

Alabama Grocer

2025, ISSUE 1

Alabama Grocers Association

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35th Year of
Service & the
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Years of the AGA:
A Conversation
With James Scott**
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FEATURES

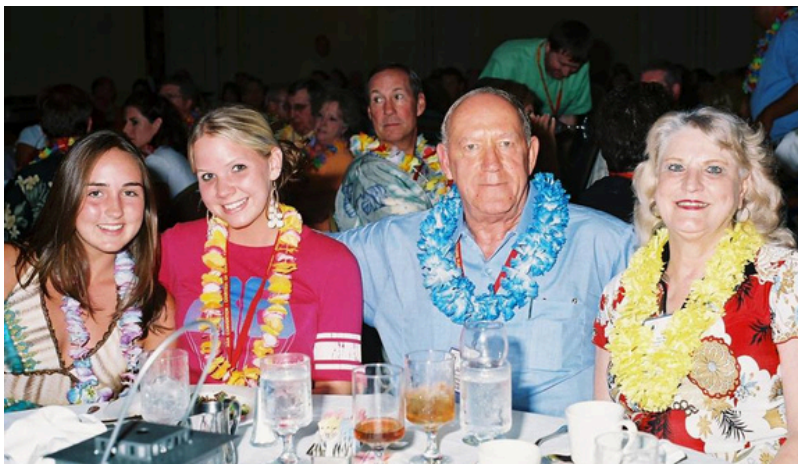


Chairman’s Message
 Celebrating AGA’s 35th Year of Service & the Future Ahead.

President’s Message
 What a Great 35 Years It Has Been.



AGA Anniversary Is a Reminder of the Respect Earned by State Leadership
 The AGA anniversary highlights the legacy of strong state leadership and the respect it has earned over the years.



Celebrating 35 Years of the AGA: A Conversation With James Scott
 Talking about the past & the future of AGA with James Scott.

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Julie Owen <i>Event & Education Director</i>	Patrick McWhorter <i>Legislative Consultant</i>	Laura Brittain Stubblefield <i>Membership & Communications Director</i>
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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

CELEBRATING AGA'S 35TH YEAR OF SERVICE & THE FUTURE AHEAD



BOB CRAWFORD
President
United-Johnson Brothers of Alabama

AS WE HEAD INTO 2025, WE NEED TO PAUSE FOR A MOMENT AND CELEBRATE AGA'S 35 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE ALABAMA GROCER'S COMMUNITY.

The AGA was Founded in 1990 by James L. Smotherman who served as its President for 17 years and in 2007 Ellie Smotherman Taylor, his daughter, was tapped to serve as the current President/CEO.

Advocacy remains AGA's top priority, and the 2025 legislative session (Feb. 4 – May 15) is already in full swing. Pat McWhorter, our legislative representative, along with dedicated board members, is actively working at both the state and local levels to ensure that our industry's interests are well-represented. Keeping our members informed and giving them a strong voice in legislative matters continues to be our top priority.

THE MISSION OF THE AGA IS TO PROMOTE THE GROWTH AND SUCCESS OF THE FOOD INDUSTRY IN THE STATE OF ALABAMA THROUGH ADVOCACY, EDUCATION, PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND NETWORKING.



James L. Smotherman, 1999.



Press conference to announce SNAP EBT to Alabama in 1997.



James L. Smotherman, Mac Otts, and Senator Jeff Sessions, 2002.

This commitment is reflected in the many opportunities we provide for our members to connect, learn, and grow.

The 2025 AGA events schedule:

AGEF GOLF OUTING:

Thursday April 3, 2025 at Timberline Golf Club.

AGA ANNUAL SHOW:

Sunday July 13-16, 2025 at The Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort.

AGEF CLAY SHOOT:

Thursday October 9, 2025 at Selwood Farm.

AGA FOOD INDUSTRY FINEST LUNCHEON:

Wednesday October 29, 2025 at The Club.

In closing, please mark your calendars and join us for these important events. As always, I am humbled and honored to serve as your chairman and look ahead with excitement and determination for the next 35 years of the AGA. ■

Sincerely,

ALABAMA GROCERS EDUCATION FOUNDATION GOLF OUTING

APRIL 3, 2025

TIMBERLINE GOLF CLUB





PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

WHAT A GREAT 35 YEARS IT HAS BEEN



ELLIE TAYLOR
President/CEO
Alabama Grocers Association



Larry Edelman, Helen Cornelius, & Ellie Taylor, 1993.



Mary L. Smotherman & James L. Smotherman, 1990.

I AM HONORED TO CELEBRATE THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION.

The Association was established thirty-five years ago by the Board of Directors of the Food Distributors of Alabama, with the aim to protect the interests of the grocery industry, including retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers, brokers, distributors, and others. Notable members of this founding committee included Charles Ping, Charles Parker, Sam Carroll, Dennis Stewart, Butch Youmans, Everette Kelley, James Scott, Jack Echols, Ron Koch, and Jim Smotherman.

