



Keeping you connected

extension cord

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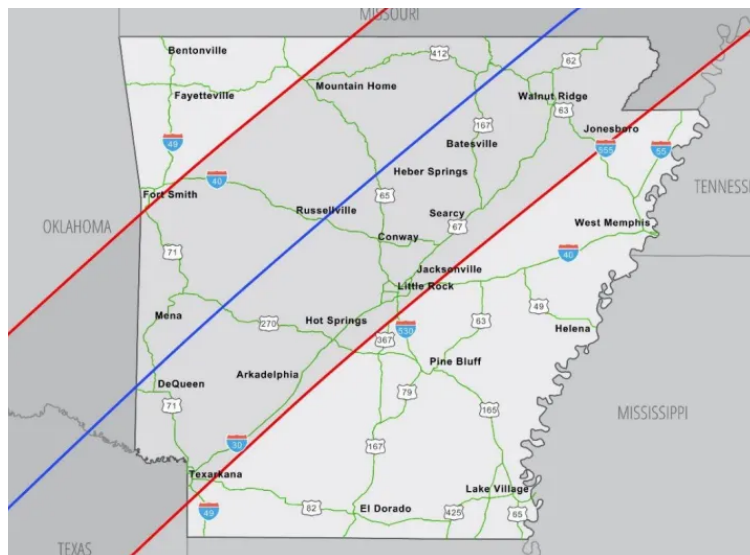
The eclipse is coming: Are agricultural communities prepared?

A tourism event unlike any other will be darkening the skies across Arkansas — and many other states in its path — in just a few months. And while the Great North American Eclipse will be something of an unescapable spectacle, rural and agricultural communities will likely see an influx of traffic as enthusiasts seek the open skies of farmlands.

On April 8, between noon and 4 p.m., the Earth's moon will completely eclipse the sun for about four minutes over any given location in its path. For Arkansas, this will mean a shadow approximately 118 miles wide, stretching from the southwest corner of the state to its northeast corner. The shadow is expected to begin near DeQueen at 1:46 p.m., CDT, and exit the state at about 2:00 p.m. near Pochontas, according to the Arkansas Department of Transportation.

People throughout the region are expected to flock to the path of totality, including agricultural areas such as Jackson County, Arkansas. Matthew Davis, staff chair for the Jackson County Cooperative Extension Service, recently appeared before the Newport Area Chamber of Commerce, urging its members to begin thinking about how best to prepare residents for the possible influx of motorists.

“The concern is that local, county and state two-lane highways typically used by sizeable farming equipment — sometimes exceeding 20-foot widths — will be potentially full of additional vehicles,” Davis said. “People using these less-trafficked roads as places to pull off to view the eclipse could be concerning to farmers with agriculture production starting at that time.”



(Graphic courtesy ArDOT.)

“Up to 1.5 million people are expected to travel from outside the state into Arkansas, along with 500,000 Arkansans who will travel from their residences to the path of totality, for a total of 2 million people who will visit the viewing area,” according to an October 2023 report from ArDOT.

To prepare, Davis had recommendations for both motorists as well as farmers, many of whom will still be preparing fields and planting crops in April.

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The 2024 Extension Retiree Luncheon is April 2!

Join us for the largest gathering of CES retirees of the year! The 2024 Extension Retiree Luncheon will be held **April 2, 2024 at 10 a.m.** at the Benton Event Center (17322 I-30, Benton).

[Click here](#) to register.

THE INSIDE STORIES

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Extension financial expert offers filing tips for 2023 tax season

With the start of tax season on Jan. 29, the Internal Revenue Service has begun accepting and processing 2023 tax year returns. The standard deduction, which is adjusted annually for inflation, increased for tax year 2023 and will also increase for tax year 2024.

Laura Hendrix, extension associate professor of personal finance and consumer economics for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said a taxpayer may choose to take the standard deduction or to itemize their deductions.

“There are several factors that can influence a taxpayer’s choice, including changes to their tax situation, any changes to the standard deduction amount and recent tax law changes,” Hendrix said. “Generally, most taxpayers use the option that gives them the lowest overall tax, and most people take the standard deduction, which changes each year for inflation.”

Hendrix said deductions are subtracted from a taxpayer’s income to determine adjusted gross income, or AGI, which is the amount on which an individual pays taxes.

“The more deductions you have, the lower your AGI and the less you will pay in taxes,” Hendrix said. “Deductions can reduce the amount of a taxpayer’s income before they calculate the tax they owe.”

Itemized deductions that taxpayers may claim include state and local income or sales tax, real estate and personal property taxes, home mortgage interest, personal casualty and theft losses from a federally declared disaster, gifts to a qualified charity and unreimbursed medical and dental expenses that exceed 7.5 percent of AGI.

