



Photos by David Manning/Staff

Above, Stan Mitchell, who was named Cattleman of the Year for Clarke-Oconee Cattleman's Association, sits on hay bales in one of his barns recently at his family farm in Farmington. Below, one of Mitchell's beefmaster cattle munches on grass.

CALL OF THE FARM

Farmington man finds career in farming, teaching

By Chris J. Starrs
Correspondent

Farmington resident Stan Mitchell displayed the perfect combination of humility and humor when he was asked why he thought he'd been named the Clarke-Oconee Cattleman's Association's Cattleman of the Year.

"I'm pretty sure I'm about the only member of the association who hadn't gotten it yet," he said.

But the 44-year-old Mitchell gets points for much more than longevity. In addition to operating a family farm on about 230 acres in Farmington, Mitchell has spent the past four years as a career technology instructor (teaching animal

science, horticulture and ag mechanics, among other subjects) and FFA sponsor at North Oconee High School after holding similar positions at Oconee County High School.

"He's a very deserving recipient of that recognition," Clarke-Oconee Cattleman's Association President Simon Garrett said of Mitchell. "He's had a cattle operation for a number of years and does an excellent job operating his farm and maintaining the health of his herd.

"And as a teacher, he's a mentor to a lot of students. He's not teaching young people how to be farmers, but he is

teaching them about being leaders and people who take action for their community. He provides

students with his experience and gives them the opportunity to learn life lessons through a lot of different projects."

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David Manning/Staff

Stan Mitchell stands in a field with some of his breeding stock recently. Mitchell raises beefmaster cattle on his family farm in Farmington.

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Mitchell's introduction to farming came nearly 30 years ago when his father, Sam, (who is retired from the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government) bought 22 acres of land in Eastville (which Mitchell said is "now surrounded by a subdivision") and put nine cows to work.

"It wasn't that big," Mitchell said. "It didn't get big until 1990, when my dad bought a big farm and went from nine to 60 cows."

These days, Mitchell is in charge of the day-to-day operations of the Farmington farm, which is home to about 40 head of cattle, and he often works alongside his 16-year-old son Peyton to keep the farm running, which has been a bit of a struggle during yet another arid summer.

"We had 60 head, but after no rain for 160 days, we were running out of grass," he said. "So we sold down to about 40 (head) and we're hoping we'll be able to have enough hay to feed them this winter."

Recognizing that it would be difficult to keep afloat just from the farm, Mitchell indulges in his other professional passion — teaching. After leaving UGA in the early 1980s (he eventually

spring or fall day and I think about how I'd like to be outside all day. But teaching fit in well with the security I was looking for and it's something I love doing. It's been a perfect fit for 14 years."

Mitchell said one of the frustrations with his job is battling the idea that he's "teaching kids how to be farmers." He added that he's more focused on offering instruction about the importance of agriculture and its effect on the national and world economy.

"In a lot of ways, farming is not a career choice to have," he said. "To make a living, you've got to have thousands of acres and half-million-dollar pieces of equipment. We focus on the agriculture industry, which employs 20 percent of the country and is still the largest industry in Georgia. I want them to understand it takes a lot of people to keep a farm going."

And here's one of the most critical lessons Mitchell

imparts to his students — there are more people to feed every day while the availability of land to produce that food is shrinking.

"That's job one," said Mitchell. "We have to continue to improve because we have to produce more food on less land. That's a big challenge."

While his oldest son spends a good deal of time working the farm, Mitchell said his other children — Meghan, 12, Katie, 10, and Mason, 6 — are enthusiastically awaiting their opportunity to pitch in.

"Meghan would like to do a lot more, but there's still things she can't do yet because her feet don't reach the pedals," said Mitchell, who added that the farm was a true family operation as his brother Tommy, who lives in Watkinsville, was instrumental in helping to develop the farm years ago and remains "always willing to help."

Although Mitchell joked

about his eligibility for the Cattleman of the Year honor, he was quite serious about its implications in his life.

"To be included in a group with people like George Hillman, Charles Osborn and Stephen Brannan is quite an honor," he said. "You want to be associated with the people you respect. If this puts me closer to them, then it is a true honor. To be able to represent agriculture is an honor for me, period. It's almost like I've got two callings — farming and teaching, and both are right up there with family and religion. It means a lot."

Are Oco

Kennel club dog owners

The Oconee Kennel Club, an American Quarter Horse Association organization that focuses on the welfare of dogs — will host a Dog Owners' Day on Sept. 7 at Hermitage Park off Highway 160 Road.

The event will take place from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and is sponsored by the AKC along with the Oconee County Office of its activities throughout the county.

The event will feature agility, obedience, and dog demonstrations. The Oconee County K-9 Club is also sponsoring the Breeds of America bake sale, dog show, and rules and regulations for children's dog training. Disaster preparedness education is also available for responsible dog owners.

Robert Scott is the president of the club. For more information, visit www.oconeeclub.org.

Computer set for Oct

The Oconee Library will offer computer classes in October.

The first class, "Introduction to Computers," is a one-hour class for beginners and will be held on Tuesday, Oct. 4, from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. The second class, "Advanced Computer Skills," will be held on Friday, Oct. 29, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Both classes will be held at the Oconee Library, 100 N. Main St., and will be a one-hour long class. For more information, call (706) 546-5689.

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