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BLUE LETTER

July 2026

No. 3891



John D. Anderson

From the Director

A couple of weeks ago, I received a letter from an old friend — not a text or an email, an actual letter, in a stamped envelope, delivered through the U.S. Postal Service. I can't remember the last time I got a personal letter in the mail. I'm sure it would have been something from my mother. She was a prolific letter writer, but even she has pretty much given it up for more modern and convenient forms of communication. Of course, there are plenty of those available. The old stand-by now is email. I was trying to determine recently when I first started using email and how many different emails I have had over the years. I really don't know. The first email account that I put to any real use was the student account I received when I started graduate school at Oklahoma State University in 1995. Not long after that, I opened a personal Hotmail account. For those of you who don't remember Hotmail, it was the MySpace of webmail services. For those of you who don't remember MySpace... Never mind; this is making me feel old.

I'm bringing this up because we are about to see some changes in our emails within the Division of Agriculture. As you have probably heard by now, UADA is migrating its digital tools and device management from our own Microsoft 365 system to the UA-Fayetteville system. As part of this migration, UADA emails will be converted to UARK addresses. Our IT team has been laying the groundwork

for this switch for some time, and the project will really get rolling in August. Most of this early work will be behind the scenes, but by the end of the year, the switch should be complete. The Microsoft migration will provide several practical benefits. For one thing, it will allow us to reduce the number of duplicative software licenses we maintain separately between UADA and UARK, resulting in meaningful cost savings. For another thing, the migration will make it easier for UADA personnel to access UARK resources. For example, our current system requires a county agent who wants access to the UA Library to go through a separate approval process to be issued UARK credentials to allow access. After the migration, this separate process will be unnecessary. Access to UARK resources, like the library, will be seamless for UADA employees.

Now, there's no need to throw out all your business cards just yet. UADA emails won't stop working. They will be converted to aliases that will forward to the new UARK addresses. For stakeholders, the migration project should be basically imperceptible. As for other questions about the migration, IT Services already has a website on the project up and running. The website includes some basic information on the project as well as a list of FAQs that will be updated as needed. We'll provide updates on the project as it progresses. In the meantime, I'll see you on MySpace. ■

INSIDE SCOOP

- 2. ACE in Greece
- 3. Dinner at the Vines Tickets
- 4. Graduate Student Career Development Seminar
- 5. Lida Araghi Selected for Leadership Program
- 6. Tech Corner
- 7. Pink Tomato Festival All-Tomato Luncheon
- ...And much more!

ACE in Greece

The Agriculture Technology Career Exploration Program (ACE Program,) a select group of Arkansas 4-H youth, packed their curiosity and traveled to Greece for an unforgettable agricultural technology adventure.

Their journey led them from ancient landmarks in Athens to modern businesses where innovation and

tradition work hand in hand. The ACE 2026 Cohort discovered how olives become world-class olive oil through advanced production methods, watched master bakers blend time-honored recipes with modern technology, and explored a candy company where science and creativity create sweet treats enjoyed around the world.

As they walked among the historic ruins of Athens, they realized that the same spirit of innovation that built great civilizations continues to shape agriculture and food production today. Every tour, conversation and hands-on experience introduced them to exciting careers in food science, engineering, manufacturing, agribusiness and international trade.

They returned to Arkansas with more than souvenirs—they brought home new friendships, a global perspective, and the confidence to dream bigger. Their Greek adventure proved that agriculture connects people, cultures and technology, and that the next generation of leaders can find opportunity wherever curiosity takes them. ■



ACE 2026 exploring the Parthenon in Athens, Greece.

4-H Camp Clover



Cross County's 4-H Camp Clover brought together 16 young campers for a day full of fun, friendship and hands-on learning at Village Creek State Park. Youth ages 5–8 participated in engaging activities designed to spark curiosity, encourage teamwork and build confidence.

