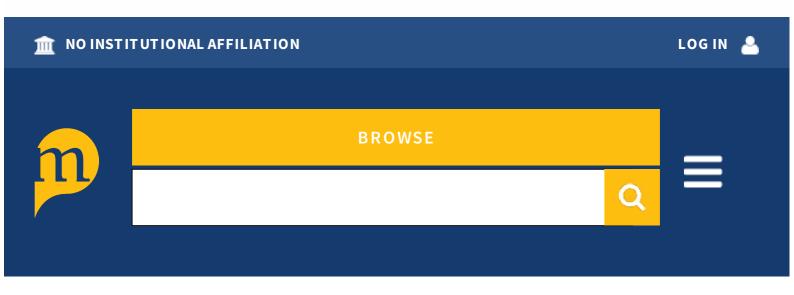
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The Southern Living solution: How the progressive farmer launched a magazine and a legacy.



## The Southern Living Solution: How The Progressive Farmer Launched a Magazine and a Legacy

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## In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

The Southern Living Solution: How The Progressive Farmer Launched a Magazine and a Legacy AZALEAS AND BEACHES, FRONTPORCHES AND FRIED CHICKEN—these are a few of the calm and leisurely icons depicting life in the South that have always filled the pages of one of the country's most popular and prosperous magazines, Southern Living. Some have questioned how such a publication could be born in Birming ham, Alabama, during the 1960s, a time when life was anything but tranquil in the world, the United States, or the region. It was a time when women were turning away from domestic lives and exploring new options for work

and self, and a time when minorities, predominantly blacks, were seeking equality and respect from the
white majority. How, then—and why— was a magazine such as Southern Living conceived, a publication that
so obviously depicted the region as a serene and happy place, where women kept the home and family, and
blacks were rarely seen? One obvious answer, more than forty years since the magazine's launch in 1966, is
that Southern Living's founders sought to comfort and reassure the region's white, upper-class elite while
reinforcing segregationist attitudes. Business correspondence from the company archives, however,
reveals that the concept for the magazine was secondary to the innovative business ideas implemented
regarding advertising and circulation issues. Ultimately, the creation of Southern Living saved the
Progressive Farmer despite a declining agricultural population, produced growth for the publishing
company with little additional risk, and rode the industry trend toward specialized magazines . The ultimate
key to success proved to be capitalizing on an affluent, white audience that was desperately trying to hold
onto its TRACYLAUDER Tracy Lauder is an assistant professor of mass communications at Emory & Henry
College in southwest Virginia. This article is based on her dissertation, completed at the University of
Alabama in 2004. JULY2007 187 southern traditions and fearful of how social change would disrupt their
way of life. By the early 1960s, the Progressive Farmer held the largest circulation of any farm publication in
the South and lead in the amount of paid advertising space for all the nation's farm magazines. Since it was
founded in 1886, this revered publication had been serving the various needs and interests of the South's
farmers and their families. But as the country shifted from an agricultural to an industrial economy, and as the
southern population became more urban and suburban, the magazine began to encounter declining
advertising and readership figures. Eager to remain a robust publishing company, management at the
Progressive Farmer Company sought ways to adapt to these changes. The publishers saw "sound and
profitable" diversification as key to the company's future growth—but not "to the point that the magazine
[Progressive Farmer] would suffer."1As early as the mid-fifties, the publishers began experimenting with
additional sources of revenue that meshed with the needs of loyal, successful Progressive Farmer readers,
including an accident insurance program to serve their rural readers and the purchase of a printing company
near their head quarters in downtown Birming ham. By the early 1960s, the company's Diversification
Committee explored new projects such as books, specialized magazines (in particular an outdoor
publication focusing on southern pastimes such as hunting and fishing), an expansion of the already
lucrative Birming ham Printing Division (one of the company's first diversification projects) to other cities, a
supplement service for suburban newspapers, and the acquisition of other publishing companies. As the
publishers and editors of the Progressive Farmer Company considered options for expanding their
$publishing\ empire, three\ key is sues\ were\ forefront\ in\ their\ minds: attracting\ readers, luring\ advertisers, and$
overcoming an increasingly negative perception of the South.2 The first major issue, circulation, became a
problem for the Progressive Farmer by the end of the 1950s. The number of southern farms 1 Sam G. Riley,
Magazines of the American South (New York, 1986), 176; "The Progressive Farmer Annual Report 1961," from
the holdings of the Library Archives, Southern Progress Corporation, Birmingham (hereafter cited as
Southern Progress Archives

# The Southern Living Solution: How The Progressive Farmer Launched a Magazine and a Legacy

TRACY LAUDER

Azaleas and beaches, front forches and fried chicken—these are a few of the calm and leisurely icons depicting life in the South that have always filled the pages of one of the country's most popular and prosperous magazines, Southern Living Some have questioned how such a publication could be born in Birmingham, Alabama, during the 1960s, a time when life was anything but tranquil in the world, the United States, or the region. It was a time when women were turning away from domestic lives and exploring new options for work and self, and a time when minorities, predominantly blacks, were seeking equality and respect from the white majority. How, then—and why—was a magazine such as Southern Living conceived, a publication that so obviously depicted the region as a serene and happy place, where women kept the home and family, and blacks were rarely seen?

One obvious answer, more than forty years since the magazine's launch in 1966, is that Southern Living's founders sought to comfort and reassure the region's white, upper-class elite while reinforcing segregationist attitudes. Business correspondence from the company archives, however, reveals that the concept for the magazine was secondary to the innovative business ideas implemented regarding advertising and circulation issues. Ultimately, the creation of Southern Living saved the Progressive Farmer despite a declining agricultural population, produced growth for the publishing company with little additional risk, and rode the industry trend toward specialized magazines. The ultimate key to success proved to be capitalizing on an affluent, white audience that was desperately trying to hold onto its

Tracy Lauder is an assistant professor of mass communications at Emory & Henry College in southwest Virginia. This article is based on her dissertation, completed at the University of Alabama in 2004.



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