

Farmers Are Hurting

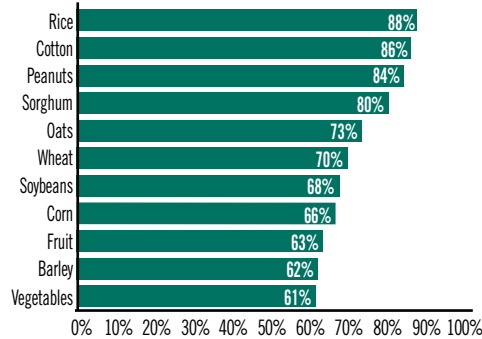
SOURCE: AMERICAN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, FB.ORG

America’s farmers are currently being seriously hurt by low crop prices, retaliatory tariffs, higher labor costs, record debt, and if that were not enough – farmers face soaring fertilizer and fuel prices. But wait, we have a possible new problem: El Niño.

The U.S. western states have just had the hottest winter in 131 years – and, on top of that, an estimated 70% of farmers cannot afford ammonia or fertilizer.

Share of Farmers Unable to Afford All Required Fertilizer

Share of Respondents Reporting They Could Not Afford All Required Fertilizer, by Commodity



Source: AFBF Fertilizer Availability Survey; Analysis by American Farm Bureau Federation

The result is that consumers can expect serious food cost inflation. A possible El Niño could trigger a full-blown global food crisis across the \$14 trillion global food and agriculture sector. ●

The Shoals and the RSA

BY BARBARA THOMAS

Dignitaries from Washington and across Alabama gathered in Muscle Shoals recently to celebrate the opening of a plant that signaled the beginning of “a Maritime Golden Age.”

The new, \$2.4 billion Hadrian Plant will partner with the U.S. Navy to manufacture large, high-tech submarine components, which will be shipped down the Tennessee Tombigbee River to Mobile for assembly. The new plant is expected to generate thousands of jobs.

While Muscle Shoals is known worldwide for its unique music vibe, at one time recording home to the Rolling Stones, Aretha Franklin, B.B. King, and others, it’s not been known as a hub for defense companies. Until now.

Some have compared the establishment of the submarine plant to the building of the Mercedes plant in Vance, Alabama. As Mercedes signaled the birth of the auto industry in Alabama, so will the submarine facility usher in defense contractors and suppliers, many predict.

As part of its mission to responsibly invest in Alabama, the Retirement Systems of Alabama (RSA) had a hand in attracting the submarine plant, as it did with Mercedes.

The RSA originally built the Muscle Shoals plant to manufacture rail cars, then to manufacture Navistar vehicles. The RSA recently sold the building to AE Industrial Partners (AEI), who leased it to Hadrian, a larger

manufacturer of military submarines. The RSA still holds the mortgage on the building, which will be paid off soon.

The RSA is no stranger to the Shoals area. The Renaissance Shoals Resort & Spa has been a welcome respite to both business travelers and tourists alike, with its famous Swampers Bar filled with music memorabilia from some of the biggest names in the business.

The nearby Robert Trent Jones

Golf Trail at The Shoals features two 18-hole championship courses, with finishing holes offering breathtaking views of the Tennessee River.



Kevin Jackson, president of The Shoals Economic Development Authority, said the RSA has been a huge factor in successful business recruiting in The Shoals.

“None of this would have been possible without the RSA. Just having the resort and the golf courses has helped us win some projects.

“The Hadrian plant is the largest capital investment project we’ve ever had. The government says it will be \$2 billion. This will be the largest job creation we’ve ever had.”

Employee salaries will be in the \$70,000 plus range, and employees can have equity in the company.

The 2.2 million square foot, AI-powered plant positions Alabama “as a key player in defense manufacturing,” according to hadrianalabama.com. ●

The RSA Efficiently Serves Its Members and Alabama

BY MARK FAGAN

The RSA was established 87 years ago to invest contributions from public educators, state employees, and their employers to provide retirement and disability income during their retirement. As regulations became less restrictive for pension funds over the last 60 years, RSA investments transitioned from only owning mortgages, bonds, and stocks to adding real estate and private corporations. Diversifying assets through prudent investments prevented catastrophic income losses and delivered contracted benefits to RSA members.

