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BLUE LETTER

February 2026

No. 3886



John D. Anderson

From the Director

I had several opportunities in February to get out and about in the state, attending a few of the production meetings that have been running fast and furious since early this year. I know I am not an objective observer, but I don't see how anyone couldn't be impressed with the quality of work that our Extension professionals are doing for Arkansas stakeholders. It is truly impressive.

One of my more recent trips was to the Ag Expo hosted by Lawrence and Randolph counties at the old Clover Bend High School, which is now a historic district. The venue was fantastic. Walking into the old gym, I felt like I was stepping back into the 1970s – made me want to lace up a pair of Chuck Taylors and start a pick-up game. Of course, I couldn't do that. In addition to my physical limitations for a game of hoops, the gym floor was absolutely covered with the tables of vendors and sponsors. Lawrence and Randolph county agents and staff did a tremendous job promoting the program, and it showed in the level of stakeholder and industry support for the event. Educational programs were held in the old high school building. There were programs across all program areas for crop and livestock producers, homesteaders and homemakers, and high school students considering college and career options. I sat in on several sessions led by our specialists and agents, and the content was exceptional: timely, relevant, accessible to all levels of producers, and clearly grounded in solid research.

I left Clover Bend in time to make the afternoon production meeting at the Jackson County Extension Center. While the

information presented at that meeting was great, I have to say that I don't think our county agents and our specialists in Crop, Soil and Environmental Sciences and Entomology and Plant Pathology have gotten enough credit for the work they have done this year on emerging pests and diseases. The amount of actionable information on cotton jassid and rice delphacid that was developed and put in the hands of producers in just a few months is hard to believe. No other organization could have done what UADA has done in response to these threats, turning what could have been a catastrophic problem into a manageable one.

I have said before — paraphrasing a well-worn line — if Extension didn't exist, it would be necessary to invent it. This season's production meetings have provided a good reminder of why that is so true. And I realize that I am only really scratching the surface of the outstanding work that has been going on around the state so far this year. These are illustrations of the much broader and deeper body of work being carried out across our program areas in Arkansas. For what it's worth, that work is being noticed. I was in Washington, D.C., last week with the rest of the UADA leadership team and UA System President Jay Silveria for a meeting with Arkansas' congressional delegation and their staffs. All six members of the state's delegation dropped by for the event, a rare occurrence. They commented specifically on the vital importance of Extension's work to the state. So, keep up the good work. I know it doesn't always seem like it, but people are watching, and they like what they see. ■

INSIDE SCOOP

2. Horticulture Upcoming Training
3. Pints & Plants Workshop
4. FCS Share Career Insights with UCA Students

5. Sheep for Farm to Table Initiative
6. Tech Corner
7. Leadership Log
...and much more!

Horticulture Upcoming Training

NWA High Tunnel Short Course Set for March 17

Extension high tunnel specialist Taunya Ernst and educators at the Center for Arkansas Farms and Food will offer a high tunnel short course March 17 at the CAFF Research Farm in Fayetteville. Follow the [UAEX Fruit and Vegetable Production Facebook page](#) or visit the [High Tunnel Production website](#) for more information.

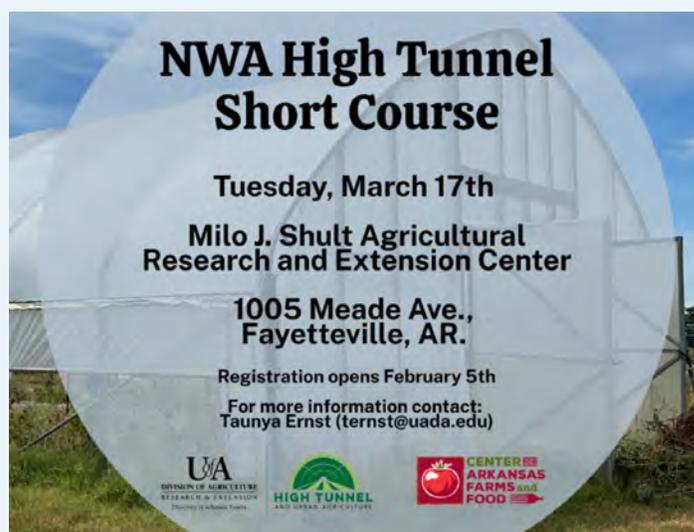
Irrigation Basic Workshop Planned for March 25

Extension staff will teach drip irrigation basics and setup on March 25 from 1:30-5:30 p.m. at the Fruit Research Station in Clarksville. Registration costs \$10 and includes educational materials and snacks. Sign-up by visiting the [High Tunnel Production website](#).

