

NEWS ARTICLE

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE RECEIVES \$450,000 GIFT FROM DR. J.B. PENN TO ADVANCE TRADING PROGRAM

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JONESBORO — Arkansas State University alumnus and Lynn, Ark., native Dr. J.B. Penn has made a gift of more than \$450,000 to support the innovative trading program jointly developed by the College of Agriculture and the Neil Griffin College of Business at A-State.

This transformative donation, held by the Arkansas State University System Foundation Inc., enhances a hands-on initiative that provides students with real-world experience in financial markets. The funds will be used for investments proposed by students, empowering them to apply their skills in futures and commodities trading.

“This gift reflects my belief in the importance of equipping students with an understanding of how financial markets influence business operations,” said Penn, who retired from Deere & Co. after serving as its chief economist. “The hands-on experience gained through this program is invaluable for their future success.”

The program utilizes the state-of-the-art Dawson Capital Markets Lab in the Griffin College of Business. Established through a [gift in 2014](#) from Scott and Kay Keasler Dawson, the lab features advanced technology for tracking and analyzing financial markets.

“The College of Agriculture emphasizes ‘beyond the classroom’ experiences and the Penn Trading program exemplifies that commitment,” said Dr. Mickey LaTour, dean of the College of Agriculture. “We believe that expertise in futures trading will set our students apart from their peers. We are deeply grateful for Dr. Penn’s generous gift which supports this unique initiative and advances our mission to prepare students for leadership in agriculture.”

Dr. Jim Washam, dean of the Griffin College of Business, expressed excitement about the partnership.

“Given the importance of agricultural business to the regional economy, our two colleges are a natural fit for joint projects,” Washam said. “This collaboration not only strengthens the academic experience but also prepares students for critical roles in the workforce.”

Through the trading platform, students will define investment goals, evaluate risks and present recommendations for real-world execution by the foundation. The returns generated will support scholarships, internships, travel and research opportunities for agriculture students.

“Dr. J.B. Penn’s generous gift supports the only program of its kind, uniquely equipping our students with unmatched, real-world trading experience across agriculture, energy and metals markets,” said Dr. Jacob Manlove, associate professor of agricultural economics and advisor for the futures and options trading program. “This initiative bridges classroom learning with the practical demands of trading, ensuring our students graduate with a competitive edge that no other program offers.”

Penn, who was designated as an A-State Distinguished Alumnus in 2001, earned his Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from A-State before completing advanced degrees in agricultural economics at Louisiana State University and Purdue University. His career included serving as undersecretary for farm and foreign agricultural services at the U.S. Department of Agriculture and providing strategic leadership at Deere & Co.



A-State College of Agriculture Dean Mickey LaTour (left) visits with Dr. J. B. Penn at his farm in Lawrence County.