Campers explored nature through guided outdoor activities, created a bird feeder, played group games and learned about the environment. Throughout the day, they practiced important life skills such as communication, cooperation and problem-solving while making new friends and enjoying the outdoors.

The work of volunteers, families, and partners helped make this a memorable experience. We look forward to welcoming even more young explorers to future Cross

County 4-H events and to continuing to inspire a love of learning, leadership, and community through 4-H. ■



16 campers enjoyed the Cross County 4-H Camp Clover and all the activities.

Discounted Dinner at the Vines Tickets Available to Employees

BL
3

Tickets are on sale now for the 6th annual Dinner at the Vines event on Sept. 29 from 5-8 p.m. at the C.A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center. Guests will enjoy a garden party, a lakeside dinner, online and live auctions, and entertainment by the Kordsmeier Music.

The regular ticket price is \$150 per person, but employees can purchase half-price ticket for \$75 at <https://bit.ly/Vines26>.

Proceeds from the event support the 4-H Center and 4-H programs at the center. Shannon Caldwell is coordinating the online auction. If you want to donate something, please reach out to her at 501-821-6884 or email scaldwell@uada.edu.

Examples of auction items include: gift cards, overnight stays, tickets or passes to events and experiences, jewelry, collectibles, home décor, and handmade items like goat soaps, jams and jellies, wooden charcuterie boards and high-end crafts. ■

Cloverpalooza Sparks Curiosity



Six county extension agents and two county agent interns from Columbia, Ouachita and Union counties hosted a two-day camp called 4-H Cloverpalooza Camp at Southern Arkansas University in Magnolia, on June 16-17.

Eighteen 4-H members and four Teen Leaders participated in hands-on educational experiences, including cooking, water bath canning, soap making, engineering pond, SeaPerch underwater robotics, entomology, Ozobots, drones, wildlife, yoga and animal care.

Cindy Phillips, who coordinates the 4-H Tech Change-makers program, introduced participants to Ozobots and coding. Jacob Hackman, assistant professor of



4-H Cloverpalooza camp participants learned many hands-on educational experiences while having a great time!

forestry management and extension, shared his knowledge of wild-life/forestry and made tracks for participants to take home. Arkansas Game and Fish Commission specialists led sessions on fishing, fish identification and aquatic education. Their expertise and enthusiasm created meaningful learning experiences that inspired curiosity

and encouraged youth to explore new skills.

Through hands-on activities and the 4-H motto, "Learn by Doing," participants gained new skills, built friendships, and created lasting memories during this exciting two-day camp. ■

Grad Student Career Development Seminar

Animal Science hosted Dr. Irena Palamani Xhurxhi, director of applied AI (Artificial Intelligence) at Walmart, for an insightful presentation titled *"From Grad School to AI Fluency: What Industry Actually Expects."*

Organized by Dr. Aranyak Goswami, the event provided graduate students with a valuable opportunity to engage with an industry leader and learn how AI is transforming research and professional careers.



Dr. Xhurxhi, Director of Applied AI at Walmart, highlighted practical strategies for moving beyond basic AI awareness to true AI fluency.

Dr. Xhurxhi highlighted practical strategies for moving beyond basic AI awareness to true AI fluency, emphasizing the use of AI tools to accelerate research, enhance communication and prepare for success in industry and beyond. Her expertise offered attendees actionable guidance and a clearer understanding of workforce expectations in an AI-driven world. The discussion attracted faculty and graduate students from multiple programs, fostering meaningful interdisciplinary dialogue. ■

Agents Participate in Tote Bag Sewing Workshop

Family and Consumer Sciences Educator Keith Statham-Cleek coordinated a two-day sewing workshop where agents made tote bags and learned pattern layout, interfacing and basic construction. The training prepared them to then lead sewing workshops in their respective counties.

The workshop was led by Dr. Laurie M. Apple, associate professor who teaches apparel merchandising and product development in the School of Human Environmental Sciences at the University of Arkansas.

