BL
BLUE LETTER

October 2026
No. 3894



John D. Anderson

From the Director

Fall is a busy time of year in Extension, and I have spent a fair amount of time on the road in the last few weeks, as have many of you. This is a great time of year to be out and about in the state – as long as you keep an eye out for deer. I've had a couple of close calls lately, but so far, I have avoided filling a tag with my vehicle (knock on wood). I recall seeing a meme once that said "Watch out for deer" means "I love you" in Arkansas. There's a lot of truth to that.

At the various events I have visited lately, I have had several opportunities to talk, in a handful of formal presentations and in many more informal conversations, about what we do in Extension and why it matters. Everyone can see the information landscape changing around us: we see it; our stakeholders see it; and policymakers see it. The proliferation of artificial intelligence tools and their adoption by the public seems to be proceeding at least as fast as the development of online information and tools in the early days of the internet. As it was in those days (which, I feel old saying, I remember like it was yesterday), it is important for us to be ready to articulate the unique and important role of Extension.

There are a lot of different ways to approach this question, but I have found a couple of key points that seem to particularly resonate with people. First, Extension is unbeatable at identifying and rapidly mobilizing to address emerging challenges. When a problem comes up that we haven't seen before – think of new pest or disease challenge – we have the network in place to recognize the problem, research potential solutions, and develop recommendations out of that research to address the problem. The land-grant system was built for that purpose, and Extension is the component that both activates that system and closes the loop between the creation of new knowledge and its practical application. And we can do this across a broad scope of technical, social, and economic challenges. Even the best large language model is useless against a new problem that requires new information and tools to address.

Second, some problems are so large, complex, and multi-faceted that we aren't even sure what questions to ask. Extension is one of the few, if not only, organizations with the breadth and depth to effectively dig into these kinds of problems, identify the right questions, and work to develop solutions. We are facing two problems (at least) just like this right now in our state – food insecurity and rice milling quality. These are obviously very different kinds of problems, but both involve complex systems influenced by important interactive effects that are not adequately understood right now. Both will likely require a variety of strategies to address effectively. Extension is working hard to better understand and address both challenges right now, with a level of hands-on engagement with the affected communities that nobody else can match.

I know that this column is a bit of a departure from the usual program updates and shout-outs, as was last month's contribution. (I'm assuming you all read and remember it.) I also realize that it may seem like I am preaching to the choir with these discussions of mission and message. My intent is rather to make sure that we're looking at the same page in the hymnal. It is increasingly important that we – all of us – are able not only to articulate our mission clearly but also to explain in simple but impactful ways why that mission should matter to people. The more consistent we all are in delivering our message, the more likely it is that the message will be received and have its intended effect.

Thank you for all you do. And watch out for deer. ■

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...And much more!

U of A
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
University of Arkansas System

Digital Connectivity in Arkansas

Extension, in partnership with the Arkansas State Broadband Office and the Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association, brought together youth, community leaders, state and local government representatives, and AT&T on Oct. 8 to discuss the importance of digital connectivity in Arkansas. The event highlighted how connectivity supports education, workforce development, healthcare, access to essential services, and stronger communities.

Program Associate Danielle Watson read the governor's proclamation recognizing Oct. 4–10, 2026, as Digital Connectivity Week. Amanda Berryhill, Hot Spring County 4-H state secretary and a 4-H Tech Changemaker, shared a youth perspective on digital opportunity and her work teaching digital literacy skills to help bridge the digital divide. Several other 4-H Tech Changemakers also attended.

Special thanks to our partners, including Glen Howie and Kamelle Gomez of the Arkansas State Broadband Office and Tomekia Moore, executive director of the Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association, for their leadership and partnership in advancing digital opportunity across Arkansas. Together, we are building a more connected Arkansas where everyone can learn, work, participate, and thrive. ■



