

Opening Session

“Bicentennial—Progress and Future Challenges of Cattle Practitioners”

Dr. James Jarrett, Chairman

Welcome and Some Insights into Georgia Livestock Production

Hon. Tommy Irvin
Commissioner of Agriculture
State of Georgia

Dr. Jarrett: A gentleman who does understand the problems of agriculture—as a farmer from the hills of North Georgia, as a member of our state legislature and very active in the area of agriculture when he was there, as our state commissioner of agriculture Mr. Tommy Irvin has been a friend to the veterinarian as well as a friend to Georgia agriculture. It is my pleasure to introduce to you at this time, Mr. Tommy Irvin:
APPLAUSE.

Thank you very much. It is a real pleasure to have the opportunity to welcome this very distinguished group. I understand you have representatives from practically every state of the Union, and maybe some from foreign countries here in the greatest city in America, Atlanta. He didn't tell you a whole lot about me but I am a genuine country boy and real proud of it. When you look around, especially those of you who are not residents of our state or our region,

you wouldn't realize how much change has transpired in the span of the last 20-30 years.

As a young boy I lived in the hills of Haversham. When you were a young boy you probably had the same things to do that I did—one of my main chores was to get up each morning about 5:30 to 6:00 in the morning before I'd get ready to go to school and head out down to the barn with a milk pail to milk the family cow. We didn't operate a dairy and I don't want anybody to get the impression that we did. I still remember those old cold winter mornings, temperature a little bit colder than it was this morning, even back before we had electricity on our farm, and I would head out down to the barn with a milk pail in one hand and a lantern in the other. I'd get down to the barn, hang the lantern up on a nail, and go over to the crib to get a big armload of shucks and spread them along the ground for the cow. We didn't have the fine improved pastures that we have today, so the old cow would have about a peck of cockleburs in her tail. You know, she'd start swishing that tail and knock you off the stool! But if you were a pretty good hand at milking, you could always get the job done.

Times were pretty hard back in those days. I still remember one of the prettiest young ladies we had in our community. She was very attractive but she used to wear some real eye-catching clothes. Of course, her parents didn't have any money either. But her mother always made her outfits. One particular outfit that her mother had made was a blouse out of a flour sack and a skirt out of a meal sack. She'd put that outfit on and wear it downtown. You'd see her coming down the street and right across that flour sack blouse it would say “self-rising.” She'd walk on by, that old meal sack kind of ruffling in the wind, but you could still read around the bottom, “Get your grinding done here.” I say that to at least illustrate the point that there has been a lot of progress in our state. I've seen a lot of progress in our great capital city here. Most of us in Georgia think that Atlanta, the whole city, is destined to be one of the great cities of the world. There is probably more activity here than in most any



other city that I've visited in the last few years and I've been in most of the major cities in America and also several others throughout the world. We have under construction now an international world congress center that will have the largest exhibit space, with the exception of one other place, in America. If you have looked around since you have arrived here, you see more new hotels under construction and we will have right up on top of the hill, on the site that belongs to the state of Georgia, the tallest hotel in the world, scheduled to open within the next 30-60 days. As a matter of fact, they may already be booking. There are some people in there already. There is going to be a lot of interest. Atlanta, to those of you who want to visit and take in the night life, has about the same things that every other major city has. Just be sure you keep your hand on your pocketbook when you move around; we're no exception there either. But you can have a good clean time and it is a great convention city.

I wish to add to the welcome I'm sure that you have already had and to point out that we are not only interested in building great cities here in Georgia, but we also are very active in trying to build a great agriculture. The field in which you have a vital interest is one in which we think, at least we who are the so-called spokesmen for agriculture in this region, feel it holds the greatest potential of all. Livestock is moving forward. As a matter of fact I had a rather busy day yesterday. I had a meeting down in South Georgia and flew to Washington late yesterday afternoon and had two meetings, one of those an extended conversation, deliberation and discussion about some of our animal disease programs that we are trying to implement nationwide, ones in which we have a great deal of interest here in our state. But you, certainly, you who are practicing veterinarians, will have a very important part in the years that lie ahead. The livestock industry in the South holds the greatest potential I think of any other region of America. Certainly we want to be a part of it. We're fortunate, we are the largest state geographically east of the Mississippi. We are the hub of the Southeast. We are in one of the fastest growing population areas of America, an area that is certainly going to be playing a predominant part in every good thing that happens to this great country from now until the turn of the century. Our agriculture is highly diversified in Georgia. I know many of you are from this region, but many of you are from the Midwest. Even though you might outproduce us in some areas, the fact that we are so highly diversified makes us the region of the country that has great potential for the future. I might mention one major commodity that is in the row crop field and that's peanuts. We produce more than 40% of all the peanuts produced in America. Our statewide average yield only 15 years ago was about 600 lb./acre. This year we had quite a number of farmers that made more than three tons per acre. We are making tremendous progress in this very vital area. I don't want to leave out one other area that

plays an important part certainly in the progress and prosperity of the livestock industry and, of course, that is the production of corn. When I was a young boy on our farm in the hills of North Georgia, we thought if we made 12-15 bushels of corn per acre, we were doing great. Our rows were about four to five feet wide and 36" in the hill and we thought we were doing just great. Just a few days ago at our annual farm bureau meeting here in Georgia, we gave awards to quite a number of farmers that had produced more than 200 bushels/acre. We had one farm that had a new record for our state of 235.8 bushels/acre on a 75-acre plot. Someone from a state like Iowa might say, well, what's so great about that?; I can assure you, from our state it proves we have made tremendous progress. And I've heard a lot of our farmers say, "Well, look out, Midwest, we're right on your heels." We are moving forward in the animal disease programs that are administered by your departments of agriculture here in Georgia and in some other states. Some states have other methods of regulatory control over this very important aspect of our livestock and farm industry. We want to assure our guests that we want to be leaders and not followers, in all the programs. When I took office as Commissioner of Agriculture in our state some seven years ago, we had hog cholera in this state so severe that many people, including many of our practicing veterinarians that are here this morning, had severe doubts about whether we could ever bring it under control or not. But we adopted some regulatory control programs that were fully supported by our veterinarians throughout Georgia, and certainly by livestock market operators and our farmers to the extent that we did bring it under control and we have not had a case now in several years. This proves that a lot of things can be done, and be done very well, if you have that spirit of cooperation. The previous speaker made some remark about the shortage of veterinarians. I want to assure him that we, and I'm talking about we in the other branches of state government, are keenly aware of this and we are trying to assist in getting additional funds to expand our potential graduates from our veterinary school here in Georgia. We have fully supported the efforts of some other states in our region that are now in the process of establishing new veterinary schools. Hopefully, within a short number of years this acute shortage can be alleviated. I might say that it is much harder to get into veterinary school in Georgia than it is into medical school, and the grade average has to be much higher. As a matter of fact, I know of some that have given up trying to get into veterinary school and changed over to the medical school. We think it is a great profession, and I don't know of any other that deserves the interest and support of everyone more than our efforts in this very important area. Let me say in closing that it is great to have you with us. Anytime that we here in Georgia can be of service to you while you are here in Georgia on this trip or a future date, certainly feel free to call on us. Thank you.