



# 2010 Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture Voter Guide



# Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture Voter Guide

Fall 2010

## Introduction

Georgia Organics, a nonprofit organization working to integrate healthy, sustainable and locally grown food into the lives of all Georgians, presents the 2010 Voter Guide for the Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture race. Commissioner Tommy Irvin is retiring after 41 years of overseeing Georgia's No. 1 industry, making this year's election an historic opportunity to shape policies that advance sustainable foods and farms across the state. This voter guide includes general information on the three candidates and their answers to nine key questions. All responses were printed verbatim.

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Georgia Organics can not endorse any candidate but can provide you with educational materials to assist in your candidate research. Please use this guide as a tool in conjunction with the available recordings of Georgia Organics' sustainable agriculture debate held with the three candidates on Sept. 2 at Emory University. The debate web link can be found at the following link: <http://vimeo.com/14833220>

Now let's meet our candidates.

Candidate	Gary W. Black (R)	Kevin Cherry (L)	JB Powell (D)
<b>Hometown</b>	Commerce, GA	Douglasville, GA	Blythe, GA
<b>Experience</b>	1989-2010 President, GA Agribusiness Council	Certified pest, wildlife and public health pest control operator for 25 years	Farmer, State Senator
<b>Education</b>	UGA, BS '80, Agricultural Education	Technical Certification in Biology and Pest Management	Augusta Tech
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.votegaryblack.com">www.votegaryblack.com</a>	<a href="http://www.cherryforagriculture.com">www.cherryforagriculture.com</a>	<a href="http://www.votejbpowell.com">www.votejbpowell.com</a>

### Gary W. Black (R)

#### 1) If you are elected commissioner of agriculture, what systemic changes, if any, do you intend to make at the department?

I will begin by instituting a revitalized organizational structure that focuses leadership on three areas: operations (all regulatory and promotional activities), administration (personnel, information technology, budget), and security (law enforcement, homeland security). I will immediately lead a strategic planning process (also noted later in the survey) aimed at improving employee morale, administrative efficiency, and service to the taxpayer. The development team will include current employees, consumer and regulated stakeholders. With broad-based input, we can set benchmarks and thereby chart a measurable path to exceptional service in the future. I will initiate a thorough review of all laws impacting the operation of the department. Upon completion, I will ask the legislature to work with me to modernize and streamline our operations to reflect the new strategic plan. I will publish our budget online so that taxpayers can monitor the monthly financial statements of their Department of Agriculture.

### Kevin Cherry (L)

- (1) Reduce outdated rules and regulations
- (2) Change the focus of Agricultural Marketing Dept. to give more emphasis to local sales and production as opposed to international sales.
- (3) Increase research on organic and green energy crops.
- (4) Reduce outdated rules and regulations
- (5) Change the focus of Agricultural Marketing Dept. to give more emphasis to local sales and production as opposed to international sales.
- (6) Increase research on organic and green energy crops.

### JB Powell (D)

I would do a cost-benefit analysis of what is being done to determine if there are better more cost effective practices that can be implemented. One thing we need to evaluate is cross-training food safety inspectors so that food safety inspectors can cover multiple food lines in smaller areas rather than large overlapping territories reducing travel time across Georgia and costs. We also need to evaluate how to strengthen our Farmers Markets around Georgia so that they become regional hubs for consumer and commercial buyers such as restaurants to purchase locally grown food. If we are serious about helping Georgia families eat more locally grown food, the Department of Agriculture needs to create the infrastructure capacity to make this possible.

**2) What level of priority does sustainable and organic agriculture play in your plans for the department of agriculture and what top three actions would you take in the first year of your administration?**

**Gary W. Black (R)**

Leaders of the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences define sustainable agriculture as follows: "It means the practice of growing food, fiber, feed and fuel in systems that meet the needs of both the present and future generations. Sustainable agriculture emphasizes production and marketing practices that are profitable, environmentally sound, and that improve the quality of life for both farmers and the public. Sustainable agriculture systems rely on building healthy soils and crops, enhancing biodiversity, and minimizing the use of non-renewable resources." I could not agree more. This definition includes all types of cultural practices and certainly embraces market driven demand. Likewise, I will give priority to all facets of Georgia agriculture covered under this definition. In my view, a rising tide lifts all ships. My first priority will be to institute a six-month long strategic planning process. We must have a sound plan in order to build for the future. GA Organics will be represented during this process. Secondly, I will introduce an internet-based system for purchasing licenses and filing reports with the department. Lastly, I will use new media tools to develop a better communication strategy with the public.

