

EDUCATION

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Leaders discuss economics



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PANEL DISCUSSION — Huntington mayor Brooks Fetters, Executive Director Mark Wickersham, and Purdue Extension agriculture educator Ed Farris speak at a panel Tuesday during a class at the Huntington County Leadership Academy. *Make this image yours. Go to www.h-ponline.com.*

Talk part of Huntington County Leadership Academy

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The Huntington County Leadership Academy hosted a panel of several community leaders at its Tuesday morning class. The leaders, which included Tracey Shafer, superintendent of Huntington County Schools; Huntington mayor Brooks Fetters; Mark Wickersham, the executive director of Huntington County United Economic Devel-

opment; Purdue Extension agriculture educator Ed Farris; and Seth Marshall of Bippus State Bank.

The panel talked about the economy and how it has affected Huntington County.

Farris talked about ag economy in relation to last year's drought.

"Soybeans (in the county) turned out a lot better," he said. "They're a plant that can handle a lot at certain times. It could have been a lot worse

with farmers in this county. They came into this drought year in a pretty good financial shape. Agriculture has increased volatility in the past couple of years, but at the same time that's increased profit potential with a lot of the grain producers."

Wickersham said he, as well as many others in the room, has lived through the dynamics and the pressures of the American economy. The county, he said, has improved in the area of unemployment.

"The county was running two percent higher than the statewide average on the unemployment

rate," he said. "We've now stabilized and we're right at the average in the state."

The county's economic base is still heavily dependent on the automotive sector, Wickersham said. Since taking the helm at HCUED, he said, unemployment in the county has been cut in half.

Fetters said his job is "a matter of stewardship."

"I am 'the head of the hired help' in Huntington," he said. "There are times when citizens need to call on their stewards (to have an) effective and efficient government."