Formed in 1990, the initial retail members were Western Supermarkets, Hardin and Company, and Gregerson's Foods, with Autry Greer & Son's as the first chain of over 20 stores. Since then, the Association has experienced continuous growth.

In 1992, the Alabama Grocers Education Foundation was created, having awarded over \$1.4 million in scholarships to date, including \$50,000 this year alone.

Beginning with 44 members, the first convention featured 25 exhibit booths and 50 attendees at Sandestin. Today, the Association comprises over 325 member companies and hosts conferences with more than 400 participants.

Over the past 35 years, the Association has advocated for the industry on numerous significant issues. These include the Americans with Disabilities Act, Electronic Benefits Transfer, the Food Safety Act of 2000, Tort Reform, SNAP Expansion, Healthy Food Financing, Minimum Wage Preemption, Curbside and Home Delivery of Beer and Wine,

Sunday Sales Reform, Service Animals, Dram Shop Liability Reform, Organized Retail Theft, and the Grocery Tax Repeal.

Currently, Alabama's food retail sector employs over 188,000 individuals, contributing more than \$6.8 billion in annual wages. Grocers in the state contribute upwards of \$1.5 billion in taxes, resulting in an economic impact exceeding \$18 billion on the state's economy.

THE STRENGTH OF THE ASSOCIATION LIES IN ITS MEMBERS.

Together, we will continue to promote and support the growth of Alabama's food industry through advocacy, education, public relations, and networking. We remain the Voice of the Grocery Industry in Alabama. ■

Sincerely, *Ellie Taylor*



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

MAGA HITS MONTGOMERY



PATRICK MCWHORTER

Legislative Consultant
The McWhorter Group

THE FERVOR THAT HAS HIT WASHINGTON DC IN RECENT WEEKS HAS INSPIRED OUR LEGISLATURE TO BEGIN WORK ON MANY OF PRESIDENT TRUMP’S CAMPAIGN THEMES LIKE IMMIGRATION, PUBLIC SAFETY, ETC.

One of the first bills signed by Governor Ivey defines what a “woman” is.

BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS, ONE-THIRD OF THIS YEAR’S SESSION WILL BE COMPLETE. AFTER A COUPLE OF BREAKS IN MARCH, LEGISLATORS WILL RETURN TO MONTGOMERY IN APRIL AND SPRINT THROUGH THE SECOND HALF OF THE SESSION, COMPLETING THEIR WORK IN MID-MAY.

Work on the education and general fund budgets has not started yet. That will dominate much of their attention in the second half. All of the federal stimulus funds are gone, and we are back to living on existing revenues. All the state’s tax categories have seen only small increases this past year.

Members of the committees charged with responsibility for the education budget are looking at new methods for distributing the state share of tax revenues dedicated to education.

Governor Kay Ivey, in her State of the State address, announced her package of bills called Safe Alabama, and the first two bills passed unanimously through the House with both Republicans and Democrats saying they want to curb violent crime in our state. The bills were to establish a scholarship program for the families of law enforcement officers, and expand the state’s ability to electronically monitor juvenile delinquents. The House previously passed on to the Senate legislation allowing prosecutors to pursue the death penalty when an adult is convicted of rape or sodomy of a child under 12.

For our members, your association staff is busy working on issues of interest and concern to you. We have partnered with the Petroleum & Convenience Marketers Association to work toward passage of “swipe fee legislation” patterned after a law passed last year in Illinois. In the absence of any relief from Congress on credit card fees, legislation that will be introduced next week will exempt all state sales and excise taxes from the swipe fee. As an industry, we collect and remit billions of dollars in taxes to the state, and since most everyone now uses a credit card to purchase groceries, we have to pay the credit card companies their fee on that portion of the bill.



Patrick McWhorter & Representative John Hawkins, 1997.

This law would only allow them to charge on the merchandise purchased, and not on the tax collected. This will allow us to pass on millions in savings to our customers. Current law only allows up to \$400 per month in collection fees for each corporation, no matter how many stores you have or how much you collect. The Illinois law has withstood the first court test.

We are also striving to gain the right for you to provide RTD (Ready To Drink) products to your customers. For the past three years we have been stuck between soft drink and beer wholesalers, who could not agree on franchise language in the distribution of these products. Again, in coordination with the PC&MA, we are putting forward a bill that simply would allow us to sell those products up to 7% alcohol by volume, purchasing them from the state ABC.

It would require ABC to deliver orders of 50 cases or more to the stores. Unfortunately, some of those same groups already appear to be trying to stall our efforts despite their protestations that they want us to be able to sell them. Actions speak louder than words.

We are also working with the AWDA to enact a statewide “vape product” tax. Last year saw the first of what promises to be a deluge of local taxes on these previously untaxed products, and we hope to get in front of that, leveling the playing field. The revenue would be split between the state for enforcement of current laws and the cities and counties. It is hoped that much of the local revenue will be directed to school resource officers to assist in reducing usage among kids.