**Kevin Cherry (L)**

The very highest priority second only to food safety enhancement

- (1) Institute a food safety education program for farm workers, food producers and food prep managers.
- (2) Seek increased organic crop marketing in state farmers markets
- (3) Seek funding to increase the number of urban farmers markets in Georgia

**JB Powell (D)**

Sustainable and organic agriculture is one of my highest priorities because it directly impacts the safety and quality of our food. My goal is to make it easier for a locally grown egg to reach local grocery stores than an egg from a factory production facility in Iowa.

Specifically, I will do the following three things to promote sustainable and organic agriculture:

1. Increase the budget for marketing organic products in the Department of Agriculture, which is currently only \$3,000. I will also put the Department of Agriculture's Market Bulletin online and create a listing of all organic farms in Georgia with links to each farm's website.
2. Work with organic farmers across Georgia to redevelop our Farmers Markets so that they can promote locally and organically grown products being purchased by restaurants, grocery stores and consumers.
3. Reform regulations that disadvantage small farms in Georgia

### Gary W. Black (R)

### 3) What policy changes and/or infrastructure expansions, if any, would you undertake to better support small and medium size farmers?

I am committed to opening/renaming one section of the Atlanta Farmers Market as "Locally Yours...". This local flavor market should be for producers from a certain radius of Atlanta. I am open to offering day rental of stalls and will work to provide an aggregation service to match larger customers (restaurants, hotels) with groups of producers who may not be able to service larger accounts on their own. I will launch a website worthy of Georgia, our farmers and employees. Better promotion through this portal as well as Facebook and Twitter will draw our citizens into a closer relationship with the producers that serve them. One video component of the new site will be "Meet Your Farm Neighbor." Regularly, I will visit with farmers throughout the state to discuss their operations. This simple action will improve agricultural literacy, and particularly for smaller farmers open market opportunities.

### Kevin Cherry (L)

(1) Over the next four years I will strive to double the number of farmers markets in the state.

(2) Increase use of Ga. Farm products by state prisons, schools and government agencies to at least 33% of all food products consumed by these organizations

### JB Powell (D)

The first thing I will do is evaluate the regulations that impede Georgia's organic farming such as requirement in the Georgia Food Code that contradict federal regulations and are unfair to small organic farmers. We need to protect Georgia's small farmers not the big agribusiness companies. In order to identify the legal obstacles to small and medium sized farms, I will solicit feedback from farmers across Georgia on what legal obstacles they face and then use my experience as a State Senator to work with the Georgia General Assembly to make legal changes as necessary and direct regulatory revisions when legal changes are not required.

Additionally, I would like to expand the ability of Georgia's Farmers Markets to provide products demanded by local restaurants so that local restaurants can depend on farmer markets for what they need. This means thinking strategically about what additional food products needs to be carried for comprehensive food offerings to be available at Farmers Markets and then adding necessary infrastructural capacity like freezers at Farmers Markets.

**Gary W. Black (R)**

**4) Where do you see the most opportunity for Georgia's agricultural growth?**

The next generation of Georgians should actually see growth on three fronts. We will continue to absorb a wide range of vegetable production from Florida as their population grows and water resources tighten. The same holds true for dairy. Consumer and institutional demand will continue to drive expansion of fresh fruit, vegetable, red meat and poultry production in and around population centers. Lastly, the introduction of olive production in the coastal plain region of the state and a yet to be determined biomass crop for fuel seem to offer promise.

**Kevin Cherry (L)**

(1 )Sales to other government institutions and agencies, schools and prisons.

(2) Increased sales through agri-tourism, more farmers markets in urban areas and in- town food cooperatives

**JB Powell (D)**

The farm gate value of Georgia agriculture in 2009 was \$11.3B, a 5% decline from 2008.

Increasing the percentage of locally grown foods consumed in Georgia can have a \$1.9B economic impact on Georgia agriculture if Georgia families eat \$10 more of food grown in Georgia instead of from out-of-state according to a UGA study. This represents the most significant opportunity for growing Georgia's agriculture. To achieve this, the Department of Agriculture needs to revamp the Farmers Markets across Georgia for them to perform a more central role in connecting local producers to local food buyers such as consumers, distributors and restaurants.

