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## BLUE LETTER

June 2021  
No. 3830



FROM THE DIRECTOR

# Full Steam Ahead

June 30 marks the end of fiscal year 2021. I am pleased that we were able to announce a merit-based salary increase for FY22. This increase comes as a result of a permanent budget increase for the Division of Agriculture, of which we are all a part. This is something that many at the Division level have worked toward for several years, but I want to take a moment in this month's Blue Letter to thank Dr. Mark Cochran, our Vice President for Agriculture, and his team for all the work that went into this accomplishment. For far too long, the Cooperative Extension Service has operated on a flat budget while the rest of the world plows forward. While we have received some deeply appreciated one-time funding a few times, it is hard to build on our greatest resource – our people – without permanent funding increases. It is also worth noting that, as turbulent a political season as we have had, our governor and our representatives were able to do this amid a pandemic. Hopefully we are continuing to show our clientele, all Arkansans, our value to them both personally but to communities and groups across the state.

I have attended numerous in-person events since the lifting of our COVID-related safety requirements. These included my first trip to the 4-H Center for O'Rama, the Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council state meeting in North Little Rock, a visit to the 4-H Grassland Evaluation event hosted by Dr. John Jennings and others (an event I did in 4-H), and sadly, a meeting in Dumas where many of our agriculture specialists provided crop management information to farmers who have

suffered greatly due to flooding in southeast Arkansas. I must confess that it is hard for me not to be a little overenthusiastic for these opportunities to see our clientele and my co-workers face to face for the first time as director. Folks seem to be happy to see us too. This summer is shaping up to be quite different when I compare it to my first.

While these events have been good for me, I know we face some challenges with many of our programs in terms of getting clients back after habits and schedules have changed during the past year. I have faith that once we get events going again, people will gradually return to us, and I know our program leaders are hard at work facilitating this.

Lots of things are happening here at the Little Rock State Office. The offices (and the parking lot) are now full following our official return to the state office on June 1. Renovations to the communications wing are nearly complete, and that group will soon return to their permanent offices! Also, the bees are coming soon to the cantina area where apiculture instructor Jon Zawislak has been working with Graham Peterson, our facilities management director, to install a demonstration beehive with outdoor access. This will be a good resource to use for education on the value of beneficial insects. The bees for this hive were relocated from an undesirable location. There is a lot more to tell, but I will stop here. Hope you are all having a productive June, and like me, enjoying things being a bit more normal. ■

## INSIDE SCOOP

2. Celebrate Arkansas Blackberries!
3. Ultrasound in New Epigenetic Research on Cattle
4. Blackberry Growers Association Meeting
5. Food Preservation In-Service Training
6. Welcome Madds
7. Tech Corner
8. Animal Science Gives Tours of Facilities and much more!

UofA

DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE  
RESEARCH & EXTENSION

University of Arkansas System

# Celebrate Arkansas Blackberries!

Gov. Asa Hutchinson proclaimed June as Arkansas Blackberry Month, and several special events are happening Saturday, June 26, at farmers markets across the state.

Horticulture extension specialist Amanda McWhirt, the Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association and the Arkansas Department of Agriculture have been promoting blackberries as an in-season, fresh, local and healthy fruit available in Arkansas.



This "I Love AR Blackberries" sticker will be given out at participating farmer's markets booths June 19 & 26.

The following markets are will have blackberry information, recipes, and "I love Arkansas Blackberries" stickers at their sites June 26.

- Cabot — Barnhill Orchards drive-through market
- Bentonville — Farmers Market
- Fayetteville — Farmers Market and Sta-N-Step Farm (pick-your-own)
- Little Rock — Hillcrest Farmers Market
- North Little Rock — Me and McGee Market
- Searcy — Searcy Farmers Market. ■



Governor Hutchinson's Proclamation for AR Blackberry Month.

# LeadAR Class 19 Finds Justice in Hempstead County

Judges, juries and jails were just a few highlights from LeadAR Class 19's first day in Hempstead County.

