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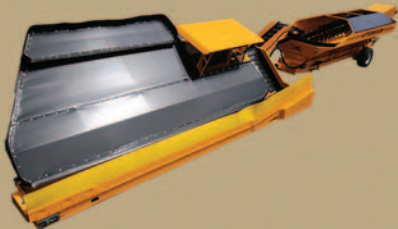


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- **April 21-23, 2026**
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May 2026

- **May 1, 2026**
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June 2026

- **June 4-6, 2026**
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June 2026

- **June 18-19, 2026**
TriState ArkLaMiss Pecanference
Alexandria, LA

July 2026

- **July 12-15, 2026**
Texas Pecan Growers Conference
San Marcos, TX
More information at www.tpga.org
- **July 29, 2026**
American Pecan Promotion Board &
American Pecan Council's Board Meetings
San Marcos, TX
More information at www.tpga.org

August 2026

- **August 19-20, 2026**
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Athens, GA
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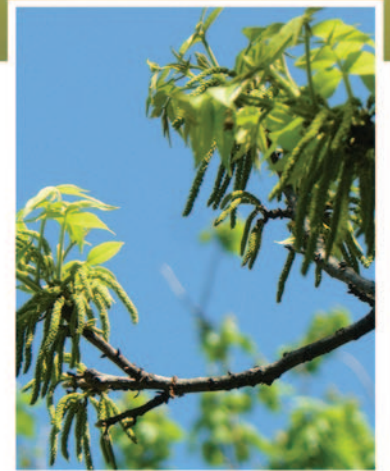
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Beautiful Spring Day in the Orchard!

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Newsletter



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EDITOR'S LETTER

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Greetings!

As the pecan trees begin to bloom, we are thrilled to celebrate National Pecan Month and share our passion for Georgia pecans. This season is a reminder of the dedication and hard work that goes into producing our state's beloved



pecans, and we're honored to be part of this journey with you.

In this issue, you'll find valuable research from esteemed experts at the University of Georgia and the United States Department of Agriculture. We're also excited to share updates on the Hurricane Helene Block Grant administered by the Georgia Department of Agriculture. Additionally in this issue, we'll see how GPGA was on the road for many events within the industry and the ways we are advocating for our growers.

We hope many of you had the opportunity to take part in the educational sessions and networking events at our 61st Annual Conference and Trade Show in Perry. This milestone event was made possible by our incredible sponsors, exhibitors, and attendees. Your support allowed us to host a full day of informative seminars, as well as engaging social gatherings, including our welcome reception, golf tournament, skeet shoot, and orchard tour. We sincerely appreciate your contributions and participation.

As we look ahead, GPGA wishes each of you a successful and rewarding season. We're eager to reconnect at our Annual Fall Field Day in September! 🌰

Mary Mikelyn Bruorton

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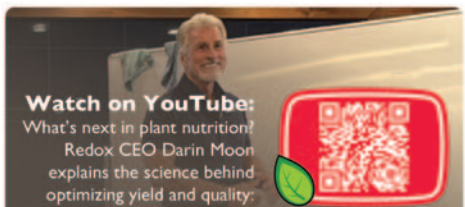
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EXPERT ADVICE

with Dr. Lenny Wells

Extension Horticulturist, University of Georgia

A New Understanding of Pecan Water Use in Humid Conditions: Part 2

Last year at this time I wrote an article discussing some of the recent research we've conducted to better understand how our pecan trees here in the Southeastern region use water. In that previous article I focused on sap flow studies and what they tell us about when our trees are taking that water up and how the volume of sap flow -- and thus the volume of water moving through the tree -- changes throughout the season. With this article I want to focus on what we've learned about exactly how much water our trees are using.

As I mentioned in the previous article, much of the good early work on pecan water use and irrigation was conducted in the desert of the Southwest, which makes sense because irrigation is so crucial there. I just returned from the Western Pecan Growers Meeting and I can tell you, based on what I heard there, I would much rather battle scab in the Southeast than try to grow pecans in the desert. One presenter shared very sobering information regarding the water situation in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Essentially, their increasing reliance on groundwater rather than surface water from the Rio Grande has led to the loss of 1-million-acre feet of water from that aquifer over the last 40 years. This aquifer does not recharge as ours does, so the situation is a major problem.

Additionally water from this aquifer is often very salty, which presents another set of problems. The increase in groundwater pumping over the last 40 years correlates well with the rapid increase in pecan acreage in the valley over the same period of time. The increase in groundwater pumping occurred because the declining waters of the Rio Grande alone cannot support the farmers' increasing needs.

During the meeting I attended, the only real solution offered by the presenters to the future of continued agriculture in the lower Rio Grande Valley was a reduction in the acreage of thirsty perennial crops -- namely pecans.

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I tell you this story to emphasize how fortunate we are here to have the water availability we have in South Georgia. Over the years, we have adopted the results of Southwestern arid land pecan water use data as an assumption for how pecan trees use water everywhere they are grown, even in the warm, water-rich, humid climate of the Southeast. While our water resources are currently abundant, we need to steward that resource wisely. It is our greatest asset.

While the same general pattern of water use remains wherever pecans are grown, the warm, humid environment and relatively frequent rainfall pattern of the Southeast leads to considerable differences in exactly when and how much water the trees use compared to the arid Southwest. Through recent studies I've been involved in with UGA climate scientist Dr. Monique LeClerc, graduate students Kriti Poudel, Ibukunoluwa Adelekan, and technician Gengsheng Zhang over the last four or five years, for the first time we are beginning to put some exact numbers on pecan water use in the growing conditions of the Southeastern region of the U.S. Through this work we are gaining an understanding of how our environmental conditions influence this use. This research will allow us to further tweak our irrigation schedule, making it much more efficient.

As mentioned, the last article I published on this topic focused on our sap flow studies. Now, I want to focus on pecan transpiration and evapotranspiration in our orchards. Transpiration is the process in which water is absorbed by plant roots from the soil, moves

through the plant and evaporates as water vapor into the atmosphere. It is a passive, vital process for cooling plants, transporting nutrients and driving water movement, which accounts for about 10% of atmospheric moisture. It can also give us a direct measure of how much water the trees are using. Evapotranspiration adds the evaporative losses from the soil and plant surface within the orchard to the transpiration values to give us a number for total water use in the orchard.

Pecan trees in the Southwestern U.S use 1,100-1,400 mm (43"-55") of water per growing season. Our annual average rainfall in South Georgia is 1,270 mm (50") however the problem is that it doesn't necessarily fall when we need it most. Thus, our irrigation systems should be supplemental. Still, over the years we have used these systems in a way suited for pecan trees grown in a desert rather than trees grown in our own humid climate.

By using the Eddy-Covariance towers placed in orchards above the canopy of the trees, we were able to

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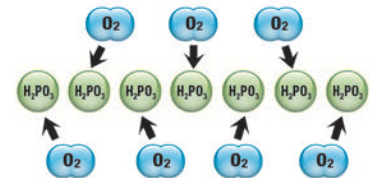
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measure transpiration from the trees and evapotranspiration from the orchard. As a result, we now have sufficient data to show that pecan trees in South Georgia are using a total of 610-680 mm of water (24"-27") per growing season -- about half that used in the arid West. About half the water our trees use in each growing season comes from rainfall. The trees themselves, use a relatively small amount of water (as little as 0.004" per day) until the canopy has been fully developed and temperatures increase, which is about mid-May.

Even if we somewhat under-irrigate prior to full canopy development, neither the trees nor the crop seem to suffer if the proper amounts are applied when peak water use begins. In other words, they are less sensitive to dry conditions until the canopy develops and then they really need the water.

Peak water use (0.25" per day) by the trees occurs during nut development (sizing and kernel fill) from June through August. Around late September, following kernel-fill there is a significant drop in pecan tree water use (to approximately 0.1" per day). They are still using

water, and they still need soil moisture for the nuts to mature properly and for the shucks to split normally, but based on both transpiration and sap flow they do not appear to use nearly the amount we have been providing in late September and October.

The fact that water use declines in September and October presents a challenge for production. The tree's water demand is driven largely by crop load. When we have a crop load on that tree and we turn dry after kernel filling, from a production standpoint, there is still a demand for water. The problem is that the tree's physiology seems to shift following kernel filling. As a result, the tree does not appear capable of up taking and using the amount of water it really needs if it is only getting water from the small percentage of the root zone covered by irrigation. The tree loses some of the efficiency with which it uses that water. It won't matter how much you apply at this time; the tree just doesn't appear capable of using it all. This situation leads to stick-tights, vivipary and embryo rot during such conditions, even in irrigated orchards. Just one or two timely rains, which

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Water, Continued from Page 12

cover the tree’s entire root zone following kernel filling, can make all the difference.

The primary reason for lower water usage by pecans in the Southeast compared to the West is most likely the result of our humidity. This difference is expressed in the form of something called the Vapor Pressure Deficit (VPD). This difference accounts for moisture in the air at any given time and how much moisture the air can hold when it is saturated. The more moisture in the air, the smaller the VPD. By and large, the VPD of the Southeast is much smaller than that of the arid Southwest. As it turns out, this is an important factor in the uptake of water by pecan trees.

Our sap flow studies have helped shed light on what’s happening here in our region. Coupled with the transpiration and evapotranspiration studies, we get a more complete picture of what’s going on. Sap flow increases around sunrise and accelerates early in the morning. It generally increases with air temperature and VPD in the morning, peaking around noon and decreasing gradually into early to mid-afternoon, declining rapidly through the early evening. The exact timing of the peak in sap flow is related to stomatal control. Stomata are the small pores on the leaves that regulate gas exchange between the plant and its environment. Water loss by the plant is controlled as the size of the stomatal pore changes. Stomata must open to allow the gas exchange of carbon dioxide and oxygen for efficient photosynthesis -- and light typically triggers stomatal opening. When stomata are open, water vapor is lost to the external environment, which increases the rate of transpiration and water use. If there is adequate water, even with a high VPD and temperature, pecan trees can keep pumping.