## Gary W. Black (R)

### 5) How would you foster stronger links between education and agriculture?

I am the only candidate with any record of direct involvement as a student, volunteer, parent and sponsor of FFA and 4H programs in Georgia. My record is solid. I will use this experience to direct my staff at the Department to be intimately involved serving as mentors in these youth programs to play a role in developing the next generation of agricultural leaders. I will institute the GDA Public Service Internship Program for college students. We must make public service an attractive career consideration. Through my school nutrition initiative "Feed My School for a Week," I will work with the next State Superintendent of Schools to challenge local communities to work together to achieve some level of school nutrition self-sufficiency for one week out of the school year. This initiative will link science, stewardship, nutrition, agricultural education, economics and career exploration together in a creative partnership that will draw communities together for a worthy goal.

## Kevin Cherry (L)

- (1) Sponsoring of more FFA and 4H programs thru state high schools.
- (2) Increase the number of internships in the Agricultural Commission for exemplary students, especially minority and female applicants

## JB Powell (D)

As a little league baseball coach, I see childhood obesity on the rise and we must reverse this trend. We don't need committees to get more local foods in schools, we need action that mirrors the efforts in 10,800 schools in 34 states that have farm-to-school such as the Organic choices salad bar in Olympia School District in Washington where produce expenditures increased, but overall food costs went down and fruit and vegetable consumption went up 27%. Here are the specific actions we need to take to get more locally grown food in our schools:

1. Create a position in the Department of Agriculture to help local school systems implement national best practices for buying local food. If just 1% of school lunch food is bought locally, it would create \$8M in revenue for Georgia farmers, which can more than generate enough state tax revenues to pay for this position.
2. Seek federal and private funds from parental, environmental and other non-profits for a grant program to purchase school kitchen equipment for washing and preparing locally grown produce.
3. Create a farm collaborative that provides liability insurance for local growers in order to fulfill school system liability insurance requirements.

**6) What is the single most important thing you would do to better address food safety challenges?**

**Gary W. Black (R)**

Food safety personnel must have the most relevant technical training available to regulate today's high tech food industry. Improving the management strategy for those on the frontline of food safety is a must as well. Inspectors can rest assured that they will have the complete backing of the Commissioner's office during my tenure. Food safety must be a 24/7 mindset for all involved from farm to fork. Food pathogens or rodent infestations do not take weekends off. A strong partnership between industry and the regulators must be developed to insure full time food safety for our consuming public. When infractions are found at a regulated business, they must be swiftly corrected. I will insist on high standards of accountability internally and in the marketplace. Georgia's food safety regulatory process must shift to a culture focused on prevention. Prevention is the key to avoiding food-borne illness outbreaks. Georgia has a wealth of expertise in the area of food safety and security at our research universities. I will use my experience to cooperate with food safety specialists from the University of Georgia, Georgia Tech and Ft. Valley State to certify that our food safety prevention measures are the strongest possible.

**Kevin Cherry (L)**

(1) Establish a program of Continuing Education classes in safe food handling and production for food producers, pest control operators and veterinarians, ect.

(2) Require each food producer above a certain volume to designate a person as responsible for maintaining minimum standards and require these individual to have a adequate level of training each year.

**JB Powell (D)**

We will continue to have food safety challenges no matter how many inspectors and inspections we have as long as our agriculture is primarily large-scale low-cost quantity factory production instead of naturally grown food from local farms. Thus, my highest priority will be helping to shift consumer purchase patterns from buying out-of-state processed food to locally grown produce. If we increase the amount of food we eat that is locally and sustainably produced, we will reduce the risk of large food safety outbreaks created by unsafe but standard large-scale industry practices. Not only will locally produced food increase our food safety, but it will help spur our Georgia economy and make our food and our lives healthier.

**Gary W. Black (R)**

**Kevin Cherry (L)**

**JB Powell (D)**

**7) How do you plan to enhance the department's effectiveness during the current state budget crisis?**

Moving as many regulatory reporting functions into an internet-based management system will be one of my first administrative priorities. This step alone will help bring near term improvements in efficiency and productivity. I am very interested in evaluating current levels of cross-training across regulatory functions. I believe in some instances inspection duties can be combined thus allowing management to shift realign some resources to higher priority programs. A fresh approach to goal-oriented management will also yield benefits. All of these initiatives and others will eventually be include in a 2014 strategic plan. A steering committee and 20 technical advisory committees will commence work soon in 2011. Through this process stakeholders from every contact point of the Department will engage to review all functions and make recommendations for the future. Improving effectiveness begins with vision-backed leadership and a good plan. I will provide both.

We must prioritize the most necessary programs to the health and safety of Georgians and cut those unneeded rules, regulation and programs not relevant to today's citizens.