And increased enforcement will be able to deal with potentially dangerous products coming in from other countries, especially China.

And there is still the possibility we will see some kind of lottery/casino gambling legislation this session. There is simply no way to separate a lottery, which would likely pass easily, from the casino side of gambling. As of the latest information we have, the Senate is 3-4 votes short for passage. You will remember that a package of bills failed in the Senate last year by one vote after passage by the House.

We welcome your comments, questions and suggestions regarding any issue of importance to you in the state capitol. Please don't hesitate in contacting our legislative consultant, Patrick McWhorter, at 334-221-0220 or patrick@themcwhortergroup.com.

ASSOCIATION NEWS



BAB DAY ON THE LAWN

Please make plans to join us at Buy Alabama's Best Day on the Lawn on Wednesday, March 19, 2025, from 11:15 a.m. - 1 p.m. on the Capitol Lawn in Montgomery. The press conference will begin at 11:30 a.m. followed by the sampling event. Governor Kay Ivey and Agriculture Commissioner Rick Pate are scheduled to attend. Executive Officers, Legislators and their staff members will be invited to join as well. This is a great way to see your elected officials, support local products and know that we are the voice of the grocery industry in Alabama! We hope to see you there!

FOOD INDUSTRY FINEST LUNCHEON



OCT. 29, 2025
11:30 AM - 1:30 PM
THE CLUB



**RETAILER
OF THE YEAR**

Eric Bruce
Bruce's Foodland



**WHOLESALER
OF THE YEAR**

Jay Mitchell
JMBL/Mitchell Grocery
Corporation



**VENDOR
OF THE YEAR**

Bubba Lindley
EDLINCO

Congratulations



INDUSTRY NEWS

AGA ANNIVERSARY IS A REMINDER OF THE RESPECT EARNED BY STATE LEADERSHIP



PAUL DEMARCO

AGA General Counsel
Parsons, Lee, & Juliano, PC

THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION IS A REASON TO CELEBRATE FOR A LOT OF REASONS.

Let's start off with what makes this group so important, which is the food industry in our state is vibrant and so essential to the Alabama economy. Actually, the numbers bear out that agriculture and food manufacturing are two of the foundations that drive the state's strong employment and income.

Alabama grocery stores and those that supply their goods and services are important to Alabama's economy. Yet, these establishments are also more important than ever to our communities, particularly in rural Alabama. In most small towns, these stores are the center of commerce and are the lifeblood of supplying residents what they need to feed their families.

Regardless of whether these stores are located along the I-65 corridor in the major metropolitan areas or less populated portions of the state, they all have one thing in common – they need a strong advocate in Washington DC, Montgomery and at their local city hall. This is where the Alabama Grocers Association has earned the respect from elected officials and regulators as a trusted voice for the state's food industry.

Grocery owners have had to hurdle so many challenges in the past decades – economic downturns, the pandemic, retail theft, employment challenges, complex regulations and laws, and inflation.

And the AGA has worked vigorously to represent the needs of both the owners and consumers to meet these problems head on and find solutions.

Everyday there are decisions being at the United States Capitol, the Alabama statehouse and county courthouses which requires vigilance to protect the interest of grocers.

Now more than ever, a unified voice for the grocery industry is needed with the partisan rancor at both the federal, state, and local levels.

THE PAST 35 YEARS HAVE SHOWN WHY THE AGA HAS EARNED ITS STRIPES WITH THE HARD WORK TO ENSURE THAT GROCERS AND FOOD MANUFACTURERS ARE TREATED FAIRLY AND THE ABILITY TO SERVE THEIR CUSTOMERS TO THEIR SATISFACTION.

The future is bright for the United States and our state. With the Alabama Grocers Association leading the way, it will be as well for our industry. ■



Senator Jabo Waggoner, Ellie Taylor, & Paul Demarco, 2024.



AGA NEW MEMBERS



Jennifer Anthony

SPECCX

jennifer.anthony@speccx.com



Jennifer Sweatman

ServiceStar, LLC

jsweatman@svcstar.com



Matthew Dufour

Farm Fresh Food Suppliers, Inc.

mdufour@farmfreshfood.com

ASSOCIATION NEWS

GOVERNOR IVEY PROCLAIMS FEBRUARY 22, 2025, SUPERMARKET EMPLOYEE DAY IN ALABAMA

Governor Kay Ivey proclaimed February 22, 2025, Supermarket Employee Day in Alabama. On this day, we celebrate and recognize supermarket employees at every level for the essential work they do feeding families, serving their communities, and enriching lives. Supermarket employees provide Alabamians with access to safe, healthy, and affordable food as well as providing countless volunteer hours in their communities. We are thankful for our local heroes.