Horticulture In-service for Extension Agents set for April 1

Extensions state horticulture specialists will offer an in-service for extension agents on April 1. Join Taunya Ernst, Randy Forst, and Drs. Amanda McWhirt, Aaron Cato, Anthony Bowden, Amanda Philyaw Perez, Jackie Lee, Margaret Worthington, and Matt Bertucci at the Fruit Research Station

in Clarksville to learn about muscadine and blackberry production, common pecan production challenges, high tunnel production, growing cut flowers, pest management, weed identification, post-harvest handling, and the MS 101 Training class. Email Anthony Bowden (abowden@uada.edu) or Taunya Ernst (ternst@uada.edu) for more information. ■



Goat Producers Visit the Little Rock State Office

Extension's Small Ruminant Program hosted a Linear Appraisal Clinic on Jan. 10 at the Little Rock State Office in partnership with the Arkansas Goat Producers Association.



Danny Louie of the American Dairy Goat Association conducted the clinic, which attracted around 50 dairy goat producers.

Linear appraisals for goats is crucial for breeders to evaluate structural traits that affect a goat's durability, longevity, production, and reproductive health, thereby guiding genetic improvement, making informed breeding decisions, identifying herd strengths/weaknesses, and enhancing overall herd management.

Participants learned to assess their animals at the training conducted by Danny Louie of the American Dairy Goat Association. Dan Quadros, extension small ruminant specialist, said the training was important for producers to select their animals, show them, and improve their herds. ■

New 'Pints & Plants' Workshop

Sebastian County Horticulture Agent Zeb Gattis started a new workshop series, Pints & Plants, in partnership with Fort Smith Brewing Company. The monthly series combines horticulture education with local brewing and engaging learning opportunities for the Fort Smith community.

Eleven people attended the first workshop that focused on growing hops in home gardens along with their role in the brewing process. Brewery owner Quintin Willard shared insights on how he uses pelletized hops in his beer production.

Interest grew quickly, with the second Pints & Plants workshop drawing nearly three times as many people. That session highlighted grains used as cover crops and explained how those same grains are incorporated into brewing.

The strong turnout reflects a growing interest in horticulture across the River Valley. Zeb has planned a wide range of future workshop topics including pumpkins, hydroponics, Lavacaberries, and more. Through Pints & Plants, participants gain practical gardening knowledge while learning how agricultural crops connect to local food and beverage production. ■



Zeb Gattis presenting to a full house at Fort Smith Brewing Company.

Facilitator Excellence Training

Extension staff improved their facilitator skills during the second annual Facilitator Excellence training held Feb. 3-5 at the C.A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center.

The training was facilitated by CPED faculty Steve Siegelin, professional development specialist; Julie Robinson, leadership specialist; Ouachita County FCS Agent Kerron Simpson; 4-H Program Associate Taylor Knox; FCS Instructor Rebecca Simon; Mississippi County 4-H Agent Kamella Neeley, and Sarah Bakker, Local Foods Program lead.

The training covered facilitation strategies including effective use of icebreakers, brainstorming, bridge building, flip charting and recording techniques, setting ground rules, mind mapping, sticky walls, quadrant diagram, sticky dot voting, verbal/nonverbal communication and practical tips for organizing the facilitation equipment and materials.



Facilitator Excellence attendees practice the round robin technique.

As a capstone project, each participant planned and led a 45-minute group facilitation with their small group on a topic of their choice. The caveat: At least two techniques demonstrated in the training were part of the facilitation. Participants received written and verbal feedback from their small group and facilitators.

Participant comments on the evaluations highlighted the variety of techniques presented, confidence gained through practice, intent to use more variety in future facilitations, and how to better plan/prepare for a group meeting. ■

Share Career Insights with UCA Students

Members of the Family & Consumer Sciences unit participated in a recruiting event Feb. 3 at the University of Central Arkansas, where they spoke with students during a combined meeting of the Student Dietetic Association and Phi Upsilon Omicron. Faculty and staff shared insights into career pathways in nutrition and health, highlighting the variety of professional roles, work settings, and opportunities for impact within the field.