As I have traveled around the state, I have heard many different ideas about improving the effectiveness of the Department of Agriculture. From improved fleet management, to leasing unused facilities to investing in more reliable technology that will improve efficiency of field services, there are many things we can do to modernize and improve the efficiency in the Department of Agriculture. Rather than use across the board budget cuts, we need to increase the efficiency of the Department of Agriculture. The number one way I can lead this effort is to listen to Department of Agriculture employees, farmers and consumers, and use their great suggestions to transform the Department of Agriculture into an efficient service oriented agency that serves farmers and consumers across Georgia.

**8) As the figurehead of Georgia's agricultural industry, what efforts would you undertake to support and encourage the next generation of farmers?**

**Gary W. Black (R)**

Though seen by some as a social issue, the number of new farmers entering the business in the future is really grounded in economics. Indeed there are social implications, but profit potential governs entry as much as any factor, in my view. The opportunities mentioned in my answers to question #2 will lure some. We must be supportive with infrastructure, markets, promotion, etc. This is particularly true for locally grown programs. For basic commodity production, it will be vital to speak out at the national level on trade and regulatory policies that impact Georgia growers. I will, as I have done for over 30 years, champion the cause of agricultural education throughout the state. We must have strong FFA and 4H programs to develop the leadership and technical competency needed for the next generation. I hope to be one of the strongest voices for young farmer initiatives in the upcoming Farm Bill discussions and ensure that resources are targeted for Georgia. Finally, I will institute a Public Service Internship Program for college students at the Department. While not exclusively for young farmers, I believe that we must have more public arena opportunities for agricultural students to broaden their horizons.

**Kevin Cherry (L)**

I will seek use my prestige and office to increase the interest, educational opportunities, and above all profitability of agriculture careers to young people

**JB Powell (D)**

As I said in the debate hosted by Georgia organics, it takes a million dollars to become a farmer these days and with how hard it is to make it as a farmer why would one want to go into farming if you have a million dollars? We have to change this and make it easier for talented young people to become farmers. We can do this by eliminating regulatory impediments to the competitiveness of small farms and creating a stronger market for local produce where small farmers can sell their produce. If we increase the demand for local produce, we can successfully attract new farmers to farming because a robust market for local produce is a powerful incentive to become a farmer.

### Gary W. Black (R)

#### 9) Why should voters who care about sustainable foods and farm choose you over your opponents?

I am certain that Georgia Organics members visit a well-qualified physician when their child is ill, a certified mechanic when their engine sputters, and I am absolutely positive that no one boards a jet without faith that a career pilot has filed the flight plan. One would never knowingly choose otherwise. The same should be true with Commissioner of Agriculture. In this race, I have the experience, the vision and record. Experience and understanding of agriculture is reason number one. Secondly, beyond my career in agriculture, my home life is rooted in agriculture. We raise beef qualified for natural labeling and sell market-weight animals to local consumers. I am listed in the 2009-2010 Local Food Guide (Black Farms, now Harmony Grove Farms). My walk and talk match. Many of today's campaign advice manuals could share the title of Art Linkletter's book, Kid's Say the Darndest Things -- people have and will say anything to try to gain a vote. I think your members expect more. My word will always be straight in agreement or disagreement. I have the leadership skills necessary to bring the department into the 21st century. I would be honored to earn the votes of Georgia Organics members.

### Kevin Cherry (L)

The farming methods of today, with it's subsidies of cheap energy, environmental waste, chemical fertilizers, steroids and antibiotics is coming to an end. I am uniquely qualified to lead Georgia family farmers in to a new era of sustainable growth, and natural production. I have spent my entire career advocating Integrated Pest Management and non-chemical farming and I will continue to do so as the next leader of the Dept. of Agricultural.

### JB Powell (D)

My Republican opponent has been a lobbyist for over 20 years for the chemical companies and large food production facilities that use their power and deep pockets to lobby for food safety regulations that advantage big agribusiness over small farmers and consumers. I feel that if this big agribusiness lobbyist is elected, we will get more out-of-state quantity agriculture production and this is not the direction Georgia agriculture should go. As a small cattle farmer, I feed my cattle grass, hay and rain and grow vegetables in my garden organically using mulch and manure as fertilizer so when it comes to sustainable farming, I practice what I preach. I have specific ideas for promoting local and sustainable farming that I want to begin acting upon day one. I hope that the choice for organic farmers is so clear that those reading this will spread the word to their entire personal network that the 2010 Agriculture Commissioner election represents a huge opportunity for advancing local and sustainable farming if I, JB Powell, am elected. I need your help winning this election and I hope you will stand with me in growing local and sustainable agriculture in Georgia.