INDUSTRIAL HEMP
On the federal level, the 2018 Farm Bill expanded the possibilities for industrial hemp to be grown as a commodity. Several states started allowing small cultivation of industrial hemp through research in the 2014 Farm Bill, but the 2018 Farm Bill expands the production ability by allowing states to create a regulatory plan, or follow a plan to be outlined by USDA. Industrial hemp is from the plant species cannabis sativa. To be classified as industrial hemp, the plant must have a tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) of less than 0.3 percent. THC is the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana. Industrial hemp is grown for its fiber and oil.

Some legislators wanted to allow Mississippians to grow industrial hemp immediately, but there were some who thought the state should be more cautious. A settlement was reached with the Legislature by creating a taskforce with the Department of Agriculture and Commerce, Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation, law enforcement, and other interested parties. The taskforce has been charged with studying how Mississippi would regulate cultivation of industrial hemp. Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation does not currently have policy regarding industrial hemp.

LANDOWNER PROTECTION ACT
During the tort reform legislation in the early 2000s, several groups tried to include language that would reduce liability for landowners for actions committed by a third party criminal actor. The legislation did not pass at that time, but was brought up again a few years ago. This year, the legislation finally crossed the finish line. Gov. Phil Bryant signed into the law the Landowner Protection Act with two main effects. First, juries will have the ability to apportion fault, meaning if the jurors feel the landowner is only 10 percent at fault for the injury to an individual on his or her property, the jury can decide the landowner should pay 10 percent of the damages. In the past, if the jury felt the landowner had any fault, the landowner could be forced to pay 100 percent of the damages. Second, it reduces the number of instances in which a landowner can be held liable when a third party commits a crime against another individual on the landowner’s property.

Protection of property rights remains a strong piece of Farm Bureau policy, and we were supportive of this legislation.

Thank you to House Agriculture Chairman Bill Pigott, Vice Chairman Vincent Mangold, Senate Agriculture Chairman Billy Hesdon, and Vice Chairman Russell Jolly for all your work regarding Mississippi agriculture.
President’s Message

Over the last 200 years, Mississippi has changed tremendously. Despite the changes our great state has endured, agriculture has been a constant. Agriculture serves as Mississippi’s leading industry; providing jobs, revenue and opportunities to our residents.

As the largest general farm organization in Mississippi, the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation strives to ensure the agricultural industry thrives in our ever-changing environment. In order to do this, we must move forward. We must encourage one another to implement conservation practices, adapt to technology and invest in our farms, so future generations can have even better opportunities to cultivate the land. We must also encourage policy makers to write laws and regulations allowing our membership to grow their farms.

Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation works to promote the future of agriculture for all of Mississippi’s farmers, ranchers and rural Mississippians at the State Capitol every year. The Mississippi Legislature produced several pieces of legislation during the 2019 Regular Session to allow Farm Bureau members to farm forward. Mississippi banned the labeling of lab or plant based protein as meat. The restrictions placed on rural electric cooperatives were lifted to allow cooperatives to begin offering broadband services to their cooperative members and owners. The Legislature also invested in the future by funding the agencies and educational institutions that support farmers, ranchers and rural Mississippians.

Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation’s strength at the Mississippi Capitol comes from you, the member. The Mississippi Legislature knows, despite our size, all of the policy the Federation and I present originates at the grassroots level. Your Public Policy Department takes the policies ratified at our Annual Convention and implements them on state and national levels. They do this by building relationships with legislators, agency heads and their staff.

Rural Broadband

Farmers, ranchers, and rural Mississippians face a big challenge every day in the lack of connectivity to broadband. Without reliable internet, rural Mississippians are at a disadvantage educationally, economically, and industrially.

Utility companies and internet service providers are no strangers to the challenges of reaching rural Mississippians, but reliable and fast internet connection today compares to electricity in the early 1900s.

At the 2018 Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation Annual Convention, members adopted two policies supporting electric cooperatives being granted the ability to provide broadband service. Speaker of the House Philip Gunn authored House Bill 366, which removed the prohibition of electric cooperatives’ ability to provide broadband service.

The bill passed both ends of the Capitol with resounding support. The Legislature’s approval of electric cooperatives’ ability to provide broadband to its members gives hope for the future of rural Mississippi. It is a fitting policy as electric cooperatives were the same entities that brought power to the rural corners of our state.

Farm Bureau thanks Gov. Phil Bryant, Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves, Speaker of the House Philip Gunn, Public Utilities Chairman Jim Beckett, Energy Committee Chair Sally Doty, and Public Service Commissioner Brandon Presley for their work on rural broadband.

State Agencies and Land Grants

Every year at the Capitol, Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation rallies behind the state’s land grant universities and certain state agencies to ensure these entities are appropriately funded. Mississippi State University and Alcorn State University’s agricultural units exist to educate future farmers and ranchers, provide valuable research for the future of the industry, and give advice on the local level on everything from gardening to cooling.

This year, all state employees were given a 3 percent salary increase, with a three-year look back. This was welcome news to our friends at the Department of Agriculture and Commerce and Department of Environmental Quality. The Forestry Commission, Soil and Water Conservation Commission, and Board of Animal Health all received budget increases.

Though Farm Bureau was disappointed the agricultural units did not receive any budget increase over health insurance and retirement adjustments, they did not take any cuts. The Legislature also approved bond money to be used for the renovation and construction of buildings on both land grant university campuses.

Harvest Permit

The repealer for the harvest permit was due this year. A repealer is like an expiration date on a law. Without renewal, the law dies. While renewing the repeal date, the Legislature also amended the harvest permit to clarify that bulk feed is an agricultural product and also inserted wood pellets. This change in the law should help Mississippi’s two leading commodities – poultry and timber.