 season has been pretty challenging. Obviously, the year kicked off with higher input prices and fertilizer reached levels we hadn't seen in years past, but, but all the inputs and the expense associated with those inputs have been higher than they've ever been. Chemicals fuel. So it's it was a very challenging time entering the production season. Fortunately, we've seen a little higher commodity prices. Both cotton and peanuts have been a little bit higher this year, which is good. The hopefully offset some of that increased expense for the farmers. But I would say that's probably been the biggest challenge this year. Obviously past, over the past couple of years, there's been other types of challenges, whether it's been the challenges associated with the storm Michael back in 18 and also challenges associated with trade.

Speaker 3 ([02:18](#)):

No in-trade policies. A lot of what China does impacts what's happening here in the state. So those have been challenges and that's an ongoing challenge. The trade issues but again, the current challenge is the expenses associated with producing a crop. Hopefully, that's gonna be offset with the higher pricing. And but there'll be continued challenges. I mean, costs aren't going down as we've seen in other industries. And so I would anticipate that to continue to be a problem over the next five years. Hopefully, we'll have good trade policies, and a good farm bill that'll help us continue to, to, to grow those commodity prices to offset that. So,

Speaker 2 ([03:00](#)):



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All right. Before Commissioner Gary Black joins us today, we're gonna go over a little bit of a history of the Farm credit system and how we came to existence, and then how we kind of, there's a farm credit that covers every county in the United States and Southwest Georgia Farm Credit is blessed to cover the southwest portion of this state, but Pax is gonna tell us a little bit more about our mission and how we're blessed to serve y'all.

Speaker 3 ([03:23](#)):

Yeah, Billy, many of our listeners may not know that Farm Credit has a very long history. Our organization was formed in 1916 to serve the needs of agriculture and rural communities that makes us 106 years old. And very few companies have been around that long. As a matter of fact, less than 1% of all companies reach the 100-year mark puts us again as an elite company of those that have achieved 100 years plus, or companies like Koch, ups, Boeing, Harley Davidson, and Kelloggs. So as you might expect, we are very proud of our sustainability, and I firmly believe our sustainability is a result of our mission to serve such a critical industry like agriculture and our employees. They have a desire to help those farming families in rural communities,

Speaker 2 ([04:12](#)):

So you don't have to be a farmer to become a member of Southwest Georgia Farm Credit, we do have several different types of products, mainly are ag driven, but we do offer home loans as well. So please do check out our mortgage lending wing, because they're, they're great people. They got great products, and great rates, and as you know, rates are on the rise, and let's lock you in one while they're still low. All right, we got a few questions from our social media poll. I'm gonna go ahead and go through those. And like I said, you can go onto our website, our social media, Instagram, and Facebook page and answer our polls, and we could read off your questions on the podcast. The first one I'm gonna read off to you is, do you continue to see trends in organic farming? And I'm gonna, for each of these questions, I'm gonna give you my answer, and then I'll let packs and chime in.

Speaker 2 ([05:00](#)):

For organic farming, there are the challenges that, I mean, come with organic farming. Organic farming, I mean, you, you lay off on the fertilizers, your pesticides. I mean, that's the definition of organic. Well, what comes with that? The challenges that not using those items and inputs come with. I mean, you, you, you have more pests, you have a lower yield. And it definitely is a challenge, but the product does get the end price. I mean, you, you go in the grocery stores, you see your, your head of lettuce is not organic, and you see your organic head of lettuce. The price is definitely higher there. And so as far as trans, I do see it going more as far as commercially. I mean, it's tough to be an organic commercial farmer. Not going to lie there, but it is doable. And we'll stand in there behind you as your loan officer and try to help you get your dream done.

Speaker 3 ([05:54](#)):

And Billy, I absolutely agree with your comments there. I think both organic and locally produced goods, you're gonna continue to be the trend. People are very conscientious about where their food is coming from. Let's face it, our farmers are tasked with feeding millions and millions of people, and they rise to that challenge. And to do that, it requires certain practices that you mentioned with both chemicals, fertilizers, and pesticides and things like that to make



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that happen. But there are those that continue to have an interest in where their food is coming from on insurers being sourced locally and organic. So I definitely see those practices continue to grow.