The May 27-28 seminar, which focused on justice and education, kicked off with a welcome from County Judge Jerry Crane. Throughout the day, participants learned about programs offered at the University of Arkansas Hope-Texarkana, Southwest Arkansas Educational Coop, and at the Sevier County Jail. Class 19 spent lunch with the Rotary Club of Hope and the afternoon touring a blade smithing school and Historic Washington. The evening ended with dinner at Williams Tavern and a visit to the Coulter Farmstead and Mercantile.

On day two, the class visited the Hope Chamber of Commerce, the construction site of the new courthouse, Hempstead Co. Library, and Yerger Middle School. Class members also heard from several community leaders. The afternoon was devoted to introducing and discussing the service project component of the LeadAR program. Dr. Julie Robinson provides a high-light of the latest seminar in this YouTube [video](#).

LeadAR helps Arkansans broaden their understanding of issues and opportunities facing our state and strengthen their ability to make a difference. For more information contact Dr. Julie Robinson, [jrobinson@uada.edu](mailto:jrobinson@uada.edu), or Lisa Davis, [ldavis@uada.edu](mailto:ldavis@uada.edu). ■



LeadAR Class 19 travel to Hempstead County, are welcomed by County Judge Jerry Crane and hear from community leaders.

# Ultrasound in New Epigenetic Research on Cattle

Dr. Brittni Littlejohn, an assistant professor in the Department of Animal Science at the University of Arkansas, conducts research in the area of prenatal programming and epigenetics in cattle. Mammals are most susceptible to programming and epigenetic modification during prenatal and early life development; therefore, nutritional management of cattle during gestation has the potential to shape lifelong performance characteristics in offspring.

Littlejohn's laboratory is conducting research to evaluate the influence of endophyte-infected Kentucky-31 Tall Fescue and melatonin consumed by the dam during gestation on uterine artery blood flow and postnatal performance of offspring. Tall fescue, commonly called toxic fescue, is the most utilized cool-season forage present in the southeastern United States, making it an important and economically relevant forage to the region. Due to its vasoactivity, toxic fescue consumed during gestation has been thought to reduce blood flow to the uterus, potentially impacting the developing fetus. Melatonin is being tested as a potential mitigation strategy to counteract negative impacts of toxic fescue exposure during gestation. Pregnant heifers are being

fed toxic or endophyte-free fescue seed with and without melatonin using the department's newly installed C-Lock SmartFeed Pro controlled feeding system at the Agricultural Experiment Station at Savoy. Doppler ultrasonography is being used to quantify blood flow in the uterine artery of pregnant heifers from each treatment group. Parameters of immune function, metabolism, growth and carcass characteristics will be evaluated in offspring.



Dr. Brittni Littlejohn (left) and graduate student Randi Benefield (right) performing Doppler ultrasonography on the uterine artery to quantify blood flow to the uterus.

The goal of this research is to provide insight into how management of pregnant cattle on toxic fescue during gestation can impact economically relevant traits in offspring at each stage of the production cycle, and to test strategies to optimize offspring performance in production scenarios utilizing toxic fescue. ■

## Youth Visit Animal Science

Students in the Arkansas Lighthouse Summer Enrichment program, a college prep program based out of Jacksonville, Arkansas, visited campus in June. The tour introduced 77 students in grades 5-8 to the UA Bumpers College of Agriculture, Food and Life Sciences career pathways. Students toured our facilities at the Milo J. Shult Agricultural Research & Extension Center and saw the cattle herd and the Dorper sheep flock. Sarah Shelby, program technician in Animal Science, coordinated the department's efforts. ■

## SAVE THIS DATE

State of the Division

July 7 at 9 a.m.

Please join us on Wednesday, July 7, at 9 a.m. for the next State of the Division broadcast with Mark Cochran, head of the Division of Agriculture. Listen in for a situation report on issues affecting the Division of Agriculture.