The discussion also focused on educational preparation, skills needed for success, and ways students can begin exploring careers while still in school. This event provided an opportunity to connect directly with students interested in nutrition and health sciences and to



(L to R): Dr. Bryce Daniels, Mr. Quad Whitson, Dr. Nina Roofe, Lane Bailey (UCA SDA President), and Dr. Lida Araghi

encourage them to consider careers within the Cooperative Extension Service. ■

COMMUNICATIONS STATION

Please, please help us promote your events by adding them to the UADA calendar.

Here's how:

Go to the [Calendar Events page](#) (Bookmark it for easy access, but you can also get to it from the [Employees site](#) Communications Calendar-Events

Click **For the Public** (for events open to the public)
Click **UADA Employees Only** (for internal events, not for the public)

Event Info: There's 2 options in the drop-down menu:

- CES** — Choose this if your event takes place at a county extension office. Later, this event will automatically be visible on the right side of your county page under "Attend an Event"
- Other Location** — Use this if your event is somewhere else

Contact Info. In the box, add in the Name, Phone Number and Email of the person who will field calls about the event.

Topical Areas: Choose the options that are relevant. Don't just select all. ■

The UADA Calendar Events Page. Add and promote your event to the calendar.

Sheep for Farm to Table Initiative

Extension's Small Ruminant Program is helping to foster farm-to-table initiatives that connect local producers directly with consumers, restaurants, and schools to provide fresh, sustainable, and traceable food while bypassing traditional, long-distance supply chains.

Alan Mahan of Rabbit Ridge Farms in Bee Branch has a successful farm-to-table free-range chicken and pork business. He invested in sheep to enhance farm diversity, improve pasture health, and provide a quick return on investment through rapid reproduction. Van Buren County Extension Agent Danny Griffin and Dan Quadros, extension small ruminant specialist, are helping Mahan implement appropriate technologies to attain a productive flock and profitable business.

"We will start with a tailored farm management plan that covers genetics, pastures, nutrition, facilities and equipment,

reproduction, health, and predator deterrence," Quadros said.

Sheep are excellent for farm-to-table initiatives.

They offer high-quality, locally sourced meat and act as sustainable, efficient grazers on small-scale farms, Quadros said.

"We are confident that the nutritional and sensorial attributes of lamb meat will win over current customers and open new market opportunities," he said. ■



(L to R): Alan Mahan, Rabbit Ridge Farms, Danny Griffin, Van Buren Co. Extension Agent, and Dan Quadros, Extension small ruminant specialist. Best management practices in sheep production will help increase meat production and quality, making it a great option for farm-to-table.



Garland County 4-H Interpretive Event

The Teen Leader 4-H Club has been learning about county government and the legislative process, and what better way to understand it than to see it in action? Thirteen club members attended the Garland County Quorum Court meeting on Feb. 9 where they served their famous pumpkin roll to each court member, along with a water bottle that listed facts about the Garland County 4-H program and a quote from a 4-H member.

Garland County Judge Darryl Mahoney recognized the 4-H program and 4-H agent Sara Jackson gave an update

to the court. The 4-H members introduced themselves, giving their public speaking skills perfect practice! After the meeting, the youth visited with their Justices of the Peace and talked about county government.



Group of 4-H youth that attended the Quorum Court Meeting.
Back Row (L to R): Berkley T., Ryan M., Judd B., Liam P., Joel B., Eisen G.
Front Row (L to R): Preslee H., Jace W., John B., Amelia G., Luna H., Kruz H.,
Konnor W., Sara Jackson (4-H Agent)

4-H member Joel Blankenship said, "It was very interesting to see the use of parliamentary procedures in action as this parallels to what we're learning in our 4-H clubs which shows how 4-H teaches our youth more about our government." ■

Protect Virtual Meetings from Online Video Scrapers

Online video scrapers are unauthorized individuals or automated bots that search the internet for virtual meeting links or gain entry through mailing lists and browser plug-ins. Once they access a meeting, they may quietly observe, record the session, or later scrape any shared recordings. The captured content is often reposted without permission, sometimes for commercial gain, distributed on third party sites, or stored indefinitely, even when organizations request its removal. Best Practices to Protect Virtual Meetings and Recordings include:

- **Control Access to Meeting Links**
 - Require registration in [Zoom](#) or Teams meetings or 1:1 distribution of joining links instead.
- **Require Authentication**
 - If you expect only UADA employees to attend, configure your meeting to [require authentication](#).
- **Use the Waiting Room/Lobbies**
 - Use the [Waiting Rooms in Zoom meetings](#) and [Lobbies in Teams](#) meetings to verify attendees before admitting them.
 - Ask unknown participants to briefly turn on the video for verification.
- **Avoid Third-Party Browser Extensions**
 - Do not use unapproved meeting plug-ins, which can leak meeting URLs or join meetings automatically.
- **Monitor Meeting Attendance**
 - [Report and remove](#) suspicious or unknown attendees immediately.
 - Be aware that some scraper bots impersonate real users with fake names/photos.
- **Enable Watermarking**
 - Consider using the watermark feature in Teams and Zoom meetings.
 - Apply a visible [watermark in Teams](#).
 - Apply [watermarks on Zoom](#) recordings.
- **Restrict Recording and Downloads**
 - [Manage sharing settings](#) for Zoom Cloud Recordings.
 - [Disable the download options](#) for the files and videos you post in OneDrive.
- **Restrict participant features for more security during meetings**
 - Securing [Zoom Meetings Settings](#).

Password & MFA Reset: What You Need to Know

When you need help getting back into your account or

re-enrolling in Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA), our IT Help Desk is here to help. This guidance applies to all employees of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

Your Verification Options (choose one)

In person at the Help Desk

- Bring a State-issued photo ID (e.g., driver's license).
- If you don't have a State ID, your UADA/UARK issued ID is accepted.

Remote via video call

- Join a scheduled video call with the Help Desk.
- Show your State-issued photo ID on camera (or a UADA/UARK issued ID if you do not have a State ID).

How to Request a Reset

Submit a [password help request](#). We will reach out on which verification method you would like to use (in person or video).

Zoom Pro Tip – Zoom Workplace Update!

After the recent update (Zoom Workplace version 6.7.0), Zoom now hides many tools inside an expanded menu nested inside the More icon in the meeting toolbar.

Steps to Access and Customize Host Tools in Zoom (v6.7.0)

1. Join a Zoom meeting
2. Hover the cursor at the bottom of the screen to display the toolbar
3. Click the More icon on the toolbar to access hidden tools
4. To pin frequently used icons, click and drag icons from the expanded menu into the toolbar

The icon, Host Tools, has a new expanded menu to help control your meetings. If you need to quickly disengage an attendee, select Host Tools. Under "Participants >" you will find meeting controls including "Suspend Participant Activities." For more details, visit the [Zoom Support Article](#).

Hump Day Hacks

Hump Day Hack resources can be found on the [Hump Day Hacks Resource page](#) in Team Dynamix. January's hacks included Tech Tuesday follow-up on AI prompting techniques, Paste Special for Quick Calculations in Excel, phishing resistant MFA tips, tips for secure meetings in Zoom, and cropping a picture to fit a shape in PowerPoint. See you at the next Hump Day Hacks! ■

2026 TECH TUESDAYS WEBINARS

Have you missed any past Tech Tuesday webinars or want to join future webinars? Check out the recordings and other resources on the [Tech Tuesday Blog page](#). More Tech Tuesday topics coming soon! Did you miss February's [Phoning It In – Mobile Photography & Videography](#) Tech Tuesday? Check out the recording and resources.





iLEAD

Two iLEAD participants share their experiences from the iLEAD seminar held in Monticello and Stuttgart.

Forests, Wildlife and the Future: A Day of Discovery at UA Monticello

By Spring Sneed, regional accountant

The third in-person session of iLEAD Cohort V began after a restful night at the Holiday Inn in Monticello, complete with an impressive breakfast for a hotel. The evening before, I stopped at the town square to admire the Christmas lights. When I rolled down my window, the scent of pine filled the air—a fitting welcome for a day centered on forests and natural resources. My inner Lorax was already excited for what we would learn. [Read more here.](#)

From Conflict Resolution to Conservation: Inside UADA's Impact in Arkansas County and Beyond

By Rita Watson, program associate for virtual education

During Cohort V's second day of our seminar in southeast Arkansas, our topics were implementation of TKI conflict management tools, the Arkansas County Extension offices, and the Five Oaks Research and Education Center. [Find more details here.](#)

LeadAR

LeadAR Class 21 takes a first-hand look at the life of Arkansas elected officials and emergency management professionals. Two participants share their experiences.