Speaker 2 ([06:33](#)):

And this is the first episode of Southwest Georgia Farm Credits podcast. Here we grow. We're going through questions from our social media poll, and we are on question number two. If I buy land and need equipment to work it, can I get all my financing from you or do I have to go to another point of contact? Well, the answer is yes. We are one stop shop when it comes to anything agriculture related and needed. We can do term notes for your land loan, as well as term notes for your equipment. We offer. Farm credit leasing as well is another option for your equipment. But basically, if you come to me as your relationship man manager or any other relationship manager that works with Southwest Georgia Farm Credit we'll be able to put into the plan financing options that should, and hopefully be able to feed and need all of your farm's input, input requirements, as well as your family's needs. But as far as landing equipment, we want you to go nowhere other than Southwest Georgia Farm Credit. And then onto our third question, is there,

Speaker 3 ([07:34](#)):

Sir, I would like, I would like to add, I think you hit the nail on the head with the products that we have to offer. But I would also like to say in addition to those financing products just as important as the expertise we bring when prescribing those products, I was doing the math the other day, and I believe our average loan officer has more than 15 years of experience. We actually have one loan officer that's got more than 50 years of experience. So in addition to getting a product that might need to meet the needs whatever it is that you may have we also bring a lot of expertise to help prescribe those products. So I think that's one of the advantages that we definitely bring to a person's operation.

Speaker 2 ([08:13](#)):

I completely agree, and that's why we've referred to our loan officers as relationship managers because it doesn't sign, won't stop When we got inked to paper, we pride ourselves in circling back with our customers, checking on them, checking on their, their new needs. And we don't like to disappear and fade off into the distance. We like to stay, stay relevant, and stay in front of our customers because we know in agriculture, there are always rising needs and concerns, and we wanna be here to help tackle those. Our third question from our social media poll is, Is there a minimum acreage I have to purchase to get financing through farm credit? And the answer to that question is no. If you are purchasing something less than 10 acres it will fall into what we call a consumer loan or maybe a home loan intention.

Speaker 2 ([09:01](#)):

So if, if, if the acreage is that small, there will be further questions asked. But anything 10 acres and above, we are and 10 acres below, we are willing to look into it and help finance the purchase, Just know that if it's less than 10 acres, we will probably need to dive a little bit, a little bit deeper just to make sure that the and intentions of this purchase aren't too, to build a home. And if they are, we do construction to permanent financing. But it's just a little bit different and more intuitive process if you're just tuning in today. This is your host, Billy Billings. I'm a



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relationship manager and loan officer out of our Camilla office. And with me, today is the CEO and president of our association Tax and port event, and as well as joining us shortly we'll be Georgia Ag Commissioner, Mr. Gary Black. Hey, good afternoon, Commissioner Black. This is Billy Billings. How are you doing today?

Speaker 4 ([09:53](#)):

Good, Billy, how are you, sir?

Speaker 2 ([09:55](#)):

Well, joining me today is Paxton. I'll let Paxton say hello real quick. Hey,

Speaker 3 ([09:58](#)):

Good afternoon, Commissioner Black. It's great to

Speaker 4 ([10:00](#)):

Have you. Yes, sir. Thank you so much.

Speaker 2 ([10:02](#)):

Well, I'm sure you've been filled in, but this is the first episode of our podcast here. We Grow. It's a new venture for us. We're hoping to provide some more value to our borrowers as well as future customers or just locals and our rural ag communities surrounding us. But we just wanted to bring on somebody like yourself that just has so much history and expertise with the state agriculture and just knowledge of the industry. So we really appreciate you coming on today. Just, I mean, I'm gonna let you take the floor for a minute just cuz you're a man of wisdom. Just kind of tell me where you are, what you see going on in ag right now in the state, and what's your overall outlook for this year's crop.

Speaker 4 ([10:43](#)):

Well, well first, I mean, I'm, I'm honored to be a part of the first edition. I'm sure it's gonna be something if it does if this continues in the rich tradition of Southwest Georgia Farm Credit, everything you do is, is, is just very professional and they very provide great value to those who, who are your members and really it service to the industry. Thanks for letting me be a part of it. I am absolutely certain the more and more I think about it that Charles Dickens most certainly was a farmer. Otherwise, he would've never written a tale of two cities. It never started it by saying it was the best of times and that it was the worst of times. Isn't that kind of the way it is most every year? There, there are ups and downs.