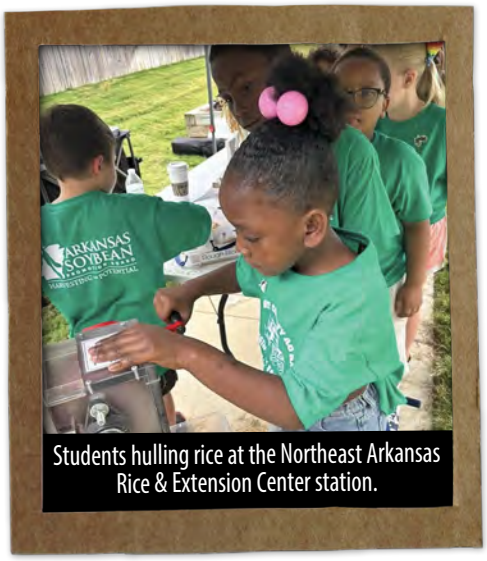
Broadband Partners for Get Connected Week include from (L to R): Jessica Golson, Connected Nation; Danielle Watson, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture; Jacob Garrett, AT&T; Kamelle Gomez, Arkansas State Broadband Office; Glen Howie, Arkansas State Broadband Office; Tomekia Moore, Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association and Stephanie Garner, ARVAC, Inc.

9th Annual

Poinsett County Ag Day

On Tuesday, October 13th over 460 second and third grade students from Harrisburg, Lepanto, Marked Tree, Trumann, and Weiner Elementary School and Ridgefield Christian School visited Main Street Learning Park for the 9th annual Poinsett County Ag Day. Students rotated through 11 educational stations highlighting Arkansas agricultural industries and practices:

- Waterfowl Conservation with Arkansas Game & Fish
- Nature Walk with the Poinsett State Park
- Field Crops with Eagle Seed
- Dairy Cow Simulator from Farm Bureau Insurance
- Farming Equipment with Greenway Equipment
- Beekeeping with Jeff & Donna Woods & Harrisburg FFA
- Barnyard Life with the Beeson Family & Craighead County 4-H
- Rice Education with Northeast Rice Research and Extension Center
- Robotics & Drones in Agriculture with University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture
- Where does your Rice Krispy treat come from? with Eagle Seed
- Photo Station with Harrisburg FFA



Students hulling rice at the Northeast Arkansas Rice & Extension Center station.

The Poinsett County Extension Service hosts Poinsett County Ag Day at the Main Street Learning Park in Harrisburg with the generous support of donors and assistance from our local volunteers. This year's sponsors included: Arkansas Soybean Promotion Board, Farm Bureau, Flying F Arena, McClendon Ace Hardware of Marked Tree and Pizza Shack. Our 2026 volunteers included Harrisburg FFA members, Poinsett County Farm Bureau, Judy Guthrie, and Teresa Bowers. ■

Fairy Gardens, Flowers and 4-H

White County Extension combined horticulture education, fundraising, community service and 4-H recruitment during a summer event featuring a fairy garden workshop and cut flower bouquet sale.



Two staff members from the White County Judge's Office receive bouquets delivered by Green Thumbs 4-H members.

Participants created miniature fairy gardens while learning basic plant care and design concepts. At the same time, flowers harvested from the White County Extension cut flower demonstration garden were arranged into bouquets for sale, with proceeds benefiting the Green Thumbs 4-H Club. White County Master Gardeners and County Extension Agent Sherri Sanders assisted with bouquet making.

The event also provided an opportunity to introduce families to Green Thumbs 4-H and recruit new members interested in gardening and hands-on learning.

After the sale, Green Thumbs 4-H members delivered leftover bouquets to local nursing home residents and to staff in the White County judge's office, extending the project's impact into the community.

The cut flower demonstration garden was funded through a competitive FIELD grant from the state Extension office under the direction of Dr. Shane Gadberry. ■

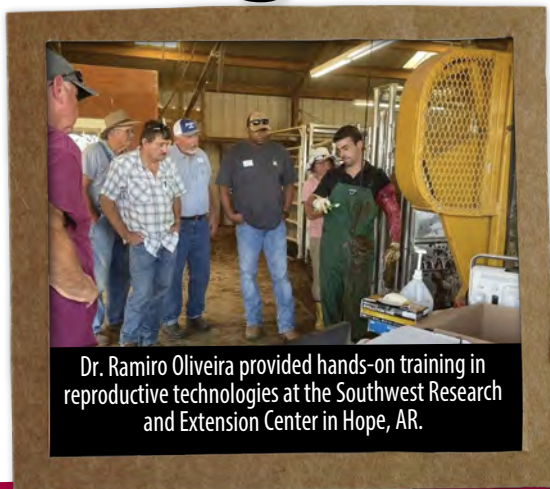


Participants create fairy gardens while learning basic plant care and design concepts during the White County Extension summer horticulture event.