Coca-Cola
ZERO SUGAR
ZERO CALORIE COLA

Proud Partner





UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY



MICHAEL SANSOLO

Retail Food Industry Consultant

MANY YEARS AGO, APPLE COMPUTERS RAN AN INTERESTING AD ABOUT THEIR MACHINES.

In the ad, two businessmen are discussing which computers used in their company are the most powerful. The first man says it likely comes down to computing power, speed, random access memory and more.

But the second man disagrees. The most powerful machines, he says, are the ones people actually use. Needless to say, Apple argued that meant their machines and remember, this was at a time when Apple was not the colossus it is today.

Retailers need keep that kind of discussion in mind when considering technology. The most powerful tools aren't those gauged by any one of a number of attributes. Rather, the most powerful are those that help you accomplish your goals of better customer service, increased sales and reducing the friction that leads to higher costs.

I have to believe that all businesses are more flummoxed by technology these days than ever before. Now we all need try to understand complex topics such as artificial intelligence and try to understand how it will impact our businesses.

AND I'D ARGUE, JUST AS WAS DONE IN THAT LONG AGO APPLE ADVERTISEMENT, THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT TECHNOLOGIES ARE THOSE THAT HELP US ACCOMPLISH OUR GOALS.

To be completely honest, I don't have a clue as to all that artificial intelligence can do for business and, like many of you, I worry that we're opening a Pandora's box of issues with the ability of technology to think and grow.

Plus, I can also see how AI will improve the customer experience possibly by helping shoppers with meal planning and menu ideas either through in-store kiosks or in mobile applications. And by doing so it could lead to greater customer satisfaction and possibly improved sales and profits.

But the possible gains of technology won't stop there. I was lucky once again to be part of the Technology Summit at the NGA convention this past February and we all witnessed the many possible ways technology can help. At the summit different speakers gave insights as to how technology can produce improvements in areas as different as reducing food waste to food safety recalls to enhancing frequent shopper programs.

The key to all of that, I believe, is to get technology providers talking about the real-world business benefits of their hardware and software. After all, your customers don't care about the computing speed of your back-office systems. But they will care if technology reduces out-of-stocks, cuts down on food waste and helps keep a lid on prices.

And frankly, you care about all of that as well as in each of those areas, you need those improvements to stay a step ahead of the competition wherever and whenever possible.

Whether or not you attended the summit, I hope you can benefit from the discussions we conducted with their focus on how these technological tools will help retailers—small and large—improve their businesses.

And we also pressed those providers to especially help smaller companies whose budgets, know-how and staffing are limited when it comes to technology.

Those are the kinds of questions and discussions I would argue you need have with providers.

But let's also stay mindful that while technology may seem mind-boggling, complex and constantly changing, it's a topic that you simply cannot avoid. More than ever the entire industry competes with operators who come from the technology space and are using their tools and know-how to reinvent and, in some cases, overwhelm industry after industry.

If you have any doubts, think about the kind of impact seen in other parts of the economy. Lyft and Uber have upended the taxi industry just as VRBO and Air BNB have become major vacation destinations. And the examples could go on and on.

It's challenging for any traditional business, especially a small one, to devote time and budgetary resources to the complex world of technology, but the alternative is irrelevance.

Omni-channel retailing, a phrase that didn't exist a decade ago, is not just a reality these days, it's almost a necessity.

The simple places to start are in conversations with fellow retailers, your wholesaler and even product suppliers. Everyone is learning about these new technologies at the same time, so perhaps you can find allies or partners inside the networks you already have.

And needless to say, you need to attend programs like the NGA Technology Summit whenever you get the chance. No program will give you all the answers, but you need expose yourself to as much information as possible.

But once again, do it all with the same simple questions in mind. When presented with any technological ideas and solutions, ask how it will benefit your customers' experience, how it will create additional sales or how it will reduce friction in your operation or supply chain, enabling you to reduce costs.

To go back to the old Apple computer commercial (from the start of this article) remember the most powerful technology isn't about bits and bytes. It's about what gets used by people better than anything else. And what benefits them most. ■



INDUSTRY NEWS

CONSUMERS EXPRESS OPTIMISM AMID SHIFTING ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE



JENNIFER HATCHER

Chief Public Policy Officer
Food Marketing Institute

THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE YEAR IS A GREAT TIME TO GET A PULSE CHECK ON THE CONSUMERS WE SERVE, PARTICULARLY ABOUT HOW THEIR SHOPPING BEHAVIORS MAY SHIFT IN THE YEAR AHEAD.

Following an election year in which a new administration and Congress set their priorities amid a focus on trying to improve the lives of the American people – including tackling a recent uptick in inflation – it’s even more important to understand grocery shopper expectations and what they mean for our industry in the coming months.

In early January, FMI surveyed consumers to get a sense of not only their spending habits but also their feelings and concerns about 2025 as it relates to their grocery shopping. While we did see the average weekly household grocery spend increase to \$169, this is not out of the ordinary, as historically we tend to witness a bump in weekly spend at the beginning of every year.