Speaker 4 ([11:36](#)):

There are y'all are right now might like to have even though you're seven days away from the drought, most anywhere in the state of Georgia. I know y'all had had an abundance here lately, and I've had some friends down in some of your borrowers say, I wish, you know, I wish you had let up. I'm sitting up here in Commerce, Georgia praying for a ring today. So it, it, it, it's all over. I feel that I was at a meeting yesterday the chairman of both here committees of agriculture and state legislature and their annual kind of mid to midyear family reunion. And we, we, we, we've done that prior to this broadcast. And, and I, you know, everybody's no doubt concerned about prices, concerned about inflation, concerned about the impact for their families.

Speaker 4 ([12:33](#)):

But I, but you still see that ribbon of optimism that's, that does that agriculture producers are, have to have. And that's on East Georgia Farmer. They say, Well, you know, we, the corn was a



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little off. We've got a great cotton crop. I think he said they had some cotton that was 1 12, 1 14. I, I think they, they, they, they've got some booked in the teams and you know they didn't tap out, you know, in the mid-twenties like other people, but still, he was just saying, you know, we're, we're going to do okay with that. Now, unless anyone says, Wait a minute, I'm not doing okay that, that, that's, that's the issue. It's just, it's, it's we'd love to see an across-the-board success story in 2022. But there's no doubt these, these, these prices and fuel of fertilizer labor situation have us probably more on the edge in times I can remember just, you know, we're holding on from the, we're holding on for today, we're holding on for 22, but, but you, you just, we're on a year to year basis of just wondering what's gonna happen.

Speaker 4 ([13:53](#)):

And then that's a very precarious situation to be in as a farmer with so much risk. So many of your, so many of your borrowers have, have, you have a lot riding with them. And you'd like, like for there to be a little longer view with respect to optimism. But perhaps you know, perhaps for Lord Blessed and I hope, and we'll just be able to get this crop in and still chalked up 2022 with all its challenge. There's, there's still some ribbon OFM that we have to latch

Speaker 3 ([14:29](#)):

On with that. What would be your advice to farmers and, and obviously advocacy things that we can do at Farm Credit Farm Bureau to advocate for our farmers just the past five years demonstrate the need for a strong farm bill and, and support programs? But what would be your advice for sustainability moving forward?

Speaker 4 ([14:53](#)):

There's a, there's, there's an element of, of where history repeats itself, or I don't know that repeats, but it, it sure does rhyme a lot. It, it, so some of these suggestions are no different than the first time I ever made a speech FFA kid, you know, And, and so you keep hoping. And I, I do think one of them that's kicked in with some of our disasters, a lot of the attention that's been paid to agriculture the last few years than with Covid and is that I think more and more Americans are are, you know, picking up on the important role that agriculture plays in national security. I think, you know, we've tried to pound that message quite a bit, but I'm sensing that you know, even, you know, people in a, in a suburban situation in Atlanta are they experienced during Covid as something they'd never seen before, and that was some empty shelves, and that really rocked, I think, a lot of people to the core.

Speaker 4 ([15:59](#)):

So I think we as producers have gotta seize that every time we have an opportunity, we need to seize it, you know, to build in the relationships with those folks that are just not in our meetings, farm families, they've got little league and soccer too. And, and so, and by gum, we're producers of food and fiber for this globe, and that's an honorable profession, and it, and it's a necessary one. And we can't really, we can't state that with arrogance, but we do have to state it in a way that I've heard a lot of people say, I'm just a farmer. Do you know? No, no, you know, not just anything that is the noble calling that we have as producers. I think building those relationships outside our, and not just the personal ones, but political relationships, that, that cut across party lines, that cut across backgrounds, that's still an ongoing challenge.

Speaker 4 ([17:02](#)):



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You know, my message to your members would be that no one could tell their story, no Southwest Georgia Farm Credit member and tell their story better than that member themselves. I can't tell it. I can, I can push the envelope and help tell you can, but nobody. So I think that owning our industry, and owning the relationships that are beyond our farm gate is going to be very, very important in the future. Because there's, there's fewer of us and more of them. They like us. They like, they like farmers. They get confused about farming sometimes. So, who better to tell you that job than your lending member? You're the person you serve, perhaps the person listening to this as a producer. Nobody tells your story better than you, but you, I do believe we're gonna have to tell that story more as we move on in the rest of this decade.

