Meeting Notes – Sep. 27, 2022

The LaFayette Rotary Club met on Tuesday, Sep. 27, 2022, for its weekly meeting. Rotarian Chris Busby was responsible for the program. He invited Cindy Tubbs Monroe to be our speaker. Cindy and her husband, Jeff, are the owners of Five Points Farms here in Chambers County. Five Points Farm is a vineyard and winery. The long-term plan for the farm is to be an agri-tourism destination, bringing visitors to Chambers County. The Monroes have lived in Chambers County since 2001. Cindy earned a BS in accounting from UAB in 1986. In order to prepare for retirement and learn more about the art and science of winemaking, she returned to school and earned a Double Masters degree in Plant Science, with a concentration in Viticulture (the study of grape cultivation) and Enology (the study of wine and winemaking) from Missouri State University in 2017.

Cindy believes people visit wineries for the experience and the hospitality. With that in mind, it is their goal to provide a high-quality experience to their visitors. There are 40 permitted wineries in Alabama. In 2004, there were only six. She hopes their winery will be permitted this year. Until about a year ago, wineries were not allowed to self-distribute their wine. Previously they were required to sell to a third-party distributor, which made it very unfeasible financially for small wineries. Cindy was instrumental in getting that law changed. It began by ALFA (Alabama Farm Bureau Association) adopting grapes as a commodity. This had to be done in each county. Once that was accomplished ALFA then lobbied to allow wine sales from more than just the tasting room. As a result of the new legislation passed, as of August 1, 2021 small wineries can now sell up to 10,000 gallons of wine directly to licensed retailers. At least half of the wine sold must be made from grapes grown in Alabama.

The grape industry in the US is valued at over $5 billion. Fifteen hundred (1500) varieties of grapes are grown in the US and 500 more are being researched to grow. The grapes the Monroes grow have been bred to grow here. Although not a permitted winery yet, the farm can hold wine tastings, but cannot sell wine. She is allowed to keep 250 gallons of wine on hand.

Cindy loves working with students. With their proximity to Auburn University they are able to provide internship opportunities to AU Agriculture students each semester. Cindy challenged our club members to invest time with students in order to impact their lives.

For more information on Auburn University internship opportunities at Five Point Farms go to [https://youtu.be/zAKkxlVo3Xw](https://youtu.be/zAKkxlVo3Xw%20)

Diane Sherriff