



Arkansas

GROWN™

CONFERENCE & EXPO

Collaboration is the Key to Success!

January 25-27, 2024 | Hot Springs Convention Center





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The Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Arkansas Grown program in partnership with Arkansas agriculture associations and organizations welcomes you to the second Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo! The Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo is open to all parties interested in the Arkansas agriculture industry, the state's largest industry, and focuses on farmers and producers who grow for our local food system. In addition to the sessions, workshops, and trade show, the conference will conclude with the first-ever Arkansas Grown & Arkansas Made Showcase.

The Arkansas Grown & Arkansas Made Showcase begins with an event Saturday morning, open to retailers and wholesale buyers only, providing Arkansas Grown and Arkansas Made members the opportunity to connect one-on-one with potential new customers. That afternoon, the Showcase will open to the public, providing the opportunity to sell directly to consumers.

We would like to extend our thanks to the committee members, vendors, and sponsors that have supported the conference.

We encourage you to use this time to network, connect, and gather valuable information to carry back to your farms.

Share your experience at the Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo using the hashtag #2024ArkansasGrownConference and don't forget to tag @arkansasgrownandmade!



PRE-CONFERENCE EVENTS

Thank You



For hosting the
Pre-Conference Farm Tour
Wednesday, January 24, 2024
1:30 – 3:00 p.m.

and



For hosting the
Welcome Reception and Tour
Wednesday, January 24, 2024
5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

before the kickoff of the Arkansas Grown Conference & Expo.

THURSDAY

Registration Opens 7:00 a.m. in Convention Center Lobby

Horner Hall Opening General Session

8:00 a.m.

Welcome

Wes Ward, Secretary, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

Arkansas Weather Now and How it is Trending Due to Climate Change

John Lewis, Senior Forecaster, National Weather Service

Federal Ag Labor Update

Michael Marsh, President and CEO, National Council of Agricultural Employers

9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Workshops

12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. Lunch Break in Exhibit Hall / Expo

2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Workshops

5:00 p.m.

Hospitality Suites

Embassy Suites Room 904: Arkansas Association of Grape Growers

Embassy Suites Room 928: Arkansas Agritourism Association

7:00 p.m.

Evening Event at Crystal Ridge Distillery

Trolleys run from Embassy Suites and Hotel Hot Springs to event from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

THURSDAY WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Room 102 Arkansas Association of Grape Growers (AAGG)

- 9:00 a.m. AAGG Annual Meeting
Grant Opportunities for Commercial Vineyards and Wineries
- 10:00 a.m. Identification, Mediation, and Prevention of Grapevine Winter Injury in Arkansas
- 11:00 a.m. Disease Management in Grapes
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 2:00 p.m. Costs and Considerations for Establishing a Vineyard and Winery in Arkansas
- 3:00 p.m. Grape Cultivar Recommendations for Arkansas
- 4:00 p.m. Cultivating Customers: How to Grow Your Company Sales and Connections
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Room 104 Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- 9:00 a.m. What's Up with WOTUS? Waters of the United States
- 10:00 a.m. Heir Property in Arkansas
- 11:00 a.m. Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Division
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 2:00 p.m. Conservation Districts
- 3:00 p.m. Grower Panel
- 4:00 p.m. Planting for Pollinators – Go Native, Grow Native
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Room 201 Vegetable Production

- 9:00 a.m. Managing Insect Pests in Vegetables: Which Conventional and Organic Products are the Right Choice for You?
- 10:00 a.m. High Tunnel Vegetable Productions: The Basics
- 11:00 a.m. Introduction to Growing Lettuce in a High Tunnel

THURSDAY WORKSHOP SCHEDULE (continued)

- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
 - 2:00 p.m. Vegetable Disease Management 101
 - 3:00 p.m. Nutsedge Management in Plastic Mulch
 - 4:00 p.m. Cucurbit Trials in Arkansas: Which Varieties are Right for Your Farm?
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Room 203 Food Systems and Safety

- 9:00 a.m. Value-Added Food Business Basics at Home or in a Commercial Kitchen
 - 10:00 a.m. AFIC@MCO: Supporting the Arkansas Food Processing Industry
 - 11:00 a.m. Intro into Spring Creek Food Hub
 - 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
 - 2:00 p.m. USDA GAP Audits (Good Agricultural Practices)
 - 3:00 p.m. The Basics of Food Preservation
 - 4:00 p.m. Food Handlers and Food Safety
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Room 204 Blueberry Production

- Facilitators: Ryan Neal, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension Agent
Clyde Fenton, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension Agent
- 9:00 a.m. Arkansas Blueberry Industry Update
 - 9:30 a.m. Grower Profiles: Matt Varoz, Hatch Farm, LLC; Pat Ford, Renee's Berry Garden
 - 10:15 a.m. Irrigation Strategies for Blueberries
 - 11:00 a.m. Blueberry Diseases
 - 11:45 a.m. Wrap Up Discussion of Industry Needs for Future Meetings

- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 2:00 p.m. Arkansas Apiary Laws and Bee Health
- 3:00 p.m. General Farm Business: Why Install Solar?
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Room 205 General Farm Business

- 9:00 a.m. Arkansas Farm Bureau Support for Specialty Crop Farmers
- 10:00 a.m. Law Enforcement at the Arkansas Department of Agriculture: How We Can Help
- 11:00 a.m. Supporting our Livestock and Poultry Producers
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 2:00 p.m. Business Trends from a Market Manager's Perspective
- 3:00 p.m. Resilient Food System Infrastructure Grant Program: Opportunities for the Arkansas Local Food System
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FRIDAY

Registration Opens at 7:00 a.m. in Convention Center Lobby

Horner Hall General Session

8:00 a.m.

Developing a Culture of Engagement

John Kennedy, Speaker. Author. Strategist., Agritourism Life

The Future of Your Farm

Gary Matteson, SVP Beginning Farmer and Rancher Programs and Outreach,
The Farm Credit Council

Attendees are welcome to remain in Horner Hall at 9:00 a.m. for Matteson's presentation, Growing Cash Flow.

9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Workshops

12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. Lunch Break in Exhibit Hall / Expo

2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Workshops

4:00 p.m.

Hospitality Suites

Embassy Suites Room 928: Arkansas Organic Network Launch

5:00 p.m.

Hospitality Suites

Embassy Suites Room 904: Arkansas Pecan Growers Association

Embassy Suites Room 928: Northwest Arkansas Food Systems Initiative

No Conference Events Planned for Friday Evening

FRIDAY WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Room 102 Arkansas Agritourism Association (ArAA)

- 9:00 a.m. Making a Case for Agritourism
- 10:30 a.m. Agritourism Roundtable Discussion
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 2:00 p.m. It's Not Selling, It's Creating an Opportunity to Buy
- 3:00 p.m. Panel Discussion
- 4:30 p.m. ArAA Membership Meeting
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Room 104 Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- 9:00 a.m. Farm Service Agency Opportunities for Farmers and Ranchers
- 10:00 a.m. Helping People Help the Land
- 11:00 a.m. USDA Rural Development Funding Opportunities for Agriculture Producers
and Rural Communities
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 2:00 p.m. The Importance of Crop Insurance
- 3:00 p.m. Resources for Arkansas Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families
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Room 201 Mid America Strawberry Growers Association

- 9:00 a.m. Marketing Materials
- 9:30 a.m. Spray Programs
- 10:00 a.m. Tip Production / Plant Availability
- 11:15 a.m. Strawberry IPM Guide and Apps
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

FRIDAY WORKSHOP SCHEDULE (cont.)

- 2:00 p.m. Strawberry Plug Production at McNitt Growers
 - 3:15 p.m. Strawberry Disease Management
 - 4:00 p.m. Open Discussion
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Room 203 Food Systems and Safety

- 9:00 a.m. Establishing a Produce Safety Culture for Any Size Produce Farm
 - 10:00 a.m. Food Safety Plans for Farms and Manufacturers
 - 11:00 a.m. Introduction to Arkansas Produce Safety Program and Food Safety Modernization Act
 - 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
 - 2:00 p.m. Small Farm Fruit and Vegetable Washing
 - 3:00 p.m. Review of Considerations and Costs of Value-Added Food Production from Surplus Produce
 - 4:00 p.m. Best Practices for Keeping Microgreens Safe from Cultivation to Consumption
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Room 205 General Farm Business

- 9:00 a.m. Arkansas Farm Bureau Support for Specialty Crop Farmers
 - 10:00 a.m. Customers Over Marketing
 - 11:00 a.m. The Next California Project
 - 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
 - 2:00 p.m. American Farmland Trust
 - 3:00 p.m. Apiary Laws and Bee Health
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SATURDAY



Registration Opens at 7:00 a.m.

Horner Hall

8:00 a.m.

General Session

Miss Arkansas Cori Keller

Managing Stress on the Farm

Jennifer Conner, Arkansas Heart Hospital

Exhibition Center

8:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

12:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Arkansas Grown & Made Showcase

Invitation Only Buyers Event

Open to the Public

SATURDAY WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Room 102 Organic Farming

- 9:00 a.m. Transition to Organic Partnership Project (TOPP) Resource Showcase
- 10:10 a.m. Organic Pest Management Strategies that Work for Open Field Production
- 11:00 a.m. Workshop: Finding Organic Pest Solutions That Work
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 2:00 p.m. Nuts and Bolts of Organic Certification
- 3:00 p.m. Organic Success Stories Panel
- 4:15 p.m. World Café Needs Assessment

SATURDAY WORKSHOP SCHEDULE (continued)

Room 104 Floral and Garden

- 10:00 a.m. Gardening in the Natural State
- 11:00 a.m. Composting
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 2:00 p.m. Pollinator Friendly Gardens
- 4:00 p.m. Apiary Laws and Bee Health
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Room 201 Arkansas Pecan Growers Association (APGA)

- 9:00 a.m. Welcome
- 9:05 a.m. Pecan Varieties
- 10:00 a.m. Tri-County Pecan Team are Boots on the Ground in Arkansas
- 10:30 a.m. Break
- 10:45 a.m. Pecan Research Updates from the Nobel Research Institute
- 11:30 a.m. Natural Resources Conservation Service Program Updates for Pecans
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 1:00 p.m. Test Your Pecan Knowledge!
- 1:45 p.m. Insect Management in Pecans
- 2:30 p.m. Break
- 2:45 p.m. Pecan Growers' Forum
- 3:15 p.m. Arkansas Pecan Growers Association Business Meeting
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Room 203 Tree Fruits

- 9:00 a.m. What are You Thinking? Considerations for New Orchards
- 10:00 a.m. Building a Spray Program for Peaches in Arkansas
- 11:00 a.m. Orchard Floor Weed Management
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 2:00 p.m. Roundtable Discussion
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Room 205 General Farm Business