Stomata typically open during the day to favor CO2 diffusion when light is available for photosynthesis and close at night to limit transpiration and save water. They will also close during the day when the tree needs to

Mature Tree Irrigation Schedule

Month	% Full Capacity	Gallons/acre/day		
April	6.4%	231	65% reduction	=4 hrs/wk
Early May	12.8%	462	50% reduction	=8 hrs/wk
Late May	27%	972-1080		
June	36%	1296-1440		
July	45%	1620-1800		
Aug-Mid Sept	100%	3600-4000		
Late Sept	36%	1296-1440		
October	36%	1296-1440		



Figure 2. New recommended irrigation schedule for mature pecan trees in Georgia.

save water due to drought conditions, excessive temperatures, when VPD (and evaporative demand) is too high (under low water availability) or when VPD is too low.

As mentioned, stomata remain open and transpiration generally increases to a point as temperature and VPD increase (drier air). This situation is primarily

Continued on Page 16, See Water

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what drives the transpirational stream of water through the tree. However, in humid climates VPD can also get too low. If VPD gets too low, then the moisture gradient becomes incredibly small between the humid air and the saturated leaf tissues. At that point, plants can't pull water from their roots, up through their shoots and out through their leaves due to excessively high humidity levels. Thus, in effect, too much humidity limits the uptake of water by the tree, reduces water use, and thereby, photosynthesis. Consider how many foggy mornings we have that last until nearly noon, how many days of 85-90% humidity, and how many rainy days we have during the summer and you can see how this limits our production.

Of interest, if you consider the evapotranspiration occurring on a single acre in a pecan orchard, you must take into account not only the water use by the tree itself, but also by the vegetation growing between the tree rows. Not surprisingly, before the tree canopy develops, most of the evapotranspiration in the orchard comes from the orchard floor. Our studies have demonstrated that orchard floor vegetation accounts for 73% of total orchard evapotranspiration in March, 56% in April and just over 11% in May after the tree canopy develops. That percentage increases from 17% in June to 22% in August with lush growth of understory vegetation through the summer and then drops again in September and October.

So, what does all this mean for a pecan grower in the humid Southeastern U.S. for how they should irrigate these pecan orchards? Based on our combined studies we are changing our irrigation recommendations for pecans. Our recommendations primarily involve reducing our recommended irrigation amounts in April and early May as you can see from the table above. We will be leaving the irrigation application amounts for June through mid-September unchanged. We feel con-

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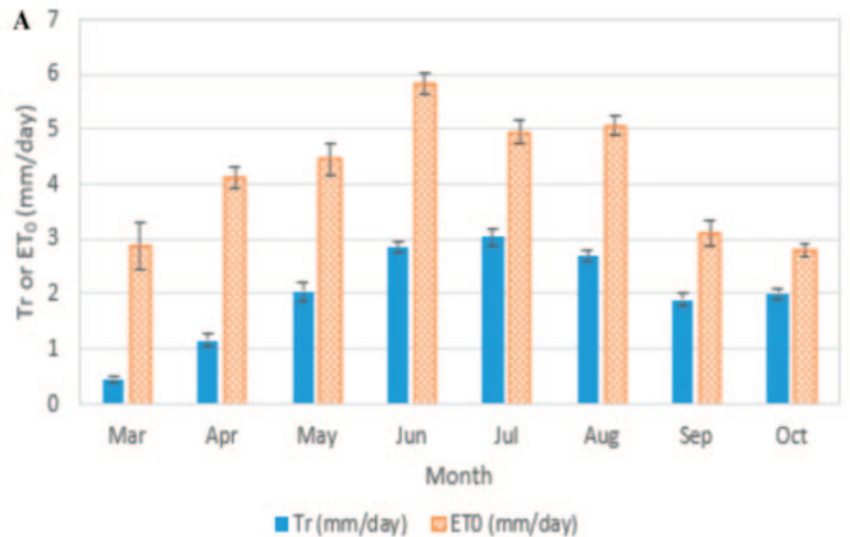



Figure 1. Pecan tree transpiration and orchard evapotranspiration from a south Georgia pecan orchard.

fidant in the accuracy of those applications. However, we are reducing the recommended amounts for late September and October. When we get an inch or more of rain during the growing season, growers can turn the water off for 3 days.

These studies are helping us to better understand pecan tree water use in the hot, humid conditions of the Southeastern U.S. and what that implies for how we

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Water, Continued from Page 16

should be irrigating here. Our transpiration/evapotranspiration studies have shown us how much water our trees use and when they use it.

Sap flow studies have shown us that VPD and the high humidity of our region can be one of our most limiting factors regarding water use. Our latest work gives us a better understanding of exactly what that means for photosynthesis and the ultimate effect on pecan production. It also shows us that there are certain times of the year, primarily April and early May, prior to full canopy development when we really don't have to apply much irrigation water at all. The real water demand begins in June and peaks through August. It has also helped us to learn exactly why late season droughts following kernel filling can wreak so much havoc on our pecan crop, even in irrigated orchards. Hopefully, this information will help growers become more efficient with how they use our region's most valuable resource and will help keep more money in growers' pockets as well.

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Block Grant Deadline Ends Soon

By Mary Mikelyn Bruorton, Editor, *The Pecan Grower Magazine*

The Hurricane Helene Block Grant has been a major topic of discussion since December 2024 following the storm's impact across Southeast Georgia. In September 2025, it was announced that Georgia would receive more than \$531 million to support growers affected by Hurricane Helene. Now, the long-awaited application period has officially opened.

Applications became available on March 16, 2026 and all impacted growers are strongly encouraged to apply before the April 27, 2026 deadline.

Specific details regarding payment amounts have not yet been released. Commissioner Harper and his team at the Georgia Department of Agriculture are focused on reviewing all submitted applications to ensure the full \$531 million allocated by USDA is distributed to Georgia's agricultural producers, with the goal of utilizing every available dollar.

Steps for applying for the application are as follows:

1. Go to the website: <https://agr.georgia.gov/hurricane-helene-block-grant> and click on the "Click Here to Apply" button.

2. Obtain a login id and password and provide your name, tax identification number, mailing address, phone number and email.

3. After logging in, click on "Go to Application" then "New Farm Recovery Application." Begin entering information about your farming operation.

4. Under "Locations" click the 'Plus' button. Enter the address and the latitude and longitude of your operation.

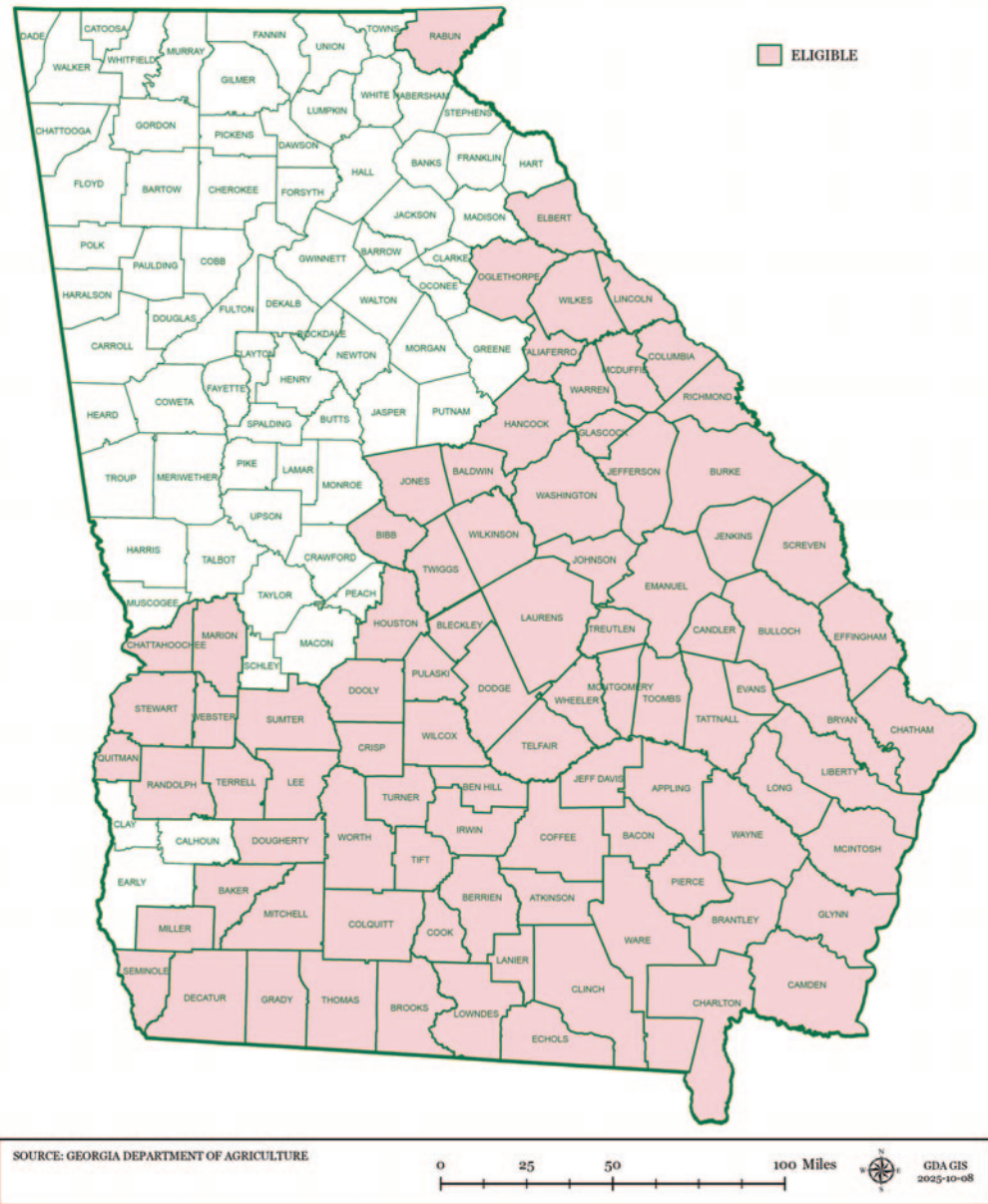
Continued on Page 22, See Grant



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Grant, Continued from Page 20

5. Scroll down to enter information for 18 different types of losses you may be eligible for. Click “Save Location Draft” periodically to save your work.

