Meeting Notes - Sep. 6, 2022

The LaFayette Rotary Club met on Tuesday, September 6 for its weekly meeting. Rotarian Steve Wheeler was responsible for the program and invited Steven Blackmon as the guest speaker. Steven Blackmon is the liaison between farmers and the Alabama Farmers' Federation. The federation, created by farmers for farmers, was created 25 years before the ALFA insurance company. The federation is bi-partisan in nature and is part of the American Farm Bureau. The structure of the federation is different from that of many organizations. Most organizations have a top-down structure, but this federation works from the bottom up. Farmers in Chambers County tell the county federation what they want or need, that is relayed up to the Alabama Farmers' Federation, and the state federation then relays the wants/needs up to the American Farmers' Federation. The county federations come together annually to make recommendations to the state federation. The state federations meet annually and vote to make recommendations to the national federation.

The federation can help farmers with a variety of issues such as connectivity, labor, mental health, rural health, education, and many others. A recent example of an issue on which they had an impact was clarifying the ad valorem tax on grain bins. The federation represents 19 different commodity groups, such as cotton, soy, poultry, dairy, etc. Each group has a 9-person committee representing it. The federation also works with other organizations to address common issues.

Steven spoke of two local activities sponsored by the Alabama Farmer's Federation. One is the Farm-City Contest held each year for students in grades K-12. The other is their Ag in the Classroom program which educates teachers and provides them for resources to use to teach about agriculture in their classrooms. There is also the Alabama Agricultural Foundation, which is their philanthropy arm. The Fatal Vision Project is another educational program offered through the federation. This program highlights to high school students the dangers of driving under the influence by using "drunk goggles".

Members of the foundation receive many perks, including ALFA insurance, scholarships, and discounts to places like Dollywood, Great Wolf Lodge, Priester's Pecans and many others. The federation also partners with land-grant universities such as Auburn, Alabama A&M and Tuskegee.

Steven reported that the average age of a farmer now is 56. He spoke on the importance of raising the next generation of farmers and leaders to carry on the traditions and more importantly the vital work produced by farmers.

Diane Sherriff