- 9:00 a.m. Coffee Talk: Farmer Health
- 10:00 a.m. Selecting the Right High Tunnel – Preparation, Installation, and Management
- 11:00 a.m. Beginning Farmer Program at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 2:00 p.m. Efficiency with Equipment
- 3:00 p.m. Vertical Farming
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Room 207 Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association (ABGA)

- 9:00 a.m. Association Member Meeting
- 9:30 a.m. Basics of Blackberry Production
- 10:00 a.m. Variety Recommendations and New Releases
Q & A begins at 10:30 a.m.
- 11:00 a.m. Overview of Blackberry Diseases
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 2:00 p.m. Farm Profile: Andre “Farmer Dre” Gradinariu, Gardeners Orchard and Bakery
- 3:00 p.m. Marketing and Agritourism for Berries
- 4:00 p.m. Recap and Reminders for 2024 Season

SATURDAY WORKSHOP SCHEDULE (continued)

Room 208 Arkansas Farmers Market Association (AFMA)

- 9:00 a.m. Introduction
- 9:10 a.m. Ready. Start. Grow! Resources for your Small Business
- 9:30 a.m. Food Freedom in Farmers Markets
- 10:00 a.m. Promoting Your Market *and*
Market Growth, How to Cultivate A Stronger Customer Base
- 11:00 a.m. Increasing Food Access by Accepting SNAP/EBT at your Farm or
Farmers Market with MarketLink
- 11:30 a.m. Modern Online Farmers Market Management
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 2:00 a.m.. Updates from the Arkansas Department of Agriculture
- 2:15 p.m. Farmers Market Panel
- 3:45 p.m. American Farmland Trust
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Room 209 Food Systems and Safety

- 9:00 a.m. Little Rock Growers: A Community of Food Producers Supporting Community Change
- 10:00 a.m. The Building an Arkansas Agricultural Network Development
(BAAND) Project: Let's BAAND together, a facilitated session to
identify what you need to be a community food producer
- 11:00 a.m. Top Three Sales Strategies for Wholesale
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO
- 2:00 p.m. Understanding Living Soils
- 3:00 p.m. Homesteading in Arkansas
- 4:00 p.m. What to Expect During a Produce Safety Inspection - Arkansas Produce Safety Program
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Room 102 Arkansas Association of Grape Growers (AAGG)

- 9:00 a.m. AAGG Annual Meeting**
Grant Opportunities for Commercial Vineyards and Wineries
 Doug Meyer, Owner, Rusty Tractor Vineyard
- 10:00 a.m. Identification, Mediation, and Prevention of Grapevine Winter Injury in Arkansas**
 Amanda McWhirt, Extension Specialist, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension
 Aaron Cato, Extension Specialist, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension
- 11:00 a.m. Disease Management in Grapes**
 Phillip Brannen, Professor and Extension Fruit Pathologist, University of Georgia
- Review of the state of the art in disease management of grapes.
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO**
- 2:00 p.m. Costs and Considerations for Establishing a Vineyard and Winery in Arkansas**
 Doug Hausler, Owner, Keels Creek Winery and Vineyard
- The average vineyard size in the US is between 5 and 10 acres, which can produce between 10 and 40 tons of grapes (600 and 1500 gallons of wine). Before starting your first planting of vines or making your first commercial quantity of wine, a good business plan would require a good faith effort in estimating the costs of your "adventure". The startup of Keels Creek Winery and Vineyard will serve as a template for that estimation.
- 3:00 p.m. Grape Cultivar Recommendations for Arkansas**
 Renee Threlfall, Research Scientist, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension
- Discuss table, juice, and wine grape cultivars recommended for Arkansas.
- 4:00 p.m. Cultivating Customers: How to Grow Your Company Sales and Connections**
 Katherine Daniels, Business Consultant & Entrepreneur, KD Consulting
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Room 104 **Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts (AACD)**
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

9:00 a.m. **What's Up with WOTUS? Waters of the United States**

Brigit Rollins, Staff Attorney, National Agricultural Law Center

This session will examine the recent changes to the definition of WOTUS, and what those changes mean for Arkansas.

10:00 a.m. **Heir Property in Arkansas**

Rusty Rumley, Senior Staff Attorney, National Agricultural Law Center

This session will cover intestate succession and practical solutions dealing with heirs' property situations in Arkansas.

11:00 a.m. **Arkansas Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Division**

Christy Steward, Environmental Program Coordinator, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

In this presentation, learn of opportunities offered at the state level for financial tools that support efficiently and responsibly managing and protecting our water and land resources for sustainability, health, safety, and economic benefit.

12:00 p.m. **LUNCH & EXPO**

2:00 p.m. **Conservation Districts**

Debbie Moreland, Program Administrator, Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts

This presentation will explain conservation districts and how they serve farmers and ranchers across the state.

3:00 p.m. **Grower Panel**

Butch Eggers, Wye Mountain Flowers & Berries
 James Meeks, Triple M Farm
 Debbie Moreland, Program Administrator, AACD

Eggers and Meeks have a wide range of experiences and will provide firsthand commentary on specialty crop farming. Eggers retired from the Pulaski County Conservation District board but continues to be involved. Meeks continues to farm in Ashley County and remains on that conservation district board.

4:00 p.m. Planting for Pollinators – Go Native, Grow Native
Ryan Parker, Arkansas State Coordinator, Quail Forever

Join Quail Forever staff in a presentation and discussion on creating native habitat for monarch butterflies, native bees, and other pollinators and wildlife in Arkansas. We will dive into common native pollinators, the importance of native wildflower diversity, how to grow these habitats, and available cost-share programs to help make pollinator habitat a reality.

Room 201 Vegetable Production

9:00 a.m. Managing Insect Pests in Vegetables: Which Conventional and Organic Products are the Right Choice for You?
Aaron Cato, Extension Specialist, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

10:00 a.m. High Tunnel Vegetable Productions: The Basics
Taunya Ernst, High Tunnel and Urban Ag Instructor, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Considering adding a high tunnel on your farm? High Tunnel and Urban Agriculture Educator Taunya Ernst will cover all you need to know about using a high tunnel to grow vegetables in Arkansas and the Midsouth region.

11:00 a.m. Introduction to Growing Lettuce in a High Tunnel
Taunya Ernst, High Tunnel and Urban Ag Instructor, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Are you currently using your tunnel for lettuce or thinking of adding some production? This talk will cover all aspects of growing lettuce in a high tunnel including choosing the right varieties, ensuring you have the fertility program, and some of the pests you may expect to encounter.

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. Vegetable Disease Management 101
Rebecca A. Melanson, Associate Extension Professor and Extension Specialist, Mississippi State University

Revisit the basics of disease management and learn how to think like a plant pathologist to improve disease management in commercial vegetable production. This presentation will highlight disease management methods that can be used in an integrated pest management (IPM) program for both conventional and organic commercial vegetable production to reduce and manage diseases! A new mobile app and pest management resource for commercial vegetable production, MyIPM for Vegetables, will also be showcased. The presentation will explore MyIPM for Vegetables content and provide useful tips for navigating through the app.

Room 201 Vegetable Production (cont.)

3:00 p.m. Nutsedge Management in Plastic Mulch

Hannah Wright Smith, Weed Specialist, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Sedges are without a doubt the most problematic pest of vegetables grown on plastic. This talk will cover strategies you can employ to prevent issues with these weeds, and how to use some herbicide options that are available.

4:00 p.m. Cucurbit Trials in Arkansas: Which Varieties are Right for Your Farm?

Matt Bertucci, Assistant Professor, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension
Rachel Woodey-Pumford
Drew Kirkpatrick

This talk will cover the results from Dr. Matt Bertucci's cucurbit variety trials here in Arkansas, which include cantaloupes, pumpkins, watermelons, and more.

Room 203 Food Systems and Safety

9:00 a.m. Value-Added Food Business Basics at Home or in a Commercial Kitchen

David Hill, Program Associate, Food Systems and Food Safety, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Basic requirements for creating a food business in a commercial space or from your home.

10:00 a.m. AFIC@MCO: Supporting the Arkansas Food Processing Industry

Darryl Holliday, Executive Director, Arkansas Food Innovation Center

Join us for an insightful presentation that delves into the pivotal role of food processing in shaping the future of the Arkansas food industry. Our discussion will cover a range of topics, exploring the significance of food trends, adaptability, and the resources of the Market Center of the Ozarks.

11:00 a.m. Intro into Spring Creek Food Hub

Anthony Mirisciotta, Executive Director, Spring Creek Food Hub

Get to know Spring Creek Food Hub.

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

- 2:00 p.m. USDA GAP Audits (Good Agricultural Practices)**
Zac Wellman, Program Manager, Arkansas Department of Agriculture
- Overview of Federal/State Inspection Service.
- 3:00 p.m. The Basics of Food Preservation**
Amber Hairston, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension Agent
- Food Safety and Basics of Food Preservation.
- 4:00 p.m. Food Handlers and Food Safety**
Valerie Turner, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension Agent
Julie Goings, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension Agent
- Learn how to handle food properly to prevent foodborne illnesses and protect your clientele.
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Room 204 Blueberry Production

Facilitators: Ryan Neal, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension Agent
Clyde Fenton, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension Agent

- 9:00 a.m. Arkansas Blueberry Industry Update**
Clyde Fenton, Grower, UA System Division of Agriculture, Searcy County

History of Arkansas blueberry industry with a snapshot of the present and vision for the future.

- 9:30 a.m. Grower Profiles: Buying an Established Farm**
Matt Varoz, Hatch Farm, LLC

Farm profile. Our experience with buying and operating an older blueberry farm. The technology we have found to stay chemical free. Results of rejuvenating older plantings as well as transplanting established bushes.

Personal Experience with Blueberry Operation
Pat Ford, Renee's Berry Garden

Grower's presentation on personal experience with his blueberry operation.

- 10:15 a.m. Irrigation Strategies for Blueberries**
Jay Robbins, Irrigation Associate, Irrigation Mart

Practical approaches to blueberry irrigation.

Room 204 Blueberry Production (cont.)

11:00 a.m. Blueberry Diseases

Jonathan Oliver, Plant Pathology, University of Georgia

Presentation on common blueberry diseases.

11:45 a.m. Wrap Up Discussion of Industry Needs for Future Meetings

Ryan Neal, Grower, UA System Division of Agriculture, Benton County

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. Arkansas Apiary Laws and Bee Health

John Martin, Apiary Inspector, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

Jacob Bates, Apiary Inspector, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

The presentation will cover Arkansas state apiary regulations and what to expect when inspectors come to your bee yard.