Consumer concerns about rising prices have mostly stabilized – which is to be expected as the inflationary environment has also hopefully leveled off – with 68% of shoppers being very or extremely concerned about rising grocery prices. Similarly, the percentage of shoppers worried about having enough money to purchase groceries has hovered around 41% since early 2023.

Consumers are also aware of the potential impact of the evolving political, economic and environmental landscape on grocery prices. The top issue shoppers are most concerned about is tariffs on food imports, with 49% either very or extremely concerned.

Forty-five percent are very or extremely concerned about decreased crop availability due to weather events, 44% expressed concerns about food transportation costs (i.e., supply chain issues) and 43% are concerned about the impact of bird flu spreading across farms. While these issues may be largely outside the direct control of the food industry, it is critical that FMI and companies communicate transparently with customers about how these developments may impact the price of food on store shelves.

THE GOOD NEWS IS, DESPITE THESE CONCERNS, SHOPPERS CONTINUE TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF THESE CHALLENGES AND EXPRESS OPTIMISM FOR THE YEAR AHEAD.

Forty-five percent believe their diet and nutrition will be better a year from now, up 13 percentage points from a year ago. Similarly, 44% of shoppers anticipate their household finances will be better off in a year, up 11 percentage points. Thirty-seven percent say their ability to purchase the food they need will improve, up 9 percentage points from last year. Taken together, this suggests that shoppers are hopeful about their economic future and expect that they will be better equipped to meet their grocery needs going forward.

One potential reason for this continued optimism is that a large majority of consumers continue to express that they have the ability manage their grocery budgets.

In fact, 78% say they have at least some or a lot of control over their household grocery spending. Shoppers have a number of strategies at their disposal to help in this regard, including loyalty programs, digital coupons, using technology to compare prices across stores and brands, tech-enabled customer personalization opportunities, and leveraging artificial intelligence for recipes and meal planning.

More generally, despite the economic disruptions over the last several years, consumers have held a consistent level of favorable beliefs and feelings concerning their grocery shopping experience since 2020.

FMI's U.S. Grocery Shopper Sentiment Index – which currently stands at 68 and is up slightly from September 2024 – shows consumers continue to find value in and enjoy their grocery shopping experience at their primary store. In fact, on a scale of one to ten, shoppers on average give their primary store a score of 8.2 in meeting their needs.

While shoppers are paying attention to the number of potential issues that may impact food prices in the months to come, they continue to feel more upbeat about their own personal futures. This confidence bodes well not only for their general attitudes about grocery shopping, but also provides a solid foundation for driving their shopping behaviors into 2025. ■

ASSOCIATION NEWS



CONGRATS TO JULIAN PAGAN FOR COMPETING AT NGA'S BEST BAGGER COMPETITION

The winner of the Alabama Grocers Education Foundation's Best Bagger Competition competed on the national stage on February 24th at the NGA Convention. As a strong representative from our state, we are so proud of Julian and his hard work, determination, and passion. Congratulations, Julian Pagan!

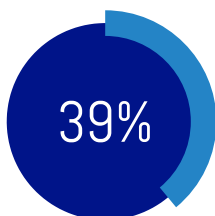




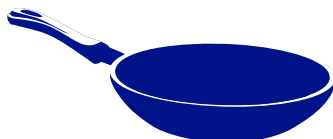
ALABAMA GROCERS ASSOCIATION

The Voice of the Grocery Industry

The Grocery Industry Is Integral to the Health of Alabama



The grocery industry is integral to the health of Alabama. In Alabama, 39% of the adult population is obese. According to studies done by Cambridge University, it is healthier to eat at home.



When cooking at home, you know what you are going to consume. You can control what you put into your food and make things healthier.



Grocery stores can help accommodate speciality diets. On a given day, 17.1% of adults are on some form of speciality diets.

The Grocery Industry Brings Families Together



With rising food prices, Alabama's grocery industry offers a relief for household pocketbooks.



The grocery industry employs diverse populations, including teenagers, retirees, and developmentally disabled people.



By shopping at grocery stores and cooking at home, families have more time to spend together.

The Grocery Industry Helps Alabama Communities



The AGA has raised more than \$1.4 million in scholarships since its inception with most of that money going to in-state colleges.



Grocers donate millions of pounds of food to food banks every year.



Alabama grocery stores engage in community outreach, bringing food to those who likely otherwise would not have access to it.



The Grocery Industry Is Integral to the Health of Alabama

- » The health of those in Alabama is something that is exceedingly important, and something that will remain important for the coming years. Obesity is an epidemic, and Alabama's obesity rate is 39% according to the Alabama Department of Public Health. Additionally, Cambridge University released a study saying that cooking at home is healthier than eating out.
- » When cooking from home, people know what they are putting in their food. With the rampantness of fast, unhealthy food, oftentimes people have questions about what goes into their food. 37% of Americans consume fast food on any given day, introducing large amounts of fat, oil, and salt into their diet. When you cook from home, you know exactly what is going into your food, and you have the ability to control how much of each ingredient you put in.
- » Grocery stores can also accommodate more specialty diets, making it easier for those with Celiac or Crohn's Disease to find food that they are able to safely eat. People with autoimmune diseases that limit the intake of food will have a hard time finding dishes at restaurants that they are able to safely consume.

