



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE**

ANDY GIPSON
COMMISSIONER

PRESS RELEASE

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Ag Commissioner Andy Gipson Kicks-off 2023 Dixie National Sale of Junior Champions

STATE FAIRGROUNDS, Miss. – Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson kicked off the 54th Annual Sale of Junior Champions today by recognizing the collaborative efforts of the Mississippi State University Extension Service, FFA and the Sale of Champions Promotion Committee in making the Sale of Junior Champions a success year after year. The Sale of Junior Champions is one of the highlight events of the Dixie National Livestock Show and Rodeo. During the livestock auction, 4-H and FFA youth livestock exhibitors winning Champion and Reserve Champion in the Junior Round-Up sell their animals through an auction.

Commissioner Gipson was joined by Dr. Steve Martin, Interim Director of the Mississippi State University Extension Service; Gary Blair, Chairman of the Sale of Junior Champions Promotion Committee; Phillip Morgan, CEO of Southern AgCredit; and Rorey Lemmel of Harper & Morgan Rodeo. Two Sale of Champions Scholarship recipients, Emma Grace Koger from the Humphreys 4-H and Calden Ratliff from the Stone 4-H/Stone County FFA, gave remarks on how the livestock program has impacted their lives.

“Everyone knows the greatest problem in Mississippi is brain drain - losing our youth to other states. The junior livestock program through 4-H and FFA is the answer to Mississippi’s greatest problem because it is the single best youth development program in the state. We had thousands of youth participating from every corner of the state. One of the most coveted honors for Mississippi’s youth livestock exhibitors is participating in the Junior Sale of Champions. The hard work and dedication that it takes to compete surpasses that required for a number of other youth activities. These youth are our future leaders. The skills and lessons learned will not just impact their generation; it will impact future generations to come. Our only challenge with this program is that we are working out of facilities built in 1953, and we have outgrown the 1953 version of this program. For all of these reasons, I will be asking our Mississippi Legislature to approve new livestock and equine facilities that will serve generations of Mississippians for the next 70 years,” said Commissioner Gipson.

This year 1,257 4-H and FFA members from across Mississippi participated in the Dixie National Junior Round-Up Livestock Show, showing 2,153 head of various livestock including pigs, sheep, cattle and goats. The animals will be sold for top dollar in the Sale of Champions. In addition, scholarships totaling \$61,500 will be awarded to 39 students.

“The Dixie National Junior Livestock Show and the Sale of Champions is one of the biggest highlights of our 4-H program throughout the year. Over 1,200 youth participated this year in this event,” said Mississippi State University Extension Service Interim Director Dr. Steve Martin. “At the heart of this is leadership, and what we are teaching through our program develops young leaders for the state of Mississippi.

The work of the Sale of Champions Promotion Committee has been the key to the success of the Sale for over 50 years. Since the Sale of Champions began in 1970, the event has continued to grow due to the generosity and dedication of the Sale of Champions Committee members.

“Mississippi is very fortunate to have very strong 4-H and FFA chapters across our state as well as great Extension and Agricultural Teachers, who lead and sponsor our Mississippi youth involved in 4-H and FFA. The Dixie National Sale of Junior Champions board members, buyers, sponsors and donors will provide monetary support and scholarships totaling over \$500,000 today at the Sale of Champions to these Mississippi young people who have spent countless hours of preparation and showing of their animals at county and district shows that culminates here this week in Jackson at the Mississippi Fairgrounds and Coliseum leading up to the largest rodeo east of the Mississippi, The Dixie National Rodeo!” said Gary Blair, Chairman of the Dixie National Sale of Champions Promotion Committee.

Over the past 53 years, the sale has grossed over \$8.5 million. Last year, the sale of 46 animals grossed \$448,500, and 39 scholarships totaling \$61,500 were awarded. Over the past 53 years, the sale has grossed \$8,524,244.40. Since the first scholarships were granted in 1993, over 797 scholarships have been awarded to various 4-H and FFA members totaling \$1,071,200.

I am proud of all of the 4-H and FFA livestock exhibitors and scholarship recipients that are being recognized here today, as well as all of those that participated in the Junior Round-Up over the last two weeks. This achievement also takes the dedication of parents, MSU Extension Agents and FFA Advisors, who are all to be commended for their efforts,” said Commissioner Gipson.

The Dixie National Livestock Show and Rodeo will continue with the Open Livestock Shows beginning Saturday, February 11, and the Dixie National Rodeo which begins Friday, February 10. To purchase tickets to the Dixie National Rodeo, visit <https://www.ticketmaster.com/dixie-national-rodeo-tickets/artist/848320>. For more information, visit www.dixienational.org, follow the Dixie National Livestock Show & Rodeo on Facebook or call 601-961-4000.

To view the press conference, visit <https://youtu.be/BasmE-j0AXM>.

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Photo and cutline attached.



Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson kicked off the Sale of Junior Champions today at the Trade Mart. He was joined by (left to right) Dr. Steve Martin, Interim Director of the Mississippi State University Extension Service; Scotty Lovelace, Harper & Morgan Rodeo; Rorey Lemmel of Harper & Morgan Rodeo; Calden Ratliff from the Stone 4-H/Stone County FFA; Emma Grace Koger from the Humphreys 4-H; Gary Blair, Chairman of the Sale of Junior Champions Promotion Committee; Commissioner Gipson; Phillip Morgan, CEO of Southern AgCredit; and Ray Smith, who was in the first Dixie National Rodeo.