Extension agents are seeing a rise in interest in sewing. There are plans to duplicate the tote bag workshop in the Ouachita and Delta districts. ■



Cooperative Extension employees took part in a 2-Day Tote Bag Machine Sewing workshop on campus at Fayetteville. The attendees are seen showing off their finished projects here in the steps of the Home Economics Building.

Araghi Selected for NEAFCS Leadership Program

BL
5



National Extension Association
of Family & Consumer Sciences

Dr. Lida Araghi, assistant professor and extension nutrition and food safety specialist, has been selected for the 2026-2027 class of the NEAFCS Leadership Experience.

The National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS) is the professional



Lida Araghi

organization for extension family and consumer sciences that builds leaders for the future, recognizes and promotes excellence and scholarship in FCS programming, provides professional growth and development opportunities, serves as a nationwide resource for education, information, networking and partnerships, promotes Extension FCS and the mission and goals of the Land Grant University Extension System. ■

The Bridge Launches with 50 Charter 4-H Members

The first annual The Bridge Leadership Conference held June 3–4 brought together 50 intermediate Arkansas 4-H members (ages 11–13) as charter members of this exciting new leadership experience.



The foam cannon was a lot of soapy fun!

Throughout the two-day conference, participants discovered the many opportunities available as they prepare to become senior 4-H members. They created vision boards, learned line dancing, crafted fire tiles and cooled off with plenty of fun in the foam cannon.

One of the conference highlights was the inaugural Rubber Chicken Games, where members showcased their creativity and quick thinking through public speaking challenges. The youth also competed in a Minute To Win It Challenge. Charter Members also attended the Teen Star Banquet and the Teen Star and Hall of Fame Awards Ceremony, giving them a firsthand look at the achievements and traditions that await them on their 4-H journey.

The Bridge successfully connected intermediate members to senior members and the next stage of leadership in Arkansas 4-H, providing new friendships, unforgettable memories and inspiration for the future. ■



Wyatts favorite part of The Bridge was lighting his fire tile!



Help Us Prepare for the UADA to UARK Migration:

Retire Unused and End-of-Life Devices

As we prepare for the migration of devices into the UARK In-tune environment, IT is asking departments to help identify and turn in computers that have reached end-of-life or are no longer being used. This includes devices sitting in closets, storage rooms, file cabinets, desk drawers, labs or office corners collecting dust (you get the picture). Devices that are no longer serving a business purpose should not be migrated into the new environment.

Our Computer Lifecycle Management specifies a five-year replacement cycle to ensure staff have secure, reliable and supported technology. While an older computer may still power on, it often no longer meets modern security, performance and software requirements. Older devices also require more support, increase cybersecurity risk, and continue to generate licensing and management costs, even when they are no longer actively used.

Removing end-of-life and unused devices before the UADA to UARK Microsoft tenant migration will help reduce complexity, improve security, lower costs and allow IT to focus migration efforts on systems that support current business operations. It also provides an opportunity to clean up inventory and eliminate equipment that has been stored and forgotten over time. Devices that have reached five years of service are retired and replaced with supported equipment. End-of-life computers are not retained, reassigned or redeployed, even if they appear functional.

If your area has computers that are no longer in use or that may be approaching end-of-life, please work with IT to have them reviewed and retired appropriately before the migration begins. Find the M&R information [here](#).

Phishing-Resistant MFA

Phishing is one of the most common ways cybercriminals try to break into accounts. Even with regular multi factor authentication (MFA), attackers can sometimes trick people into approving fake sign in requests. Phishing resistant MFA uses modern sign in methods, like Microsoft Passkeys, that can't be reused by

attackers, even if someone clicks a bad link. Passkeys use your device's built in security, such as a fingerprint, face recognition or PIN, to confirm it's really you.

Microsoft Passkeys are now available for UADA users. They make signing in faster, reduce password problems, and help prevent account lockouts and recovery delays while keeping accounts highly secure.

How to get started: [Set Up Passkey in Microsoft Authenticator](#).