The Grocery Industry Brings Families Together

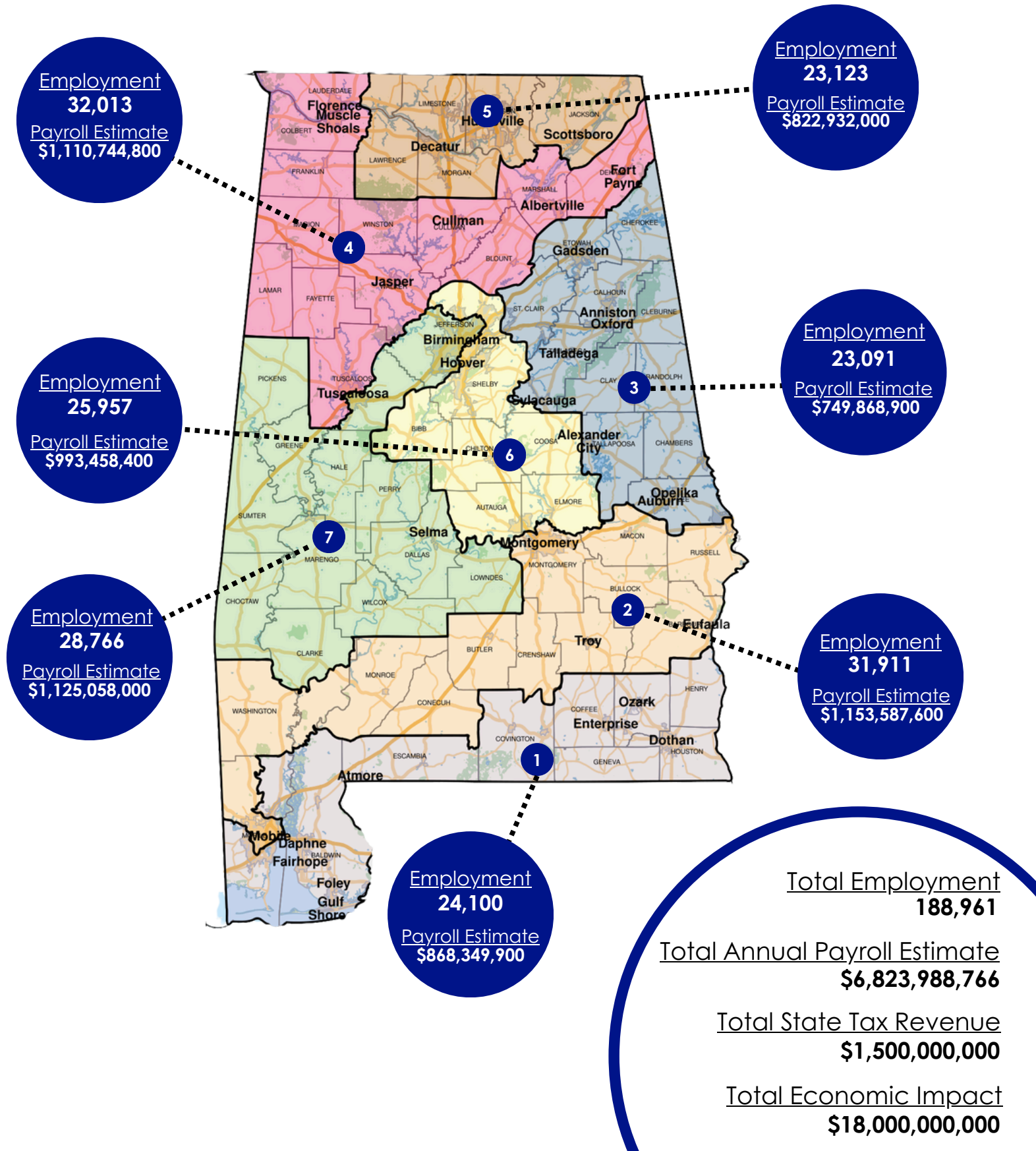
- » With inflation hitting the highest levels seen in the last four decades, the vast majority of Americans are citing groceries as their top concern, and families across Alabama are looking for ways to navigate rising prices that can cut into their pocketbooks. Food costs from sit-down and fast-food restaurants are projected to rise 6-7%, but Alabama's grocery industry offers a cost-effective alternative that saves hard-working families money. While restaurants limit customers to menu items, grocery store customers are offered a variety of unique ways to save money, such as buying in bulk, shopping generic brands, and switching from meat to plant-based alternatives - all of which are of growing interest to Americans.
- » Grocery stores are also key employers for diverse populations of local communities. With supermarket and grocery store wages now topping \$15/hour, developmentally disabled individuals can find fulfilling careers within grocery stores serving as baggers, stockers, and other positions. Retirees work as greeters, giving them extra retirement income and a social outlet. Teenagers and young adults can find their first jobs working as cashiers, teaching them the value of hard work and allowing them to build transferable skills.
- » Only about a third of families manage to eat together regularly, and with regular family dinners associated with lower rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, tobacco use, and early teenage pregnancies, families have more than just an economic interest in eating together. With a rising trend of saving money on groceries by cutting down on restaurant spending, families can find full meals for dinners together in grocery stores and supermarkets. Curbside and delivery services help families with convenience and time management.