3:00 p.m. General Farm Business: Why Install Solar?

Chris Kane, Vice President of Business Development, Delta Solar

There are a variety of reasons why businesses want to go solar, but the most common are environmental benefits and cost savings. Many people are aware that solar is an excellent efficiency upgrade and are eager to reduce their carbon footprint while also increasing the value of their business. Whether you're going solar for economic, environmental, or personal reasons, this list of solar power benefits has something for everyone.

Room 205 General Farm Business

9:00 a.m. Arkansas Farm Bureau Support for Specialty Crop Farmers

John McMinn, Director, Commodity Activities & Economics, Arkansas Farm Bureau

10:00 a.m. Law Enforcement at the Arkansas Department of Agriculture: How We Can Help

Billy Black, Chief Law Enforcement Officer, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

11:00 a.m. Supporting our Livestock and Poultry Producers

Patrick Fisk, Director, Livestock & Poultry Division, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

Cheri Ellis, Egg & Poultry Division Manager, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. Business Trends from a Market Manager's Perspective
Roby Brock, CEO, Talk Business & Politics; Founder, Market at Chenal

Roby Brock shares global and national trends and the impact they have on our state.

**3:00 p.m. Resilient Food System Infrastructure Grant Program:
Opportunities for the Arkansas Local Food System**
Karen Reynolds, Arkansas Department of Agriculture
Amanda Philyaw Perez, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension
Angela Gardner, Arkansas Small Business & Technology Development Center
Brenda Williams, Communities Unlimited

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is receiving \$5.6 million from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to improve food supply chain operations and strengthen local food systems throughout the state. Eligible entities include agricultural producers, nonprofit organizations, for-profit entities, local governments, tribal governments, and institutions. This presentation discusses the state plan and resources available to applicants.

FRIDAY

Room 102 Arkansas Agritourism Association (ArAA)

9:00 a.m. Making a Case for Agritourism
John Kennedy, Agritourism Life

10:30 a.m. Agritourism Roundtable Discussion
John Kennedy, Agritourism Life

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. It's Not Selling, It's Creating an Opportunity to Buy
John Kennedy, Agritourism Life

3:00 p.m. Panel Discussion
John Kennedy, Agritourism Life
Panel: Culinary, Farm Stay, Agri-tainment, Markets

4:30 p.m. ArAA Membership Meeting

**Room 104 Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts (AACD)
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**

9:00 a.m. Farm Service Agency Opportunities for Farmers and Ranchers
Doris Washington, State Executive Director, USDA Farm Service Agency

This presentation will provide information about Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs and loans and how to get started working with FSA.

10:00 a.m. Helping People Help the Land
Katy Brantley, State Urban Conservationist, NRCS
Andres Aponte, District Conservationist

This presentation will explain how to get started working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and review multiple programs and opportunities in Arkansas.

11:00 a.m. USDA Rural Development Funding Opportunities for Agriculture Producers and Rural Communities
Tim Smith, Rural Business Director, USDA Rural Development
Steve Mosher, Program Coordinator, USDA Rural Development

This presentation will share various funding opportunities available through USDA Rural Development for agricultural producers and rural communities.

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. The Importance of Crop Insurance
SeRena M. Hill, Navigator Project Director, UA System Division of Agriculture,
Southern Risk Management Education Center

The Crop Insurance Navigator Program works to enhance the understanding and use of federal crop insurance by producers historically underserved by the crop insurance sector.

3:00 p.m. Resources for Arkansas Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families
Jody Bergstrom, Chief Executive Officer, Camp Alliance

This presentation will share resources for Arkansas service members, veterans, and their families, such as CampConnect, a platform used to share career opportunities and available federal and state resources.

Room 201 Mid America Strawberry Growers Association

9:00 a.m. Marketing Materials

Lizzy Hererra, Program Manager, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

9:30 a.m. Spray Programs

Aaron Cato, Extension Specialist, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

10:00 a.m. Tip Production / Plant Availability

Jim Goodson, Balamore Farms, LLC

11:15 a.m. Strawberry IPM Guide and Apps

Rebecca Melanson, Associate Extension Professor, Mississippi State University

Overview of the IPM guide and apps to assist growers.

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. Strawberry Plug Production at McNitt Growers

Bill McNitt, McNitt Growers

After getting out of the US Air Force in 1994, McNitt came home and joined the family farm. In 1999, McNitt graduated from Southern Illinois University Carbondale with a bachelor's degree in plant and soil science. McNitt is the head grower at McNitt Growers. Since the mid 2000's, McNitt Growers has been producing strawberry plug plants for growers in multiple states.

3:15 p.m. Strawberry Disease Management

Phil Brannen, Professor and Extension Fruit Pathologist, University of Georgia

Basics of disease ID and disease management for plasticulture strawberry production.

4:00 p.m. Open Discussion

Room 203 Food Systems and Safety

9:00 a.m. Establishing a Produce Safety Culture for Any Size Produce Farm

Amanda Philyaw Perez, Extension Specialist, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Come learn about the basics of produce safety practices, what you need to do to sell to different types of markets, audits versus inspections, and how to grow your food safety culture as you grow your farm.

10:00 a.m. Food Safety Plans for Farms

Danielle Dozier, GSS Group

In this session, Danielle Dozier will discuss the bones of preparing a food safety plan, common questions, and where to find resources.

11:00 a.m. Introduction to Arkansas Produce Safety Program & Food Safety Modernization Act

Greg Alexander, Produce Safety Program Manager, Arkansas Department of Agriculture
Mark Stoll, Director, Regulatory Services Section, Arkansas Department of Agriculture
Tammy Winsor, Produce Safety Inspector, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

This session is an introduction to the Arkansas Produce Safety Program/Food Safety Modernization Act.

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. Small Farm Fruit and Vegetable Washing

Sarah Bakker, Program Associate, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

This session is geared towards small-scale farmers, backyard gardeners, and anyone interested in improving their fruit and vegetable washing and handling practices. After attending, participants should have a better idea of why produce safety is important on smaller operations, have a better understanding of what are generally considered to be “best practices” when washing and packing produce, and will be shown a very basic and affordable wash/pack setup that even backyard gardeners can use to mitigate contamination risks in their final products.

3:00 p.m. Review of Considerations & Costs of Value-Added Food Production from Surplus Produce
Renee Threlfall, Research Scientist, UA System Division of Agriculture
Andrea Myers, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

4:00 p.m. Best Practices for Keeping Microgreens Safe from Cultivation to Consumption
Kristen Gibson, Professor, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Microgreens are the immature seedlings of edible herbs and vegetables. Compared to the mature plants they grow into, microgreens have a ton of nutrients in a tiny package. However, similar to other fresh produce commonly eaten raw, there are potential food safety risks if not cultivated, harvested, and handled using best practices. This presentation will discuss some of the risk factors related to the production and consumption of microgreens and best practices to mitigate these risks.

Room 205 General Farm Business

9:00 a.m. Arkansas Farm Bureau Support for Specialty Crop Farmers
John McMinn, Director, Commodity Activities & Economics, Arkansas Farm Bureau

10:00 a.m. Customers Over Marketing
Katherine Daniels, Business Consultant & Entrepreneur, KD Consulting

How to cultivate customer relations not marketing mayhem.

11:00 a.m. The Next California Project
Trey Malone, Assistant Professor, UA System Division of Agriculture

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. American Farmland Trust: Our Efforts to Protect Farmland, Promote Sound Farming Practices, and Keep Farmers on the Land
John Larson, Senior Vice President, American Farmland Trust

3:00 p.m. Arkansas Apiary Laws and Bee Health
John Martin, Inspector, Arkansas Department of Agriculture
Jacob Bates, Inspector, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

The presentation will cover Arkansas state apiary regulations and what to expect when inspectors come to your bee yard.

Room 102 Organic Farming

9:00 a.m. Transition to Organic Partnership Project (TOPP) Resource Showcase

Welcome to the Arkansas Grown Organic Track. What's going on around the state? This resource showcase briefly highlights farmer support opportunities from many different organizations around the state.

Heather Friedrich, Assistant Director at the Center for Arkansas Farms and Food
Henry English, Director, Small Farm Program, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
Karen Lee, Extension Program Specialist, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
Robyn Metzger, Program Specialist, National Center for Appropriate Technology
Kesha Cobb, USDA certified Urban Farmer, The Sustainability Project

10:10 a.m. Organic Pest Management Strategies that Work for Open Field Production

Ayanava Majumdar, Auburn University

Pest management is one of the most challenging aspects for organic growers in our region. Building from his research experience and time in extension, Dr. Ayanava Majumdar will discuss organic approved pest management practices that actually work.

11:00 a.m. Workshop: Finding Organic Pest Solutions That Work

Riley Arnold, Grower, Organic Crop Advisor and Teacher
Joe Hannan, Instructor, Center for Arkansas Farms and Food

This discussion-based session focuses on solving the biggest insect, disease, and weed challenges on your farm using organic control methods. Share your successes and challenges with your peers. Refine your knowledge, teach others, or learn something completely new.

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. Nuts and Bolts of Organic Certification

Jeff Stearns, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture
Mark Cain, Dripping Springs

How do you actually get certified organic? Jeff Stearns, an experienced inspector from Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, will walk you through best practices for ensuring a smooth inspection. Joining him is Mark Cain of Drippings Springs, a long time certified organic specialty farmer, who will walk you through how he keeps his organic records and what he does to prepare for an inspection.

3:00 p.m. Organic Success Stories Panel
Shawn Peebles, Peebles Organic
Mark Cain, Dripping Springs Garden
Kyle Manning, Fat Rabbit Farms, and Becca Manning

Hear from three Arkansas farms who are successfully growing and selling certified organic or certified naturally grown specialty crops. Each panelist will discuss what they are growing, how they made the switch, and how they are addressing some of their biggest challenges.

4:15 p.m. World Café Needs Assessment

Heather Friedrich, Assistant Director at the Center for Arkansas Farms and Food
Riley Arnold, Grower, Organic Crop Advisor and Teacher
Joe Hannan, Instructor, Center for Arkansas Farms and Food

Room 104 Floral and Garden

10:00 a.m. Gardening in the Natural State
Janet Carson, In the Garden: Plan It Janet

Tips for gardening success, and how to avoid pitfalls while gardening in Arkansas.

11:00 a.m. Composting
Chris Wyman, in partnership with Dunbar Gardens

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. Pollinator Friendly Gardens
Janet Carson, In the Garden: Plan It Janet

4:00 p.m. Arkansas Apiary Laws and Bee Health
John Martin, Inspector, Arkansas Department of Agriculture
Jacob Bates, Inspector, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

This session will cover Arkansas state apiary regulations and what we do when we come to your bee yard.