Animal Science Offers Hands-on Training

Dr. Ramiro Oliveira, assistant professor and Extension beef cattle production specialist in the Department of Animal Science, led a one-day beef cattle reproduction workshop at the Southwest Research and Extension Center in Hope to help cattle producers improve herd management and profitability.

The workshop covered key topics such as establishing a breeding season, estrous synchronization, artificial insemination, natural service, pregnancy testing methods, and animal selection strategies. Participants received hands-on training in blood sample collection, chute-side pregnancy testing, and synchronization protocols. ■



Dr. Ramiro Oliveira provided hands-on training in reproductive technologies at the Southwest Research and Extension Center in Hope, AR.

Full Steam Ahead with Captain Cash!

Students at Glen Rose Elementary set sail on a financial adventure with Captain Cash, a money management curriculum developed by Purdue Extension. Led by Hot Spring County FCS agent Jessica Rodriguez and Devyn Britt, program associate for personal and family finance, this four-session program introduced elementary students to the important money management concepts of earning, saving, spending and borrowing.

Each lesson incorporated hands-on activities that make learning about money fun and exciting. Students built their financial vocabulary, created their own piggy banks, set savings goals, and made spending and saving decisions using classroom money. These interactive experiences help bring financial concepts to life, allowing students to learn by doing while building skills they can use now and in the future.



Jessica Rodriguez (family and consumer science agent) and Devyn Britt (program associate - personal and family finance).

The Glen Rose students' curiosity, participation, and eagerness to learn proved that it's never too early to build smart money habits. This program is helping young learners become confident captains of their financial future while having fun along the way. ■

4-H Community Service Project

Bradley Blessing Box


(L to R): James Barnes, Bradley City Councilman and Mayoral Candidate; Jason Martin, Bradley Mayor and Adryianna Burton, Gin City 4-H member.

Gin City 4-H conducted a dedication for their Bradley Blessing Box community service project recently. The Blessing Box was a community service proposal the group presented to the Bradley City Council and the Council approved. Gin City 4-H was awarded a $200.00 grant from the Arkansas 4-H Alumni Association towards the project.

Other fund raisers were conducted in recent months to complete the project. The Blessing Box was installed, fully stocked and dedicated, Monday, September 21. A reception was held after. ■

U of A Livestock Judging Team

Second Highest Team in Tennessee

The Razorback Livestock Judging Team had a busy but fun week at the Professor Lidvall Memorial Contest held in Cookeville, Tennessee. The results:

- 2nd High Team Overall
- 1st High Team Reasons
- 1st High Team Cattle
- 3rd High Team Sheep & Goats

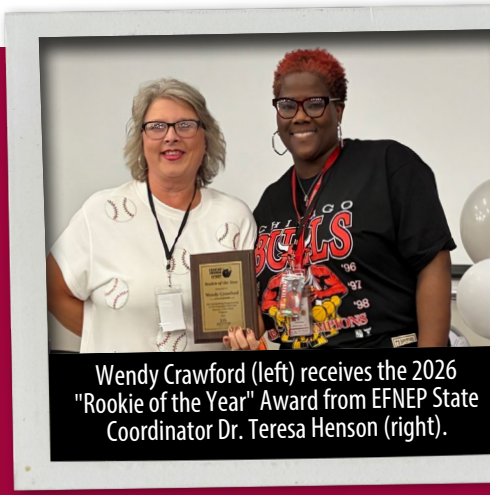
Thank you to the Rich family for providing us with amazing meals and a place to stay during our trip! Also to Five Oaks Farm Red Angus for the amazing judging workout! These trips wouldn't be possible without the incredible support of donors to the Livestock Judging Team!



U of A Livestock Judging Team members. From (L to R): back row: Braydon DeCounter, Eli Stamps, Eli Rich. From (L to R):, front row: Amelia Murphy, Erin Arney, Hailey Jones, Kymber Lenderman.

