

(Photo caption) Chuck Culver, Director of Development for University of Arkansas' Division of Agriculture for the past 20 years, speaking to Benton County Democratic Women's Club on May 24, 2010.

Chuck Culver's presentation this week answered the question "Why Should I Care About Arkansas Agriculture?" Culver showed the ranking of Arkansas and Benton County with the nation. Agriculture in Arkansas provides one in every six jobs and accounts for more than 15% of its labor income. Arkansas agriculture sector's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the highest percentage in the nation at over 12%, and its production and processing percentages of GDP are 3 times higher than the US as a whole.

First in rice, second in broilers and third in cotton productions, Arkansas ranks among the top 25 states for over 20 agricultural commodities. Culver pointed out Arkansas agriculture is bigger than Mississippi and Louisiana combined. It ranks 29th in land area with 97% of it in ag use.

Culver noted that, Benton County is #1 contributing to these remarkable standings, with 5.8% (\$433,957,000) in total receipts from agricultural sales in Arkansas. In fact, of over 3,000 Ag counties nationwide, Benton County ranks 77th largest in agricultural sales, and if the county was ranked against all the states, it would rank after 48th ranked Massachusetts.

Pointing to the future, Culver showed the changes development is having on our county. Between 2002 and 2007, the number of farms decreased almost 10%, with the total acreages down almost 20%, and average farm sizes reduced from 132 acres to 118.

Because of the influx of people and jobs in the area, it is predicted that Benton County, now 3rd most populous in the state, will become the most populace by 2030. Culver's talk addressed the environment challenges agriculture and development present and spoke of the serious hunger experienced in Arkansas, and he expressed the value of strong federal representation as Arkansas moves forward.