The Grocery Industry Helps Alabama Communities

- » Helping Alabama's grocery stores helps the colleges you love, whether you bleed crimson or orange. Through the AGA and other members of the grocery industry, colleges in the state receive donations and scholarship funds to help keep bringing in bright young students to get a worthwhile education.
- » The rural parts of Alabama often have little to no access to grocery stores, creating food deserts, leaving communities in need without the supplies to care for themselves. Through the AGA and grocery-affiliated community outreach programs, food and supplies are taken to these communities to help eliminate or reduce food scarcity.
- » Eight hundred pounds of food are discarded by grocery stores each year in the United States alone. That amount of food is equal to 129 fully fueled Saturn V rockets. Grocery stores have partnered with organizations all across Alabama to help remove food from the waste stream and redistribute it to communities facing food uncertainty through food banks. Grocery stores and affiliates keep Alabama's food banks afloat by providing the majority of donations.



Totals by Congressional District



Testimonials from Alabama Grocers

Jimmy Wright - “Nourishing Families, Strengthening Communities.”

Jimmy Wright, a long-time AGA member, was only twelve when he started his first job at a small convenience store across the street from his childhood home, a store built and owned by his father and operated by their family. Together, Jimmy and his parents mostly served workers of Opelika's textile mills – and, like many twelve-year-olds, was sometimes sent home for goofing off, only to be called back to work when his parents needed help. Despite his semi-tumultuous early employment as a young boy, Jimmy Wright eventually grew to own and run the same family store on his own and continue serving the proud people of east Alabama.

The original market opened in 1973 and was rechristened as Wright's Market in 1997 when Jimmy took over ownership from his father. Located just outside of the historic downtown area of Opelika, the grocery store has been a staple of the town and its surrounding rural communities for decades. And Jimmy's not the only person who's enjoyed a long career at the store – he works alongside a dedicated staff comprised of many employees who have been with the store for 25 or 30 years. From its humble beginnings, Wright's Market has seen substantial growth, allowing Jimmy to participate in numerous community outreach programs, such as delivering groceries to small communities in food deserts. Alabamians of Lee County likely agree with Jimmy's adage: “Nobody goes without anything if we can help.”

Austin and Andrew Virciglio - “The AGA Goes to Bat for You.”

As fourth generation employees of Piggly Wiggly, Austin and Andrew Virciglio were quite literally born into the grocery industry. Both began their respective grocery careers by working in various positions in their family store before working up to management positions – and one shopping trip at their Piggly Wiggly located in Birmingham will prove they know exactly what they're doing. Their family, as well as many other Piggly Wiggly's in the state, are proud members of the Alabama Grocers Association.

The Virciglio's are major proponents of the AGA for a variety of well-deserved reasons, with perhaps the cornerstone being the sense of family and community felt among members. They feel pride in what they have accomplished for their local community and see the AGA as an extension of that, connecting them with other members of the industry that share the same goals of consistent and affordable fresh produce, meat, and dairy products for Alabama. The Alabama Grocers Association has been a voice for the industry and a leader amongst leaders, allowing the Virciglio brothers to continue offering the same quality service as their father, grandfather, and great-grandfather before them.

Sources:

www.bls.gov/cew, www.ers.usda.gov, agi.alabama.gov, revenue.alabama.gov, RIMS II for economic impact modeling, www.feedingtheeconomy.com, <https://data.census.gov/US> including Census Bureau County Business Patterns, OpenAI LLM





"We wanted everybody to feel like they were part of the group, part of the family, and everybody being represented." – James Scott

CELEBRATING 35 YEARS OF THE AGA: A CONVERSATION WITH JAMES SCOTT

For 35 years, the Alabama Grocers Association (AGA) has been the backbone of Alabama's grocery industry, bringing together retailers, wholesalers, and suppliers to advocate for and support the industry's growth. In a recent episode of the Alabama Grocers Association Podcast, host Paul DeMarco sat down with James Scott of Better Choice Power, one of the founding members of AGA, to reflect on the organization's origins, accomplishments, and future aspirations.