The inaugural Professor Lidvall Memorial Contest was established in 2019 to honor Professor Ed Lidvall, who taught at the University of Tennessee for 39 years and passed away in 2010. ■

EFNEP Annual Statewide Meeting


Wendy Crawford (left) receives the 2026 "Rookie of the Year" Award from EFNEP State Coordinator Dr. Teresa Henson (right).

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) hosted its annual statewide meeting on Oct. 15 at the Little Rock State Office, bringing together program assistants and agents from the Ozark, Ouachita, and Delta districts. This year's theme, "*Game On! Play with Purpose, Lead with Passion, and Win as a Team,*" inspired an atmosphere of teamwork, learning, and enthusiasm.

Attendees actively participated in discussions and trainings focused on strengthening their knowledge and enhancing their day-to-day EFNEP responsibilities. Dr. John Anderson and Dr. Nina Roofe, head of FCS, welcomed participants and expressed their appreciation for the vital work EFNEP staff provide to Extension and communities across Arkansas.

Program assistants, agents, and LRSO staff were also recognized for their dedication, support, and achievements in reaching adult and youth program goals. A heartfelt tribute honored the late Ms. Joyce Baker of Pulaski County through a memorial video recognizing her years of outstanding service to EFNEP.

The team proudly recognized Louvenia Harris of Phillips County for her 30 years of dedicated service to EFNEP. Wendy Crawford was honored as the EFNEP Program Assistant Rookie of the Year, and the team also celebrated Arkansas EFNEP's recent national achievement, earning third-place honors at the NEAFCS Conference. The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) EFNEP coordinator and team joined in the celebration, highlighting the strong partnership between the two institutions.

Participants left the meeting inspired, appreciated, and energized to continue making a positive impact in Arkansas communities. ■

Montgomery County

In Full Bloom, Painting the Town Pink

This October, a vibrant wave of pink transformed Mount Ida's storefronts, offices, and windows. The Montgomery County Extension Office went all out for this year's "*Paint the Town Pink*" campaign—an annual community effort organized by the Montgomery County Health Department for Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

This spirited decorating competition brings friendly local rivalry to a noble cause. Businesses across the county showcase their creative flair, competing for bragging rights and the coveted Traveling Trophy.



The Montgomery County Extension Office team went all out for this year's "Paint the Town Pink" campaign.

In our tight-knit community, health issues affect us all. Montgomery County is home to countless breast cancer survivors whose resilience inspires us daily. "*Paint the Town Pink*" serves as a visual celebration of their courage, proving that no one in our county fights alone.

Beyond the bright displays, the campaign carries a life-saving message: early detection saves lives. If you are due for your annual mammogram — or have been putting it off — let this be the push you need to schedule your appointment today. ■

Pints & Plants

Growing Community Engagement

Sebastian County Horticulture Agent Zeb Gattis has continued to grow the Pints & Plants program in partnership with Fort Smith Brewing Company. Since the success of the inaugural session in December 2025, Gattis has hosted monthly lunchtime learning events on plant-related topics, such as berries, beekeeping, houseplants, and pumpkins, with an average attendance of 30 guests per session. The program has become a popular community gathering, providing accessible horticulture education in a welcoming setting.



Zeb Gattis (standing), Sebastian County horticulture agent discusses the Pints & Plants program.

Community organizations including River Valley Master Gardeners and local plant nurseries help promote the program. These collaborations have strengthened community engagement and expanded awareness of the Cooperative Extension Service as well as the horticulture expertise and resources available to Sebastian County residents.

The 2027 schedule with workshop topics has been completed and includes culinary gardens, insect collecting, and composting. Through consistent programming and strong community partnerships, Pints & Plants continues to create meaningful educational opportunities, connect residents with resources, and increase the visibility of local Extension efforts. ■

Cattle Health Field Day

The first *Beyond the Bite* Cattle Health Field Day brought producers, researchers and industry professionals together at the UADA Savoy Beef Cattle Research Complex to learn more about the Asian longhorned tick and its impact on cattle health.



Dr. Kirsten Midkiff shared the latest research surrounding the Asian Longhorned tick and Theileriosis in beef cattle.