Room 201 Arkansas Pecan Growers Association (APGA)

9:00 a.m. Welcome

John Bruhl, Vice President/Treasurer, Arkansas Pecan Growers Association
Jackie Lee, Director, Fruit Research Station, UA System Division of Agriculture

9:05 a.m. Pecan Varieties

Michael Polozola, Fruit and Nut Specialist, Louisiana State University

This presentation will cover pecan varieties that have a potential fit in Arkansas.

10:00 a.m. Tri-County Pecan Team are Boots on the Ground in Arkansas

Jacob Holloway, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension, Prairie County
Sherri Sanders, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension, White County
Kyle Sanders, UA System Division of Agriculture Extension, Lonoke County

This presentation will cover a multi-county demonstration trial that provides education for pecan growers relating to integrated pest management techniques and monitoring.

10:30 a.m. BREAK

10:45 a.m. Pecan Research Updates from the Noble Research Institute

Charlie Graham, Senior Pecan Specialist, Noble Research Institute

This presentation will cover pecan research projects conducted by research scientists from the Noble Research Institute.

11:30 a.m. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Program Updates for Pecans

Katy Brantley, State Urban Conservationist, USDA NRCS Arkansas

This presentation will address NRCS programs and services available to pecan growers.

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

1:00 p.m. Test Your Pecan Knowledge!

Rebecca Melanson, Associate Extension Professor, Mississippi State University

Commercial pecan producers face numerous horticulture, disease, insect, and weed problems each year and must make informed decisions to properly manage these problems to produce a successful crop. Test your knowledge of these problems as well as your knowledge of pecans, in general, in this interactive presentation, and become better prepared to identify and handle problems that develop.

1:45 p.m. Insect Management in Pecans

Jackie Lee, Director, Fruit Research Station, UA System Division of Agriculture

This presentation will cover integrated approaches to insect management in pecans including how to monitor for pests and how to time pesticide applications.

2:30 p.m. BREAK

2:45 p.m. Pecan Growers' Forum

John Bruhl, Pecan Grower

Greg Rusher, Pecan Grower

Round table discussion of grower practices. This will include an overview of production at the Rusher Farm and Bruhl Farm. The speakers will entertain questions and have open discussion on any topic fellow growers would like to address.

3:15 p.m. Arkansas Pecan Growers Association Business Meeting

Jackie Lee, President, Arkansas Pecan Growers Association

John Bruhl, Vice President/Treasurer, Arkansas Pecan Growers Association

Greg Rusher, Secretary, Arkansas Pecan Growers Association

This session is a short business meeting to discuss items related to the Arkansas Pecan Growers Association.

Room 203 Tree Fruits

9:00 a.m. What are You Thinking? Considerations for New Orchards

Curt Tom, Professor, UA System Division of Agriculture

Factors to consider when planting a new apple, peach, or other tree fruit orchard in Arkansas.

10:00 a.m. Building a Spray Program for Peaches in Arkansas

Aaron Cato, Extension Specialist, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

11:00 a.m. Orchard Floor Weed Management

Hannah Wright-Smith, Weed Specialist, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. Roundtable Discussion

Room 205 **General Farm Business**

9:00 a.m. Coffee Talk: Farmer Health

Rachel Hale, MA, Instructor, College of Public Health, University of Arkansas
for Medical Sciences (UAMS)

Kelly Dundon, LMSW, Licensed Psychotherapist, Chenal Family Therapy Consultant,
Agricultural Marketing Resource Center

Come enjoy a cup of coffee and a conversation about farmer health in Arkansas.

10:00 a.m. Selecting the Right High Tunnel – Preparation, Installation, and Management

Sean Pessarra, The Mindful Farmer

This session will dive into the topic of high tunnels and greenhouses, specifically how to select the style that works best for your enterprise and best practices regarding site preparation, installation, and management.

11:00 a.m. Beginning Farmer Program at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Karen Lee, Extension Program Specialist, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Are you interested in farming, but do not know where to start? Do you have a small farm and want to know more about improving your operation? Learn more about the opportunities for beginning and small farming operations.

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. Efficiency with Equipment

Fred Ibbotson, River Valley Tractor

3:00 p.m. Vertical Farming

Luigi Campos, Vice President, 180 Pipe

Arturo Quintero Ferrer, Assistant Professor, University of Arkansas Monticello

Room 207 Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association (ABGA)

9:00 a.m. Association Member Meeting

9:30 a.m. Basics of Blackberry Production

Amanda McWhirt, Extension Specialist, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

10:00 a.m. Variety Recommendations and New Releases

Carmen Johns, Assistant Fruit Breeder, UA System Division of Agriculture

Q & A begins at 10:30 a.m.

Updates from the University of Arkansas Blackberry Breeding Program.

11:00 a.m. Overview of Blackberry Diseases

Johnathan Oliver, Plant Pathology, University of Georgia

Overview of diseases common in the Southeast on blackberries and their management.

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. Farm Profile

Andre "Farmer Dre" Gradinariu, Gardeners Orchard and Bakery

"Farmer Dre" is a member of the Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association and a YouTube star. Join us to see behind the scenes of his family farm, Gardeners Orchard and Bakery, located in Southwest Missouri. Andre is the production manager at Gardener's Orchard and has become the online face of the family farm. He documents farm operations and activities on social media and YouTube.

3:00 p.m. Marketing and Agritourism for Berries

Dennis McGarrah, Jr., Rivercrest Orchard

Dennis McGarrah Jr. "Buddy" and his wife run Rivercrest Orchard, an agritourism operation in Fayetteville, Arkansas. They have developed various markets for their strawberries and blackberries. Dennis will share insights from their farm on marketing and agritourism.

4:00 p.m. Recap and Reminders for 2024 Season

Room 208 Arkansas Farmers Market Association (AFMA)

9:00 a.m. Introduction

Katrina Betancourt, Arkansas Center for Obesity Prevention (ArCOP) President

This session will introduce the ArCOP organization and share how the Arkansas Farmers Market Association can help the community, markets, managers, farmers, and vendors.

9:10 a.m. Ready. Start. Grow! Resources for your Small Business

Angela Gardner, Arkansas Small Business & Technology Development Center

Launch and grow your business with confidence through the Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center. In this seminar, you'll learn about our in-house resources, technical assistance services, and local programs available to support entrepreneurs in the state. Position yourself for success in 2024.

9:30 a.m. Food Freedom in Farmers Markets

Jeff Jackson, Arkansas Department of Health

This session will provide a brief history of home-based food production in Arkansas, the foods that are allowed to be sold, foods that are still prohibited, minimum labeling requirements, how these products can be marketed, and food safety considerations when operating a home-based food business.

10:00 a.m. Promoting Your Market

Steve Powell, Arkansas Center for Obesity Prevention (ArCOP)

10:15 a.m. Market Growth, How to Cultivate A Stronger Customer Base

Katherine Daniels, Business Consultant & Entrepreneur, KD Consulting

Customers = Cash. Learn key areas to focus on to cultivate and connect with more customers.

11:00 a.m. Increasing Food Access by Accepting SNAP/EBT at your Farm or Farmers Market with MarketLink

Lisa Roach, Regional Representative, MarketLink

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – an income-based federal nutrition benefit program, is one of the largest and most successful food assistance programs that many farmers and farmers markets qualify to accept. Facilitated by one of our SNAP/EBT specialists, this presentation will introduce direct marketing farmers and farmers markets to the MarketLink grant program and cover the basic steps of becoming a SNAP Authorized Retailer, cover what is provided through the MarketLink grant for eligible farmers and farmers markets, including: free point-of-sale (POS) equipment, one-year free TotiPay Go subscription with the possibility of additional year(s) extension, and technical assistance, and provide a brief overview of additional MarketLink projects, including SNAP Online and eWIC/FMNP/incentives.

11:30 a.m. Modern Online Farmers Market Management

Adam Stokes, Marketspread

Presentation covering this platform and tools for managing every aspect of a farmers market from booking to receiving payments.

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. Updates from the Arkansas Department of Agriculture

Arkansas Grown and Arkansas Made Team, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

2:15 p.m. Farmers Market Panel

Jeff Quick, Food Bank of North Central Arkansas / Mt. Home Farmers Market

Jeremy Adams, Arkansas Center for Obesity Prevention (ArCOP)

Kayla Lindsey, Fayetteville Farmers Market

Tedra Duck, Hot Springs Farmers Market

Mark Nelson, Oak Forest Community Garden

There will be a short overview of the Double Up Food Bucks Program and the impact it has made at farmers markets in Arkansas.

3:45 p.m. American Farmland Trust

John Larson, Senior Vice President, American Farmland Trust

Room 209 Food Systems and Safety

9:00 a.m. Little Rock Growers: A Community of Food Producers Supporting Community Change

Jimmy Parks, Anna Sawyer, Lauren Anderson, Dena Patterson, Rachel Partridge
Urban Patchwork

10:00 a.m. The Building an Arkansas Agricultural Network Development (BAAND) Project

Amanda Philyaw Perez, Associate Professor, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Hunter Goodman, Assistant Professor, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Let's BAAND Together, a facilitated conversation to identify emerging values, practices, and resource needs for community food producers whether you identify as a backyard gardener, homesteader, sustainable or regenerative agriculture producer, master gardener, naturalist, beginning farmer, market gardener, food preservationist, prepper, permaculture food producer, community garden organizer, urban ag grower, farm-to-school garden coordinator, or have some other new sector of agricultural production. This session is a space to share what you are doing, how you would like to connect with other like-minded food producers, and to share what resources you need to be successful.

11:00 a.m. Top Three Sales Strategies for Wholesale

Kim Bryden, CEO & Founder, Cureate

Cureate CEO & Founder, Kim Bryden, shares best practices for landing and maintaining wholesale accounts in retail and foodservice. This session will be a discussion with active Q&A. If you run a farm or value-added product business and are excited to learn more about sales, this session is for you.

12:00 p.m. LUNCH & EXPO

2:00 p.m. Understanding Living Soils

Adam Chartrand, Man of the Red Earth

This session is a 30-minute lecture on living soil and the soil food web, with a 15-minute Q&A following.

3:00 p.m. Homesteading in Arkansas

Britt Talent, Organizer, Arkansas Homesteading Conference

This session is an overview of the homesteading movement in Arkansas.

4:00 p.m.

What to Expect During a Produce Safety Inspection, Arkansas Produce Safety Program

Greg Alexander, Produce Safety Program Manager, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

Mark Stoll, Director, Regulatory Services Section, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

Lowell French, Produce Safety Inspector, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

THURSDAY



Welcome

Wes Ward

Secretary of Agriculture, State of Arkansas

Wes Ward is serving as the 3rd Secretary of Agriculture for the State of Arkansas. He was first appointed to the position in 2015 by Governor Asa Hutchinson and reappointed in 2023 by Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders. He also serves as the Vice President for the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA).

