



Keeping you connected

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Justice focuses on the needs of beef cattle producers

About a year after Maggie Justice discovered a passion for animal science research as a sophomore at Clemson University, she found what would become her credo: “What does this mean for our producers?”

Justice joined the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture as an assistant professor and beef cattle specialist for the Cooperative Extension Service in May.

In a way, Justice was born into her career.

“I grew up on a commercial cow-calf operation in South Carolina,” she said. Justice said she and her three sisters “learned to work on the farm and were part of the cattle operation. Like most of our cattle farmers, especially in the Southeast, it was secondary income.”

Justice’s father was a retired lawyer and her mother was a school teacher but “the farm was definitely a family affair on the weekends,” she said.

Growing up, “I was very active in 4-H and came to love extension because of my time in 4-H,” Justice said.

Justice followed in all of the family’s footsteps, heading to Clemson University. She knew she wanted to study animal science but didn’t want to go to vet school.

“I was kind of steered toward research as an undergrad and started that as a sophomore, and fell in love with it,” she said. “Luckily, I had a great mentor that I stayed on with for my master’s. She noticed that I like to talk to people, and kind of noticed I had a passion, in that I always asked her questions about ‘what did her research mean for our producers?’”

That mentor is Susan Duckett, professor and Ernest L.

Corley Jr. Trustees endowed chair of the Animal and Veterinary Sciences department at Clemson.

About a year into the research, Justice told Duckett that she “wanted to be an extension specialist so I could help producers like the ones I grew up with.”

She has enjoyed her newly adopted state.

“I love Arkansas. Everyone has been so welcoming, so open to my program, and excited for me which has made my job easy and enjoyable,” Justice said. “I’m just excited to help the agents build their programs in their counties and ultimately help the producers in this state.”

Mike Looper, head of animal science for the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences and the Division of Agriculture, said Justice earned the job amid an “extremely strong applicant pool.”

“When Maggie interviewed for the job, we knew she was the perfect fit for the department as well as for our beef producers in Arkansas,” he said. “You might say she came in on day one and embraced extension and the idea of helping farmers and ranchers be more efficient, and ultimately more profitable.”

Justice received her master’s degree at Clemson and her Ph.D. at Auburn University. ■



Maggie Justice, extension beef cattle specialist for the U of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

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Extension's 'Veggie to Value' Bootcamp focuses on creating value-added food products

Starting or expanding a food business can be daunting, with many barriers to entry. For Arkansans navigating this process, the Cooperative Extension Service's Share Grounds program offered a Veggie to Value Food Entrepreneur Bootcamp, in which clients received assistance in food production, safety regulations and scaling up their recipes.

The boot camp is part of Share Grounds, an educational and technical assistance program conducted by the Cooperative Extension Service.

Amanda Philyaw Perez, extension associate professor of food systems and food safety specialist for the Division of Agriculture, said her team received a Specialty Crop Block Grant from the Arkansas Department of Agriculture to make the boot camp possible.

"We worked to recruit food entrepreneurs to take them from the bare bones basics of getting a food business off the ground all the way through production," Perez said.

Share Grounds has a commercial kitchen facility at the Cleveland County Fairgrounds in Rison, Arkansas, complete with commercial food processing equipment. The Veggie to Value clients received technical assistance from Perez and David Hill, extension program associate for food systems and food safety.

Clients used fresh produce from Barnhill Orchards in Lonoke to create value-added food products. These take a raw commodity and change it to create a new product, such as the transformation of fruits into jams or jellies, or tomatoes and peppers made into salsa.

Loretta Smith recently purchased 50 acres of land in Carthage, Arkansas, as a retirement plan. She and her husband are in the beginning stages of planning their future farm and orchard, and Smith applied for the Veggie to Value program because she was interested in expanding their eventual revenue options.

"I knew from personal experience growing up on a farm and training in operations that you can't control all of the variability on a farm," Smith said. "Knowing that I'll have



Veggie to Value client Loretta Smith pours her mock apple butter mixture into a sanitized jar.

varying amounts of production when I have bumper crops, I need a plan to do something with that and extend my revenue stream."

Smith is an associate professor of management at Arkansas Tech University, and she said getting started in the field of commercial food production was "not something I could do by myself."

"I knew that was an area of expertise I didn't have, and it's not something that's simple to navigate," Smith said. "You're talking about the chemistry of cooking, and I don't have the equipment or the knowledge for that."

Smith's food product is based on an old family recipe for mock apple rings. Throughout the boot camp, Smith said they pivoted to making a mock apple butter for food safety reasons.

"To get the water activity and the pH right, we navigated from mock apple rings to mock applesauce or mock apple butter," Smith said. "When we taste tested the various recipes, people had no idea that it's actually made of cucumbers, because it tastes like a spicy cinnamon apple."

Smith said the Veggie to Value program has been an "incredible learning opportunity."

Message from the director



It was good to see many of you at the regional retiree meetings this past month. I believe that keeping in touch with our retirees is part of the reason we call ourselves an “Extension Family”. Few organizations can boast of the kind of support that Extension gets from former employees in so many of our current efforts. I thank you all sincerely for that support. Khalia Coleman and everyone involved in organizing these meetings did an outstanding job, and I hope a good time was had by all who attended. If you want to contact Khalia and thank her for her efforts while the search continues for Brian Helms’ replacement, you can email her at kcoleman@uada.edu.

