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BLUE LETTER

February 2021

No. 3826



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Plowing Forward

It is hard to believe that we're already two months into 2021. February has been an eventful month, and I hope everyone has survived the "snowpocalypse." I think it was the first time in the history of the Cooperative Extension Service that all 75 county offices were closed due to inclement weather at the same time. Thanks to remote work options, we kept most of our major operations moving along during this time, and we've had time to think about and develop a new "normal" operating procedure for bad weather and facility closings. For the most part, we are still intact; however, I want to throw my support behind our county offices that suffered water damage during the cold weather, some of whom have had to find new office space. We wish them a speedy recovery.

It gives me great pleasure to type the following words: COVID numbers in the state are going in the right direction! I am pleased that we can return to having meetings over 10 but under 100 people without Arkansas Department of Health approval. This is great news, especially for our 4-H groups and other county programs. Hopefully, this signals a return to normal business operations soon. For the time being, we will continue to require groups to have a social distancing plan and prior approval from the senior associate vice president.

On Feb. 23, the state office hosted a second clinic for employees at LRSO and surrounding counties to receive the second dose of the vaccine. I want to thank our Human Resources team for their ongoing efforts. We have worked hard to get vaccination opportunities for all employees, but much of this is out of our hands due to availability and local distribution opportunities. We will continue to work toward opportunities for all Division employees who want the vaccine to receive it. Division employees qualify to receive the vaccine as part of Phase 1B of the state's distribution plan, which now includes Arkansans age 65 and older and educators (including K-12, postsecondary and childcare workers).

Evaluations and programmatic discussions are or soon will be underway for many of our faculty and programmatic positions. This is an important time to reflect on performance last year and look to 2021 activities. I hope everyone has included both online and in-person options for their efforts going forward. My feeling is that even if we return to business as usual at some point this year, we will still need to offer a mix of online or virtual options. Most importantly, we should remain service-oriented and base decisions on the needs of our clientele, and not totally on convenience.

Continued on page 3

INSIDE SCOOP

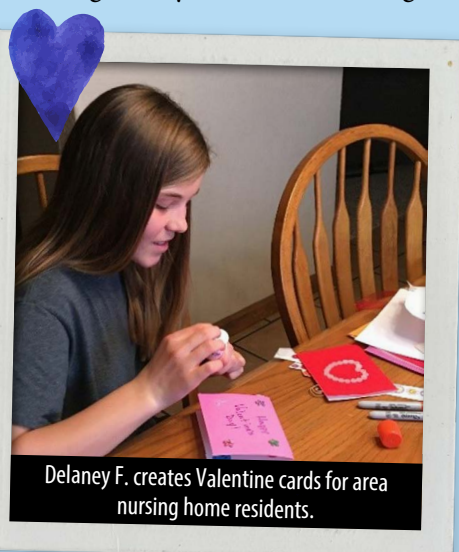
2. Howard Co. 4-H Deliver Valentines to Nursing Home
3. Domain Change: UAEX Email Changes
3. Picture Day!

4. Leadership Lunch and Learn Launched
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 6. Walk Across Arkansas
- ...And much more!



Howard Co. 4-H Deliver Valentines to Nursing Home Residents

Howard County 4-H members who participated in February community service were asked this: "what does "My Hands to Larger Service" mean to you?" One of the many great responses received was this: "To put my hands to work. To get busy and do something."



Delaney F. creates Valentine cards for area nursing home residents.

That's exactly what the youth did. They created and designed about 200 custom-made Valentine cards for residents in three area nursing homes. The cards were delivered in time for Valentine's day.

This month's community service project was about teaching youth valuable lessons and life

skills that give you a greater awareness of community needs during these times of social distancing.

When asked what kind of impact their efforts might have on card recipients, they said: "happy, grateful, and excited because they have not been able to see their family and friends due to COVID-19."

The lesson for all of us: No matter the obstacles we may face in today's world, it should not stop us from giving back to others. ■



Guy Cooper K. personalizes Valentine cards for area nursing home residents.

Domain Change: UAEX Email Changes in Process

The move to UADA.edu is under way. Both the UAEX and AAES IT departments have been working for months to make this change as smooth and as simple as possible. IT will be working with Communications to make sure you know not only what's happening and when, but what actions you'll have to take. This info will come through email and will be found on our Domain Change Central page. Be sure you bookmark this page for reference: <https://uada.edu/domain>.