Fruit Research Station & Extension Horticulturalists Host

# Blackberry Growers Association Meeting

On June 9, the Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association held its 2021 summer meeting at the Fruit Research Station in Clarksville. Led by horticulture extension specialist Amanda McWhirt and food scientist Renee Threlfall, the meeting highlighted the highly successful collaboration of UADA employees with growers and the Arkansas Department of Agriculture. The meeting was funded with support from the Arkansas Specialty Crop

Block Grant program in support of research led by Drs. McWhirt and Threlfall and was hosted in conjunction with the Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association.



Graduate student Anthony Gunderman shows a robotic blackberry picker prototype.



Dr. Amanda McWhirt discusses training methods for the Rotating Cross Arm Trellis at the 2021 Summer Meeting for the Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association.

A total of 70 attendees started off with a blind blackberry taste test featuring several UADA-bred varieties. After the results, they heard from Renee Threlfall about her lab's prototype robotic blackberry picker and extension agricultural economist Ron Rainey's [Experience Arkansas Agriculture](#) program. The tour then headed out to the field for a tour of the blackberry research at the station. Find a complete list of the stops [here](#). ■

## Meet, Greet and Eat

Employees at the state office returned from remote status on June 1.

View more images from the Meet, Greet and Eat event [here](#).



# County Extension Agents Complete Food Preservation In-Service Training

Arkansas has a long history of food preservation, and the art and science of saving food is making a comeback. Twelve county extension agents attended a food preservation

in-service training June 1-3 at the University of Central Arkansas Foods Lab in Conway. Six food preservation agent specialists — Jane Newton, Debbie Baker, Terrie James, Shannon Autrey, Michelle Carter, and Julian Carpenter — showcased several food preservation techniques to make jams and jellies, salsa, and canned chicken and pork over the two-day training. Now equipped with the knowledge and skills of preserving food, the 12 agent-attendees will be an ongoing resource for their community clientele.

For more information, visit <https://www.uaex.uada.edu/life-skills-wellness/food-safety/preservation/>. ■



2021 Food Preservation in-service training at UCA.

First row: Jane Newton (Lincoln), Anna Harlan (Stone), Debbie Baker (Clay); Second row: Terrie James (Hempstead), Karalee Black (Pike), Christa Mazzanti (Chicot), Pamela Luker (Pope); Third row: Mary Beth Groce (Faulkner), Shannon Autrey (Conway), Jamie Collier (Columbia), Michelle Carter (Bradley); Fourth row: Jessa Heavin (Van Buren), Julian Carpenter (Independence), Jessica Angel (Cleburne), Elizabeth Daigle (Izard), Karley Mishler (St. Francis), Megan Wells (Pulaski), Alison Crane (Garland).

# FCS Science Team Receives Immunization Education Grants

Dr. Bryan Mader and the health team in Family and Consumer Science received two grants totaling \$225,000 from a partnership between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, and the Extension Foundation.



The long-term goal of this partnership is to strengthen immunization education with a special focus on adult vaccination hesitancy. The immediate goal of this first funded project is to promote the uptake of COVID-19

vaccinations through relevant messaging and innovative models for community action. The target audience for these projects will be minority adults in rural Arkansas, mostly in the Arkansas Delta region. ■



Dr. Bryan Mader



## Focuses on Enhancing Virtual Meeting

Virtual meetings often save time and money but present challenges in keeping participants engaged. In the latest Leadership Lunch and Learn, Dr. Kristi Farner, program and state development specialist at the University of Georgia Extension, shared her insights on engaging participants online.

She also shared several helpful tools and resources to ramp up online meetings (view a recording [here](#), tools/resources [here](#)):

- **Virtual meeting icebreakers.** A compiled list of suggestions for ice breakers.
- **Digital tools and resources for online engagement.** Tools and resources compiled to assist 4-H staff in virtual program delivery efforts.
- **Facilitator notes.** A comprehensive template and timeline for producing online meetings.
- **Tips for successful virtual facilitation.** Tips to convert

in-person meetings or programs to virtual sessions.