Hendrix said the amount of one’s standard deduction depends

on a taxpayer’s filing status, age, whether they are blind and whether the taxpayer is claimed as a dependent by someone else.

“Generally, if a taxpayer’s itemized deductions are larger than their standard deduction, it makes sense for them to itemize,” she said. “Taxpayers who choose to itemize deductions should read the instructions for Schedule A and complete Form 1040, Itemized Deductions.”



Standard deduction amounts for tax year 2023, filing in 2024:

- For married couples filing jointly: \$27,000, up \$1,800 from 2022
- For single taxpayers and married individuals filing separately: \$13,850, up \$900 from 2022
- For heads of households: \$20,800, up \$1,400 from 2022

Standard deduction amounts for tax year 2024, filing in 2025:

- For married couples filing jointly: \$29,200, up \$1,500 from 2023
- For single taxpayers and married individuals filing separately: \$14,600, up \$750 from 2023
- For heads of households: \$21,900, up \$1,100 from 2023

Read more [here](#). ■

Eclipse, cont.

Here are a few things to consider when planning your routes as a farmer:

1. Make sure the lights are legal and working.
2. Hazard lights and slow-moving vehicle signage need to be visible.
3. Proceed with caution when entering and exiting highways.
4. Use "follow cars" with flashing lights to alert traffic.
5. Verify that attachments are secured, lights are functioning, and equipment widths and heights are noted.
6. If traffic stops, pull over, seek assistance, or remain until traffic clears.
7. Limit equipment movement during the day of the eclipse. Move equipment to areas that would provide a full day of work without the need to move equipment if possible.

Here are a few things for drivers to consider:

1. Slow down when approaching equipment.
2. Watch for hand signs or turn signals.
3. Refrain from attempting to overtake machinery by speeding past.
4. Watch for flashing lights or slow-moving vehicle signage.
5. Only pull out in front of slow-moving vehicles after verifying that the slow-moving vehicle is a safe distance away and the road is clear enough to do so. Large equipment cannot stop as quickly as a motor vehicle. Always be cautious and verify safe operating distances to maintain space between yourself and the machinery.
6. Slow-moving vehicles may be unable to use the shoulders, and you should not expect them to use them.
7. Avoid stopping on shoulders or private drives. ■

Rare dual brood emergence of cicadas coming this spring

2024 is gonna get loud.

Entomologists say two broods of periodic cicadas will be making a rare simultaneous emergence this spring. The last time this happened in the U.S. was in 1803 and the next one won't happen for another 221 years.

Arkansas is home to brood XIX, a group whose adult insects emerge every 13 years. The brood's last emergence was 2011 and the next will be 2037. Brood XIII, which emerges every 17 years, last emerged in 2007 and will again emerge in 2041. Brood XIX is the largest 13-year brood in the United States, covering 15 states.

Cicadas spend most of their lives underground as nymphs, then "they all emerge at once, in an effort to overwhelm their natural predators by sheer numbers," said Jon Zawislak, extension assistant professor-apiculture and urban entomology. "Anything that might want to eat a cicada will be able to get a belly full, so the rest can survive to continue the species."

The insects know how to turn up the volume, often hitting 90-100 decibels, louder than a hair drier.

Brood XIII is found in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan and Wisconsin. Brood XIX can be found in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana,

Maryland, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

Zawislak said the two broods won't be alone.

"There are a number of annual cicadas that will come out and there are often some stragglers from other broods that don't quite synchronize with the rest of their group," he said. "Arkansas is home to 20 different species of cicada."

The cicadas' unique sounds are part of their mating process. In their "choruses," adult males "sing" by vibrating a membrane on the sides of their bodies called a tymbal. Females can make clicking noises to indicate they are ready to mate.

The song of the African cicada, *Brevisana brevis*, can hit 107 decibels from 20 inches away. That compares to a chainsaw, which can hit 110 decibels from the same distance, according to the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

Read more [here](#). ■



Message from the director

This month's newsletter has kind of an end-times vibe to it, what with stories about total eclipses and 200-year simultaneous cicada hatches and, worst of all, tax season. To top it off, as I sat down to write this, I got word that cell phone service had collapsed around much of the country. Maybe all those preppers – I'm sorry, homesteaders – I keep hearing about really are on to something.

While I am more than happy for any excuse to head for the hills, I'm not quite ready to abandon my post just yet. There is a lot of work yet to be done despite the possible impending end of days. I had the great pleasure this week of welcoming several new hands to that work. Steve Siegelin and the professional development team in Community, Professional and Economic Development (CPED) were offering new agent training to nearly 30 new agents who joined our ranks in the past year. It was a real pleasure, not to mention a great honor, for me to welcome these new agents into the ranks of Extension professionals. These agents range from new college graduates to a 30-year veteran of secondary education. All are bringing their unique talents, perspective, and enthusiasm to our work on behalf of Arkansas stakeholders.