Zoom Pro Tip

How to Improve Lighting

Lighting in virtual meetings can be difficult to work with. A few lighting adjustments can make a big difference in your on-camera presence. Good lighting helps you appear more professional and engaged during meetings. Here are some tips to help you improve your lighting:

- Sit 3 to 6 feet away from a window
- Keep lighting behind the camera
- Keep light in front of you
- Use a curtain to soften bright sunlight
- Use a lamp or ring light for even lighting

For more suggestions on improving your lighting, please read the Zoom article "[Lighting Concepts](#)."

During a Zoom meeting, select the up-caret next to Video in the meeting toolbar, then open Video Effects. Select Virtual Background and choose from the available options. For more details about changing your Zoom background, please watch the Zoom video, "[Backgrounds & Video Filters](#)."

Hump Day Hacks

Hump Day Hack resources can be found on the [Hump Day Hacks Resource page](#) in Team Dynamix. June's hacks included sorting data by multiple columns in Excel, exporting Word documents as accessible PDFs, and how to change your Zoom background. See you at the next Hump Day Hacks on the fourth Wednesday of the month! ■

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 July's Social Media 101 webinar? Check out the [recording and resources](#).



Bradley County Pink Tomato Festival

All-Tomato Luncheon

Bradley County Extension Homemakers continued a tradition started by longtime Extension agent Jean Frisby: the All-Tomato Luncheon. The All-Tomato Luncheon is part of the annual Pink Tomato Festival held in Bradley County. The festival, in its 70th year, is the longest-running festival in Arkansas.

The luncheon began in the second year of the festival. Mrs. Frisby gathered with others to celebrate the girls who ran for Tomato Queen that year and was inspired to establish an event for the next year. The first event was held at the YMCA, which had air-conditioning, a luxury in those days. About 25 people attended, but the next year the event drew more than 100. Attendees heard various speakers from the Cooperative Extension Service, which continues to be an integral part of tomato production in Bradley County.

Bradley County tomatoes are allowed to begin ripening on the vine versus supermarket varieties that

are picked green.

The pink tomato has translucent skin, and the interior when ripe looks pink instead of red. In 1923, Bradley County Extension Agent C.S. Johnson experimented with tomatoes grown from seeds in a hotbed.

Over time more farmers experimented with pink tomatoes in Bradley County.

Dr. John Anderson and Arkansas Sen. Ben Gilmore were speakers at this year's luncheon. 4-H members were involved too and volunteered as servers during the luncheon. ■



Longtime EHC Member, Wanda Carr, shows off her tomato apron.

PEARS



The Office of Organizational Accountability and Evaluation would like to highlight a time-saving tool for reporting program activities that cover similar content. The Copy function in PEARs is a simple but powerful

tool that helps users save time when entering activities, events or records that share similar information. Instead of creating a new entry from scratch, users can quickly duplicate an existing record and make any necessary adjustments.

This feature is especially helpful when documenting recurring activities, ongoing programs or events that follow a similar

format. By copying an existing entry, users can retain important details such as locations and activity information, reducing repetitive data entry and minimizing the risk of errors. By using the Copy function, PEARs users can maintain high-quality records while making the reporting process faster and more manageable. ■

The screenshot shows the PEARs web application interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Plan', 'Engage', 'Analyze', and 'Reflect'. Below that, the breadcrumb trail reads 'Engage / Program Activities / Financial Management - Searcy Library - April 2026'. The main content area displays the details for 'Financial Management - Searcy Library - April 2026'. A yellow arrow points to the 'Copy' button in the top right corner of the entry details. The entry details include 'Reporting Periods', 'Program Areas', 'Action Plans', 'Delivery Methods', and 'Sessions'. A sidebar on the right shows a list of checkboxes for various report sections: General Information, Collaborators, Custom Data, Youth Programming, Evaluation, and Demographics.

The Copy function in PEARs is a powerful tool and time saver.