- **Virtual facilitation resources.** A list of online software/tools available to engage online meeting participants.

The next Lunch and Learn session will be on time management with Julianne Dunn, an instructor in the Community, Professional and Economic Development unit. The session is June 30 from 12:15-1 p.m. Register [here](#).

For more information about the webinar leadership series, contact Julie Robinson at [jrobinson@uada.edu](mailto:jrobinson@uada.edu) or Lisa Davis at [ldavis@uada.edu](mailto:ldavis@uada.edu). ■



## Welcome Madds

If you happen to drive down Deane Street, passing the Milo J. Shult Agricultural Research & Extension Center (SAREC) in Fayetteville, you may notice a new face among the Dorper sheep research flock. This spring, Madder-Akka, or “Madds,” a 4-year-old llama, joined the sheep to work as a livestock guardian animal.

After a 30-day period to acclimate to her new home and flock, Madds is now tightly bonded to her sheep and their lambs. During the day, you might see her moving the sheep away from the fence line if visitors or joggers pass too closely. When llamas sense danger, they emit a high-pitched, eerie “alarm call,” then run toward the threat, placing themselves between the intruder and their flock. They will kick, rush, charge and may even bite to protect their flock.

Although guardian dogs and even donkeys are more common for protecting livestock, llamas have recently

seen a surge in popularity. They are naturally sociable, easy keepers, have similar nutritional requirements as sheep, and producers have reported a near 100% reduction in losses due to predators after adding a llama or pair of llamas to their flock. They are usually very gentle, calm and curious, but are not overly affectionate and prefer less handling.

Be sure to keep on the lookout for Madds. She will be on duty. ■



Madds a 4-year-old llama, protects sheep and lambs at the Milo J. Shult Agricultural Research & Extension Center.



## Email Etiquette Tips: Preventing reply-all by using BCC

We have all experienced the annoying influx of emails. Someone sends an email to a distribution list (DL) or group email account (group) and someone inadvertently does a Reply-All when asking the sender a question or making a comment.

### When is it proper to reply-all?

Most times the answer is never. This is especially true if you are responding to an email that was sent to a DL or group. You should only Reply-All to an email when you're sure your reply is relevant to everyone in the thread.

### How can you as the sender prevent the reply-all response?

When sending emails to a DL or group, make sure you place it in the BCC field. Since you must include something in the TO field, you can enter your own email address there.

### How does this prevent someone from using reply-all?

It doesn't. However, a Reply-All will only be sent to recipients in the TO and CC fields, not the BCC field. This is how you prevent them from responding to everyone in the distribution list or group account.

## Don't see the BCC field when composing your email?

Within Outlook online (OWA) – begin a new message, BCC is located to the far right of the TO field.

Within Outlook desktop – begin a new message, select the Options menu and click on the BCC icon.

## Help for You

Do you have a document or a web page that needs an accessibility review? Use the [Accessibility Request/ PDF Submission Form](#) to request an accessibility audit or submit a PDF for review.

If you currently are a website editor and upload your PDFs to the webpage before submitting for approval, feel free to continue to use that method.

## Zoom Pro Tip-Reduce your Email with Zoom's App Chat

Is your email inbox overflowing? Are you tired of the volley of emails back and forth and back and forth? Jump off the email train and use Zoom's desktop and mobile app Chat for those quick communications.

### Get started:

1. Sign in to your UADA Zoom account and stay signed in on your:
  - a. [Computer desktop app](#)
  - b. [Mobile device\(s\) app](#)
2. Enable the [recommended settings](#) and notifications in your Zoom app.

