As we enter a new year, I can't help but to reflect back on the previous 12 months. What a year it was for cattle producers and the Georgia Cattlemen's Association.

As an industry, we have been blessed with record cattle prices and relatively favorable weather conditions (although we've been dry here as of late). I have been amazed to watch the livestock auction reports from across the state as they seem to set a new high each week. Seedstock producers continue to set records with each passing production sale that we attend. Ag economists have predicted that, barring any catastrophic event, we should see favorable market conditions through the upcoming year and beyond as our industry rebuilds the herds that have declined over the last decade. Even with higher prices in the retail markets, consumer demand has continued to be strong.

In our state, producers joined together to pass the ACC for Beef Checkoff early in 2014. The state dollar will go a long way in funding research for the specific needs of Georgia beef cattle that has not been possible in the past. It will provide additional opportunities for education as well as expands the ability to promote our product to the millions of consumers in our metro areas.

The Georgia Cattlemen's Association would have to consider 2014 a great year as well. GCA started the year with a successful legislative session in Atlanta. The policies that passed have already begun to be fruitful with additional funding for cattle research positions and diagnostic opportunities around the state. We followed up the session with our spring tour through the American Heartland, which included several stops on large ranches, a tour of a meat processing facility, feedlots, seedstock operations and the research farm at KSU.

Spring concluded with one of the most successful GCA Convention and Beef Expo's ever. The trade show, forage conference and a full slate of speakers all came together to provide a great opportunity for our members to share ideas and learn new techniques in producing beef. Dr. Temple Grandin proved to be a big draw and offered thoughtful insight into cattle handling and opportunities for our young producers.

Summer Conference also set a new attendance record and the business of the association was handled with lots of family fun thrown in the mix. A new booth in the Georgia Grown Building during the Georgia National Fair gave the Georgia Beef Board a great opportunity to tell the beef story and meet with thousands of consumers each day. We survived the flood on the first day of the Sunbelt Expo and were able to talk with producers and grow our membership over the course of the week. Speaking of membership, we wrapped up 2014 with 5,337 members, a positive sign of growth.

All of this success would not be possible without the exceptional work by our members and volunteer leaders from around the state. It can't be said enough that the strength of our Association lies directly with our membership!

I must admit that cattle producers and GCA weren't the only ones who had a good year; it was great for me personally as well. GCA gave me an opportunity to work in an industry that I grew up in and I am extremely passionate about. While working as our Director of Association Services, I was able to travel around the state and meet with many of our great producers. Not only did GCA give me the opportunity to represent our members around the state and country, they gave me the chance to do that job and be within a short drive of my family's cattle farm in Upson County. You can't beat getting to raise cattle with your family and working for an association like GCA.

My good fortune continued when I was given the opportunity to take over the role of Executive Vice President with GCA. It's a position that I am extremely humbled to have and I am excited to take on the challenges that come with the job. Thanks to the leadership of our Executive Committee and our past EVP, there are defined strategic goals that I look forward to working toward and moving Georgia's cattle industry forward in the years to come.

These were all exciting events in my life, but there is one thing that really made 2014 great for me. I was lucky enough to become engaged to my longtime sweetheart, Kristie, in Savannah, Georgia, on May 3. Most people would call it some of my best work yet. I was somehow able to convince a girl who grew up in California and went to school in Colorado, that Georgia would be the best place for us to live our lives together. She's been unbelievably supportive as I've pursued my passion in the cattle industry.

Though 2014 was a year filled with countless blessings and opportunities for all of us, the challenges that we as cattle producers faced and will continue to face in 2015 are real. From issues such as the EPAs overreach with the WOTUS to the recent announcement that USDA Secretary Vilsack intends to impose an additional Checkoff under the 1996 Promotions Act, we all have our work cut out for us. The staff here at GCA promises to work every single day to improve the environment for our members to raise cattle in.

I sincerely believe that our best days are in front of us and that 2015 will be another great year to be a part of the Georgia Cattlemen's Association! May God bless you and your farm in the upcoming year.