6. Click on the ‘Plus’ sign if you operate in more than one location. Repeat steps 4&5 if you have losses at more than one location.

7. Go to your main application and click “Check for Completion.” If you receive an “Error” message, click on the error statement and it will take you up to the entry that needs to be corrected or completed. Fix the errors and click “Pre-Submit” in the lower right-hand corner. You will see the following instructions: Option 1: Click the “Acknowledge” button. Your application will be reviewed by GDA and you can no longer make changes. Option 2: Click the “Undo Submission” button. This takes you back to the application and allows you to make changes. Option 3: Click “Save Draft.” This retains the information you entered, but you still need to continue by clicking on: “Undo Submission” or “Acknowledge”.

8. To finalize the application, complete the Acknowledgement section by clicking in the boxes. You must agree to follow legal requirements, obtain crop insurance, retain your records, affirm the accuracy of the application and to provide your electronic signature.

9. You may be contacted by GDA if additional information or clarification is required. After signup closes, you will be notified if you meet all eligibility requirements and the award amount.

If you are a grower affected by Hurricane Helene and need assistance with the application or have any questions, please contact the GPGA office at (229) 382-2187 or the Georgia Department of Agriculture’s Hurricane Block Grant hotline at (404) 656-3630. You may also reach the hotline by email at hbg@agr.georgia.gov.

Updates regarding the Hurricane Helene Block Grant will be shared through GPGA’s newsletter. If you are not currently receiving these emails and would like to subscribe, please contact Mary Bruorton, GPGA Executive Director, at mary@georgiapecan.org. 🌰

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A Comprehensive Look at Phylloxera

Dr. Apurba Barman, Assistant Professor, Andrew Sawyer, SE Georgia Area Pecan Agent, UGA Extension and Dr. Lenny Wells, Extension Horticulturist, UGA

Pecan leaf phylloxera—and in some cases stem phylloxera—has caused consistent damage to pecan trees in recent years. This article summarizes new research specifically focused on phylloxera, along with results from a largely unreported insecticide drench trial conducted in 2013. Finally, it examines how recent research on pecan sap flow may help explain and support current phylloxera management recommendations.

Southern pecan leaf phylloxera is our most common species infesting leaves of older pecan trees. The tiny, aphid-like insect overwinters in the tree itself and with the onset of spring, they wake up, crawl and start feeding on newly developing tissues resulting in the formation of galls on leaves. The galls on the leaves have a two-fold issue. If galling becomes heavy, photosynthesis is reduced on these leaves and those leaves tend to lose early. Additionally, the hickory shuckworm, which is a late season pest that primarily feeds on shucks of developing nuts, find these galls to be the best food to survive in absence of the pecan nuts early in the season (May/June). Due to the availability of phylloxera galls, hickory shuckworm population can increase and shuckworm become problematic late in the season. Therefore, managing phylloxera in pecan is not only going to help maintaining healthy leaves, but also can prevent development of hickory shuckworm population in pecan orchards.

The current recommendation for pecan phylloxera is to spray imidacloprid right after budbreak. If the timing is not right for this application, leaves will likely have the galls in the next few weeks and it would be too late to take care of the phylloxera. In 2013 then Andrew Sawyer (who was serving Thomas County extension at that time) and former Extension Pecan Entomologist Dr. Will Hudson conducted a trial to evaluate if soil application of imidacloprid would control pecan leaf phylloxera.

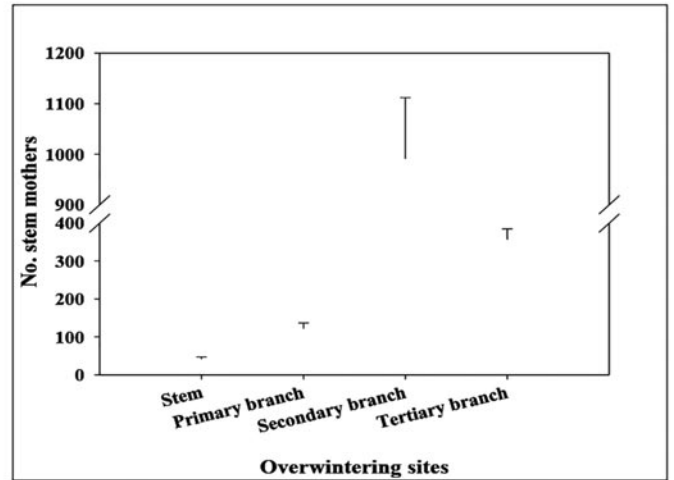


Fig 1. Number of phylloxera adults recovered from different types of branches on a pecan tree.

A heavily infested orchard in Merryville as well as an orchard in Athens were drenched with imidacloprid in December, January, February and March to determine the timing for imidacloprid to rise through the

Continued on Page 25, See Update

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Update Continued from Page 24

xylem and be present in the leaf tissue and control the insect. After drenching these trees and comparing to a control in two locations in Georgia, there was no significant reduction of phylloxera galls on the trees drenched with phylloxera. At the time it seemed very interesting and even unexpected learning that imidacloprid drenching did not reduce phylloxera damage. The only other option to attempt was physical injection of chemical into the tree - which would not be feasible for growers.

After more than a decade since that trial was done, current Pecan Entomologist Dr. Apurba Barman has started new research projects on pecan phylloxera. His research on the vertical distribution of phylloxera on a pecan tree clearly indicates that pecan leaf phylloxera are significantly higher up on the tree canopy, overwintering on the small, secondary or tertiary branches rather than the lower portion of the central tree trunk (Fig. 1). Additionally, Barman's research for the last two years clearly shows that imidacloprid application timed just after bud break will keep the leaves clean and protected from phylloxera damage.

Revisiting the drench method, however, may be worth another look. The physiology research on sap flow conducted by Dr. Wells and Dr. Monique LeClerc at the UGA-Griffin Campus may explain why our only xylem moving insecticide has difficulty traveling up the tree through the winter.

Dr. Wells has now shared this work on tracking sap flow in pecan and discovered that the sap rises heavily in the spring and continues in the summer as expected. However, sap flow begins to decline around the middle of August (Fig. 2). This change has significant implications for water movement, as our highest pecan water demand begins at this time. As the kernels are forming, the pecan tree slows in its ability to extract water from

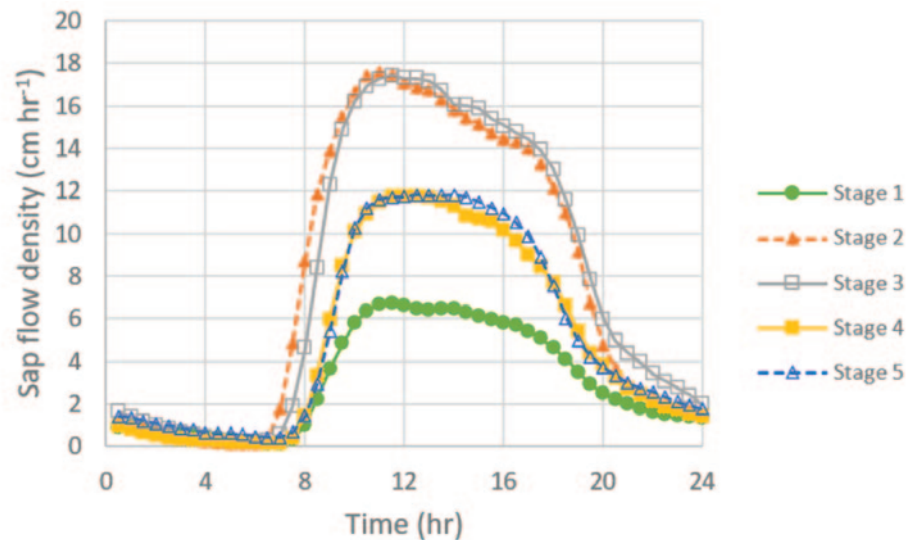


Fig 2. Variation in sap flow density in pecan trees at different time of the year.

the soil. This factor may explain why our drench method never materialized.

The timing of the pecan sap flow and the timing of phylloxera control simply do not occur together. The drench method could be an option for backyard pecan trees; however, foliar applications of imidacloprid remain the best way to manage phylloxera on pecan. 🌰

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The Next Wellness Trend is Already in the Pantry



By Anne Warden, CEO of American Pecan Council & American Pecan Promotion Board

As we move into springtime and bring Q2 to a close, we're seeing how bold, culturally relevant creative campaigns can position pecans squarely in the center of today's wellness conversation.

To capitalize on the healthy living mindset, the American Pecan Promotion Board launched a fully integrated campaign, positioning pecans as "The Next Wellness Trend". Our goal was straightforward: to drive trial and repeat purchase among health-conscious customers by reintroducing their beloved holiday baking aisle pecans as a simple, daily wellness snack.

It's no secret that the wellness landscape in today's culture is crowded and at times, overwhelming. It can be hard to keep up with the latest health trends, let alone participate in complicated fitness routines, acquire subscription-based supplements and purchase all the fancy gadgets. The constant bombardment of these "must try" trends are causing consumers to experience wellness fatigue. They are looking for something simple, effective and accessible. That's where pecans come in.

"The Next Wellness Trend" playfully spoofs overhyped wellness culture and positions pecans as the refreshingly simple solution that's been here all along. Whether someone is training hard or simply focused on aging well, the body benefits from real, wholesome nutrition. Pecans deliver that in one ingredient; no subscription, no charging cable and no assembly required.



By leaning into humor and cultural relevance, the campaign reframes pecans as nature's surprisingly snackable upgrade. A wellness choice that offers real nutritional value without the hype, hassle or high price tag. At its core, the message is simple: in a world of complicated health trends, the best wellness solution might just grow on trees.

This campaign rolled out through across our digital platforms including e-commerce channels with support across social media and influencer, meeting consumers where they are and reinforcing pecans as an easy, everyday snack. The full video spot is available to see at www.youtube.com/@EatPecans.