Use Zoom app chat for quick communication with individuals and groups. ■

## 2021 TECH TUESDAYS WEBINARS

Join us for the July Tech Tuesday, "UADA Software". [Register here](#). Did you miss the Tech Tuesday "Do You Have "Sensitive" Data? Protecting You and Your Data" webinar? Check out the blog post [here](#).



# Animal Science Gives Tours of Facilities to Heifer, Grass Roots Co-op

Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station animal scientists and staff members Kelly Vierck, Tim Johnson, and Brittini Littlejohn gave tours of animal science facilities to members of Heifer USA and the Grass Roots Co-op.

Vierck and Johnson gave the group a tour of the UA System Division of Agriculture Red Meat Abattoir and showcased some of the equipment and research capabilities of the facilities.



Kelly Vierck

Visitors also saw three farms, including the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Stations at the Savoy Research Complex, the Physiology and Parasitology Research

Unit, and the Milo J. Shult Agricultural Research & Extension Center.

The tour showcased the department's new C-Lock SmartFeed Pro precision agriculture-controlled feeding system, which was demonstrated to visitors during the tour. The tour provided visitors with information about research with beef cattle, sheep, and swine, and potential collaborations.



Brittini Littlejohn

Heifer USA, a flagship project of Heifer International, provides training to farmers in cultivation techniques, and helps them organize cooperatives that share marketing, packaging, distribution, and credit and loan services. ■

## Rain Garden Successfully Installed

The rain garden installation was a team effort between Washington Co. Extension Office Water Quality Agent Meghan Post and the Arkansas Arts Academy Elementary School in Rogers. Meghan worked closely with sixth grade teacher, LaVona Cerna to develop and implement programming for her students related to water quality. After a lesson on watersheds, Meghan and LaVona discussed ways to continue the educational experience for students, and decided on a rain garden to enhance the aesthetic of the school's entrance.



Finished rain garden installation.

Students were involved from beginning to end. They helped dig the holes, conduct percolation tests, plant the native plants and move the thousands of pounds of pea gravel.

The rain garden is managed by LaVona Cerna, her colleagues and their students. It provides the school with an outdoor learning space and creates a pollinator habitat. By capturing and soaking in stormwater, the rain garden puts less pressure on the storm drain system, lessening the volume of water running through and therefore helping decrease streambank erosion. Rain gardens require minimal management, and are a great best management practice for stormwater pollution prevention! ■



The rain garden installation team included student and parent volunteers, as well as sixth grade teacher LaVona Cerna.

## Tour De Tomato

Bradley Co. 4-H sponsored a rest stop for the Tour De Tomato. Mr. Cloverbud was the special guest and was worn by Mia B.



## 4-H Makes Fundraising Push

The Arkansas 4-H Foundation is just \$3,780 away from reaching its goal of \$350,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30.

“We’re on the verge of a very good total, which means great things for Arkansas 4-H’ers, like scholarships, program sponsorships and greater access to all we offer,” John Thomas, foundation development officer, said.