Extension employees will see the most immediate changes. On Feb. 15, Uaex.edu emails were moved to

uada.edu. Both emails will continue working in parallel for now. Be making a list of everything your email might be used for, including:

- Accounts outside of the Division of Ag in which your email is a username
- Local email distribution lists
- Colleagues, stakeholders, vendors who use your uaex.edu as a primary contact
- Your county, departmental or program webpage
- Digital or print newsletters
- Presentations, business cards, social media ■

CREATE BRIDGES Team Works with Arkansas Tourism

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On Jan. 6, the CREATE BRIDGES team partnered with Arkansas Tourism to host a virtual training for the state's tourism site, [Arkansas.com](https://www.arkansas.com), to teach businesses how to sign up and manage listings through the site's extranet. In 2018, [Arkansas.com](https://www.arkansas.com) was overhauled to make it easier for prospective visitors to plan trips and for business owners to create and manage listings. The website is designed for businesses offering tourism-related services to reach local and national audiences, and it provides businesses the opportunity to create a free online listing with photos and contact information, create and manage their own events, and offer coupons and discounts to visitors.

The training was available to both Arkansas CREATE BRIDGES regions and states that are part of the national CREATE BRIDGES initiative. Nearly 20 representatives of business, chambers of commerce, and community festivals attended. In addition to businesses, [Arkansas.com](https://www.arkansas.com) also features cities, counties, and regions and all the great

things Arkansas' 75 counties offer. The training was recorded and can be viewed online at www.uaex.edu/createbridgesresources. More information is available at www.arkansas.com/business or by contacting Brandon Mathews at bmathews@uada.edu. ■



Plowing Forward from page 1 continued...

I anticipate that we will eventually have a return-to-work date for state office employees and for all Division employees who have been working remotely. This decision will be based on the number of COVID cases in the state and will take into consideration what other government entities and universities decide to do. Whether or not you have received the vaccine may impact your return to some degree. However, I expect that as more people are vaccinated, the number of COVID cases will continue to decline. For me, I look forward to finally getting to see my Extension colleagues in person. ■

Picture Day!

The Office of Communications will provide photography services on Tuesday, March 2, at the Little Rock State Office for new employees needing a professional photo or ID badge.

Appointments are required and are available from 9 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Sign up [here](#).

On Picture Day, go to the LRSO front entrance a few minutes before your appointment time, and someone will help you find your way to the photo studio. When entering the building, you must perform a self-evaluation and wear a mask. Please only come to the photo studio at your scheduled time.

For more information contact Kerry Rodtnick at krodtnick@uada.edu ■

Leadership Lunch and Learn Launched

The new Leadership Lunch and Learn kicked off Jan. 27 with a presentation by Dr. Joe Waldrum, professor emeritus and former LeadAR director, who shared tall tales about unique experiences in facilitating the LeadAR program for more than 20 years.

He talked about delayed flights, lost luggage and souvenir shopping. However, the most telling story involved LeadAR members participating in a health fair and one discovering he had cancer and caught it early enough to be treated. LeadAR literally may have saved a life.

Dr. Dub Ashton, a past LeadAR presenter, also shared his most memorable experiences from the LeadAR program. He created a LeadAR talent show where class members showcased their talents ranging from singing, storytelling, and playing musical instruments. One group created a new musical instrument called the “commodium,” basically a guitar made with a toilet seat. Ashton still has the instrument to this day.



The virtual Lunch & Learn sessions will be held on the last Wednesday of each month, 12:15 – 1 p.m. We invite you to join us for these sessions. For more information, contact Dr. Julie Robinson, jrobinson@uada.edu or Lisa Davis, ldavis@uada.edu. ■

Rural Profile & Data Dashboard

The Rural Profile has been around for decades, but no year is quite the same. The new 2021 Rural Profile, out this month, not only identifies critical demographic, social and economic issues facing rural

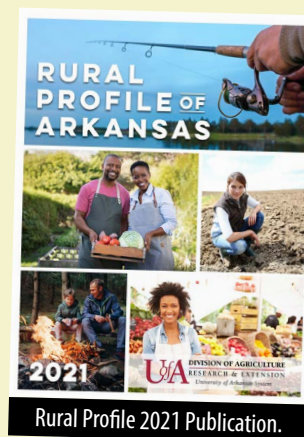
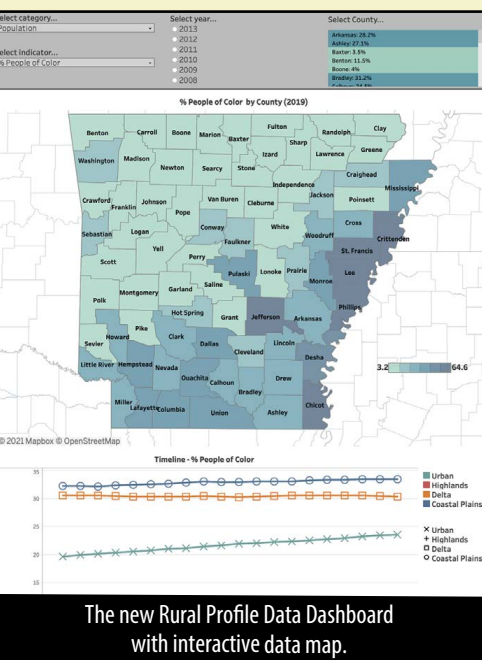
Arkansas counties, but also includes analysis of how the COVID-19 pandemic shines a spotlight on the need for access to good health care, employment opportunities and broadband access, especially in rural regions of the state.