Ward is from the small town of Lake City in Northeast Arkansas and is a graduate of Riverside High School. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Business with an emphasis in Agricultural Finance from Arkansas State University. Ward has also earned a law degree (JD), a Master of Laws degree (LL.M.) in Agricultural and Food Law, and a Master of Science degree in Agricultural Economics from the University of Arkansas.

Ward has been serving in the United States Marine Corps for over 23 years and has completed deployments and exercises in Afghanistan, Jordan, and Japan. He is currently serving in the Marine Corps Reserves as a Detachment Commander with the 1st Civil Affairs Group in Camp Pendleton, California.



Arkansas Weather Now and How it is Trending Due to Climate Change

John Lewis

Senior Forecaster, National Weather Service

John Lewis, Senior Forecaster for the National Weather Service, talks about the changing weather patterns and the impact it has on agriculture in Arkansas. Lewis will take a look at our current drought situation, and how it may play out in the coming months. Lewis will then focus on climate change: what it is, and how it is affecting our weather.

Lewis began his career in the late 1980s as a television meteorologist in Sioux City, Iowa. After a few years, he joined the National Weather Service in Charleston, West Virginia. In that part of the country, it rains and snows, but severe storms are rare. So, in 1994, John came to Arkansas and has been here ever since. He is currently a Senior Forecaster, is the office webmaster, and has given numerous talks about the weather to schools, civic groups, and the agricultural community. Away from the office, John likes to cook and run with his wife of 28 years.



Federal Ag Labor Update

Michael Marsh

President and Chief Executive Officer,
National Council of Agricultural Employers

During this session, attendees will have an opportunity to hear the latest news and hot topics from the federal perspective on one of agricultural employers' biggest threats to their economic sustainability: labor cost and availability. Federal legislation, regulation, and litigation against some of those onerous federal regulations will be discussed.

Michael Marsh earned bachelor's degrees in history and accounting from the University of Wyoming where he also studied law. He is a certified public accountant. Although Marsh started his career in public accounting in Casper, Wyoming, working for a CPA firm that had many farm and ranch clients, his career changed dramatically when he began to focus in the areas of forensic accounting and fraud investigation. In fact, it was a fraud he uncovered at the National Potato Promotion Board in Denver that ended up tying him inextricably to agriculture. He was subsequently hired to be the Director of Finance for the Almond Board of California and later became the CEO of the largest dairy producer trade association in the United States at Western United Dairymen in Modesto. After consulting for a few years in the areas of litigation support and complex financial transactions in Federal District Court, Marsh returned to his true passion advocating on behalf of America's farmers and ranchers at National Council of Agricultural Employers.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

FRIDAY



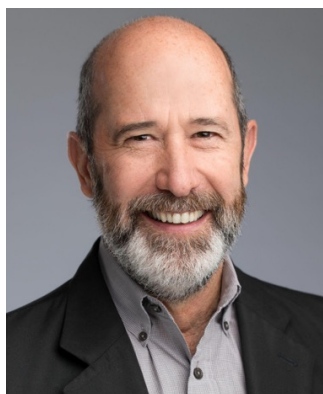
Developing a Culture of Engagement

John Kennedy

Speaker. Author. Strategist.
Agritourism Life

Over the last 25 years, John Kennedy has presented to nearly 500,000 audience members worldwide delivering a dramatic and sustainable impact on scores of companies and associations within the green and agritourism industries. His extensive client list both inside and outside the green industry include Pick Seed Canada, Everde Growers, The Garden Center Group, AmericanHort, Maryland Wine Association, Cape May Brewing Company, Willoway Nurseries, Marriott Hotels, The Baltimore Ravens, Canada Bread, Bermuda Tourism, and over 100 state associations, landscapers, growers, farms, nurseries, and garden centers throughout North America.

Kennedy specializes in strategic planning, culture creation, on-boarding/retention processes; videos, leadership development; teamwork, and accelerating sales within the horticulture and agritourism industry. He and his wife, Souny, have created a customized intranet platform for the green industry as well. Visit www.yourgrouppspace.com for a sample site.



The Future of Your Farm

Gary Matteson

Senior Vice President Beginning Farmer Programs and Outreach,
The Farm Credit Council

Gary Matteson works for Farm Credit's trade association in Washington, DC as Senior Vice President, Beginning Farmer Programs and Outreach. This includes policy work on local foods, sustainable agriculture, and direct-to-consumer agriculture.

He is an advocate for young, beginning, small, and minority farmer outreach programs. This includes work on emerging opportunities in local foods, direct-to-consumer agriculture, and generational transition of farm businesses. He has researched, designed curricula, and taught financial and business planning skills for more than fifteen years to thousands of beginning farmers in conferences, seminars, webinars, and college classrooms. Matteson specializes in making basic business concepts approachable and relevant to beginning farmers.

For thirty years Matteson was a small farmer raising greenhouse wholesale cut flowers marketed in the Northeast and beef cattle for local sales. He has served on numerous boards of directors including Farm Credit, Farmer Veteran Coalition, Farmers Market Coalition, Native Agriculture Financial Services, and many other non-profits.



Addressing the Needs of Rural Arkansas: The Importance of CPR and Local Wellness Initiatives to Improve Health

Jennifer Conner

American Heart Association

The health and wellbeing of all Arkansans, especially those living in rural areas, is of utmost importance. Emergency response planning, CPR knowledge and skills, and other local wellness initiatives are critical in ensuring the best quality of life and place for residents. In this presentation, we will share how the American Heart Association is addressing current health needs by collaborating with local organizations and local industries to increase CPR awareness, strengthen cardiac emergency response planning, and implement local wellness programs aimed at reducing known health risk factors and access to care barriers. We will also demonstrate the basics of Hands-Only CPR and offer the opportunity to practice Hands-Only CPR skills throughout the conference.

Dr. Conner has over 25 years of experience bringing together people and organizations to achieve a better quality of life and quality of place in rural communities. She has served as a subject matter expert for rural health and chronic disease prevention and was a founding board member of the Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention and the Rural Health Association of Arkansas. Dr. Conner currently serves as the Vice President for Rural Health for the SouthWest Region of the American Heart Association. She also serves as a Stakeholder Advisory Committee member for the Arkansas Community Health Workers Association and a board member for the Rural Health Information Hub. Prior to joining the American Heart Association, Dr. Conner was an Associate Professor at the NYIT College of Osteopathic Medicine at Arkansas State University and served as the Deputy Director of the Delta Population Health Institute at NYIT. She has also served as an Area Coordinator at the CDC Foundation, assisting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with vaccine and workforce surge staffing to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Conner's prior work also includes serving as a Regional Program Associate at the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, working with a variety of stakeholders ranging from agricultural workers to elected officials. This important work was highlighted at the Next Generation Rural Creative Placemaking Summit. Most recently, Dr. Conner launched the Supporting Health Advances for Rural Employees initiative, a worksite wellness program supported by USDA funding focusing on chronic disease issues and executed in partnership with Winrock International, FQHCs, and community health workers.

Dr. Conner has received numerous honors and awards at the local, state, and national level for building sustainable partnerships. Her commitment to serving communities was recognized in 2019, being named a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Leader finalist. She also received the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Community Partnership Award, the Arkansas Chronic Disease Council Trendsetter Award, and Lake Village Chamber of Commerce "Woman of the Year" Award. She earned a Doctor of Public Health in leadership and policy from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, as well as a Master of Public Health in biostatistics and a Master of Applied Psychology in research and evaluation design.

WORKSHOP SPEAKERS

Jeremy Adams

Arkansas Farmers Market Association, Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention

Jeremy Adams is a native of Arkansas with early childhood exposure to agriculture. His dad was a high school agriculture teacher and his grandparents had a multi-acre kitchen garden well into their 70's. Adams has a Natural Resource Science degree from Colorado State University but came back to Arkansas to try and make a difference. Since 2016 he has been the project manager for the Arkansas Center for Obesity Prevention's (ArCOP) "Double Up Food Bucks" program that works with farmers markets and direct marketing farmers to double SNAP recipient's money if they purchase local fruits and vegetables. Adams is also the President of the Arkansas Farmers Market Association.



Riley Arnold

Grower, Organic Crop Advisor and Instructor

Riley Arnold is a small farmer, an organic crop advisor, and teacher. Riley manages a 25-acre non-profit farm that raises fruits, vegetables, and livestock for hunger relief distribution in Northwest Arkansas. Riley works as an agricultural educator and has taught in public schools, as an independent, and for the Center for Arkansas Farms and Food (CAFF). Riley works with CAFF to develop their experiential field curriculum for their Farm School, advises crop production on the CAFF teaching farm, and assists with organic transition programming.



Sarah Bakker

UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Sarah Bakker is a Program Associate with the Local, Regional, and Safe Foods team at the Cooperative Extension Service through the University of Arkansas. She was most recently the Garden Manager at Heifer Ranch in Perryville, Arkansas where she managed three acres of certified organic produce and trained residential volunteers in the basics of small-scale market gardening. She has been working on farms for over nine years in both diversified produce and small ruminant dairies and is excited to be making the transition to extension work where she can focus on serving the great folks in the Arkansas agricultural community.



Jacob Bates

Apiary Inspector, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

Jacob Bates is the North Apiary Inspector for the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Plant Industries Division. He currently serves on the Apiary Inspectors of America Regulatory Committee. Bates keeps around 100 colonies personally; he loves to share his passion for beekeeping and prides himself in helping to keep the honeybees of Arkansas as healthy and productive as they can be.



Matt Bertucci

Assistant Professor, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Dr. Bertucci is a native of Chalmette, Louisiana. His curiosity and interest in food production led him to pursue his graduate training in plant pathology and in horticultural weed science. Dr. Bertucci runs a field research program investigating sustainable fruit and vegetable production practices. He is especially interested in integrated weed management strategies, utilizing a combination of weed control strategies to prevent crop losses due to problematic weeds. Dr. Bertucci's applied research program works to develop scale-neutral solutions for specialty crop growers in Arkansas.

He works out of Fayetteville on the main campus of the University of Arkansas. But his research program is not restricted to Northwest Arkansas. He has plot work across the state, specifically in Hope, Batesville, Clarksville, and Kibler. These off-campus sites offer distinct environments for his research, and they also make the research more accessible and relevant to people from other areas of the state.