Continued on Page 27, See Pantry

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In addition to our Q2 wellness push, APPB is launching a timely digital activation around Tax Day called “Snax Season.” Designed to capitalize on the cultural moment of April 15th, this creative concept plays on familiar tax-season language while highlighting the strong “returns” pecans provide, including protein, fiber and maximum crunch. Digital ads will encourage consumers to maximize their “snax return” and let a CPA (Certified Pecan Advisor) handle it. This lighthearted activation allows us to capitalize on and maintain engagement during a cultural moment that everyone can relate to.

Together, these efforts reflect a broader strategic priority: expanding everyday use occasions and driving incremental consumption. By positioning pecans as a simple, satisfying wellness snack and keeping our messaging culturally timely, we continue building demand beyond traditional baking seasons.

We look forward to sharing performance results as these campaigns wrap up. Each initiative is designed with growers in mind, strengthening consumer demand, reinforcing value and ensuring that American-grown pecans remain competitive in an increasingly competitive snack marketplace. 🌰



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Desirable Mystery a Delayed Reaction from Hurricane Michael Injury

Jess C. Jones, Manager, Graham Pecan Farm Leary, Georgia
 Dr. Darrell Sparks, Professor Emeritus, Department of Horticulture, University of Georgia

Shortly after Hurricane Michael occurred on October 11 2018, Desirable production was less than normal and light weight nuts were blown out at the cleaning plant. These problems were especially severe at Graham Pecan. Thousands of Desirable trees on Graham Pecan were individually inspected. Almost all trees had at least three areas of bark split and in some cases, sap was leaking from the split. Split length was 18-24 inches (Fig. 1.). The split was limited to mature trees. Bark split did not occur on young trees (Fig. 2). Presumably due to their small size. A mature Desirable presents a large sail against the wind with the result being the tree trunk is twisted to the point that the bark splits. In comparison the wind sail of a young tree is tiny. Other Desirable orchards in the surrounding area



Fig. 1. Longitudinal bark split on Desirable pecan following Hurricane Michael. Seven years after Michael. had the same production and nut quality as Graham Pecan. A survey indicated these orchards also had widespread bark split.

Continued on Page 29, See Injury






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Fig.2. Four year old Desirable with no bark split. Seven years after Michael.



Fig. 3. Cutaway of split bark on Desirable pecan exposing dead inter bark and dead wood of the trunk. Seven years after Michael.



Fig. 4. Desirable stump. The trunk had bark split. Severe dry rot has progressed inward from the outer edge of the stump. The tree at this stage is dead. If it had not been cut down, it would eventual fall from its own weight. Seven years after Michael.

Discussion

Of the thirty plus pecan varieties on Graham Pecan. Desirable was the only one to bark split and for reasons unknown. Bark split initiates a gradual decline in tree health and eventually tree death. Once decline begins, it apparently cannot be reversed.

Injury does not heal over or callus (Fig.3). Repair was not expected as live wood and bark are required for the process, and both are dead. The base of the trunk eventual dry rots (Fig.4). Water cannot be transported up the tree trunk and the tree dies. Desirable decline is widespread in Georgia as was Michael. Financial loss is huge.

Revenue loss begins with the initial stage of decline and increases with time. Expense is incurred removing the split bark Desirable, planting a replacement, and maintaining it until heavy production is attained.

Graham Pecan removed all split bark Desirables and replaced them with Morrill, Huffman, and Tanner. At Graham Pecan these varieties have performed well in extensive trials.

Addendum. Also following Michael, some large Stuart trees had thinning foliage and a major decrease in nut production. We propose that although not uprooted, a portion of the root system was broken and detached from the tree. If the tree eventually recovers is unknown. 🌰

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On the Road with GPGA

*By Mary Mikelyn Bruorton, Editor, The Pecan Grower Magazine and
By Scout Weesner, GPGA Communications & Events Coordinator*

Georgia Agribusiness Council Legislative Breakfast

By Mary Mikelyn Bruorton

The Georgia Agribusiness Council hosted its annual meeting and legislative breakfast on February 3rd-4th bringing together hundreds of GAC members and agricultural leaders from across the state. This event provided an opportunity to discuss the challenges facing various sectors of Georgia's ag industry and the ways in which legislators have supported efforts to address them.

At the breakfast, Georgia pecans had a designated table for key discussions with legislators. Present at the table were Representative Chas Cannon, along with GPGA Vice President Marianne Brown, GPGA Treasurer Arren Moses, grower Taylor Moses and GPGA Executive Director Mary Bruorton. The conversation centered around the difficulties faced by pecan growers.

Attendees were also fortunate to hear from a number of prominent figures, including Governor Brian Kemp, Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones, Speaker Jon Burns, Georgia Agricultural Commissioner Tyler Harper, and Chairmen Russ Goodman and Robert Dickey. Each speaker offered valuable insights on the importance of Georgia agriculture and the ongoing support for the industry.



Governor Brian Kemp addresses the crowd.

This event remains a vital opportunity for the agricultural community to connect and collaborate. A heartfelt thanks to the Georgia Agribusiness Council for organizing such a remarkable gathering. 🌰

Continued on Page 33, See Road



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Southeastern Pecan Growers Association (SEPGA) Annual Conference and Trade Show

By Scout Weesner

The Southeastern Pecan Growers Association (SEPGA) kicked off the 2026 conference season with its 118th Annual Convention and Trade Show, held February 20th –21st in Gulf Shores, Alabama. The two-day event brought together pecan growers, researchers, industry leaders, and exhibitors from across the region to exchange ideas, discuss industry challenges and explore opportunities for innovation and growth.

The convention began with a welcome reception that provided attendees and exhibitors a chance to unwind after a day of travel while reconnecting with old friends and meeting new faces in the industry. The evening also featured the event's \$5,000 drawing and silent auction, creating an engaging and social start to the convention.

On February 21st SEPGA President Justin Jones officially welcomed attendees to a full day of educational programming. The sessions offered practical insights and research-based information designed to help growers strengthen their operations and stay informed on the latest developments within the pecan industry.

In addition to the educational sessions, attendees had the opportunity to visit the trade show floor, where exhibitors showcased innovative products, technologies and services supporting pecan production. The trade

show provided valuable opportunities for networking and learning about new solutions available to growers and industry professionals.

The SEPGA Annual Awards Luncheon on February 21st recognized several individuals for their dedication and service to the pecan industry. Tommy Bryan received the Certificate of Merit Award, while Vicki Jenkins was honored with the Certificate of Appreciation Award. GPGA would like to congratulate these award recipients! 🌰

Continued on Page 34, See Road



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The advertisement features a red background with several circular images of holiday-themed tins. One tin has a scene with Santa Claus and reindeer, another has a scene with a house and trees, and another has the word 'JOY' in a decorative font. The text is in white and green, providing contact information for Holiday Tins & Containers.

County Production Meetings Held

By Scout Weesner

Since January our staff has had the opportunity to attend several county pecan production meetings held across the state. These meetings, which are coordinated each year by UGA Extension, offer the latest research and production management related to pecans for the growers and industry representatives to prepare for the next harvest year. Scout Weesner from the GPGA and Bailey Segars with APC and APPB have been attending these meetings and representing their respective organizations.

Throughout the meetings, attendees have heard informative presentations from Dr. Lenny Wells, Dr. Apurba Barman, and Dr. Clemen Oliveira, who all work together as part of the University of Georgia's pecan team. Each speaker shared updates on their recent research and findings related to pecan production over the past year. Their presentations covered a range of topics important to growers, including production practices, pest management, and ongoing research efforts aimed at improving pecan yields and orchard health.

In addition to the educational presentations, the meetings have also served as a great opportunity to connect with growers from across the region. Meeting new producers and visiting with those already involved in the pecan industry has made these events especially enjoyable. The conversations and shared experiences among growers, researchers, and industry representatives help strengthen the pecan industry and encourage the conversations that support success in pecan production.



We have truly enjoyed attending these meetings, hearing the presentations, and meeting growers throughout the state. Events like these play an important role in keeping the pecan industry informed, connected, and moving forward. 🌰

Continued on Page 35, See Road

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Western Pecan Growers Conference

By Mary Mikelyn Bruorton

The Western Pecan Growers Association (WPGA) hosted its 60th Annual Convention and Trade Show from March 1st–3rd, which brought together pecan industry leaders, growers, researchers and exhibitors for three days of collaboration, education and networking. The event was a great success and continues to play an important role in advancing innovation and strengthening the pecan industry across the western United States.

The convention featured a wide variety of activities designed to connect growers and provide valuable industry insights. Attendees had numerous opportunities to network with fellow industry professionals, explore the trade show floor showcasing the latest equipment and technologies, and participate in educational sessions covering key topics affecting pecan production and marketing.

The event kicked off on Sunday, March 1st, with a corn hole tournament followed by a welcome reception that offered attendees an opportunity to reconnect with colleagues and meet new industry partners.

Monday, March 2nd, featured a full day of educational programming. Highlights included a presentation on the 2026 weather outlook and its potential impacts on water availability in the Western United States. Another notable presentation came from students with New Mexico State University's National Agri-Marketing Association team, who showcased an innovative project focused on developing biodegradable golf tees made from pecan shells. The day concluded with WPGA's annual banquet dinner and food contest auction, a long-standing tradition that brings growers together for an evening of fellowship and fun.

The final day of the convention continued with another half-day of educational sessions. Presentations included discussions on pecan markets and production in Mexico, as well as research on insect pests affecting pecan orchards in the southwestern United States. The event concluded with a grower panel focused on man-



aging pecan farms as efficient, sustainable businesses while successfully transitioning operations across generations.

The 60th Annual WPGA Convention and Trade Show was a resounding success, and the Western Pecan Growers Association looks forward to welcoming growers back for the 61st Annual Convention and Trade Show in 2027. 🌰

Continued on Page 36, See Road



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Secretary Brooke Rollins Visits Georgia

By Mary Mikelyn Bruorton

On March 10th, Brooke Rollins, Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture, visited the Georgia State Capitol to participate in a roundtable discussion and press conference regarding the release of \$531 million in Hurricane Helene Block Grant funding.

I had the opportunity to attend this event on behalf of Georgia's pecan industry. Members of the Georgia Senate and House agriculture committees were present and spoke candidly about the challenges facing Georgia agriculture while also highlighting areas where Secretary Rollins and federal partners could support our growers and rural communities.