The RSA currently has investments in 24 countries. The RSA developed private investments around the U.S. and invested in Alabama when the return was equal to or better than other places. The RSA played a major role in Alabama's economic expansion over the last 50 years. The RSA has invested in housing, office buildings, golf courses, hotels, restaurants, spas, retail, and manufacturing plants in over 30 cities around Alabama. The RSA has financed over 60 companies in steel, forestry products, aerospace, automotive, maritime, metals, railcar, bioscience, chemical, healthcare, defense, and data storage in Alabama.

The RSA's development of 9 office buildings, 8 parking decks, one hotel,

and a performing arts/convention center helped rejuvenate Montgomery. Most of the space in these RSA buildings is leased to Alabama state agencies, making the RSA the largest landlord for Alabama state agencies. These buildings significantly improved working conditions for state employees. The RSA's development of four office buildings, two hotels, and a cruise ship terminal helped revitalize downtown Mobile by bringing in corporate offices and tourists.

Substantial private commercial and residential development around the RSA's RTJ Golf Trail's 11 sites and 8 resort hotels increased the economic impact of the Trail without further investment of the RSA funds. The RSA investments in media companies produced more than a billion dollars in free advertising for Alabama. The Trail contributed significantly to the increased tourism spending in Alabama over the last 35 years, from about \$1.2 billion to \$25 billion annually. The increased number of tourists to Alabama resulted in an increase of 35,000 hotel/motel rooms over the last 35 years. The increased number of tourists to Alabama has helped make Alabama a move-in state now.

The RSA's billions of dollars in investments in Alabama produced a return

on investment, increased the number of jobs, and generated billions of dollars in state and local tax revenue. Independent academic experts determined that the RSA's Alabama investments have in some years generated higher returns than those in stocks and bonds. Free ads by the RSA and publicity generated by the Trail helped enhance Alabama's image, which contributed to the state's economic expansion. The RSA's Alabama investments paved the way for others to invest in the state, thereby improving its quality of life. The RSA's Alabama investments are a long-term source of positive economic impacts for many years to come. The RSA became more secure by increasing tax revenue for public education and state agencies.

As Alabama's population increased through the years, the number of public teachers and state employees increased. As the RSA's retired members increased, the total benefits paid by the RSA increased. In FY 2025, the RSA paid \$4.3 billion in benefits, with 90.69% of those benefits going to members living in Alabama. Each dollar received in pension benefits produces \$2.13 in local economic output. This means that since 1973, the RSA benefits paid have produced an economic output in Alabama of \$167 billion. ●

Diesel Fuel

SOURCE: ENGINE TECHNOLOGY FORUM; ENGINETECHFORUM.ORG

They report that diesel fuel is inelastic because transportation vehicles require that specific fuel. The price of diesel fuel has risen by over 60% since January. Diesel engines power 75% of all farm equipment and 90%

of agricultural transport in the U.S., along with most locomotives and barges for bulk crops. There is a direct tie between food costs and diesel. ●

Help RSA Save Postage Costs

Are you and your spouse both receiving the *Advisor* in the mail? Or do you prefer to read it online? You can help the RSA reduce postage costs by contacting the RSA Communications Division at 334.517.7190 or by emailing communication_correspondences@rsa-al.gov. We can update your household's preferences to ensure only one copy is mailed each month. The *Advisor* is available online at www.rsa-al.gov/about-rsa/publications/advisor/.



Alabama Success Story

Alabama Honors 76 Schools for Commitment to Military Families

Seventy-six schools across Alabama have earned the Purple Star designation, a statewide recognition highlighting schools that provide exceptional support to military-connected students and their families. The award reflects a growing effort to address the unique challenges faced by children whose parents serve in the armed forces.

Military families often experience frequent relocations, sometimes moving across states or countries with little notice. These transitions can disrupt a child's academic progress and make it difficult to build lasting friendships. Extended deployments can also add emotional strain, leaving students to cope with the absence of a parent for long periods. The Purple Star program aims to ease these burdens by ensuring schools are prepared to meet the academic and social needs of these students.

Alabama introduced the program in 2021 following legislative approval as part of the national Purple Star School initiative.

