ABAC Farm Manager Trey Davis (right) prepares Ben Cole, a senior diversified agriculture major from Boaz, Ala., for a field experience.

ABAC Farm Manager Gives Credit to Students

TIFTON—Trey Davis looked over the field of soybeans on the J.G. Woodroof Farm at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College with a satisfied smile on his face. He thought of all the students who had a hand in making the crop possible. For him, that’s what his job as farm manager is all about.
“Ninety to ninety-five per cent of the work done on these crops is by students,” Davis, a 2005 ABAC alumnus, said. “Even if they go into the sales and marketing side of agriculture, they have experienced the production side of it up close and personal.”

Davis actually employs six students who work part time on the farm, which is named for the first president of ABAC. Many other students spend time on the 200-acre site as a part of their class work.

“The students who work here help to maintain the equipment and the crops,” Davis said. “But we have a lot of other students who are here a lot. Every student in the farm operations class spends six hours a week on the farm.”

Some of those students are majoring in Diversified Agriculture, the hottest new bachelor’s degree program at ABAC. The popularity of that program is one reason why the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources has over 1,000 students enrolled for the first time ever this semester.

Dr. Tim Marshall, Dean of the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources, realizes the farm is a valuable tool in the ABAC educational process.

“People don’t usually think of a farm as a learning laboratory but at ABAC, that’s exactly how we use the J.G. Woodroof Farm,” Marshall said. “It’s very important that our students are capable of doing what they are learning in their curriculum. We want to make sure they have the proficiency in a certain area that is required by employers who hire them. We use the farm in some of our classes to make that happen.”

Davis and the students grow mainly corn, soybeans and hay on the farm. From planting to harvesting, students are involved.
“With the precision agriculture classes, our students are on the tractors a lot,” Davis said. “They also work with the variable rate irrigation, take soil samples, and keep data on the soil moisture sensors.”

Ben Cole, a senior diversified agriculture major, says the farm is one of the reasons he came to ABAC.

“I looked at other colleges for my agriculture degree, but my main reason for coming to ABAC was the hands-on experience,” Cole, who hails from Boaz in northeast Alabama, said. “I believe the farm gives ABAC graduates a leg up on graduates from other institutions.”

As a class of 14 students gathered around a John Deere tractor on the farm, Cole emphasized his point.

“There’s a lot more teacher to student interaction at ABAC,” Cole said. “The instructors help you understand what they’re teaching and why they’re teaching it to you. When I graduate, I’ll have all the tools and resources necessary for the work I’m going to do.”

Cole plans to graduate in December and go to work for a chemical company as a sales representative. He’s also going to do some farming on the side. He’s confident that he’ll be ready for the world of work.

“Everything here is oriented toward teaching you how to be a better manager when you graduate and get into a business,” Cole said. “It’s a good atmosphere. Everybody gets along.” Davis said when it’s time to sell the crops, the students are right in the middle of the marketing game.

“We find a market, sell it, and put that money back into the farm,” Davis said. “I did retain 1,000 bushels of corn last year, put it in the bin, and now students in the farm operations class can take it to the buying points.”
Davis said the farm also has 60 head of beef cattle and three horses which are used in the animal science classes. Students can also bring their own horses to ABAC and board them in the ABAC stables.

After completing his ABAC curriculum, Davis received his undergraduate degree from the University of Georgia. After some time in the business world, he was offered the opportunity to return to the college as farm manager.

“I never would have thought that I would have come back to ABAC,” Davis said with a grin. “But I sure am glad I did so I can be a part of everything that’s happening here.”

###