The event was also attended by Governor Brian Kemp, First Lady of Georgia Marty Kemp, Georgia Agriculture Commissioner Tyler Harper, and Small Business Administration Administrator Kelly Loeffler, demonstrating the strong collaboration between state and federal leadership as they work to address the needs of Georgia's agricultural sector.



The Georgia Pecan Growers Association is grateful for this level of engagement and remains hopeful that the funding will include meaningful provisions that strengthen Georgia agriculture and the rural communities it supports.

GPGA remains committed to ensuring that Georgia's pecan growers have a voice in these important conversations. We will continue working to secure a seat at the table so that the concerns of our growers are consistently shared with legislators and leaders at both the state and federal levels. 🌰



Small Ruminant Grazing in Pecan Orchards: A Novel Research Collaboration Between USDA-ARS (Byron) and Fort Valley State University

Dr. David Shapiro-Ilan¹, Dr. Aftab Siddique², Dr. Cristina Pisani¹, Dr. Cameron Bardsley¹, and Dr. Tom Terrill²

¹USDA-ARS Southeastern Fruit and Tree Nut Research Station, Byron, GA 31008

²Department of Agricultural Sciences, Fort Valley State University, Fort Valley GA 31030

Summary

Adding small ruminants as grazers to orchard systems can be an economic boon to farmers. However, the profitability of small ruminant enterprises and orchard systems is challenged by various factors. The long-term goal of this project is to integrate small ruminant production into pecan orchard systems to enhance economic and ecological sustainability, productivity, and profitability.

In this project, we focus on goats and pecan as a model system. Studies will focus on enhancing the quality and yield of small ruminants, e.g., in meat and milk production. Advanced technology will be developed to monitor goat health, including break-through sensing devices and drone applications. Animal health and parasite load will be assessed, and novel approaches to alleviate parasite pressure will be developed based on biological control methodology.

The potential of beneficial microbes, or their derivatives, to control internal and external parasites of goats will be explored. For internal parasites, we will use endophytic fungi and bacterial metabolites as novel bio-control solutions. The impact of small ruminant presence on pecan tree and soil health will be evaluated following various grazing regimes (Figure 1).

Factors to be investigated include soil compaction and fertility, leaf nutrition, gas exchange, nut yield, and nut quality. A complete soil microbiome analysis will also be included, looking at the potential risk of food-borne pathogen contamination. The results of this project will fill key knowledge gaps in small ruminant grazing and production in the southeastern U.S. and reduce the risk of parasite burdens, as well as adoption of new technologies. Practices that provide environmental

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Figure 1: Goats grazing in a pecan orchard (USDA-ARS, Byron GA).

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and economic benefits to farmers will be developed. The model system constructed within this project plan will have applicability to other animal/orchard ventures as well.

Introduction

Small ruminant production, particularly goat farming, can be a valuable economic asset for farmers, in diversified orchard systems. A major issue in goat production is maintaining animal health under grazing systems. Goats are particularly vulnerable to infection with gastrointestinal parasites such as *Haemonchus contortus*, which can lead to anemia, poor growth, and death if unmanaged. External parasites like chewing lice (*Bovicola caprae*) also pose a burden on animal health and welfare. These parasite challenges reduce productivity and increase management costs, which may contribute to declining goat numbers. Therefore, novel, sustainable, and cost-effective parasite control methods, including biological control strategies, are urgently needed. At the same time, real-time tools to mon-

itor goat health can help producers make timely management decisions and reduce losses.

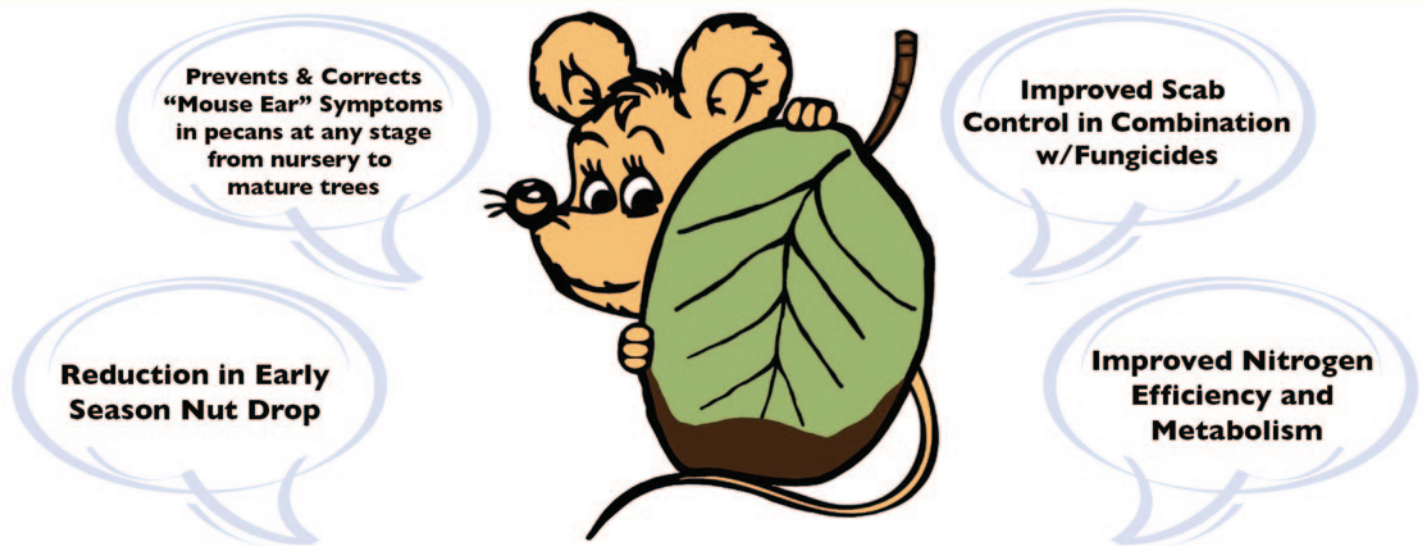
In this context, integrating goats into orchard systems—particularly pecan orchards—offers a promising dual-benefit approach. With rising input costs for fertilizers and herbicides (e.g., for pecan growers), alternative orchard management strategies are in demand. Managed grazing by small ruminants can provide natural weed suppression and improve soil fertility through manure deposition, reducing the need for synthetic inputs. Goats, as browsing animals, are well-suited for this task due to their preference for woody and broadleaf species, making them ideal for integrated orchard systems where selective grazing is needed.

However, the performance and health of goats in orchard-based systems are not well-documented, nor is the impact of such grazing on orchard productivity, tree health, or soil biology. This project (inaugurated in 2022) seeks to fill these knowledge gaps through the following research objectives:

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1. Developing improved and sustainable strategies for internal and external parasite control.
2. Evaluating advanced, non-invasive technologies (e.g., sensors) for goat health monitoring in field settings; and
3. Assessing the effects of goat grazing on soil properties, weed suppression, and pecan tree health.

Ultimately, the integration of goat grazing into orchard systems can increase economic resilience for producers, enhance land-use efficiency, and promote sustainable agricultural practices—*provided that health challenges like parasitism are effectively addressed*. This research aims to offer a model for successful co-industry development that benefits both livestock and crop sectors.

The following activities have been initiated and expected deliverables are described:

Sub-objective 1. Grazing effect on small ruminant production, meat quality analysis and animal microbiome.

Goats in Orchards: A Practical Opportunity for Producers

Adding livestock to orchard systems comes with challenges but also benefits for producers. Goats are usually kept out of young orchards because they can harm tender trees. But in mature pecan orchards, the bark is tougher, so goats rarely cause serious damage. This lets producers use orchard groundcover for grazing instead of just mowing or herbicides. Our project looks at how managed grazing in mature orchards can boost small ruminant productivity, meat quality, and animal health.

This study compares rotational grazing with continuous grazing in mature pecan orchards over six months. We monitor goats by checking their body condition, weight, and how much forage they use. We also use GPS collars, RFID tags, and wearable sensors to track their grazing habits and activity. The goats eat either just orchard forage or orchard forage plus extra feed. We assess meat quality by looking at tenderness, fatty acid makeup, and oxidative stability, using quick methods like UV-Vis hyperspectroscopy and bioelectrical impedance alongside standard lab tests.

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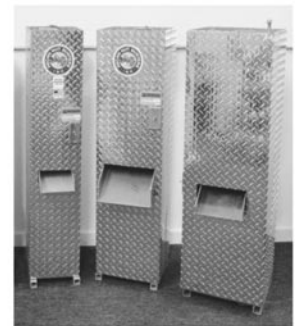
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So far, we have set up the experiment at Fort Valley State University. We installed monitoring equipment and collected BIA (Siddique et al. 2025) (Figure 2) and imaging data. We have also started radio-frequency (Siddique et al. 2025) (Figure 3) and microbiome analyses. The results will show if adding goats to mature orchards can make land use more efficient, lower management costs, and create extra income for producers.

Deliverables

1. **Orchard–Livestock Integration Plan:** Guidelines for grazing management, stocking rates, and tree protection in mature pecan orchards.

2. **Performance and Value Assessment:** Evaluation of goat productivity, forage utilization, meat quality traits, and economic benefits of orchard grazing systems.

Sub-objective 2.A. Control of external parasites (lice, ticks, etc.) using microbials.

The use of chemical pesticides is still the major preventive and curative approach for ectoparasite infestations. Long term and repeated use of these chemicals result in development of resistance, environmental contamination, and negative nontarget effects to various organisms including humans. Therefore, sustainable, alternative strategies are needed such as biological control. The use of entomopathogens (beneficial insect-killing nematodes and fungi) represent potential alternatives. There are some previous studies on entomopathogens against ectoparasites of cattle and sheep but not for goats. The primary initial focus will be on goat lice (*B. caprae*) but will also include prominent ticks that parasitize goats as time allows (e.g., lone star tick, *Amblyomma americanum*).

In laboratory experiments the potential control of goat lice using beneficial nematodes has been established within this project (Gulzar et al. 2025). The susceptibility of goat lice to entomopathogenic (insect-killing) fungi will be assessed in forthcoming experiments as well as testing susceptibility of ticks to beneficial nematodes and fungi. Subsequently, field ex-

periments through controlled applications or “smart sprayers (Goolsby et al., 2018) will be implemented.