Day One: Public Policy, Media, and the Public Health Thread That Ties It All Together

By Quinyatta Mumford, CEO, Mumford and Associates Inc.

Day One of our Public Policy and Media session began in Little Rock with the kind of energy that reminds you leadership rarely happens in stillness. As the city prepared for winter weather, traffic moved with intention and urgency. Little Rock was spicy that morning, but timing and purpose aligned. I made it to the hotel just in time to meet up with the group, load the bus, and step fully into a day that would beautifully connect policy, leadership, and public health in motion. [Read more.](#)

Day Two: Inside the Arkansas Senate: LeadAR Class 21 Brings the Legislative Process to Life

By Rena' Lawson, chief deputy county/circuit clerk, Perry County

Have you ever wondered what it takes to get a bill passed through the Arkansas Senate? LeadAR Class 21 was educated firsthand in the process. After brainstorming to come up with an idea for a bill and getting great tips from the fabulous Kristin Higgins, program associate-public policy, on writing them, and doing the research for their topic, the class was finally prepared to introduce their bills to their peers in the committees. [Read more here.](#) ■



(Top collage): iLead Cohort V members visit UA Monticello to learn more about forests, wildlife and natural resources.
(Bottom collage): LeadAR Class 21 spends time in the Arkansas Capitol learning about the legislative process.

American Forage and Grassland Conference

Several UADA employees and students attended the American Forage & Grassland Conference held Jan. 12-15 in Asheville, North Carolina, where they showcased their work through 10 posters and one oral presentation, highlighting ongoing forage demonstrations/research being conducted across Arkansas.

The group including six county agents, three state extension specialists, a program associate and program technician, four UA undergraduates and one graduate student, and two faculty from UA Monticello. Additionally, four UAM students competed in the Forage Quiz Bowl. The Arkansas Forage and Grassland Council was honored as the 2025 State Affiliate Council of the Year, underscoring the state's commitment to forage education, research, and producer support. Kenny Simon, extension animal science instructor, serves as president of the Arkansas Forage and Grassland Council.

The conference featured sessions on forage management, research advancements and effective outreach and education strategies. Key themes included integrating legumes,



(L to R): Lonnie Davis, Connor Foote, Kadence Gibson, Thomas Lingo, Grant Kilpatrick, Kenny Simon and Harley Warren.

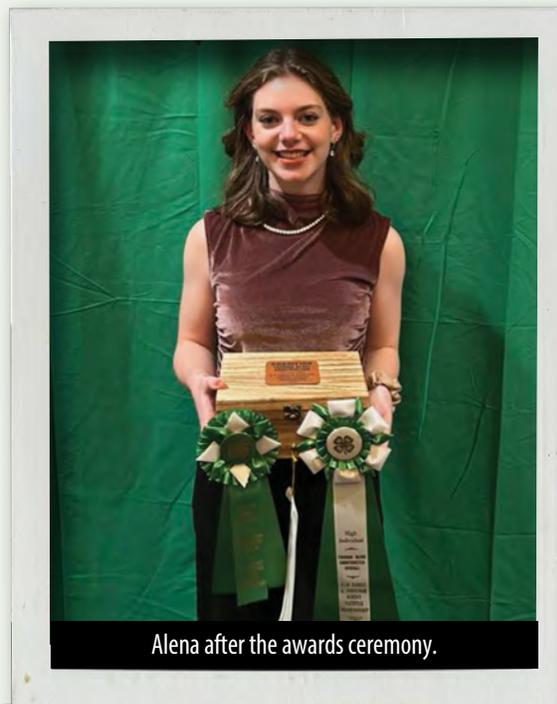
updating recommendations, and developing regenerative approaches for pasture and hayfield management.

Attendees also had the opportunity to network with forage specialists, researchers, and industry leaders from around the country, fostering the exchange of ideas and best practices that can be applied to Arkansas forage systems. Next year's conference will be Jan. 11-14, 2027, in Knoxville, Tennessee. ■

Union County 4-Her wins at the 2026

National FCS Championship

Union County 4-H member Alena S. won first place in the Fashion Revue Constructed Contest at the 2026 National FCS Championship in San Antonio, Texas. She also showed off her confidence, communication skills, poise and personality, earning second place overall in modeling and third-place overall in the interview part of the Constructed category. ■



Alena after the awards ceremony.