To give securely online, go to: <https://uada.formstack.com/forms/donate4h>

# Grants and Contracts

PROJECT TITLE	AWARD AMOUNT	PI	GRANTING AGENCY
Cotton Incorporated-Cotton Specialists Partnership: Large-Plot, Replicated Variety Evaluations - AR	\$10,000	Bill Robertson	Cotton, Inc.
Crawford County HydroPonic Conservation and Sustainability Project	\$4,500	Brandi Davis	Arkansas Economic Development Commission
Best Care Agreement for FY22	\$322,500	Brittney Schrick	Arkansas Dept of Human Services, Division of Child Care & Early Childhood Education
Arkansas Game and Fish Wildlife Conservation Education Grant Program for Drew County WHEP	\$4,000	Danielle Dickson	Arkansas Economic Development Commission
Protocol No. IN21USADJB - Service Order No. 133	\$13,230	Gus M Lorenz	Monsanto Company
Insect Management in Mid-South Pest Management: AR	\$37,500	Gus M Lorenz	Cotton, Inc.
Tarnished Plantbug insecticide initial timing in B3TXF versus B3XF - Service Order No. 128	\$95,760	Gus M Lorenz	Monsanto / Bayer CropScience
Desha County Game & Fish Wildlife Conservation Education	\$11,450.10	Heather Reed	Arkansas Economic Development Commission
Conduct study "TK2-A"	\$10,500	Thomas R. Butts	BASF
Evaluate efficacy and crop safety of NAI-1555 on rice.	\$16,800	Thomas R. Butts	Nichino America, Inc.
Emon 301286/Soybean/Grass Efficacy - Service Order No. 132	\$8,820	Tom Barber	Monsanto - Bayer
High Load Warrant/Grain Sorghum/Pre & Post/Phyto & Efficacy - Service Order No. 129	\$8,085	Tom Barber	Monsanto / Bayer
Evaluate Burndown weed efficacy of XtendiMax and Liberty separately and tank-mixed together with Roundup - Service Order No. 127	\$9,261	Tom Barber	Monsanto / Bayer
BASF Field Trial DEV-V-2021-US-FGB-H	\$22,000	Tom Barber	BASF Corporation
<b>TOTAL AWARDS FOR MAY 2021: \$574,406</b>			

# Benefits Corner

The minimum required employee retirement contribution rate will increase from the current 4% to 5%, effective July 2021.

The increase was originally scheduled for July 2020 but was delayed because of the COVID pandemic.

The transition to uniform required contributions began in 2016 with a 1% required employee contribution. With this last required increase, all participants will receive total contributions of at least 10% (5% employee and 5% employer) into their retirement accounts. Except for those contributing the 4% minimum only, the required increase will not change the total employee contribution.



An employee contributing a total of 7% (4% required and 3% voluntary) will be adjusted to 5% required and 2% voluntary.

Thinking about retirement? Be sure to reach out to HR before submitting your resignation in Workday.

If you have questions, please reach out to [yourbenefits@uada.edu](mailto:yourbenefits@uada.edu). You may review your current elections through Workday. ■

# Personnel Changes



## Welcome Aboard:

- Amber Hairston** - County Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Science, Ashley County
- Tiffany Harris** - Fiscal Support Analyst, Credit Union, Little Rock
- Karalee Black** - County Extension Agent, 4-H/FCS, Pike County
- Trent Burroughs** - Program Technician, Information Technology, Little Rock
- Malinda Noel** - Administrative Specialist III, Pike County
- Marshall Dickey** - Program Facilitator, 4H & Youth Development, 4-H Center

## Farewell to:

- Nancy Clark** - Administrative Specialist III, Family & Consumer Science, Little Rock
- Elizabeth Easley** - County Extension Agent, 4H, Mississippi County
- Jessica Smith** - Director of Finance, Little Rock
- Vertina Banks** - Administrative Specialist II, 4H & Youth Development, Little Rock
- Jenifer Forrest** - Administrative Specialist III, Development Office, Little Rock
- Alex McLeod** - Program Assistant, EFNEP, Benton County
- Lindsay Sutton** - Administrative Specialist I, Clay County
- Sam Boyster** - Chief Operating Officer, Little Rock
- Rebekah M Beene** - Administrative Specialist III, Clark County
- Rebecca Lynne Bridges** - Accessibility Manager, Information Technology, Little Rock
- Harlee Haney** - County Extension Agent, 4H, Greene County
- Beverly Jo Sims** - Computer Specialist, Operations, Little Rock
- Ellie Wheeler** - Program Associate, Community, Professional, & Economic Development, Little Rock
- Janis Kaye Reginelli** - Administrative Specialist III, Chicot County
- Shea Michelle Wilson** - County Extension Agent, FCS/4-H, Prairie County
- Alex Dykes** - County Extension Agent, Agriculture/Horticulture, Garland County
- Terilyn Maize** - Administrative Specialist III, Entomology/Plant Pathology, Little Rock State Office