Deliverables

1. Development of safe, novel and effective mechanisms to control external parasites of small ruminants.

Sub-objective 2.B. Control of internal parasites with microbial-based approaches.

Development of anthelmintic drug resistance occurred in animals due to their extensive use, wide adoption and lack of knowledge about integrated control procedures. There is a need for alternate solutions such as biological control agents for suppression of gastrointestinal nematodes (GIN) in small ruminants. In this project entomopathogenic fungi, introduced as endophytes, and bacterial metabolites, will be explored as novel mechanisms for control of GIN. Entomopathogenic



Figure 2: Handheld BIA device for impedance analysis



Figure 3: Radio frequency wave device for data collection in meat goats

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fungi (such as *Beauveria* and *Metarhizium* species) have been shown to have anthelmintic properties. Entomopathogenic fungi have been used as effective biopesticides when applied directly to the target pest, but also the fungi have been shown to be effective when incorporated into plants as an endophyte (Ramakuwela et al., 2019). Endophytic fungi will be incorporated into various forage plants (plant amenability studies are underway) and fed to goats in various concentrations to determine the impact on GIN.

Bacterial metabolites derived from *Xenorhabdus* and *Photorhabdus* spp. have shown broad toxicity to various harmful microbes such as plant pathogens (including those that cause pecan diseases) (Shapiro-Ilan et al. 2014) and against plant parasitic nematodes. Thus, the metabolites may also serve as control mechanisms for GIN. Bacterial metabolites in various feed formats and concentrations will be delivered to goats and suppression of GIN will subsequently be assessed.

Deliverables

1. Development of safe, novel and effective mechanisms to control internal parasites of small ruminants.


Sub-objective 2.C. Novel sensing systems to monitor goat health and behavior.

AI-Enabled Goat Health Monitoring: From Sensors to Smarter Deworming Decisions

Goat producers are dealing with labor shortages, higher costs, and worries about parasite resistance. Precision livestock technologies now provide ways to keep an eye on animal health all the time instead of just during occasional physical checks. Tools such as wearable sensors, RFID tags, and bioelectrical impedance analysis (BIA) (Siddique et al. 2025), along with artificial intelligence, can detect early signs of health issues and help make quicker decisions.

Wearable sensors monitor movement patterns like grazing, resting, and walking. AI analyzes these patterns to spot unusual behavior that might indicate stress, illness, or parasite infection. At the same time, BIA tech-

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nology measures electrical conductivity in body tissues to assess body condition and physiologic changes (Siddique et al. 2025, Shahat et al. 2025). Also, AI systems are being developed to automate FAMACHA anemia scoring using smartphone images, thereby improving targeted treatment for barber pole worm (Siddique et al. 2025).

By combining wearable sensors, RFID tags, BIA measurements, and AI scoring into one monitoring system, producers can spot health problems sooner and treat only the animals that need it. This procedure helps reduce drug use and slows down parasite resistance.

Deliverables

1. **Integrated Smart Monitoring System:** A platform combining wearable sensors, RFID identification, BIA measurements, and AI-based FAMACHA analysis for early health alerts and targeted treatment decisions.

2. **Parasite Management Evaluation:** Assessment of reduced dewormer use, earlier parasite detection, improved animal health, and potential cost savings from AI-guided targeted selective treatment.

Sub-objective 3.A. Grazing impact on fertilization and microbiome.

The use of small ruminants (goats and sheep) in pecan orchards can have a positive impact in certain commercial orchards. Grazing has had significant impacts on soil microbial communities and ecosystem functions impacting soil organic carbon (SOC) and improving soil fertility from livestock feces via the acceleration of nutrient recycling. Walnut and grape growers in Central California have integrated targeted sheep grazing with extensive cover cropping. They partnered with sheep farmers and have reported significant benefits from improved soil health, increased biological control against insect pests, thus leading to reduced dependence on fertilizers and pesticides. Such growers have reported large scale integration of grazers to accelerate nutrient cycling, reduction in fertilizer needs and simultaneously increasing tree resilience. This is a positive mutual relationship with the sheep farmers where growers benefit from weed control and soil improvement, while sheep farmers get a place to forage their animals on healthy cover crop material.

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Unfortunately, contamination from livestock waste is a concern since many crops, including pecans are harvested from the ground. Animal waste is a potential contaminant of *Escherichia coli*, *Salmonella* and other pathogens in pecan nuts collected on the orchard floor and hence a food safety concern. In the past, tree nuts have been linked to foodborne pathogen outbreaks in the United States. Although goats will be removed from the orchard system months before harvest, it is still important to monitor potential for foodborne pathogen contamination.

As part of this small ruminant collaborative project, the horticulture and food safety scientists at USD-ARS Byron are looking to evaluate the influence of small ruminant grazing strategies on soil productivity and health. The goal is to evaluate the soil microbiome (bacterial and fungal) of organic orchard blocks with rotating goat herds compared to organic blocks with no goat rotations in relation to conventional orchard blocks. This study will also determine the prevalence and persistence of *Salmonella* and Shiga toxin-producing *E.*

coli (STEC) in soil and goat fecal samples of the orchards. DNA from soil and fecal samples has been extracted from a two year period study of seasonal small ruminant grazing regime. Sample quality is currently being assessed followed by molecular analysis to identify microbial communities and potential presence of human pathogens.

Deliverables

1. Understanding of how co-management of small ruminant livestock in orchards impacts the microbial community, soil fertility, and tree health,
2. Develop strategies for managing livestock for maximum benefits to pecan production.

Sub-objective 3.B. Drone monitoring of pecan health.

Drones in Pecan Orchards: Turning Aerial Data into Practical Decisions

Drones are proving to be a valuable tool in pecan farming because they let growers quickly and easily survey the whole orchard. High-resolution aerial photos reveal tree height, canopy size, and overall orchard health

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over large areas. By regularly mapping each tree, growers can spot weak rows, uneven canopy growth, or thinning spots that might impact yield, spray coverage, or sunlight reaching the trees.

Drone images also improve decision-making in orchard care. Thermal images show temperature differences in the canopy linked to water stress, helping growers adjust irrigation timing and coverage. Multi-spectral images measure canopy greenness, which often relates to nitrogen levels, allowing producers to spot nutrient differences across the orchard. UAV maps can also reveal vegetation patterns on the orchard floor and identify possible pest or disease hot spots, guiding scouting and management (Panda et al. 2025).

When used together, by combining these aerial data layers, producers can shift from guessing to making decisions based on solid data. Drone images can support irrigation management, targeted use of inputs, vegetation control, and planning grazing rotations. With regu-

lar monitoring, drones become a useful tool that boosts orchard efficiency, sustainability, and long-term productivity.

Deliverables

1. Orchard Decision-Support Map Package: High-resolution UAV maps showing canopy structure, stress zones, nutrient variability, and pest hot spots to guide irrigation, fertilization, and targeted scouting.

2. Integrated Orchard Management Plan: A data-driven strategy linking UAV insights to irrigation scheduling, input management, vegetation control, and grazing rotation planning to improve yield consistency and resource efficiency.

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New Researcher Joins USDA-Byron

Research Plant Pathologist Dr. Christopher Ference recently joined the team at the USDA Agricultural Research Service Southeastern Fruit and Tree Nut Laboratory in Byron, Georgia. Ference will be primarily responsible for conducting research into mitigating the impact of pecan scab (*Venturia effusa*) on the pecan industry. Ference will be working with pecan growers and fellow researchers at UGA and the USDA to provide pathology expertise on economically impactful diseases troubling pecan production. He plans to work closely with Dr. Clemen Oliveira at UGA as well as with experts in agricultural engineering and precision agriculture from UGA, Texas A&M, and the USDA to develop methodologies, techniques, and technologies to assist pecan growers in the field.



Dr. Christopher Ference

Ference earned his PhD in Plant Pathology from the University of Florida and he asks that you not hold that

against him. While at UF, Ference worked on strategies to manage bacterial canker disease on Florida citrus, developing field methods and determining factors contributing to host resistance. Ference subsequently worked as a pathologist for the U.S. Forest Service, operating in the western portion of the Southern Region, encompassing the states of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Later, Ference worked as a researcher on diseases afflicting macadamia nut trees in Hawaii, improving methods of disease detection and diagnosis as well as assessing the efficacy of fungicides on macadamia nut trees infected with *Phytophthora* on the Big Island. He looks forward to working with pecan farmers and welcomes your questions and concerns. 🌰

To contact Dr. Ference:

Christopher Ference – ORISE Postdoctoral Research Fellow

Southeastern Fruit and Tree Nut Research Station
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Research Service

21 Dunbar Road, Byron, GA 31008

Email: christopher.ference@usda.gov

Cell: 772-971-1004

PECAN PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT TIPS

<i>May</i>	<i>June</i>	<i>July</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Continue foliar zinc sprays -Apply foliar boron sprays <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Irrigate as needed -Continue fungicide sprays at 14 day intervals <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Spray for pecan nut case-bearer as scouting indicates need (usually around May 15) -Scout and spray for pests as needed <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Keep orchard mowed (unless allowing clover to re-seed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Examine June drop and determine cause (pollination or insect induced) <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Irrigate as needed <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Apply herbicide as needed -Make 2nd fertilizer application to mature trees if needed <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Fertilize 1st year trees exhibiting good growth -Make 2nd nickel application for mouse ear affected trees as needed -Apply fungicide at 14 day intervals (close to 10 days during wet weather toward end of month) <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Scout for yellow aphids and black aphids; spray as needed -Scout and spray for casebearer and hickory shuckworm as needed <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Keep orchard mowed (mechanical or chemical mow) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Take leaf samples for nutrient analysis -Soil samples may also be taken <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Irrigate as needed -Patch bud beginning at end of month <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Apply herbicide as needed <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Apply fungicide at 14 day intervals (close to 10 days during wet weather) -Scout and spray for insect pests as needed <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Pay attention to mite populations, especially in hot, dry weather <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Keep orchard mowed <li style="padding-left: 20px;">-Order trees for new planting



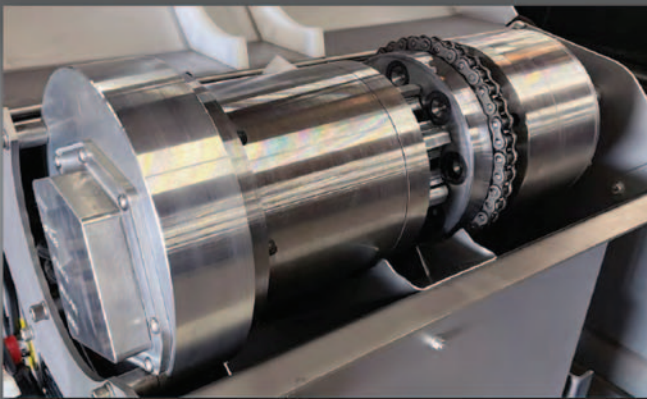
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Jack Thompson Scholars Selected

By Amy Howell, Copy Editor, *The Pecan Grower Magazine*

Now in its 11th year, the Jack Thompson Scholarship has served 32 students in their college pursuits in memory of Thompson and his family’s contributions to the pecan industry. Our 2026 award winners bring the total number to 34 with the addition of **Kate Lane** from Perry and **Brodie Law** from Tifton.

