A14 GRiffin DAILY NEWS, Wednesday, March 4, 2015

LUNCH
FROM THE FRONT PAGE

office on the ground every day, doing store inspections, licensing and inspecting manufacturing and processing plants. One of the primary responsibilities, he said, is animals, and with Georgia being the top poultry producer in the nation, something like avian flu would be devastating if incidents occurred here.

In a routine grocery store inspection, Black said the inspectors check the cleanliness of the bakery and deli areas, the temperatures of storage areas and the temperatures of the meat.

“We check to make sure things that are not supposed to be there are not there,” he said.

There are three things, Black said, that his office — help get people in business, help people stay in business and discipline.

“We spending more time on the first two, but are known for the last one.”

Some of the initiatives from the Department of Agriculture include Georgia Grown and locally grown, which he said tout fresh products in the market place that are locally produced. He said the different means of production — organic, cage free and conventional — should not compete with one another.

“Imagine an umbrella,” he said, all the ribs are the same size and will expand and contract based on the market. The power is not in each section but in the umbrella itself. If local, then it’s the producer that benefits, not one at the expense of the other.

Georgia Grown and Georgia processed, Black said, “mean the jobs are here.”

Oak Hill Baptist Church Pastor Chris Holdorf, who hosts the Power Lunch on the first Tuesday of the month, asked about the future of family farms.

Black said, one of the challenges is agriculture is an intensely capital intensive business. An area where there is potential from growth he said is hogs. “We have a real need for hogs,” he said, as the small farms were bought by larger ones, but then closed.

To help with the capital especially for beginning farmers, Black said, there’s the Securing Tomorrow’s Agricultural Resources Today (START) program. From the currently $10 million fund, Black said, a START loan for up to $400,000 is at 3.5 percent interest.

He also encourage the continued support of the Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H programs, noting a program was started by three students in DeKalb County, showing there is certainly a future there.

Ray Lightner/Daily News

Georgia Agriculture Commissioner Gary Black (right) was the guest for the monthly Power Lunch Leadership Forum hosted by Pastor Chris Holdorf of Oak Hill Baptist Church and held at the University of Georgia Griffin Campus.

Ag commissioner visits UGA-Griffin for Power Lunch

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Agriculture touches everybody, Black said, from the gas pump to food safety, store inspections and new varieties of crops.

At the pump, those stickers you see show where his department does the inspections.

“We take thousands of fuel samples to test at the 70,000-square-foot lab in Tifton,” he said, testing octane and ethanol levels and that a gallon is a gallon.

He said the number one priority is food safety and the 60 professionals in his