



Covington County Cattlemen's Association utilized the County Grant Program and took local agriscience high school students on a tour of a local beef operation and discussed beef production in Alabama.



More Than Beef and a Dollar: Cattle Producers Deepen Community Ties Thanks to Alabama Beef Checkoff County Grant Program

By Josie Jones, ACA Staff

Beyond rolling green pastures and the dedication to producing high-quality beef, Alabama's cattle producers' roots run deep in their communities. From the smoky aroma of mouthwatering steak sandwiches sizzling at local gatherings to the wide-eyed wonder of elementary school students meeting retired show cattle while listening to agriculture books read by cattlemen and cattlemen, producers' contributions stretch far beyond the farm gate.

But the dedicated volunteers who spearhead these valuable initiatives often face a familiar hurdle – resources. Hosting farm tours for budding young agriculturalists, sharing a taste of cowboy culture with nursing home residents, or organizing vital producer education events all require more than time and passion. Recognizing this crucial financial need, the Alabama Beef Checkoff introduced a game-changing initiative in 2024: The County Grant Program.

The concept, born from the vision of an Alabama producer, aims to strengthen county programs by providing them with financial fuel to amplify existing state promotions. Think enhanced youth livestock clinics, engaging culinary workshops showcasing beef's versatility, easily accessible beef consumer resources, and impactful producer education events – all now within closer reach for local associations. Funding for this vital program comes directly from the Ala-

bama Beef Checkoff Program Marketing Plan, with the annual allocation determined by the Alabama Beef Checkoff Council. This council also reviews grant applications quarterly, ensuring that every dollar aligns with the strict requirements established for Checkoff spending. This rigorous approval process not only safeguards the responsible use of funds but also provides an opportunity for Alabama Cattlemen's Association (ACA) staff to review applications and identify potential areas for implementation of already-produced resources. According to Alabama Beef Checkoff Council Chairman Steven Smith, this program will help continue to extend the state association's promotional efforts to rural Alabama areas.

“The State Beef Checkoff recognized a need last year to appropriate monies to aid our counties who take an active role in supporting beef promotion throughout the state,” said Smith. “The County Grant Program is another way that our checkoff dollars are at work helping create the demand for beef.”

For ACA Executive Vice President Erin Beasley, the County Grant Program represents a significant step in supporting efforts at the grassroots level.

“We are proud to offer this program as a way to directly support our county associations,” said Beasley. “Their diligent efforts to promote beef and educate Alabama consumers are

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crucial to maintaining a strong and vibrant cattle industry across our entire state. This program gives ownership back to the very individuals who invest in the Check-off, allowing them to directly impact their local communities.” The program has already been utilized across the state in a variety of ways. In West Alabama, the grant was used to facilitate a hands-on

Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) training workshop, equipping the next generation with essential animal husbandry skills. South Alabama saw a boost in agricultural education with a grant-supported tour for a high school agriscience class.



Tallapoosa County Cattlemen’s Association hosted a Eat & Learn program for producers in the region to cover a variety of production topics, with the dinner provided thanks to the County Grant Program.

Meanwhile, in East Alabama, producers gathered for an educational dinner, a collaborative effort made possible through grant funding and a partnership with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

Looking ahead, counties are brimming with ideas for utilizing the funding. Plans are underway for enhanced youth livestock showing educational programs, eye-catching promotional materials for large county festivals, and a strengthened presence during October Beef Month. While the focus of each project may vary, the underlying sentiment of gratitude and empowerment remains consistent from applicants across the state.

“I absolutely would recommend the County Grant Program,” said Steven Blackmon, President of the Tallapoosa County



Sumter County Cattlemen’s Association built on the Beef Quality Assurance training completed by a local high school by providing students with a hands-on practice opportunity complete with a beef meal with funding from the County Grant Program.



Cattlemen’s Association and previous grant recipient. “It works to ease the burden of feeding attendees, renting space for events, or purchasing more impactful promotional materials. For a small county like ours with a limited budget, this program offers a huge boost, allowing us to better serve our members and our community.”

The Alabama Beef Checkoff County Grant Program isn’t just about dollars and cents; it’s about fostering a deeper connection between cattle producers and their communities by empowering local leaders to amplify their efforts and ensuring that the positive impact of Alabama’s cattle industry resonates far beyond the pasture or plate.

HOW TO APPLY FOR THE COUNTY GRANT PROGRAM

1. Meet with your board to determine program funding needs and establish local approval for application
2. Visit BamaBeef.org/CountyGrantProgram and complete the application for a \$500 grant
3. Wait for notification of approval
4. Email receipt copies and photo proof of event to County Grant Program managers for reimbursement sent directly to your county