The scholarship is open to high school seniors, as well as currently enrolled college students, at post-secondary institutions and technical schools. The application process opens each Fall semester with a January deadline for submission. Applications are reviewed by GPGA’s Board during the month of February, with decisions announced in March by the scholarship committee. Each candidate submits an application that includes an essay describing their academic experiences and future goals, along with three professional references. The scholarship winners receive a \$500 check as the award.

GPGA would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the Jack Thompson Fund and hopes you will continue to support this worthy endeavor. This year’s applicant pool included 53 outstanding candidates, which made the selection process quite challenging for the scholarship committee.

If you are interested in continuing this blessed tradition, please contact the GPGA office any time. We are pleased to present this year’s recipients:

Kate Lane is the daughter of Duke and Beth Ann Lane and will graduate in May from The Westfield School. Kate has been recognized for numerous academic awards across all subject matters during her high school career while also playing Varsity basketball and varsity



golf. She was a Governors Honors nominee in English literature, recipient of the Georgia Certificate of Merit, and President of the Key Club. She is active in her community and church and has traveled to Honduras 5 times for mission trips during her high school years. She plans to attend Samford University this fall.

Brodie Law is the son of Kirk and Dawn Law of Tifton and will graduate in May from Tift County High School. Brodie has been a standout member of the TCHS Baseball team and recently committed to play at the collegiate level at the East Georgia campus of Georgia Southern University next year. Brodie was also a member of TCHS Swim team while maintaining honor student status. During high school he has been dual enrolled in college classes at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, while also working on his family’s pecan farm. 🌰



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National Pecan Federation Washington, D.C. Update

Robert L. Redding, Jr., The Redding Firm

Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026

The U.S. House Agriculture Committee passed legislation of the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 on March 5th largely along party lines, with seven Democrats, including Representatives Vaquez (NM-02), Costa (CA-21), Davids (KS-03), Davis (NC-01), Gray (CA-13), McDonald Rivet (MI-08) and Riley (NY-19) joining Republicans in support. The bill now advances forward. The National Pecan Federation had previously sent a letter of support to the Committee for this Act.

Included in the bill were multiple provisions that will benefit the pecan industry, such as:

- Expanding eligibility for the Tree Assistance Program (TAP)
- Adding pecans and other tree nuts as eligible products under the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program
- Implement reforms to specialty crop risk management programs

NPF did not support the amendment offered by Congressman Adam Gray (CA-13) which requires mandatory reporting on how modification or evocation of the United States- Mexico- Canada Trade Agreement (USMCA) would affect agricultural imports and exports.

U.S Trade Representative Jamieson Greer Announced First Round of Bilateral Discussions with Mexican Secretary of Economy Marcelo Ebrard

The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) announced on March 5th that representatives from the U.S. and Mexico will begin trade negotiations the week of March 16th. According to USTR, representatives from both countries have “instructed negotiators to begin scoping discussion on measures to ensure the benefits of the agreement accrue primarily to the parties, including by reducing dependence on imports from outside the region, strengthening rules of origin, and enhancing the security of North American supply chains.”

U.S. Department of Agriculture Updates Pecan Moisture Content Guidelines in Response to National Pecan Federation Request

In January 2026, USDA released an update to its Commodity Specification for Tree Nuts. The revised specifications include an adjustment to the acceptable moisture content range for pecans.

The final published range was set at 2.0%–4.5%, replacing the originally proposed draft range of 4.0%–4.6%. The National Pecan Federation submitted a letter to USDA in December 2025 in response to the agency’s request for feedback on the draft specifications.

U.S. Trade Representative Announces President Trump’s 2026 Trade Policy Agenda

On March 2nd the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative released President Trump’s 2026 Trade Policy Agenda. The agenda focuses on continuing the President’s America First Trade Policy as follows:

- Continue the Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART) Program
- Pursue Robust Enforcement of ARTs, Other Trade Agreements, and United States Trade Laws
- Secure Supply Chains for Critical Minerals and Sectors

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- Conduct the Review of the U.S.–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA)

- Manage Trade with China for Reciprocity and Balance

- Promote American Interests in International Fora.

The report also highlights the accomplishments under the ART program that created the agreement for the EU to give preferential market access to U.S. tree nuts.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Value-Added Producer Grant Application are Open

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) opened application for the Value-Added Producer Grant Program on February 17th. Grants can be used for a variety of production and research needs. Application will close at 1:00pm ET on April 22, 2026.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Announces Intent to Purchase \$10 Million of Pecans through Section 32

Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins announced the intent to purchase \$263 million in agricultural products from American producers by way of Section 32 of the Agriculture Adjustment Act of 1935. Included in the announcement was an intent to purchase \$10 million worth of pecans from American growers for use in the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service.

Section 32 is a mandatory appropriation created by Congress through the Agricultural Adjustment Act Amendment of 1935 with the purpose of strengthening American Agriculture by encouraging the exportation and domestic consumption of commodities and by reestablishing farmers' purchasing power by making payments to producers.

U.S Department of Agriculture Secretary Rollins and Health and Human Service Secretary Kennedy announce Dietary Guidelines Partnership

On March 4th U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins together with Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy and National Nutrition Advisor Dr. Ben Carson announced the Dietary Guidelines for Americans Strategic Partnerships initiative.

The initiative encourages private sector engagement in educating the public on the importance of the Dietary Guidelines and their role as the foundation for healthier eating habits.

Georgia Department of Agriculture Hurricane Helene Block Grants Opened March 16, 2026

The Georgia Department of Agriculture opened applications for the Hurricane Helene Block Grant on March 16th. The program is intended to help agricultural producers recover from losses caused by Hurricane Helene. Producers interested in applying can visit the Georgia Department of Agriculture's website for more information and application instructions.

Applications will close on April 27, 2026. 🌰

With Sympathy

*It is with deepest sympathy that we report the loss of **Margaret Page Easterlin**, who passed away on February 6, 2026 at the age of 74. She was the beloved wife of J.B. Easterlin of Easterlin Pecan and a cherished mother, grandmother, sister and educator. Margaret and J.B. were married for 50 years and had 3 children and 5 grandchildren at the time of her death. Margaret raised her family while also teaching high school and college English before retiring after 33 years in the profession. She enjoyed traveling, singing in choirs, playing tennis, and stayed active with community volunteer work. She was surrounded by love and leaves behind a legacy of warmth, joy, and faith. 🌰*



Margaret Page Easterlin

January 16, 1952 – February 6, 2026

March 2026 USDA Pecan Breeding & Genetics Program Update

*By Dr. Warren Chatwin, Dr. Angelyn Hilton, Dr. Xinwang Wang and Keith Kubenka
USDA-ARS, Somerville, Texas 77879*

The busy spring season for pecan breeding has begun, and the USDA Pecan Breeding & Genetics program is ready. We are closely watching our trees of interest for flowers and are ready to jump on the opportunities nature provides us this year to continue to improve pecans. While human-guided pecan breeding has been happening for almost 100 years at the USDA, most pecans in commercial production have grandparents that were wild trees. It's a long process, but we're diligently working to make progress to create better pecans for your orchards. In that spirit, I'd like to update you on some of the objectives our research program completed over this last year.

Pecan Breeding

First, and most importantly, seven new controlled crosses were made last season in the breeding program resulting in hundreds of seed being planted for evaluation. Disease severity, crop load, flowering timing, and other trait ratings were taken on thousands of pecans. Photographs and destructive nut quality analyses of over 1,800 breeding lines (pecans under evaluation for new cultivar status) and pecan cultivars (over 9,000 total nuts) were performed at our Brownwood, Texas facility. This is a detailed process that requires an experienced full-time technician at least 9 months to complete and is critical to our breeding process.

Facilities improvements include the installation of net-wire fencing around the majority of the College Station location to exclude wild hogs from all breeding orchards. A large, shaded seedling nursery has also been constructed, which includes a bay for controlled leaf scab inoculations on pecan breeding lines. Land has also been cleared for a new grafted breeding-line evaluation trial and soon we will plant the Elliott seedling rootstocks. Disqualified breeding lines continue to be thinned or cleared to open up space for new plantings.



Modern plant breeding methods require DNA sequence information in addition to field measurements to increase accuracy and speed of the breeding cycle. Significant progress has been made in obtaining genetic DNA sequence for pecan breeding lines. To date, more than 7,000 trees (comprised of pecan breeding lines, native pecans, and hickories) were genotyped by a modern genetic approach (targeted sequencing panel) comprised of 3,100 genetic sites spread across all 16 pecan chromosomes. 6,000 more trees are expected to be sequenced this year.

Both field and genetic information is critical to our efforts to implement genomic selection (which uses mathematical models to predict mature pecan tree traits, like scab resistance or crop load, in seedling trees). The first batch of models (based on historic data) are planned for construction this year and will be refined as more data is available.

