



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

ANDY GIPSON
COMMISSIONER

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 17, 2024

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MDAC Hosts Freshly Picked Podcast Featuring Guests from Calhoun and Oktibbeha Counties

JACKSON, Miss. – Special guests and business owners Jan Cook-Houston of Vardaman and Kirk Hutchinson of Starkville joined this week’s Freshly Picked podcast episode to discuss their unique businesses that depend upon Mississippi specialty crops. Listeners can hear their extraordinary stories in the “Value-Added and Sugar-Coated: Turning Crops into Sweet Success” episode today at 9:30 a.m.

Within this episode, both guests talk about the challenges and joys of using locally grown ingredients. Cook-Houston owns Sweet Potato Sweets in Vardaman, which was founded in 1996 by her mother and two other sweet potato farmers’ wives. These ladies started out with the simple notion to not let a single sweet potato go to waste. They would take all the misshapen or imperfect sweet potatoes from the farm that the local stores did not want and repurpose them into delicious, sweet treats to enjoy. Cook-Houston is proud of her mother’s legacy and initiative to create something good from something undesirable saying, “sweet potatoes taste the same whether they’re pretty-shaped or not.” Today, Sweet Potato Sweets offers sweet potato-flavored pies, breads, sausage balls and more.

Hutchinson started his business, Power of Almond Bakery, amid the Covid pandemic in 2020. He attributes his vision to provide low-carb, gluten-free and keto-friendly products made with almond flour to his own personal experience dealing with dietary restrictions. He also talks about the importance of sourcing locally grown ingredients like pecans and blueberries for his products. Now, Hutchinson finds joy in creating and providing delectable, healthy and value-added goodies to the public. Hear their inspiring accounts and more at www.msfreshlypicked.com and on all major podcast platforms.

The Freshly Picked podcast series, developed by the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, will feature 24 episodes and include specialty crop farmers, experts, entrepreneurs and/or chefs as they tell the stories behind their farms, businesses and the unique products they offer. Listeners can find new episodes every Thursday through February 2025 at www.msfreshlypicked.com, Spotify, Apple Podcasts or other major platforms.

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Photo attached.



The latest episode of MDAC’s Freshly Picked podcast, titled “Value-Added and Sugar-Coated: Turning Crops into Sweet Success,” airs today at 9:30 a.m. Pictured L-R: Jan Cook-Houston, owner of Sweet Potato Sweets; Kirk Hutchinson, owner of Power of Almond Bakery; and Claude Nash, podcast host and editor of MDAC’s *Mississippi Market Bulletin*.