Roby Brock

Chief Executive Officer, Natural State Media
Founder, Market at Chenal

Roby Brock is the CEO of Natural State Media, parent company for Talk Business & Politics and The Northwest Arkansas Business Journal. Brock also created and manages the Market at Chenal, a monthly farmers market and festival located in west Little Rock.

Brock is the host and executive producer of Talk Business & Politics, a media outlet that covers business and politics in Arkansas through TV, radio, online, newsprint, email, and social and digital platforms for the past two decades. Talk Business & Politics has bureaus in Little Rock, Fort Smith, Jonesboro, and Northwest Arkansas.

Brock also moderates radio programs on NPR affiliates statewide and a daily digital newscast at TalkBusiness.net.



Kim Bryden

Chief Executive Officer, Cureate

Kim Bryden, CEO of Cureate, is an accomplished business development professional with expertise in strategy, marketing, and operations focusing on the food & beverage industry and economic development. Kim has consulted 300+ small businesses on growth strategy, building out diversified revenue streams, and identifying new market opportunities. In addition to her commitment to small business growth at-large, Bryden's expertise has led her to develop multi-sector, public-private partnerships across industries such as governmental agencies, food tech start-ups, and top Fortune 500 retailers and foodservice operators. Now she leads the growth of Cureate throughout the

Mid-Atlantic and Heartland regions, as the business continues to grow nationwide.

WORKSHOP SPEAKERS

Kim Bryden (cont.)

Bryden is a World Economic Forum Global Shaper, a member of the Sandbox Network, a Board Director for Land Betterment Corporation, and an advisor to Fair Farms Maryland. She holds a Graduate Certificate in Digital Media Management and Analytics from Georgetown University and a BA in Public Communication & Spanish from American University.

Mark Cain Dripping Springs Garden

Mark Cain came to organic market gardening through his interest in all things biological, with a degree in biology from the University of Illinois and subsequent study in organic horticulture at the Farm and Garden Project of the University of California Santa Cruz in 1978. Mark is an active member of the Fayetteville Farmers Market Board of Directors, and often an invited speaker at local and regional sustainable agriculture conferences.



Luigi Campos
Vice President, 180 Pipe

Luigi Campos is a wireless network engineer and the current vice president of 180 Pipe. Luigi graduated from the University of Phoenix in 2012 with a bachelor's degree in computer networking. Luigi is an inventor by nature and has been awarded several patents in the United States. Luigi has two years of experience in the vertical farming industry. By combining technology and farming, Luigi hopes to help future farmers optimize their growing spaces from soil to water, indoors and outdoors.



Janet Carson
Plan It Janet

Janet Carson, Emeritus Extension Horticulture Specialist, retired in 2019 after a 38-year career with the UA System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service. She has her Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Carson began her career as a county agent in Pulaski County in 1980 as a horticulture agent. She began the Arkansas Master Gardener program in 1988. Upon completion of her Master's degree, Janet moved to the state extension office to take on the role of statewide horticulture specialist.

Since retirement, she lives in Little Rock with her husband and dog Petals, where she continues to write weekly columns in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette on Saturdays and monthly columns in Arkansas Living magazines, along with a blog 'Plan it Janet.' She leads garden travel programs, and now gets to spend more time in her own garden.

Janet Carson (cont.)

Carson was the 2003 recipient of the John White Award for Excellence in Extension Education, the 2010 Extension Educator Award from the American Society for Horticultural Science, the 2016 Extension Employee of the Year, and the 2019 UA Horticulture Outstanding Alumni Award. Her first book *In the Garden* was published in 2010, and her second book *Field to Feast* was published in 2016, both by the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.



Aaron Cato

Extension Specialist, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Dr. Aaron Cato grew up in the Mississippi Delta in Osceola, Arkansas, where he spent most of his childhood chopping cotton, pulling red rice, and chasing the wildlife around agriculture production fields. Aaron received a bachelor's in biology from Arkansas State University before pursuing graduate degrees in Entomology from Kansas State University then the University of Arkansas. Aaron is currently the Extension Specialist in Horticulture Integrated Pest Management for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture – Cooperative Extension

Service. Dr. Cato is an Entomologist whose work focuses on sustainable management of pests (insects, pathogens, and weeds) in fruit and vegetable crops by employing systems approaches that rely on pest prevention and cultural controls, scouting, economic thresholds, and use of targeted and specific pesticide applications. Dr. Cato currently works on a wide variety of insect pests across small fruits such as blackberry, strawberry, and blueberry, and several vegetable crops such as pumpkins and tomatoes.

Adam Chartrand

Man of the Red Earth

Adam Chartrand is the owner operator of Man of the Red Earth in Mayflower, Arkansas. A hobbyist gardener turned soil microbiology junkie. Starting a small worm box in the mid-1970s has turned into being the leading producer of vermicompost and amended soils in Arkansas.



Kesha Cobb

USDA certified Urban Farmer, The Sustainability Project

Kesha Cobb was born in East St. Louis, Illinois, and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas. The middle born of triplets, she also has two sisters and a set of twin brothers. She became an entrepreneur in Dallas, Texas, in 2002 where she owned a salon for more than 10 years. After launching a marketing company for small businesses, she developed a passion for establishing sustainable practices by way of urban agriculture and community development projects. She is now fulfilling that goal after founding a non-profit organization, The Sustainability Project. She is a USDA certified Urban Farmer and teaches others how to establish community gardens and urban farms to benefit low-income communities.

WORKSHOP SPEAKERS



Katherine Daniels
KD Consulting

Katherine Daniels was born and raised in Arkansas, hailing from Little Rock, a UA Little Rock alumna, and now resides in Benton. She has been part of Arkansas's media and small business landscape for over 25 years. She has had the opportunity to build businesses, develop brand strategies, and cultivate customer experiences for several industries of private and public companies, municipalities, and political brand personas. In 2020, she established KD Consulting Company, an independent agency dedicated to helping small businesses become more profitable. As a certified consultant and brand specialist, she focuses on developing brand potential and profit growth. She is an independent contractor for hire and has represented several state agencies, such as the Arkansas Small Business Technology Development Center, the University of Arkansas, Arkansas State University, and the Arkansas Department of Higher Education. Her clients also include generational businesses and personal brands.

Daniels exemplifies entrepreneurship through her additional businesses, which include Natural State Market, a retail store dedicated to supporting sustainability and Arkansas-made products. She offers consulting services to local producers to help them discover their full potential and educate the community on the importance of supporting small businesses. She also recently acquired a thirty-year media company, Kid's Directory. She hopes to use the platform to connect with other local small businesses and promote their services and products to central Arkansas families. She states her work-life balance is a work in progress, with an excessive pool of intellectual property and a great network of connections to help her along the way. Her clients and colleagues state she is a natural and completely relatable in all the roles she plays.



Kelly Dundon, LMSW
Licensed Psychotherapist, Chenal Family Therapy Consultant, Agricultural Marketing Resource Center

Kelly Dundon is a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) and holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a focus in marketing from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Dundon's practice background includes in-patient acute psychiatric care, higher education, and case management. She is passionate about public health and dedicates part of her time to research endeavors which explore enablers and barriers to healthy communities. She is a Registered Yoga Teacher and incorporates aspects of yoga and mindfulness into her personal and professional practice.



Cheri Ellis

Egg & Poultry Section Manager, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

Cheri Ellis has been with the Arkansas Department of Agriculture for over 20 years and started her career at a small shell egg processor in Rose Bud. From there, Ellis went on the road for several years traveling across the state and was promoted to Field Supervisor. Ellis stepped into her current position in 2017. Ellis is a member of the National Egg Regulatory Officials and serves on the board as well as a section leader for the National Egg Quality School.



Henry English

Director, Small Farm Program, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Dr. Henry English is the director of the Small Farm Program at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB). The Small Farm Program targets small, limited resource, and socially disadvantaged producers (SDPs) in eastern and southwest Arkansas. The program offers education, training, and technical assistance with farm financial planning, crop and livestock production, marketing, the use of USDA Programs (conservations, loan, disaster, and safety net), heirs' property,

and a special emphasis on helping small farmers diversify by adding vegetables or fruits. The Small Farm Program also provides risk management training and beginning farmer training for SDPs. The UAPB Small Farm Program is also one of the eight state programs that has a Sustainable Forestry Land Retention Program (SFLR).

Dr. English has received several awards including the UAPB University Outreach and Engagement Award, the Outstanding Community Service Award from the Black Farmers & Agriculturalist Association of Arkansas, the George Washington Carver Public Service Hall of Fame Award, the 2014 Association of Extension Administration Award, and the 2014 Regional Award for Excellence in Extension. He has also served on the Advisory Committee for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers for three years, he currently serves on the Natural Resources Conservation Services State Technical Committee, and he is a member of the Jefferson County Conservation District Board of Directors.



Taunya Ernst

UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Taunya Ernst is the High Tunnel and Urban Ag instructor for the UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension. Taunya has many years of high tunnel production experience, beginning her horticultural career working on Utah State University's High Tunnel Program. After leaving Utah State she continued working with high tunnels at the University of Arkansas Fruit Research Station where she managed small fruit and vegetable high tunnel production trials. After working for an indoor vertical farming company for a couple years, she is excited to be back at the UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension, and working with high tunnels again.

WORKSHOP SPEAKERS



Clyde Fenton

Extension Agent, UA System Division of Agriculture,

Clyde Fenton has 30+ years of experience growing blueberries.

Arturo Quintero Ferrer

University of Arkansas Monticello

Arturo Quintero Ferrer is an accomplished professional in the field of biology, with a strong background in plant science, virology, and molecular biology. He has served as an Assistant Professor of Biology at the University of Arkansas at Monticello since August 2021.

Dr. Ferrer holds a Post Doctorate in Synthetic Biology and Next Generation Sequencing from the Centro de investigación y asistencia en tecnología y diseño del estado de Jalisco (CIATEJ), Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico, completed in 2019. He obtained his Doctor of Philosophy in Plant Science with an orientation in Virology from the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho in 2015. Ferrer holds a Master of Science in Plant Science with an orientation in Virology from the University of Idaho (2012) and a Bachelor's degree in Biology with an orientation in Biotechnology from Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara, Mexico (2010).



Heather Friedrich

Assistant Director, Center for Arkansas Farms and Food

Heather Friedrich is the Assistant Director at the Center for Arkansas Farms and Food (CAFF). She has over 20 years of experience working to support the local food system of Northwest Arkansas from organic production research to facilitating an alliance of NWA farmers market managers and more recently, in the development of CAFF. CAFF was created to train the next generation of farmers through experiential learning, connecting them to resources and strengthening the farm community network. Heather oversees CAFF's programs, including an on-farm apprenticeship program and the Farm School.