At the same time our CPED crew was training new agents at the 4-H Center, District Directors Carla Due and Jerry Clemons were interviewing prospective interns for the 2024 internship cycle. We had an exceptional pool of internship applicants this year. Carla and Jerry had the difficult job of winnowing this pool down to about 15 interns who will join us this summer.

The strong internship candidate pool that we had this year is testament to the success of this important program. This is easily one of the best programs that I have ever seen for introducing well-qualified college students to the rewarding career opportunities with the Cooperative Extension Service. I am confident that we can look forward to more than a few of these interns eventually showing up in a new agent training as full-time extension employees. That is, assuming the sun eventually comes back out from behind the moon and we aren't all eaten by cicadas. ■



March Birthdays

Ralph Tyler Jr. - March 1
Lynn Whitlock - March 1
Janet Hill - March 3
Glenda Rushing - March 5
Sandra Schlinker - March 5
Barbara Tompkins - March 9
Bobbie Floyd - March 10
Alene Bates - March 10
Bonita Mueller - March 10
Mark Cochran - March 11
Dorothy Rodgers - March 12
Danny Allen - March 14

Sue Seevers - March 14
Katie Reddick - March 14
Judy Drewrey - March 14
Dorene Wills - March 16
Lydia Guffey - March 16
Doris Markle - March 17
Chris Russell - March 18
Nina Boston - March 19
Juanita Sherman - March 19
Danny Walker - March 21
Steven Seideman - March 22
Charlie Parsons - March 23

Mary Barrentine - March 23
John Robinson - March 24
Ronnie Bateman - March 24
Kathy Rawlingson - March 25
Ocsie Barnes - March 26
Thomas Moody - March 27
Debbie Henry - March 28
Celia Boon Shireman - March 29
Eddie Hubbell - March 29
Patsy Hall - March 29
Shelly Johnson - March 30
Karen Fite - March 31

Cooperative Extension Service's Grow Your Own Groceries series continues in 2024

For people interested in learning to grow healthy, nutritious food at home, the Cooperative Extension Service's Grow Your Own Groceries webinar series offers monthly Zoom presentations on Arkansas-friendly crops for gardeners of all skill levels.

Krista Quinn, Faulkner County agriculture agent for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said the Grow Your Own Groceries series is designed to connect Arkansans with extension agents' knowledge about growing and preparing nutritious food.

"I think there are a lot of people who are interested in gardening but have very little experience," Quinn said. "Often, they did not grow up in families that gardened, and they didn't really know where to start. If they start looking for gardening advice on the internet or even in books, they quickly realize that a lot of that information often doesn't work in Arkansas. With the Grow Your Own Groceries program, we are giving people information based on experience and research from right here in Arkansas, so participants have the best chance of being successful."

The series is a collaboration between extension agriculture agents and family and consumer sciences agents. In each presentation, agriculture agents discuss how to grow a specific crop, with information on variety selection, growing methods, soil health and common pests or problems. Family and consumer sciences agents then share how to store the produce and demonstrate recipes. Read more [here](#). ■



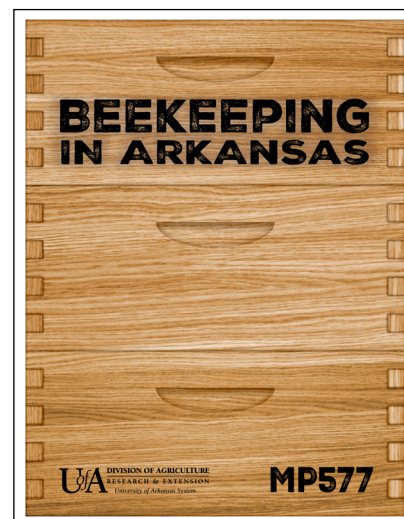
Arkansas extension brings new book for beginning beekeepers

The Cooperative Extension Service is introducing a new resource that targets beginning beekeepers, said Jon Zawislak, extension assistant professor in apiculture and urban entomology.

"Beekeeping in Arkansas' is an all-purpose introduction to small-scale beekeeping," Zawislak said. "This publication is recommended for anyone who is considering getting into beekeeping. At 32 pages, it looks like a lot of information, but it is a basic introduction to the main concepts."

"It will give the curious a starting point to decide if they want to learn more or learn enough for them to know that beekeeping is more than they want to take on right now," he said. "It was written to be a printed companion to the [online video short course](#)."

"[Beekeeping in Arkansas](#)," MP577, replaces MP-419. ■



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