



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

ANDY GIPSON
COMMISSIONER

PRESS RELEASE

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**Ag Commissioner Andy Gipson and MDAC Celebrate National Ag Day in the Capital City
*State Blueberry Orchard Planted on Capitol Grounds to Commemorate Ag Day***

JACKSON, Miss. – Today, Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson and the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce celebrated National Ag Day on the Mississippi State Capitol grounds by planting the first-ever State Blueberry Orchard.

Commissioner Gipson was joined by Mississippi legislators and farmers, including several blueberry growers, as well as Mannsdale Upper Elementary Teachers Lisa Parenteau and Harli Lee, and their former students from the original fourth grade class that led the charge to have the blueberry designated as the state’s official fruit in 2023. State Representative Jill Ford (District 73, Madison), sponsor of the legislation designating the blueberry as Mississippi’s state fruit, was also in attendance and provided remarks.

“Today we celebrate National Ag Day, and we’re celebrating Ag Day in Mississippi as well,” said Commissioner Gipson. “Agriculture is essential to every Mississippian. Farmers touch the lives of every single person by providing the food, fiber and shelter we all need to survive. So, today we want to recognize our Mississippi farmers and the important, and often thankless, job they do. God bless our farmers.”

“Every year we try to do something special on National Ag Day, and today, we’re doing something historic,” continued Gipson. “This unique class here today has accomplished something incredible for both our state and ag industry. They had the idea to designate a state fruit for Mississippi. When they realized that blueberries are the most produced fruit in our state, they researched, worked and lobbied their legislators to make blueberries our official state fruit. And they made it happen. Our young people are our future, and I am so proud and excited about our youth who are passionate about agriculture and about keeping our ag industry strong. The future looks bright for the great state of Mississippi.”

Following remarks, Commissioner Gipson, Representative Ford, Mrs. Parenteau, Mrs. Lee and the Mannsdale students planted the final two blueberry bushes in the newly designated State Blueberry Orchard. The orchard includes a row of 10 blueberry bushes from Hutto’s Home and Garden Center in

Jackson, which is owned and operated by Billy Hutto. Several native blueberry varieties are represented within the orchard, including Tifblue, Climax, Prince, Austin, Powder Blue, Brightwell and Ochlockonee.

Blueberries are native to the Southeast and grow especially well in the Pine Belt of south Mississippi. According to Mississippi State University Extension Service, there are over 2,000 acres of blueberries in production statewide. Blueberry bushes typically ripen and bear fruit in the spring months, between April and June. The bushes are fairly low maintenance, requiring pruning once a year and minimal watering. Blueberries are one of the best natural sources of antioxidants and are an excellent source of vitamins C, K and A, along with manganese.

“This State Blueberry Orchard stands as a testament to Mississippi’s rich agricultural heritage and its promising future. For years to come, visitors will have the opportunity to pick fresh blueberries and literally reap the benefits of our state’s example of a flourishing ag industry thanks to the initiative shown by the next generation.” View full Ag Day festivities at [link](#) and the Ag Day proclamation signed by Governor Tate Reeves at [link](#).

Agriculture is the largest industry in the state of Mississippi, producing \$9.04 billion in agricultural and forestry commodities last year alone. In 2024, Mississippi exported more than \$1 billion of agricultural and forestry products to 90 countries. Agriculture also employs 11.4 percent of the state’s workforce and contributes to over 14 percent of the state’s overall economic activity. Mississippi currently ranks in the Top 25 in the U.S. for production of 14 agricultural commodities, including catfish, sweet potatoes, cotton, pine lumber, broilers, rice, peanuts and more!

The 2025 Feeding the Economy report was released today in conjunction with National Ag Day detailing the significant impact of America’s food and agriculture sector to the economy. The study highlights Mississippi’s strong agriculture industry, which provides 420,373 total jobs with 222,482 being direct-related jobs to agriculture. Additionally, the industry accounts for \$7.22 billion paid in direct wages and \$19.46 billion in total wages. Overall, the food and agriculture industries resulted in a direct output of \$34 billion and a total output of \$77.08 billion. Visit <https://feedingtheeconomy.com/> to view the full report.

National Ag Day was established in 1973 by the Agriculture Council of America as an effort to encourage every American to understand how food and fiber products are produced; appreciate the role agriculture plays in providing safe, abundant and affordable products; value the essential role of agriculture in maintaining a strong economy; and acknowledge and consider career opportunities in the agriculture, food and fiber industry. To learn more about National Agriculture Day, visit www.agday.org.

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Photos attached.



Ag Commissioner Andy Gipson; State Representative Jill Ford; Mannsdale Upper Elementary Teachers Lisa Parenteau and Harli Lee; and students from the original Mannsdale Upper Elementary fourth grade class who led the charge to have the blueberry designated as the state's official fruit, planted blueberry bushes as part of the newly designated State Blueberry Orchard. The students pictured, now in sixth grade, currently attend Germantown Middle School.



Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson unveils sign designating a green space within the State Capitol grounds as the first-ever State Blueberry Orchard.



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