Attendees participated in discussions and demonstrations covering tick identification and surveillance, pasture management, blood sampling and integrated pest management strategies.

The field day was coordinated by Dr. Kirsten Midkiff, assistant professor in Animal Science, Dr. Kelly Loftin and Dr. Emily McDermott, both from the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology, with Dr. Powell from the Department of Animal Science. ■

Bradley County

4-H'ers Stay Busy During Fall Break



Bradley County 4-H members took a visit to Simple Simon's Pizza for a behind the scenes look at the restaurant and its daily operations.

Bradley County 4-H members stayed busy over their fall break with three activities.

On Day 1, the group participated in Kid Chef Challenge, an educational cooking activity for 4-H youth held four times a year at the extension office. Youth demonstrate their cooking skills by preparing a soup, stew, or gumbo for the challenge. Students prepared the food at home and then took it to the extension office, where evaluated the item on nutritional content, taste and appearance. Participants also demonstrated their table-setting skills and provided basic nutritional information about their chosen dish. Kid Chef Challenge is a collaborative effort between Family and Consumer Sciences and 4-H.

On Day 2, the youth went to Simple Simon's Pizza where they got a behind-the-scenes look at the daily operations of a commercial restaurant. The interactive tour focused on practical skills and industry standards. Members learned essential health and safety protocols, including proper hand sanitation and food safety regulations. In addition to health compliance, the students had a lesson in basic business management, exploring topics such as inventory control, product pricing, and operating costs. After the instructional part of the tour, the 4-H members applied their newly acquired knowledge by crafting their own custom pizzas with guidance from the restaurant staff.

On Day 3, the youth toured the family farm of a fellow 4-H member. They saw firsthand the hard work that goes into running a farming operation, from livestock management, incubation of chicken and quail eggs, and the peacocks that the family raises. Students received tips on the skills needed to show livestock in Bradley County. They enjoyed lunch and then tried their hand at archery, which was a new experience for some.

These events highlight 4-H's ongoing commitment to workforce readiness, practical life skills, agriculture, and local community engagement across South Arkansas. ■

Animal Science

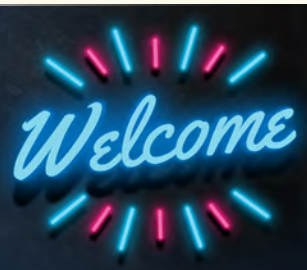
Thankful for Support

Thank you to all that supported the Bumpers College Judging Team Fundraiser. Your generosity helps provide students with hands-on learning opportunities, competitive experiences, and valuable professional development. Through judging team competitions, students strengthen their technical knowledge, leadership, communication, and decision-making skills while representing the University of Arkansas across the region and nation. We sincerely appreciate your investment in our students' growth and future success. Overall, $14,885 was raised from 106 donors for Bumpers College Judging Teams. ■

Grants & Contracts

PROJECT TITLE	AWARD AMOUNT	PI	GRANTING AGENCY
ARS Graduate Student Support 2026-27	$34,436	Amanda McWhirt	Agricultural Research Service
FSMA Produce Safety Extension Outreach and Education Program Year	$179,615	Amanda Perez	Arkansas Department of Agriculture
Arkansas Extension Implementation Program	$224,138	Glenn E. Studebaker	National Institute of Food & Agriculture
Arkansas AgrAbility Project	$180,000	Jessica Vincent	National Institute of Food & Agriculture
Arkansas SPDN 2025-2026 Amendment for Additional Funds	$1,500	Taylor Klass	University of Florida
TOTAL NEW AWARDS FOR SEPTEMBER: $619,689			

Personnel Changes



Welcome Aboard:

Robert Allan Cole – Maintenance Coordinator, LRSO
Mallory Perkins – County Extension Agent - Family & Consumer Science, Woodruff County
Leah Lambert – Administrative Specialist III, Vines Center
Jill Jellen – Administrative Specialist III, Benton County
Eric Nuertey Tetteh – Program Associate - Food Safety - Family Consumer Sciences, LRSO
James Watkins – County Extension Agent - Agriculture, Monroe County
Suzy Hart – County Extension Agent - Family & Consumer Science, Clay County

Farewell to:

Brenna Hyatt – Administrative Assistant, LRSO

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