This year's report also includes a new way to access county data through an interactive data map

and dashboard. The data dashboard allows users to access the entire Rural Profile database and create custom maps and graphs. You can visit the dashboard [here](https://www.uaex.uada.edu/ruralprofile).

Printed copies of the Rural Profile are being sent to agents in all 75 counties, with the latest information on county trends in population, economy, infrastructure, education, social and economic stress, and local government. Rural Profile can be viewed online at <https://www.uaex.uada.edu/ruralprofile>.

If you needed additional copies to distribute to local leaders, please contact Andrea Price at: aprice@uada.edu. If you have questions about the Rural Profile or would like assistance, please contact either Wayne Miller at: wmiller@uada.edu or Ellie Wheeler at: ewheeler@uada.edu. ■



Rural Profile 2021 Publication.

The new Rural Profile Data Dashboard with interactive data map.

Domain Change Tips

TECHNICAL ISSUES?

If you are having any technical issues, get help by submitting a [Support Request](#).



CONSTANT CONTACT

Do you use an Extension Constant Contact account? Be sure to update your internal contacts and your footer website address using the new domain! Learn how to [update your Constant Contact account for the domain change](#) on our employee website.

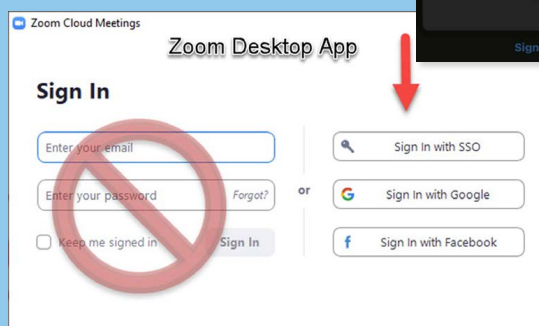
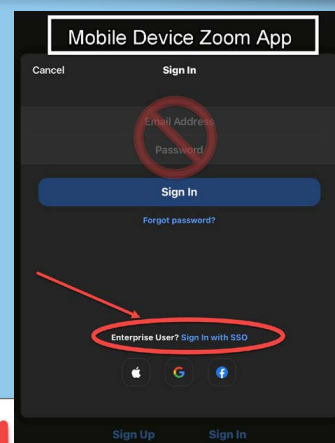
ACCESSIBILITY AWARENESS - ISSUE 4 - WHAT IS COLOR CONTRAST?

Color contrast is the difference in light between font (or anything in the foreground) and its background. In web accessibility, how well one color stands out from another color determines whether or not most people will be able to read the information. (Bureau of Internet Accessibility)

Find out what is needed to [check color contrast](#) in documents.

ZOOM

Did you sign back into your Zoom desktop app and Zoom on any mobile devices you use for work? Remember to always sign in through SSO (Single Sign On). ■



UPCOMING TECH TUESDAY WEBINARS



Tuesday, March 9: Update on the Division Domain Change.
Register [here](#). Check out previous Tech Tuesdays webinars. Visit the blog <https://employees.uada.edu/techtuesdays> to view recordings.



HG Squad 4-H Club



Circle H 4-H members

Union Co. 4-Hers Collect Food

Union County 4-H members recently collected more than 1,600 lbs. of canned food as part of a community service challenge in January. Members of the Circle H 4-H and HG Squad 4-H clubs participated, and the food was donated to a local food pantry. ■



Walk Across Arkansas

Registration Opens March 1

It's time to get a team together and get ready for the spring Walk Across Arkansas.

Registration opens March 1, and participation is free. The 8-week event begins March 15. Teams are made of 3 to 8 members and a team captain.



The 8-week program is delivered online, although paper tracking forms are available to download from walk.uada.edu. All participants must be registered online, and all data entered online.

Mileage has been the focus in the past, but the event now focuses on minutes of physical activity which can lower the risk of early death, coronary heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and some cancers, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Exercise also helps with weight loss and weight control and can improve mood and energy levels. Adults should get at least 150 minutes of exercise per week, and youth need at least 60 minutes of exercise daily.

Last year, 569 Arkansans statewide participated in the fall 2020 Walk Across Arkansas, logging 993,002 minutes. There were 141 participating teams across 48 counties. ■

Soil & Water Conference Brings Large Audience

This year's Arkansas Soil & Water Education Conference, hosted virtually on Jan. 27, brought together experts who shared the latest issues and trends in soil and water conservation. More than 400 participants from 12 states and one from the United Republic of Tanzania, tuned in to learn about topics that they can use to improve their farming operation. During the two-hour free conference, Dr. Mikey Latour, ASU's Dean of Agriculture gave the welcoming address.