Speaker 2 ([18:05](#)):

Oh, I completely agree with that. Like I said earlier in this podcast, we pride ourselves here at Southwest Georgia Farm Credit on being, listening loan officers. I mean, it's up to us to get done what you want to get done. And so I had one of the customers that I look up to the most I've been doing this for about four years now, but I'm still somewhat new in my mind. But one of the customers I look up to the most the other day said, Billy farmers are the first to feel inflation, and they're the last to feel it. And I couldn't believe it, I couldn't stand by that statement more. It kind of hit me later on as I was driving because with rising rates, and rising input costs they feel it across the board. And as I've been with Farm Credit, I came with, an ag background somewhat. My grandfather was a farmer, My mom's an ag. But until I really started working here and understanding the ins and outs of each and every farm operation that I'm fortunate enough to deal with, I really didn't see it until I became a loan officer. And so my question is, obviously rates are uncontrollable, and it seems like input prices are, but do you see our input, input, and supply issues changing in the future, more importantly to chemicals, fertilizer, potash, and stuff along that lines?

Speaker 4 ([19:15](#)):

I think there's one recorded quote from John Fitzgerald Kennedy President Kennedy. There was one recorded quote of him having something to say about agriculture. He told a group one time that the farmer is the only person he knew that bought at retail, sold at wholesale, and paid the freight both ways. That's just as true today as the day he uttered, uttered those, those deals. So it's, it's a squeeze. The markets respond with this, you know, the technology and everything. There are some of those disruptive things that are taking place right now that, that might help balance some of this out. I, I still think inflation's a huge problem where we continue as a government to spend way more, and deficits spending, I think a, is in the top three of our nation's greatest problems if we don't get the discipline to get those types of things in control. That where agriculture is certainly being impacted by that, that, but that's an issue where it's not exactly an agriculture policy, it's an overall macroeconomic policy. But agriculture would respond very favorably if we if I believe if we were, have the discipline to take our medicine now so that the next generation could benefit. But I fear right now we're, we're that would, we could do that. I think it those, I think those are the things that most if we're gonna save us Republic.

Speaker 2 ([20:55](#)):

Oh, I completely agree. And that kind of segues perfectly into my next question. One of our points of emphasis here at Southwest Georgia Farm Credit as well as farm credit across the



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nation is our young beginning and small farmers. And I get questions all the time Billy, how do I get an ag? How do I start a farm? And, and it's really tough. I mean, and I don't have the answer and probably no one in this room does, but if you were, if you could tell you back in the early seventies, or are young, beginning small farmers of today, what, what are ways that they can help themselves to go out? And whether it's typical row cropping or the new hot wave of agritourism in the state, what are things that they can do to better themselves to I guess essentially get to where they wanna be, to start their venture and to, to get in ag if they're not in ag,

Speaker 4 (21:48):

Right? I mean, you may have some listeners of this podcast that, that absolutely disagree with and, and that great, we live in a lens of, of freedom. But you know, if you look at little pockets of opportunity there, there I, I, if, if what you had a prospective person that came to you and said, Billy, you know, I'll, I, I wanna get started and I wanna grow 1500 acres of peanuts and 2000 acres of cotton and you know, 400 acres of corn and 150-mile cows. Can you help me? Well, I mean, I mean, the magnitude of that is, is beyond reach unless you're that young man or young lady is successful in attracting each other where one of their parents is, is already in that, and then you have something to start with that's very difficult to start a scratch.

Speaker 4 (22:48):

But if a young farmer today had had something that was secure and had 50,000 either in a small building or on the ground the way you used to do it, there's an enormous market for every one of those baby pigs. Well, that cash flow, yeah, it, it, it might, would down, you've got the commodities down there to deal with something like that, that that's almost, well, that's just antiquated. No, there's not. Cause we're not growing any hogs. And you get to the agri amateurism and local consumerism, you know, I think that Georgia Gro has helped there's an, there is a market for that properly managed. There's a, there's a decent cash flow there, and I bet you could, I bet you could make one of those loans. Does that mean, Well, I'm gonna start at 50 so I can get it, 5,000?

