



A Year in Review

Looking back on the year that was 2017, we at the Department of Agriculture and Industries had a very eventful 365 days. We experienced an avian influenza outbreak, a case of BSE, multiple hurricanes, and several plant diseases that threatened the citrus and nursery industry.

Through each of these challenges, we learned one important thing. Our staff was prepared. Despite extensive budget cuts and short staffing, our department sprung into action. We surveyed animal disease outbreaks, addressed citrus greening, worked with the USDA to obtain disaster declarations for farmers experiencing weather-related crop damage, and sheltered evacuated livestock from neighboring states during Hurricane Irma.

Looking forward to 2018, we plan to fine tune our response plans for animal and plant disease outbreaks. We hope to improve our abilities to manage avian influenza in the future by obtaining additional funding from the legislature to purchase depopulation equipment. Working with our stakeholders, we will also continue to implement the Food Safety Modernization Act on the state level.

I am proud of not only the commitment of our staff, but also the assistance we have received from the Alabama Legislature to reform many functions of the agency during our administration. Working with the Legislature, we completely overhauled the department's Weights and Measures Division, moved the petroleum commodities fee collection to the Department of Revenue, and absorbed the Farmers Market Authority. We are especially proud of the work the Farmers Market Authority is doing with local farmers markets and the farm to school program.

Through a common-sense approach, we cut costs by outsourcing the publication of the Farmers and Consumers Bulletin, consolidated sections within the agency and cross-trained employees to assume additional responsibilities. We repaired aging infrastructure at the Beard Building by replacing the HVAC system and roof. We also upgraded outdated laboratory equipment. In addition to the improvements to the building, we downsized the agency's vehicle fleet, placing it on a manageable rotation to minimize maintenance costs.

When I took office as Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, it was my vision to leave this agency in better shape than I found it and make a positive impact on this state's ability to help feed the world. In the final year of my term, we will continue that goal. I hope 2018 brings you and your family much happiness and every sector of Alabama's agriculture economy a productive year.