Guest speakers include Dr. James Rigby, a research hydrologist and acting branch chief with the U.S. Geological Survey's Lower Mississippi-Gulf Water Science Center; P & P consultant Richard Pickett, who discussed drone data; and Adam Chappell, a farmer from Cotton Plant, who shared his successes.



Dr. Chris Henry, associate professor and water management engineer for the Division, coordinated the Most Crop Per Drop contest and announced the winners. Dr. Mike Daniels, professor and co-director of the Arkansas Discovery Farms Program, received the Conservationist of the Year award.

To watch the conference video, visit <https://www.arkswec.com>. For more info, contact Rita Watson at rwatson@uada.edu. ■

Benefits Corner

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Recognizing the impact of COVID-19 for employees and their families, the University has adopted the following temporary changes for both Medical and Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA).

Mid-Year Enrollment Changes

1. Allowing prospective election change requests made between Jan. 1, 2021, and Dec. 31, 2021, to increase or decrease salary reduction amounts for both accounts without a qualified status change event.

Carryover of Unused Contributions

1. Employees may carry over 100% of unused 2020 contributions to be used in the 2021 plan year. The carryover period extends through Dec. 31, 2021.
2. Employees may carry over 100% of unused 2021 contributions to be used in the 2022 plan year. The carryover period extends through Dec. 31, 2022.

Grace Period Extension from 2½ months to 12 months for the Dependent Care Account

1. For plan year beginning on Jan. 1, 2020, the standard grace period is extended for 12 months after the end of the plan year with the filing deadline of March 31, 2022.
2. For plan year beginning on Jan. 1, 2021, the standard grace period is extended for 12 months after the end of the plan year with the filing deadline of March 31, 2023.

For additional details, please reach out to yourbenefits@uada.edu for specific information and to obtain the required FSA Change Form. ■



4-Hers Score Grand Champion Awards

Utah State University hosted the first ever Virtual 4-H Invitational Contest in early January. The event had over 387 youth contestants from 29 different states competing in 15 contests. Arkansas 4-H was represented by 15 youth from across the state and was lucky enough to have two

Grand Champion placements from the White County FCS Skill-A-Thon team and Kimber C. from Sebastian County in Impromptu Speaking. These youth took the virtual contest and ran with it. Congratulations to the winners! ■



Grants and Contracts

PROJECT TITLE (GRANTS & CONTRACTS)	AWARD AMOUNT*	PI	GRANTING AGENCY
Agricultural Marketing Resource Center (AgMRC) 2020-2022	\$200,000.00	Ron L. Rainey	Iowa State University of Science and Technology
Economic Development Strategic Plans for Clarksville	\$64,161.00	Wayne P. Miller	City of Clarksville, Arkansas
Arkansas State Master Gardeners Conference 2021	\$9,000.00	Berni Kurz	Jonesboro Advertising & Promotion Commission
Effect of Cultural Strategies & Application Technologies on Weed Control in Flooded & Furrow-Irrigated Rice	\$444,757.00	Thomas Butts	NIFA
TOTAL AWARDS FOR JANUARY 2021: \$273,161			

*An error in the December 2020 Blue Letter incorrectly included the Arkansas Delta Region Obesity Project subaward in the amount of \$94,746 to UAMS for Debbie Head and the 4-H Grows Here School Garden in the amount of \$3,000 through Walmart Foundation for Debbie Baker that was not awarded

Personnel Changes

Welcome Aboard:

Justin Kirkes - Program Technician, 4-H Center Programs, Pulaski County

Farewell to:

Bill Eldridge - Administrative Specialist I, Clay County-Corning

Emily Keathley - Administrative Specialist II, Community, Professional, & Economic Development, Little Rock



Front Page News You Can Use

Looking for a news story to use in your local paper? Look no further than the front page of uada.edu. And if you click on view all news, you'll see all of our archived news stories back to 2014.

If you want to be on the email list to receive our news stories, email Mary Hightower at mhightower@uada.edu and Communications will add you to the distribution list. ■

The screenshot shows the UADA website front page. At the top, there's a 'COVID-19 Myth Busting' section with a 'Click Here' link. Below that, there are four circular icons representing different topics: 'Allied in Davis', 'Search our Directory', 'Find Your County Agent', and 'Get News'. The main section is titled 'NEWS' and features three news stories with headlines and brief descriptions. The stories are: 'Hendrix named interim head of rice station at Stuttgart', 'Ag tourism: Opportunities and obstacles discussed in August 19 webinar', and 'Double Your Dollars program expands to Pandemic EBT recipients in northwest Arkansas'. Each story has a 'Click Here' link at the bottom.