Roots To Re-Entry Program

What started as a meeting between with Crittenden County Ag Agent Katrina Wallace and East Central Arkansas Community Corrections to bring agriculture programs to the women's correctional facility has grown into a quarter-acre garden, educational programs and cooking demonstrations, all to teach incarcerated women life skills to take back to their families.

With just three months of harvesting, the ladies harvested just over 2,500 pounds. The fresh produce was then served at the facility. Along with learning soil health, planting dates, disease pressure and fertilization, the woman have also been busy making strawberry jelly, compound butter and enjoying fried green tomatoes.

Through hands-on gardening experiences, the women plant, tend, and harvest their own garden. They gain not only gardening skills but also life skills such as responsibility,



(From L to R): CES Agriculture Agent Katrina Wallace and Lieutenant Burton collect the final summer harvest.

accountability, work ethics, self-confidence, teamwork and a sense of personal growth and achievement.

Just as seeds require care, time and dedication to flourish, participants are developing the skills needed for successful re-entry into their families, workplaces and communities. ■

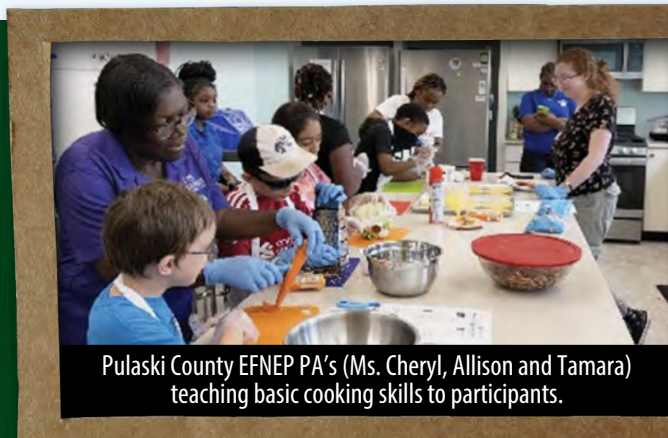
Pulaski County Explorer Camp

The Pulaski County Extension provided Pulaski County youth with four days of educational, artistic and hands-on experiences at Explorer Camp. Youth explored what nature has to offer and learned about the important work of Cooperative Extension and 4-H.

Throughout the week, campers used their imagination and creativity to create nature-inspired artwork using colors and materials found in the natural world. They

also learned from local firefighters about the important role firefighters play in communities.

In the kitchen, campers developed valuable food preparation skills while having fun making healthy snacks and meals.



Pulaski County EFNEP PA's (Ms. Cheryl, Allison and Tamara) teaching basic cooking skills to participants.

They learned how to prepare salsa and chips, smoothies and fresh fruit salad while gaining knowledge about nutrition and healthy eating habits.

To conclude their camp experience, participants visited several local farms and toured the Arkansas 4-H Center. These visits helped them see agriculture in action and allowed them to explore the beautiful C.A. Vines Arkansas 4-H center while learning about the many 4-H opportunities available to them.

Three 4-H Teen Leaders – Landon, Kye, and Ashlee – mentored younger campers throughout the week. Their leadership and energy helped create a positive and engaging environment for all participants. ■



Jason Davis (assistant professor remote sensing and pesticides application) demonstrating how to maneuver a drone.

Reciprocal Meat Conference in Amarillo

BL
9

Arkansas Meat Science had a strong presence and many accomplishments at the recent American Meat Science Association's (AMSA) Reciprocal Meat Conference (RMC) held in Amarillo, Texas. The road trip from Fayetteville to Amarillo included stops at the Tyson Foods Case Ready Plant in Sherman, TX; Bar S Plant in Altus, OK; and a tour of the West Texas A&M Research Feedyard in Canyon, TX.

The Meats Science Quiz Bowl team competed with teams from across the country. Team members included Cason Frisby, Madison Blank, Victoria Castillo, Emily Longwit, and Anna LeRoux. They were coached by Jeremy Summers.