Mid-South Berry Conference a Success

Despite the winter weather, approximately 60 growers from across the south attended the Mid-South Berry Workshop in Fayetteville on Jan. 22-23. Organized by the Mid-America Strawberry Growers Association, the Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association, the Arkansas Grape Growers Association, and UADA fruit and vegetable production extension staff, the event brought together a wide range of strawberry, grape, muscadine, and blackberry producers, specialists, and other stakeholders for an informative conference designed to help guide production in the upcoming season.

Thirteen new growers also opted to participate in a Berry Basics for New Growers Workshop. Co-led by Drs. Aaron Cato and Amanda McWhirt, growers received an

introduction to small fruit production so that they could better understand other sessions later in the program. ■



Taunya Ernst discusses benefits and drawbacks of growing grapes under high tunnels.

Grants & Contracts

PROJECT TITLE	AWARD AMOUNT	PI	GRANTING AGENCY
Novaluron Caneberry Ir-4	9,000	Aaron Cato	University of Florida
Blackberry Fusarium Wilt	5,000	Amanda McWhirt	Southern Region Small Fruit Consortium
Food Safety To Cottage Food Producers in Texas & Arkansas	158,727	Amanda Philyaw Perez	Texas A&M AgriLife Research
Southern Regional and Lead Coordination Centers for Food Safety Training and Outreach	28,980	Amanda Philyaw Perez	University of Florida
Environmental Horticulture Trials	15,810	Anthony Bowden	University of Florida
City of Pine Bluff Storm Water Management Education and Outreach Program	358,116	Kevin Harris	City of Pine Bluff
Developing the National Cotton Profit/Loss Analysis Tool	10,000	Ryan Loy	Cotton Inc.
Determining Field Residue Colonization and Protection by Xylaria Necrophora	9,928	Terry Spurlock	Cotton Inc.
Multi-state Coordinated Trials: Management of Emerging Cotton Diseases	18,000	Terry Spurlock	Cotton Inc.
Multi-state Coordinated Trials: Management of Emerging Cotton Diseases	18,000	Travis Faske	Cotton Inc.
Efficacy of Seed Treatment Nematicides	10,000	Travis Faske	Cotton Inc.
Planting date effects on the growth and yield of Arkansas Cotton	30,000	Zachary Treadway	Cotton Inc.
TOTAL AWARDS FOR JANUARY 2026: \$671,561			

Save the Date!



Support Staff Conference

Come join us for this IN-PERSON celebration
Thursday/Friday, April 23/24 at the Vines Center.

Benefits Corner

UMR Programs

Work with a Health Coach

Program coaches help you create health care goals and adhere to your diabetes and healthy heart treatment plan. If you are identified as high-risk, you may be invited to work with a health coach to bring these and other health conditions under control. You can also self-enroll by calling UMR Care Management at 866-575-2540.

Disease Management

UMR—the medical plan administrator—offers disease management programs to help you and your family members deal with chronic conditions. If you or a covered family member has a chronic condition, like diabetes or hypertension, speak with a UMR representative about your options at 866-575-2540.

Maternity Management

Navigating infertility treatment can be overwhelming, but if you are enrolled in university medical coverage, you can contact the UMR Maternity Management Program for help. Speak with a dedicated nurse, who can guide you through pre-approvals and inform you of your options. Call 844-604-6244 to get started.

Do you have questions regarding your University Benefits? Please use the yourbenefits@uada.edu email address. The email is monitored and allows your benefits team to respond in a timely manner. ■



Personnel Changes

Welcome Aboard:

Tracy Clark – Administrative Specialist III - 4-H & Youth Development, LRSO
Ericca Lynn Corker – County Extension Agent - Agriculture, Bradley County
Ana Morales-Ona Smith – Extension Soil Fertility Specialist - Crop Soils, NERREC
Doug Whatley – Program Associate - Professional Development -
 Community, Professional and Economic Development, LRSO

Farewell to:

Felecia Cope – Administrative Specialist III, Ashley County
Tahira Marciano – Pulaski County - 4-H Program Assistant, Pulaski County
Parker Roark – ITS Field Operations - Technical Support Specialist - Field Operations, LRSO
Tucker Allen Vonkanel – County Extension Agent - Agriculture, Phillips County
Chris Roofe – County Extension Agent - Family & Consumer Science, Searcy County