Angela Gardner

Business Consultant, Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center

Angela Gardner is a business consultant with the Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center. A supporter and advocate for all things “local”, Gardner started a seasonal packaged food business in 2014 to turn surplus produce from local farms into shelf stable treats. She marketed and sold her products through an online farmers market in Little Rock but closed the business due to a lack of commercially available kitchen space. The bulk of her

work experience is grounded in providing adult education programs, technical help, and business best practices for farms and food producers. Gardner earned a Bachelor of Science in Environmental, Soil, and Water Science and a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.



Kristen Gibson

Professor, UA System Division of Agriculture

Dr. Kristen Gibson is a Professor in the Department of Food Science and Director of the Center for Food Safety at the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. She received her Bachelor of Science in Microbiology and Molecular Biology from the University of Central Florida and her Ph.D. from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Environmental Health Sciences. Gibson’s research interests are focused on understanding the fate and transport of human pathogens within the environment including leafy green production systems, optimization of methods for the detection of human pathogens in food and water and on environmental surfaces, and food safety at the retail and consumer level.



Hunter Goodman

Assistant Professor, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Dr. Hunter P. Goodman is an assistant professor for Community, Workforce, and Economic Development at the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service. She focuses on building capacity across the state, particularly in the areas of nonprofit, workforce, and community leadership for local development and resiliency. Goodman believes strongly in the power of community, organizations, local leaders, and neighborhoods to create change. In her work, Goodman uses asset-based community development and consensus organizing as strategies for local community change. Through her research, she focuses on the impact of nonprofit leadership and management on the local community. She also focuses

on the intersection of civic and democratic engagement in the community. Goodman earned her doctoral degree in leadership studies from the University of Central Arkansas, Master of Education degree from the University of Southern Mississippi and Bachelor of Arts from Rhodes College. Goodman, along with her husband Mark, and children Lowell and Patrick, are honored to call Little Rock home.

WORKSHOP SPEAKERS

Andre “Farmer Dre” Gradinariu
Grower and YouTube Personality

“Farmer Dre” is a member of the Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association and a YouTube star. Join us to see behind the scenes of his family farm, Gardeners Orchard and Bakery, located in Southwest Missouri. “Farmer Dre” is the production manager at Gardener’s Orchard and has become the online face of the family farm. He documents farm operations and activities on social media and YouTube.



Rachel Hale, MA
Instructor, College of Public Health, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS)

Rachel Hale is a PhD Student and Instructor at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Health Promotion and Prevention Research. Hale holds a Graduate Certificate from Yale University in Climate Change and Health, an Master of Arts degree from Eastern University, and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Arkansas Tech University.



Joe Hannan
Instructor, Center for Arkansas Farms and Food

Joe Hannan is the horticulture classroom instructor at Center for Arkansas Farms and Food (CAFF) Farm School. His background is in delivering science-based curriculum and technical assistance to fruit and vegetable farmers. His goal is to increase the quantity and quality of produce grown in northwest Arkansas.

Doug Hausler
Owner, Keels Creek Winery

Doug Hausler retired in 2023 as winemaker, vineyard manager, and owner of Keels Creek Winery which he started in 2004. Previously, Hausler held the position of Senior Research Associate at Phillips Research Center (Phillips Petroleum). He earned his PhD from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in 1980.



David Hill
UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

David Hill is the Share Grounds program manager. He helps entrepreneurs who are interested in becoming a food manufacturer reach their goals. He helps navigate the regulatory permitting process, writing food safety plans, setting up production spaces, and a whole lot in between. Hill brings 25 years of food manufacturing experience to his role ranging from poultry processing to baked goods.



Darryl Holliday
Executive Director, Arkansas Food Innovation Center

Dr. Holliday is a senior level food and beverage professional with expertise in culinary and food science product development, ingredient functionality, cost reduction, and business development/market presence. His educational background as well as his product development experience with everything from start-up operations to multinational companies uniquely positions him to support many clients. This background has allowed him to become a Certified Research Chef through the Research Chefs Association. His 20+ years in the food industry have included work in bakeries, fine dining establishments, multi-unit chain restaurants (both kitchen and management), specialty ingredient companies, and finished product manufacturers.



Jeff Jackson
Public Health Section Chief II, Arkansas Department of Health

Jeff Jackson has been employed by the Arkansas Department of Health since 2006 where he currently serves as the Standardization/Quality Assurance Officer for the Retail Food Program. In this position, he is responsible for the training and standardization of all retail food staff in the state, ensuring consistency within the Retail Food Program, as well as working to ensure conformance with the National Voluntary Retail Food Program Standards. He received his Bachelor of Science in Education (biology emphasis) from Arkansas State University in 2005 and a Post Baccalaureate Certificate in Public Health from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in 2013. He was selected to Cohort 5 of the National Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute and was the 2017 recipient of the Mid-Continental Association of Food and Drug Officials Achievement Award.

WORKSHOP SPEAKERS



John Larson

Senior Vice President, American Farmland Trust

John Larson represents American Farmland Trust (AFT) externally and works to establish strategic partnerships that advance mission goals. Before joining AFT, John served as CEO of the National Association of Conservation Districts, executive director of the Washington Association of Conservation Districts, and president of the Washington Association of District Employees. He has also served as manager of the Conservation Districts Partnership – a consortium of multiple conservation districts. Before beginning his service with conservation districts, Larson owned and operated his family's irrigated farm in Royal City, Washington. He completed a Bachelor of Arts in general studies at Washington State University, with an emphasis in agricultural economics.



Karen Lee

Extension Program Specialist, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Karen Lee is an Extension Program Specialist at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) in the Small Farm Program. Ms. Lee provides outreach education about the program and its activities while seeking opportunities to build, strengthen, and expand the organization's sustainability and capacity for greatest impact. The Small Farm Program works with all producers regardless of color, race, or religion but also targets historically underserved and small farm landowners and producers in Arkansas. The program offers a holistic approach to production through education, production management, technical assistance, marketing, forestry management plans, and financial planning as a part of its services. The staff

has also placed emphasis on conservation programs and climate smart practices that assist landowners to improve their land and their income potential. The Small Farm Program is one of the eight states that is a part of the Sustainable Forestry Land Retention Program (SFLR). All of the program assistance services are free to the producer and landowner.

Ms. Lee has worked in agriculture for over 20 years. Her work is now concentrated training in forestry, soil health, conservation programs, heir property resolution, marketing, and business planning. She has also been a family self-sufficiency and credit counseling specialist for 16 years and has received several community service and professional awards for her work in helping to build the viability of the community through outreach efforts. Ms. Lee believes that the greatest gifts to this world are its people and the land, and that we must be good stewards of both to thrive and survive.



Ayanava Majumdar

Extension Professor Entomologist, Auburn University

Dr. Ayanava Majumdar, aka Dr. A and Dr. Bug, is an Extension Professor Entomologist at Auburn University. Since 2008, he has led the Alabama Vegetable IPM and the Alabama Beginning Farmer Programs and reaches thousands of farmers and others through the Alabama IPM Communicator newsletter. Additionally, he has led the development of other digital learning opportunities through the Farming Basics Online Course and Farming Basics Phone App which are available to all producers. Dr. Majumdar leads the Alabama SARE professional development program as well. Information about his program can be found at aces.edu/blog/category/farming/ipm-farming/ and his

Organic Vegetable IPM toolkit can be found here, aces.edu/blog/topics/farming/the-organic-vegetable-ipm-toolkit/#read-more.



Trey Malone

Assistant Professor, UA System Division of Agriculture

Trey Malone is an agri-food economist whose primary research interests are agribusiness entrepreneurship and public policy impacts on agri-food supply chains. He has published over 50 peer-reviewed articles and received a dozen research awards and fellowships, including the Emerging Scholar Award from the Southern Agricultural Economics Association and the Presidential Award for Excellence in Research and Communication from the Food Distribution Research Society. Dr. Malone's research has been funded by institutions including the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the World Wildlife Fund, among others. Before joining the University of

Arkansas, he was an Assistant Professor and Extension Economist in the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics at Michigan State University. He earned his master's and doctorate degrees from the Department of Agricultural Economics at Oklahoma State University and his bachelor's from Rockhurst University. His insights have been featured in popular press outlets, including the New York Times, CNBC, USA Today, Fast Company, and Popular Science. He currently serves as the Agricultural Economics Fellow for Sustainable Food Systems for the Farm Foundation and the Fellow for Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.



Kyle Manning

Fat Rabbit Farms

Kyle developed his passion for farming while attending Arkansas Tech University (ATU) where during his research, he interviewed farmers, gardeners, and seed-savers across the state. After graduating from ATU, Kyle found his way back to farming serving as the farm manager of a 20-acre farm, restaurant, and vineyard just outside of Kerrville, Texas. After two years of farming in Texas, Kyle and his wife, Becca, realized they wanted to start a farm of their own and moved back home to Hot Springs, Arkansas, to start Fat Rabbit Farms. Fat Rabbit Farms is beginning their second full growing season in Hot Springs. They currently sell their produce

in three farmers markets, two local grocers, several restaurants in Garland County, and Farm Friday pickups. They use regenerative farming practices, implementing only OMRI certified organic and biological inputs.

WORKSHOP SPEAKERS



John McMinn

Director, Commodity Activities and Economics, Arkansas Farm Bureau

John McMinn's work includes the implementation of Farm Bureau policy affecting each of the agricultural commodities. McMinn is responsible for economic analysis and commodity-specific programs and activities surrounding beef, equine, and specialty crops.

A native of Stuttgart, McMinn came to Arkansas Farm Bureau after spending three years as a program associate in the agricultural economics and agribusiness department with the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. His primary responsibility was to develop and promote specialty crop budgets for growers within Arkansas and to help them better manage risk. He also did price analysis for different specialty crop markets and helped define new forms of value-added products for Arkansas growers. McMinn also worked as a precision ag adviser for Greenway Equipment, where he helped farmers deploy global positioning satellite equipment and other precision ag technologies.

McMinn earned undergraduate and graduate degrees through the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences at the University of Arkansas. As part of his master's degree program in international agricultural economics, McMinn studied at the University of Ghent in Belgium.

Bill McNitt

McNitt Growers

After getting out of the US Air Force in 1994, Bill McNitt came home and joined the family farm. In 1999, McNitt graduated from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale with a bachelor's degree in plant and Soil Science. McNitt is the head grower at McNitt Growers. Since the mid 2000's, McNitt Growers has been producing strawberry plug plants for growers in multiple states.