I am very proud of the direction that we have Extension headed in now. I believe we have created positions and made some critical new hires that will put a real focus back on the county agents and county programs. A few of them are highlighted in this Extension Cord issue. I am also very excited about our internship program now in its third year. I was told that within days of the application portal opening that we had already received numerous applications. I appreciated the retirees who have met with our interns the past couple of years, and we have already hired some from previous classes.

As most of you know, I will be stepping down as Director of Extension effective Jan. 1. At that time, Dr. John Anderson, who is currently the department head of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness department in Fayetteville will be taking over. I know that he is capable and will do a great job leading Extension forward. I will support him in any way I can. For more information about this transition, [follow this link](#).

Veggie to Value, cont.

“The business side of food production, particularly value-added production, was just not something I’d really thought about or ventured into,” Smith said. “People assume it’s pretty simple, but it’s not. To stay on the right side of the law and keep everybody healthy is a complex process.”

Having the assistance and expertise of Perez and Hill was a crucial element of the program, Smith said.

“Knowing who to call, what to do and where to look for the answers as we get further and further into the process, we wouldn’t have that knowledge if not for the program and working with David,” she said. “With scaling up, David’s got the experience to say, ‘You can push it this far.’ We didn’t have to try and fail and waste all that product.” Read more [here](#). ■

2024 INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

10 Week Summer Internship Competitive Pay

The 2023 Internship program is now accepting applications. It is open to all incoming junior and seniors in college who want to learn more about becoming a county extension agent and are seeking a degree in agriculture or family and consumer science related fields. This 10-week paid program offers interns the opportunity to:

- Gain valuable hands-on professional experience
- Work on special projects that directly impact communities
- Experience a full professional working environment that is a positive place for mistakes, growth and learning
- Network with other professionals
- Understand Extension as a career

Please share this opportunity with your friends and family! Students may apply by [following this link](#).

November Birthdays

Max Franks - Nov. 1
 Massie B. Silva - Nov. 3
 Eric Grant - Nov. 3
 Reba D. Hawkins - Nov. 3
 Frances Story - Nov. 4
 Joseph Dale Waldrum - Nov. 7
 Sue Palsa - Nov. 9
 Ursula Ann Crow - Nov. 9
 John Hopkins - Nov. 10
 Russell Wilson - Nov. 10
 Jerry R. McIntyre - Nov. 11

Nita Willis Cooper - Nov. 11
 Gerald Wayne Alexander - Nov. 12
 Patsy Keller - Nov. 15
 Kay Stokes - Nov. 15
 Gloria G. Eubanks - Nov. 16
 Eugenia E. Hockett - Nov. 18
 Luther H. Roberts - Nov. 20
 Anita Frances Clark - Nov. 20
 Joe David Vestal - Nov. 22
 Linda Bates - Nov. 22
 John L. Philpot - Nov. 23

Brenda Hawkins - Nov. 24
 Janice Marie Jones - Nov. 24
 Kathryn Fowler - Nov. 25
 Jane Kriigel - Nov. 26
 Rosemary Rodibaugh - Nov. 26
 Vatra Stone Hibbs - Nov. 17
 Ron Matlock - Nov. 27
 Sharon Reynolds - Nov. 27
 Louise McPherson - Nov. 28
 James L. Barrentine - Nov. 28
 Jim Frala - Nov. 30

Keep lawns green in 2024 with proper fall preparation

Early freezes and long-term drought in 2022 had lasting effects on this year's lawns. However, much of this heartache can be avoided in 2024 with proper fall preparation.

Wendell Hutchens, assistant professor of turfgrass science for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said much of the lawncare woes in 2023 were due to an early cold snap at the end of December 2022, before zoysiagrass and bermudagrass were dormant.

"This past year was an absolute doozy for warm-season grasses," Hutchens said. "We saw widespread winterkill across Arkansas in bermudagrass and zoysiagrass. A lot of lawns were not fully dormant when we got that cold spell around December 22 and 23."

This year, Hutchens recommends taking a few steps early to prepare lawns for dormancy. Proper irrigation and higher mowing heights are crucial.

"A big issue we saw last year was depleted root systems due to drought. This left them very susceptible to winterkill. So proper irrigation going into fall dormancy is key," Hutchens said.

"We want to give the plant the best possible chance, so you can also raise your mowing heights now. If you're mowing at 2 inches, bump it up to 3 inches."

Additionally, stopping fertilizer applications in October will help plants go dormant for the cold winter temperatures. Hutchens recommends stopping fertilizer before Oct. 1 for zoysiagrass and before Oct. 15 for bermudagrass.

Pre-emergence herbicides for winter annual weeds are okay, but proceed with caution, especially in recently re-sodded areas.

Hutchens' take home message for lawn care in 2024: buckle up.

"The best we can do is hope for a mild winter, but manage expectations for next spring," he said. "Areas that were damaged from winterkill this past year are highly susceptible to reoccurring damage this year. Raise those mowing heights, get that grass up to 2.5 or 3 inches and keep it properly irrigated." ■



Assistant professor Wendell Hutchens shares opening remarks to kick off the 2023 Arkansas Turfgrass Field Day.