Speaker 4 (23:39):

Well, I, I don't, I don't know that that's the, you gotta find those niches, find those things where the market will respond favorably so that you are able to service debt pretty quickly. But, the point is finding what the market will respond to, finding what you can adequately handle if you have a second job, or what your family's situation's all about. I think maybe we get into talking about crystal ball stuff, still the most important, most popular thing in my office, and it has been for seven years, we've got to increase protein processing in Georgia. Y'all got Jones Meats down there that does a wonderful job. I know new things happening over in that facility. Terry Pickle's a good friend, but he had a little transition that facility from other people, but there's still room for that.

Speaker 4 (24:33):

Cause people wanna buy jewelry to grow on protein. There are lots of restaurants, lots of Atlanta. You know, when you take Atlanta, Savannah, all, all these other places, but even y'all sitting down there with, you know, Tallahassee and Dohan and, and, and everywhere, and I know you've got a great restaurant there on your square that serves a lot of a lot of local products. That's where young people starting small can really make a difference. And I'm hoping we're



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gonna get some processing capacity so that we can improve those opportunities. And that that actually is another agribusiness opportunity for a young person. I know there's gonna be some really good low-interest loans. I know y'all love to have the business, but you might partner with some of these federal programs too, so we could increase, this processing capacity.

Speaker 4 ([25:28](#)):

So it's hard to be a little pinball there and kind of bounced around. But those are where I do see some opportunity. How, how do we capture more of the value of the commodity reproduce is just, is still ongoing, But I think if that next, next generation of agriculturalists that's gonna be key to the success of saying that, you know, I can't just be a price taker. I can't just be a, you know, produce something that gotta use all the price protection tools in front of me if I'm in commodity production. But then how can I take parts of those, parts of my production, and add value to it here? Cause those people who, like farmers may not be trying to understand farming, you can build those relationships we talked about to start the first part of the podcast. And, and there's some real profit potential there for the people that will think this thing through

Speaker 3 ([26:21](#)):

Commissioner Black. I think that was some really, really good feedback. I enjoyed that. And as you mentioned these various, there are programs that we, where we can help Farm Credit can actually help these people that want to get into these types of ventures. We can partner with the U S D A through their 50-50 program or their guarantee program. So, it's our responsibility to help them find those programs where we can hopefully provide them with the capital to get started for the ventures that you mentioned. So I thought that was some really great feedback and we, we definitely feel like we play a role in that as well.

Speaker 2 ([26:56](#)):

Perfect. Well, Mr. Black, I believe at this time, that is all the questions we have for you today. We greatly appreciate you tuning in with us, and we look forward to taking this place or this podcast to higher places. And you being one of our first guesses, definitely help

Speaker 4 ([27:14](#)):

Appreciate y'all. I, I, I know we've, y'all, y'all on the, on the button here, but please let me say this, the Farm credit system, South Georgia and your other two groups here in, in Georgia, man, the the the families, y'all have impacted the kids that have gotten a ribbon because of you. The students that have gone on to pursue higher education because of you the successful businesses because you have lenders with integrity. You got a great board. Y'all have always been visionary. And the way you operate is it is not just agriculture that's better because of y'all, but the, this state's better. And I, I just, for every kind deed that and the level of support throughout my career I've had with y'all and the farm and the farm credit family, I just want to tell you how much I appreciate that. And I, I think I speak forever, Georgian.

Speaker 3 ([28:21](#)):

We appreciate the very kind words, and I, I wanna return those same words in, the way in which you've served us over the past several years. You're one of the first people that come to mind when I think about Michael coming through here and being down here with sleeves rolled up, trying to find a solution. So we appreciate all the support you've given Southwest Georgia agriculture over the years and, and look forward to you being part of that years to come.



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Speaker 4 ([28:45](#)):

We, we, I, I surely do. And thanks for the opportunity here and if we, we help with the future one, let us know. But I'm, I'm just looking forward to being back in southwest Georgia here real soon.

Speaker 3 ([28:58](#)):

Thank you very much. Have a great day.

Speaker 4 ([29:01](#)):

Okay guys, thank you.

Speaker 2 ([29:02](#)):

Thank you. Well, y'all, that concludes our podcast today. That was Commissioner Gary Black, signing off and sitting with me still as our CEO and President pack's port event. To read the transcription of today's podcast, you can visit our website. Make sure you subscribe to get information, on our upcoming episodes, call us on Facebook and Instagram for great industry resources. Thanks again for listening. I'm your host, Billy Billings.