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Germplasm Repository Updates

Over the last year, the National Plant Germplasm System Repository for Pecans and Hickories distributed graftwood, seed, or plant tissue from 68 cultivars in the living collection. Hickory species diversity in the germplasm collection is limited, and targeted wild seed collections were made to fulfill the repository mission of maintaining living collections for all species closely related to pecan. Last year seed was collected from 115 native trees across 15 states that will be planted this spring alongside the breeding program seed.

Rainwater has been a scarce commodity in Texas these last few years. Multiple repository orchards (such as the native and cultivar collections) that were fully or partially unirrigated showed significant signs of stress over the last few years. To address this, we have installed irrigation in both orchards and look forward to their improved health before we hedge them next year to address tree crowding due to orchard spacing.

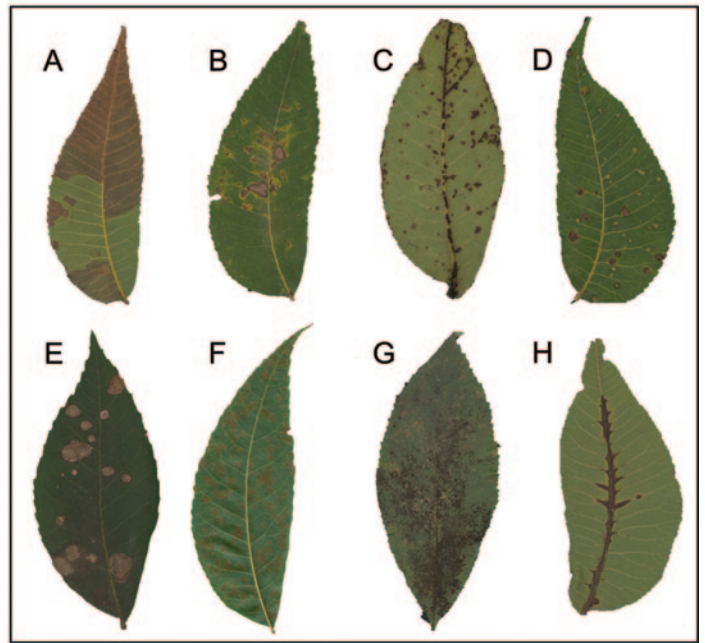
Despite the lack of rain later in the season, heavy early-spring rains last year led to high disease pressure in College Station. Both breeding and germplasm repository orchards were screened for the presence of pecan diseases, including scab, downy spot, anthracnose, powdery mildew, and pecan bacterial leaf scorch. We are currently collecting a library of isolates of local pecan diseases and images of leaves affected by those diseases to aid ongoing efforts to evaluate the susceptibility of commercially available cultivars and controlled-cross seedlings. (Disease Images above right)

Outside of the living collection, we maintain collections of preserved leaves and nuts from pecans and hickories. A new room was built and furnished inside another building on-site to house those collections. As the collection is moved, it is being placed in cabinets with better protection from insect pests and new containers with printed labels that will allow it to be preserved for decades to come. (Nut library pictures right)

Research Updates

While there are many pecan-focused research projects happening within the USDA and with our collaborators from other research institutions, I want to share a couple of highlights from research projects that were recently published or accepted for publication.

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Title: Comparison of methodologies for determining tree architecture in dormant pecan trees.

Journal: *HortTechnology*

Accepted for publication, but not yet online.

Manual and computational methods for assessing tree growth traits have long been employed in breeding programs, yet a clear comparison of their accuracies has been lacking. We developed a three-year dataset (2022-



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2025) comparing traditional hand-held measurements against image-based software tools for measuring tree height and trunk diameter in a young orchard planted in 2020. We discovered that manual tools deliver the most precise readings on smaller trees, but their error rate rises as trees grow taller or trunks widen. In contrast, measurements taken with handheld cameras were both more accurate and far easier to collect and process. Drone-captured images showed promise, though they will need further refinement. Coupled with ongoing improvements in drone imaging, this data will be used to investigate the genetics of pecan growth and vigor. Overall, this work outlines simpler, more reliable protocols for monitoring pecan tree growth—protocols that are user-friendly, accurate, and poised to benefit ongoing pecan research and breeding efforts aimed at enhancing the crop for U.S. farmers.

Title: Rootstock impacts on ‘USDA-ARS-Pawnee’ pecan growth, physiological traits, and soil microbial communities.

Journal: *Frontiers in Horticulture*

Link: <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/horticulture/articles/10.3389/fhort.2025.1603031/full>

Rootstock selection is a pivotal factor shaping pecan productivity, influencing tree vigor, physiological function, and the overall performance of the grafted cultivar. The effects of rootstocks from different geographic locations have been widely tested in other nut tree crops, but have not been thoroughly tested in pecan. To fill this gap, we conducted a multiyear study on the impact of 12 distinct rootstock families from different geographic regions on the growth and physiological traits of the ‘USDA-ARS-Pawnee’ pecan scion. Among many smaller effects, one clear trend was established. Southern origin rootstocks increased tree height and stem diameter compared to other regions, whereas northern origin rootstocks tended delayed spring leaf burst in the same scion. This study is ongoing to assess effects these rootstock families have on yield and production.

Title: The effects of freezing and stratification on pecan (*Carya illinoensis*) seed germination and seedling growth.

Journal: *Technology in Horticulture*

Link: https://www.maxapress.com/data/article/tihort/preview/pdf/tihort-0024-0030.pdf?utm_source=copilot.com

Cold stratification is essential for breaking dormancy and promoting strong germination and seedling growth in pecan seeds. Our study evaluated how freezing and cold stratification affected pecan (*Carya illinoensis*) seed germination and early seedling growth. We tested whether freezing seeds before stratification could enhance dormancy breaking or improve vigor. Results showed that freezing offered no benefit and sometimes reduced germination success. In contrast, cold stratification significantly increased germination percentage, accelerated emergence, and produced more vigorous seedlings. The findings confirm that stratification is essential for overcoming physiological dormancy in pecan seeds, while freezing is unnecessary and potentially harmful. These findings underscore the need to balance pest control freezing with stratification to optimize seed viability and seedling performance in pecan nurseries.

Overall, we are optimistic about the many things we will accomplish in 2026. We are working diligently to improve our breeding methods and orient our research projects to translate the regional needs of the industry into targets we can deploy in breeding. Science isn't always fast, but with focused effort great things are possible.


Mention of trade names or commercial products in this publication is solely for the purpose of providing specific information and does not imply recommendation or endorsement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. 🌰

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The Georgia Pecan Growers Association  is a growing, dynamic organization striving to serve the Georgia Pecan industry and meet the needs of our members. Whether you are a grower, supplier, consumer or industry supporter, GPGA welcomes your support of Georgia's Pecan industry through our membership. The GPGA needs your continued support for research, education, marketing and development for the pecan industry in 2026.

Voice of the Industry

GPGA is a founding member of the National Pecan Federation, which houses the Pecan Political Action Committee and allows pecans to lobby in Washington D.C. through one of the agricultural industry's top lobbying firms, The Redding Firm.

GPGA represents your interests at all agriculturally-focused legislative events, both state and national, in order to affect policy.

Education

The Pecan Grower magazine & *The Pecan Grower* eNewsletter are the official publications of GPGA. They provide both time-sensitive news along with the latest research and production management updates for anyone involved in the pecan industry.

GPGA's Annual Trade Show & Educational Conference provides an outlet for networking, industry updates, and new educational information, aiding growers in pesticide credits for application licensing, and more.

GPGA's Fall Field Day showcases hands-on research outcomes from the nation's leading pecan research teams in unique research-based orchards.

Marketing & Promotions

GPGA Staff promotes Georgia Pecans at:

- Domestic & regional trade shows
- International trade shows
- Outbound trade missions
- Inbound trade missions
- Ag field days

GPGA markets Georgia Pecans through:

- Chef camps & partnerships
- Georgia's Museum of Agriculture
- Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.)
- Traditional Media (TV ads, billboards)
- Samples Distribution program (at Georgia Welcome Centers, expos, trade shows)
- Georgia Pecan Supplier List

Member Resources

- Graphic Design assistance for ad development
- Educational Resources through our website
- Free subscription to *The Pecan Grower* magazine & *The Pecan Grower* eNewsletter
- Full time staff ready to assist you with all production and marketing needs
- Free admission to GPGA's Fall Field Day

Commercial Membership

Commercial members are critical to the success of the GPGA. Commercial members receive their company contact listing on georgiapecan.org, as well as premium booth placement as an exhibitor at the annual conference, admission for 2 to Fall Field Day, and a year's subscription to *The Pecan Grower* magazine and *The Pecan Grower* eNewsletter.

Please complete the form on the following page and return with payment to GPGA:

By Mail: Georgia Pecan Growers Association; PO Box 1367, Tifton, GA 31793

By Email: sheila@georgiapecan.org

By Fax: 404-393-9298

By Phone: 229-382-2187

Information for joining GPGA can also be found on our website www.georgiapecan.org. A 2026 Membership Card will be mailed out to you for admittance to 2026 Fall Field Day upon receipt of membership payment.

TO ENCOURAGE RESEARCH, EDUCATION, and PROMOTION of GEORGIA PECANS

JOIN US TODAY!



The Georgia Pecan growers Association (GPGA) needs your continued support for research, education, marketing, and development for the pecan industry in 2026.

Quantity	Category	Price	Benefits	If you have multiple memberships: How many magazines would you like to receive?
	Grower, 30 Acres or more	\$200	Includes magazine, free admittance for two to Fall Field Day and voting rights in GPGA	
	Grower, 29 Acres or less	\$100	Includes magazine, free admittance for two to Fall Field Day and voting rights in GPGA	
	Grower Family of 3: NO Farm Managers or Employees, and has to be Same Entity Name	\$500	Includes magazine, free admittance for three to Fall Field Day and voting rights in GPGA	
	Farm Managers	\$75	Includes magazine and free admittance for one to Fall Field Day	
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	Commercial Membership	\$250	Includes magazine and free admittance for two to Fall Field Day	
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**** The 2026 GPGA membership card will be mailed upon receipt of your payment. Credit card payments can be made online at the georgiapecan.org website or by calling our office at (229)-382-2187.**

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