

South Carolina Living

AIKEN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

CEO MESSAGE

Growing with
our communities

SC RECIPE

Savory peach
entrées

A large group of people are on a white and blue fishing boat, actively fishing on the Gulf Stream. The boat has a blue upper deck and a white lower deck. Several people are visible on the deck, some holding fishing rods and others handling equipment. The ocean is a deep blue, and the sky is a lighter blue with some clouds. The text 'Catch of the day' is overlaid in large white letters on the right side of the image.

Catch of
the day

Spend a day on
the Gulf Stream



**Aiken Electric
Cooperative, Inc.**

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The mission of Aiken Electric Cooperative, Inc. is to empower communities by providing reliable, competitively priced energy and other services desired by our membership.

CO-OP NEWS EDITOR

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AEC is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



Growing with our communities

SINCE AIKEN ELECTRIC

Cooperative was founded nearly 90 years ago, our mission has remained

the same: serving the people and communities that call our service area home.

Over the years, our communities have grown and changed. New businesses have opened, industries have expanded and technology has transformed the way we live and work. Through it all, Aiken Electric has continued to grow alongside our members, adapting to meet their changing needs while remaining committed to safe, reliable and competitively priced service.

Today, that commitment extends beyond electricity. Just as reliable power is essential to daily life, access to high-speed internet has become increasingly important for families, farms, schools, healthcare and local businesses. That's why we continue to invest in services and infrastructure that support the long-term success of the communities we serve.

On page 5, you'll read about a local peach farm that relies on both Aiken Electric and CarolinaConnect to help power and connect its operation. Their story reflects the important role local

"It's about understanding our members' needs, supporting local growth and helping to create opportunities for future generations."

utilities play in helping businesses thrive and communities prosper.

As a member-owned cooperative, our focus is not simply on providing services. It's about understanding our members' needs, supporting local growth and helping to create opportunities for future generations.

We are proud to grow with our communities and grateful for the trust you place in us each day. We look forward to continuing to serve you for years to come.

APRIL M. COLLINS
Chief Executive Officer



**Get back-to-school
with speeds that
pass the test.**



CAROLINACONNECT
internet made better

Rooted on the ridge

Peach farm relies on AEC and CarolinaConnect

BY JOSH P. CROTZER

IN THE EARLY PART of the 20th century, a few South Carolina farmers figured out that the ridge running through Aiken, Edgefield, Lexington and Saluda counties was the best place to grow peaches.

Al DuBose's great-grandfather was one of them, and for five generations, Cotton Hope Farms in Monetta has taken advantage of that rich soil and warmer elevation to grow its peaches.

"It just grows a better peach," says DuBose, who runs Cotton Hope Farms with his father, Tristan.

Today, Cotton Hope Farms produces about 30 varieties of peaches along with watermelons, cotton and soybeans on 2,500 acres. It employs 20 people year-round and more than 200 seasonal workers during a harvest period that runs from May through early September.

But the DuBoses don't chase volume. It's quality that they are after.

"If we put it out there, we want it to be good," DuBose says. "You bring it back, and there's something wrong with that peach, we're not going to argue. You're going to get another basket."

Cotton Hope ships to Food Lion, Walmart, Kroger and dozens of grocers in Texas, Minnesota and Canada.

Quality is also why DuBose chose his electric provider. When he built his home on the property, the lot sat right on the boundary between Aiken Electric Cooperative's service territory and another provider.

"I said, 'I want, if any way possible, to be on co-op,'" says DuBose, whose grandfather William H. DuBose served on Aiken Electric's board of trustees. "You're not just a meter number to the co-op."

Over the past 30 years, as the farm shifted from diesel motors to electric-powered irrigation and expanded a packing facility built around 120-ton

"You're not just a meter number to the co-op."

—AL DUBOSE

hydrocooling units, its power demand has grown 10 to 15 times over. The co-op has kept pace at every step.

A few years ago, Aiken Electric delivered something else the DuBoses needed: CarolinaConnect, the fiber-optic broadband internet service offered through the co-op. Before the high-speed connection, Tristan DuBose had to wait hours, sometimes overnight, for important documents to download or upload. Now, the same task finishes in seconds.

"From a strictly business standpoint, it has been a game changer," Al DuBose says.

Kenny Brown, Aiken Electric's manager of key accounts, knew Cotton Hope was anxious to get connected to the new broadband service, and he was anxious to deliver the news it was coming.

"I was excited for them," Brown says. "I stopped by and said, 'Before you even ask me, CarolinaConnect is at the end of your road.'"

Tristan DuBose, who was born in 1946, has been around long enough to see Aiken Electric bring crucial services to the family farm twice. He's made sure his son understands that legacy.

"Daddy said if it wasn't for the co-op, Lord knows when we would have gotten power," Al DuBose says. "They gave us power and internet. Both of those things are very valuable."



PHOTOS BY JOSH P. CROTZER

Cotton Hope Farms in Batesburg, now run by Al DuBose (pictured) and his father, Tristan, has grown peaches since 1913.

GET CONNECTED—CarolinaConnect through Aiken Electric offers affordable, reliable and fast internet service to homes and businesses in their service territory. Visit carolinaconnect.com or call (803) 785-3455.



Grab a peach

Throughout the summer, you can find Cotton Hope Farms peaches at three roadside stands in Lexington County.

- ▶ 3087 Augusta Highway in Gilbert.
- ▶ 1753 North Lake Drive (Lake Murray Dam) in Lexington.
- ▶ 667 Highway 378 (Kings Corner) in Lexington.