Roughly 40,000 Alabama students — about 7% of total enrollment — are part of military families, with large populations near Montgomery, Huntsville, Mobile, and Fort Rucker, according to State Superintendent Dr. Eric Mackey.

"We know that military families come bearing all the same responsibilities and needs that everybody else does," he said. "Plus some real anxiety as they're entering new communities, and many times they get split because of deployments during the year."

To receive the designation, schools must meet a set of requirements designed to create a supportive environment. Each

school must appoint a staff member to serve as a military liaison, someone who can help families navigate enrollment, connect them with resources, and provide ongoing support. Schools are also required to maintain a dedicated webpage with information tailored to military families, including contacts, transition guidance, and community resources. In addition, they must offer student-led transition programs that help new arrivals feel welcome and quickly integrate into school life.



"It's a good bit of work that they go through to be certified," Mackey said. "It is more than just a piece of paper."

Education leaders say these efforts can make a significant difference for students adjusting to a new environment. Having a clear support system in place helps reduce the stress of moving and allows students to focus more on learning and building relationships. It also ensures that families feel welcomed and understood from the moment they arrive.

Several schools in the Ozark City Schools system were among those recognized in April, reflecting the district's close connection to nearby Fort Rucker and its large population of military families. Schools in the area have developed programs specifically designed to support incoming students, such as peer

ambassador groups that guide new students through their first days and campus tours that help them become familiar with their surroundings.

"Schools have stepped up and said, we realize we need to go an extra step for military families, and we're going to do that and be welcoming," Mackey said.

Officials say the increase in the number of Purple Star schools demonstrates Alabama's commitment to supporting military families and maintaining continuity in education. By creating consistent systems of support across multiple schools, the state is working to ensure that students can transition more smoothly, no matter where they are assigned.

The recognition also serves as a model for other schools, encouraging them to adopt similar practices and prioritize the needs of military-connected students. As the program continues to grow, education leaders hope it will foster stronger school communities and improve outcomes for students who face the challenges of military life.

Ultimately, the Purple Star designation underscores the importance of understanding and addressing the unique experiences of military families. By providing targeted support and resources, these schools are helping students not only adjust, but thrive, wherever their families' service may take them.

This is a series of articles about Alabama Success Stories. Please let us know if you have a similar success story you would like to share with the RSA membership. You may contact us at communication.correspondences@rsa-al.gov. ●

Early to Mid-Career Seminars

If you are a TRS or ERS member who is NOT within five years of retirement eligibility, let Field Services help you plan a path to retirement and give you helpful tips as you prepare. Because financial security in retirement doesn't just happen. It takes commitment and planning. And we're here to help!

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You must be registered to attend, and registration is on a first-come basis. No fax or phone reservations are accepted. You may bring your spouse or a guest,

but let us know when you register. Lunch is not provided, so plan ahead. You can register online at www.rsa-al.gov by clicking Member Log In at the top of the screen. Once you log in, click Seminar under the Schedule tab. Within five years of retirement? Register for our Retirement Preparation Seminars.

Have questions? Contact Field Services at 877.517.0020 and let us help. ●

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Make Your Vote Count: ERS Board of Control Election Information

As of the April 29, 2026, nomination deadline, the following candidates were unopposed for positions on the Employees' Retirement System (ERS) Board of Control: incumbent David J. Harer for the Active City Employee Position and Merceria Ludgood for the Active County Employee Position.

Regular election ballots for the Active State Employee Position, No. 1, will be mailed by June 3, 2026, and must be returned to YesElections no later than 4:00 p.m., July 15, 2026. The Active State Employee Position, No. 1, is currently held by Derrick T. Turner Sr.

The unopposed and elected members will begin their four-year term of service on October 1, 2026. Elected members to the ERS Board will only be elected by members from the same category of the retirement system. To be eligible to vote for the Active State No. 1 position, you must be a vested member of the ERS and employed with a state agency.

Eligible members will be able to vote by mail, phone, or the internet. Instructions will be included with the paper ballot. More information about the candidates can be found on the RSA website.

By submitting your vote, you are confirming that you are eligible to vote for the position based on your classification. If your classification is incorrect, please contact the Elections Coordinator at 334.517.7192 or 877.517.0020.



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