Rebecca Melanson

Mississippi State University, Associate Extension
Professor and Extension Specialist

Dr. Rebecca A. Melanson is an Associate Extension Professor and Extension Specialist with the Mississippi State University Extension Service. She has statewide plant pathology Extension responsibilities for vegetable, fruit, and nut crops, and focuses on developing educational programs and resources for stakeholders in those commodity groups. She has delivered over 100 presentations to stakeholder and scientist audiences, authored or coauthored over 70 state or regional Extension publications, developed and/or hosted several Extension programs, and published various other educational resources, such as videos, newsletter articles, and images, on plant diseases. Dr. Melanson also maintains several web pages on the MSU Extension website (extension.msstate.edu) and a Facebook page (@MSUextDiseasesVFP) that support her overall Extension program. Recent research and Extension projects include monitoring for cucurbit downy mildew, surveying for whitefly-transmitted viruses in cucurbits, organizing and leading the Emerging Viruses in Cucurbits Working Group (EVCWG; ecucurbitviruses.org) to address the

Rebecca Melanson (cont.)

introduction and spread of viruses in cucurbits in the U.S., and the development of the MyIPM for Vegetables (myipm.app/vegetables/) smartphone app. Dr. Melanson is the commodity editor for the Strawberry IPM Production Guide for the Southeast (smallfruits.org) and has also published several manuscripts highlighting her work on *Xylella fastidiosa*, the causal agent of pecan bacterial leaf scorch.



John Martin

Apiary Inspector, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

John Martin spent 30 years in automotive dealerships with 25 of them as an automotive service manager. While still working at the dealership, he became interested in honeybees and has been keeping bees for 10 years. Martin has been working for the Arkansas Department of Agriculture as an Apiary Inspector since 2021.



Robyn Metzger

Program Specialist, National Center for Appropriate Technology

Robyn Metzger joined the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) in 2004 and is a program specialist in the Southeast Regional Office. As coordinator for the Armed to Farm program, she facilitates the planning, implementation, and evaluation of NCAT's multiple Armed to Farm training events each year. She also responds to client requests for information on programs for veterans in agriculture. Robyn also provides planning, outreach, and communications support for NCAT Southeast's regional activities. Her 20 years of communications experience include writing, editing, and designing press releases, email campaigns, publications, and newsletters for print and digital distribution; producing content for websites; and social media management. The daughter of a farmer-veteran, Robyn grew up on a dairy goat farm in north Arkansas. She currently is focused on replacing her family's urban lawn with vegetables, cut flowers, and pollinator-friendly native plants.



Shawn Peebles

Peebles Organic

Peebles Organic, located in Augusta, is a large, diversified farm specializing in the production of organic black-eyed peas, chickpeas, edamame, rice, sweet potatoes, and wheat. Shawn serves on the governing council of the Organic Farmers Association Board and will be the president of the Arkansas Seed Growers Association in 2024. Shawn enjoys putting his 14 years of organic specialty crop experience to use by consulting with others wanting to transition into organic farming.

WORKSHOP SPEAKERS



Sean Pessarra
The Mindful Farmer

Sean Pessarra is the owner of Mindful Farmer, a farm and garden supply company located in Central Arkansas. Mindful Farmer designs and manufactures high tunnels and tools for growers in addition to providing organic potting mixes and fertilizers. Mindful Farmer also provides high tunnel and greenhouse construction services.



Amanda Philyaw Perez
Associate Professor, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Dr. Amanda Philyaw Perez serves as the state Extension Specialist for Food Systems and Food Safety and Associate Professor in the Department of Horticulture with the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. Dr. Philyaw Perez has secured over \$3 million in grants and contracts since 2018 to work on supporting food safety, value-added, and local food systems projects. Dr. Philyaw Perez leads the Local, Regional, and Safe Foods Program Team (5-8 staff and intern positions) supporting the growth of local and regional food systems and supports specialty crop growers with understanding and implementing food safety regulations and associated practices through outreach, education, and technical assistance. Dr. Philyaw Perez has 16 years of experience working with Arkansas stakeholders to address growing local food and agriculture systems, supporting access to healthy food options, and ensuring food safety.



Jeff Quick
Chief Executive Officer, Food Bank of North Central Arkansas

Jeff Quick is the CEO of the Food Bank of North Central Arkansas where he has led the organization since 2011. Jeff is a past president of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance and recipient of the Alliance's "Acting Out Against Hunger" award. As CEO of the Food Bank, Quick is constantly looking for creative partnerships that will increase access to food and reduce food insecurity. The Food Bank's recent partnership with the City of Mountain Home and local farmers, artisans, and musicians has brought record numbers of vendors to the market, provided over 300,000 meals to the Food Bank's distribution program, increased market attendance, and in 2023 alone saw nearly \$5,000 worth of SNAP and Double Up Food Bucks redeemed at the Mountain Home Farmers Market.



Lisa Roach
Regional Representative, MarketLink

Lisa Roach's interest in food and agriculture stemmed from visiting her grandparent's farm in rural Germany during the summer, helping her parents garden, and cooking with her family. This upbringing led her to pursue an education in food systems at San Francisco State University where she majored in Family and Consumer Sciences with an emphasis in Nutrition.

After graduating, Roach continued to volunteer for farmers markets and gained valuable hands-on experience while working as an info booth volunteer, vendor, and eventually as assistant manager of one of San Francisco's busiest EBT markets.

This valuable work motivated Lisa to apply at the Ecology Center, where she worked for two years as the Farmers Market Access and Equity Program Coordinator. In this role, she assisted farmers markets throughout California with starting their EBT programs and helped facilitate California's incentive program, MarketMatch.

Roach is delighted to be part of the National Association of Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs (NAFMP) team, as a MarketLink Regional Representative. She loves being able to connect to farmers and market managers throughout the country and hear from their perspectives.

Outside of MarketLink, Roach does her best to support local food by shopping at the Alemany Farmers Market in San Francisco; California's first official farmers market. In her free time, she's usually biking, hiking through local parks, cooking at home, visiting friends, or working on many art projects.



Curt Rom
Professor, UA System Division of Agriculture

Curt R. Rom is a University Professor in the University of Arkansas (UA) department of horticulture specializing in fruit crops, alternative crops, sustainable and organic production systems, and crop physiology and management. He has been a faculty at the UA for 35 years and been providing horticulture instruction and conducting research for 42 years. He grew up on a small-scale apple farm in Northwest Arkansas. He is a gardener in his spare time.

Britt Talent
Organizer, Arkansas Homesteading Conference

Britt Talent is the organizer of the Arkansas Homesteading Conference, which provides educational sessions from experts on gardening, small farm livestock, food preservation, alternative energy, and other topics related to achieving a self-sufficient, sustainable lifestyle. The conference is going into its ninth year and has had attendees from across Arkansas and several other states.

WORKSHOP SPEAKERS



Renee Threlfall
Research Scientist, UA System Division of Agriculture

Dr. Renee Threlfall is a Research Scientist at the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture (UA System), Fayetteville. She has worked in the Food Science Department at the UA System for over 30 years. She currently has a split position of 47% research, 35% Extension and 18% teaching. At the University of Arkansas, she completed her B.S. in Microbiology and M.S. and Ph.D. in Food Science with an emphasis in enology and viticulture.

Dr. Threlfall's research and extension at the UA System is focused on processing and postharvest storage of specialty crops (wine grapes, muscadine grapes, table grapes, blackberries, strawberries, peaches, hops, etc.) and value-added processing of horticultural crops. She has over 40 refereed journal publications. She teaches an introduction enology and viticulture class, *Uncorked: Vines to Wines*, at the University of Arkansas each fall and teaches enology, viticulture, and sensory topics for grape and wine production in other food science classes.

Dr. Threlfall is a member of the American Society of Enology and Viticulture (ASEV), ASEV-Eastern Section, American Wine Society, American Society for Horticultural Science, North American Raspberry and Blackberry Association, and American Society of Brewing Chemists. Dr. Threlfall is on the Extension and Outreach Committee for the National Grape Research Alliance and is also a member of the Arkansas Association of Grape Growers and serves on the Arkansas Wine Producers Council. She is also the director of the Arkansas Quality Wine Program.

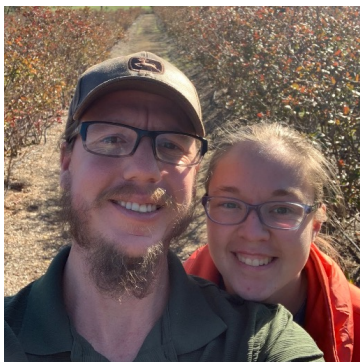


Valerie Turner
UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension Agent



Julie Goings
UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension Agent

Valerie Turner is a County Agent in Monroe County and Julie Goings is a County Agent in Phillips County. Both have been county agents for 10 years and have been ServSafe Food Manager Certification Instructors for more than six years.



Matt Varoz
Hatch Farm, LLC

Matt Varoz has a degree in horticulture and landscape technology. He has been market gardening and small fruit farming for over a decade with chemical free practices. He has experience growing in different zones and climates from the desert mountains of Colorado to the Arkansas Ozarks. Varoz is an out of the box thinker; when finding answers for conventional issues that arise in market gardening, he has integrated technologies from around the world in his solutions.



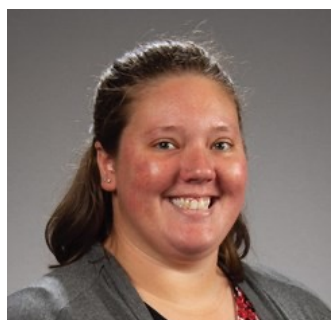
Doris Washington
State Executive Director of the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Doris Washington was appointed by the Biden Administration to serve as the State Executive Director of the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Arkansas in December 2021.

Washington joins FSA with 33 years of experience managing governmental and public affairs initiatives designed to impact environmental protection, education, economic development, and agriculture.

Most recently, Washington was the Director of the National Water Management Center at the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. In that role, she directed operations, served as an advisor, and oversaw a \$2.2 million budget. Under her guidance, the National Water Management Center successfully planned and implemented an analysis of watershed environmental projects including emergency and disaster programs. Washington is a two-time graduate of the University of Arkansas where she received a Bachelor of Science in agriculture and a Master of Public Administration in public policy.

Washington lives in Little Rock where she served over 10 years as an Officer in the Arkansas Army National Guard.



Hannah Wright-Smith
Weed Specialist, UA System Division of Agriculture, Extension

Hannah Wright-Smith is an Extension Weed Specialist for turf and specialty crops with the University of Arkansas. She attended Mississippi State University for her B.S., the University of Arkansas for her M.S., and the University of Georgia for her Ph.D. Hannah has been with the Extension for a year and strives to connect specialty crop growers and turf professionals with relevant and timely research so they can make the best weed management decisions. She resides in Little Rock with her husband, Tyler, and their dog, Doug.

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