In addition to Quiz Bowl and the Iron Chef competitions, students also presented research. Cason Frisby placed second in

the undergraduate research poster presentation and won the Undergraduate Scholastic Achievement Award. Cameron Catrett, a Ph.D. student, won third place in the graduate research competition. Both students are advised by Dr. Derico Setyabrata. Undergraduates Madison Blank and Victoria Castillo also presented their research. The Arkansas Beef Council funded the educational experience for students. ■



Arkansas Meat Science was well represented at the Reciprocal Meat Conference in Amarillo.

Airport Project



Sebastian County 4-H has partnered with the Fort Smith Regional Airport to showcase the creativity of local youth through a rotating art exhibit in the airport's main lobby. The display highlights the impact of 4-H in the community while giving travelers a chance to experience the talents of area members.

The inaugural exhibit features photography by Sebastian County 4-H members. The photos were selected from more than 50 entries submitted to the Ross Photography Contest. The four photos that won the county-level contest have been part of the "traveling photo exhibit" that has moved all over Sebastian County in recent months. With this unique opportunity to partner with the airport, Sebastian County 4-H has carved out a more permanent location to showcase even more photography taken by our talented young people.



(From L to R): Allisyn Stratton, 4-H Program Assistant and Megan Adkins, 4-H Agent in front of the large metal 4-H clover.

At the center of the display is a large metal 4-H clover generously donated by Kopco, Inc. of Fort Smith. Positioned in a high-traffic area, the exhibit will be seen by more than 120,000 passengers and visitors each year. Free crayon packs, coloring sheets, and information about 4-H are also available for young travelers to enjoy during their visit, creating an engaging experience and raising awareness about 4-H in Sebastian County. ■

Grants & Contracts

PROJECT TITLE	AWARD AMOUNT	PI	GRANTING AGENCY
Mite and Insect-Transmitted Virus Complexes in North Carolina Caneberries	19,003	Aaron Cato	NC State
Tyson Career Readiness CALL Tour	12,500	Debbie Nistler	4-H National Council
Cotton Spray Drone Trials	20,000	Jason Davis	Cotton, Inc.
Arkansas State Walking College - 2026-2027	99,154	Jessica Vincent	Arkansas Department of Health
Optimization of U.S.-Manufactured Spray Drone Applications for FHB Control in Wheat	29,915	Terry Spurlock	Agricultural Research Service
TOTAL AWARDS FOR JUNE 2026: \$180,572			

Personnel Changes



Welcome Aboard:

Serena McGinley – County Extension Agent - Staff Chair, Grant County
Shyia Ellingburg – County Extension Agent 4-H, Jefferson County
Claudia Pouncey – County Extension Agent - 4-H/Agriculture, Jackson County
Penny Merritt – Administrative Specialist III, Monroe County
Shelby Curry – County Extension Agent - Family & Consumer Science, Lonoke County
William Barnett – Program Associate - Crop Soils, NERREC

Farewell to:

Eva Langley – County Extension Agent - Staff Chair, Pike County
Katrina Alison Sellers – County Extension Agent - Family & Consumer Science, Craighead County
Amanda Sinkey – 4-H Program Assistant, Prairie County
Krysti Gerlach – Administrative Specialist III, Monroe County
Alyx Herring – Administrative Specialist II, Benton County
Maxwell Sturdivant – Plant Pathology Post Doctoral Fellow, Lonoke Agricultural Center
Jamison Purtle – Administrative Specialist III, Hempstead County
Savanna George – Program Associate - Community Professional & Economic Development, LRSO
Kristin Lehmann – 4-H & Youth Development - Program Technician, LRSO
Lauren Cheevers – County Extension Agent - 4-H, Washington County
Stephanie Falwell – County Extension Agent - Family & Consumer Science, Woodruff County
Jasmin Hoskins – EFNEP Program Assistant, Phillips County