The Founding of AGA: A Vision for Inclusivity

The roots of AGA trace back to the Food Distributors of Alabama, but as Scott recalls, the early leaders recognized the need for a more comprehensive organization that represented every facet of the grocery industry. Leading the charge was Jim Smotherman, alongside industry pioneers like Charlie Parker, Charlie Ping, Greg Gregerson, and Scott himself. Their collective vision was to create an association that would serve as a true community for Alabama's grocers, ensuring that all members felt represented and had a voice.

"Jim Smotherman had such a wealth of knowledge—not just about people, but about processes," Scott said. "He's the one who really put everything together."

Growth and Impact: From a Handful to Hundreds

From its humble beginnings with approximately 60 members, AGA has grown to include over 350 members and represents more than 1,100 stores across the state. This expansion is a testament to the organization's ability to evolve and address the changing needs of the grocery industry.

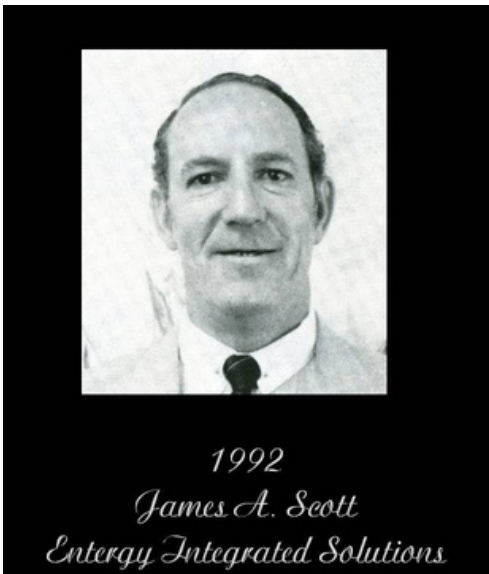
One of AGA's most impactful initiatives has been its scholarship program, which was originally sparked by a partnership with American Systems and Service Lighting. Scott recalled how the company contributed one dollar for each light fixture installed or fixed, with the first check to the association amounting to \$6,700. Today, the scholarship program has flourished, awarding nearly 60 scholarships annually to members and their families, helping to further education and career development.



Scott’s message for the future is clear: “We want this association to grow bigger, bring in more people, and ensure that every phase of our industry is represented.”

Philanthropy and Advocacy: Giving Back to Alabama
 AGA’s commitment extends beyond its members to the broader Alabama community. The association has a long-standing partnership with Children’s of Alabama, raising funds through an annual event. In February 2024 alone, AGA presented a check for \$21,611 from just a single day’s efforts—demonstrating the organization’s deep commitment to charitable giving.

Additionally, AGA plays a pivotal role in supporting its members through legislative advocacy, healthcare assistance, and insurance support. The organization actively represents the grocery industry at both the state and national levels, ensuring that Alabama grocers have a voice in key policy discussions.

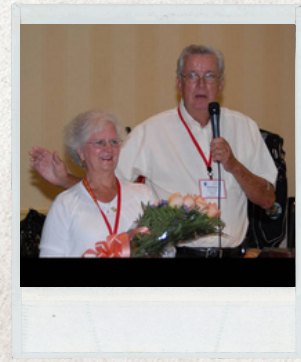
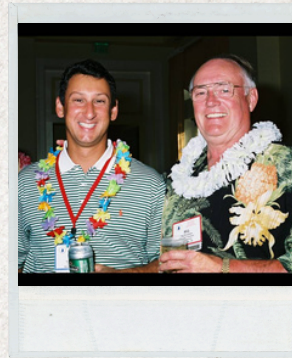


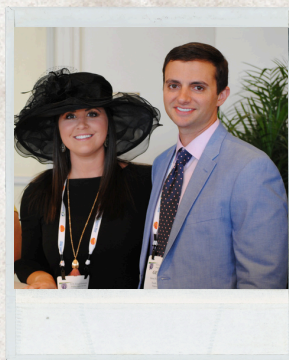
Looking Ahead: A Future of Growth and Engagement
 Reflecting on the future, Scott envisions continued expansion in both membership and community engagement. With the grocery industry contributing nearly \$2 billion to Alabama’s economy, AGA aims to strengthen its influence and provide even greater benefits to its members. The goal is to see higher attendance at events like the annual convention—where last year’s exhibit hall and hotel reservations sold out—as well as increased participation in initiatives such as the AGA Golf Tournament, which directly funds the association’s scholarship program.

A Legacy of Leadership
 As AGA celebrates its 35th anniversary, the organization’s legacy of leadership, community service, and industry advocacy remains stronger than ever. Thanks to the vision and dedication of its founding members, AGA has become a pillar of support for Alabama’s grocers—one that will continue to shape the industry for decades to come.

To watch James Scott’s interview, visit our Youtube channel @AGAPodcast. For more stories, updates, and insights from the Alabama Grocers Association, tune in to future episodes of the AGA Podcast.

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