



Keeping you connected

# extension cord

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DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE  
RESEARCH & EXTENSION  
University of Arkansas System

## Youngest members of state Master Gardener program learn, grow in Craighead County

As the youngest members of Arkansas' Master Gardener program, siblings Jakin and Elia Riddle said they are happy to use their training to spread beauty in Craighead County.

"God says love your neighbor, so what better way to give back to your community and neighbors than to work on something that everyone can enjoy from all over the county?" Jakin said.

Jakin, 15, Elia, 14, and their mother, Jackie Riddle, began taking classes with the Craighead County Master Gardener program in October 2022 and are part of the organization's 2023 class. Master Gardeners undergo 40 hours of training to become horticultural volunteers. Through demonstration and educational programs, they extend research-based information throughout the state. This outreach includes on-site lawn clinics, community beautification projects, plant sales, public speaking, research and more.

Branon Thiesse, Craighead County extension staff chair, has been the adviser for the county's Master Gardener program since 2009. He said Jakin and Elia's membership has given the group a "shot in the arm to have some younger people get into it."

"A lot of our members are seasoned, and we've got to recruit younger members to take over with certain tasks, like working out in the heat," Thiesse said. "It gives the seasoned Master Gardeners a chance to share their knowledge of gardening, and it's amazing how young people have all this energy."

"It's contagious to the older people, so it's a win-win for everybody," he said. "They're a blessing to have."

Jakin echoed this sentiment and said he encouraged other young people to get involved.



Jakin Riddle, left, Elia Riddle, middle, their mother, Jackie Riddle, right, and Elora Riddle, front, at the site of a Craighead County Master Gardeners project.

"If you're about our age and you're joining, everyone is probably going to be older than you," Jakin said. "It's a great way to learn from your elders about something that they want to pass on about gardening, something they maybe haven't gotten to pass on to anyone else before."

"It's a great way to learn, get outside and enjoy nature," Elia said. "If you're interested in gardening, it's the best way to meet other people and get more experience." Read more [here](#).



Elia Riddle, 14, left, and Jakin Riddle, right, 15, are the youngest Arkansas Master Gardener members.

### THE INSIDE STORIES

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## Mystery of the Methuselah monarchs



Monarch butterfly collecting nectar.

The Methuselah monarchs — those that make the multi-thousand-mile flying commute between the United States and central Mexico — are different from the monarchs that flit around in the milkweed all summer.

“It takes several generations of monarchs to reach Canada from Mexico, but one generation — the Methuselah — makes the entire trip back to Mexico and starts the migration northward,” said Austin Jones, director of undergraduate education and outreach coordinator for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture and the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences. “The same can be said for the western monarchs” that migrate between the U.S. inland and the southern California Coast.”

“They are still a genetic mystery,” Jones said.

A key to their longevity is being in a state of reproductive diapause, that allows them to delay mating until they get to the end of their migration.

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### Registration Open!

#### Upcoming Fall Regional Retiree Meetings:

**Oct. 7 – Arkadelphia** | Youth Building, Clark Co. Fairgrounds

**Oct. 10 – Stuttgart** | Rice Research and Extension Center

**Oct. 21 – Fort Smith** | University of Arkansas at Fort Smith, Center for Economic Development

**Nov. 5 – Little Rock** | Little Rock State Office

Register to Attend [HERE](#) or call Tiffani Barnes at (501) 671-2004

## Check out the new FCS Matters Podcast!

The [FCS Matters Podcast](#) is an official look at the art and the science of living and working well in our complex world. The FCS Matters Podcast is hosted by Dr. Nina Roofe, head of Family and Consumer Sciences



for the Division of Agriculture.

Each episode will tackle an FCS content area that is important to the everyday life of Arkansans. Guests will include your friends, neighbors, and Extension experts on the topic to offer sound and practical advice for making informed decisions that work for you and your family.

Find it on Apple Podcast, Spotify, or your preferred podcast streaming app.

### DINNER at the VINES Online Auction

The Arkansas 4-H Foundation will host the 5th annual Dinner at the Vines on Sept. 30 — complete with garden party, lakeside dinner, online and live auctions and entertainment — all benefiting Arkansas 4-H.

Tickets are \$150 per person can be purchased at <https://uada.formstack.com/forms/donate4h>

If you're unable to attend, you can still participate and support 4-H by bidding on items in the online auction. The auction is open now and closes at 7 p.m. Sept. 30 and can be accessed [here](#).

You'll find Razorback tickets, sporting equipment, jewelry, restaurant gift certificates, Arkansas Travs tickets, theater and symphony tickets, artwork and lots MORE.



## Arkansas 4-H hosts International 4-H Camp, welcomes youth from three countries

For Gabriella Pardo, a member of Texas 4-H who attended the International 4-H Camp hosted in Arkansas, global citizenship involves meaningful connections with neighbors near and far.

“Some people call that networking, but I like to think of it as making friends for life,” she said.

Pardo, 17, was one of 38 youths and 12 adults from Jamaica, Japan, Taiwan, Arkansas, Michigan, New Jersey and Texas to attend the weeklong International 4-H Camp, held Aug. 7-13 at the C.A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center in Little Rock.

Debbie Nistler, head of 4-H and youth development, said the event brought youth together across language barriers and cultural differences.

“Building cultural competencies and understanding of other countries is a critical part of building understanding of our own communities,” Nistler said. “If we understand each other, we can build cooperation across cultures and nations. This week of camp offered our Arkansas youth and youth across the world a chance to gain understanding of how others think and make decisions.”

The camp was first held by New Jersey 4-H in 2019, and Arkansas 4-H was asked to be a partner with New Jersey to plan the 2025 event. Nistler said she hopes the camp will take place every other year going forward, “with a potential inter-state cultural exchange on the off year.” Read more [here](#).



38 youths and 12 adults from Jamaica, Japan, Taiwan, Arkansas, Michigan, New Jersey and Texas attended the weeklong International 4-H Camp, held Aug. 7-13 at the C.A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center in Little Rock. Pictured is one group of attendees at the 4-H Center's ExCEL ropes course.

## Arkansas Discovery Farms program recognized for excellence among Southern states

Agricultural producers in Arkansas are under increasing scrutiny to minimize impacts on natural resources and to improve sustainability of the agricultural supply chain. The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture helps producers do just that through its Arkansas Discovery Farms Program.

The Discovery Farms team documents water quality, soil health, climate effects and resource use in research at 18 private farms across the state's diverse agricultural sectors. The team also provides demonstrations and educational outreach to promote sustainable farming.

“The overall goal of the program is to document sustainable and viable farming systems that remain cost-effective in an environmentally sound manner,” said Mike Daniels, distinguished professor in the crop, soil and environmental sciences department at the University of Arkansas.

Examples of climate change parameters the Discovery Farms team monitors in the network of private, working farms includes greenhouse gases and soil carbon in poultry, livestock, row crops, forestry and horticulture operations.

The team — made up of faculty and staff from the Division of Agriculture and the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff — recently received the Excellence in

Extension Team Award from the Association of Southern Region Extension Directors. The award was presented Aug. 19 at the association's annual meeting in Atlanta. The association includes extension directors from 13 southern states and two territories — Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

“Through cutting-edge monitoring tools and extensive outreach, the Arkansas Discovery Farms program demonstrates how sustainable agriculture benefits both the environment and the economy, positioning Arkansas as a leader in conservation and agricultural resilience,” said Rich Bonanno, executive director of the Association of Southern Region Extension Directors. Read more [here](#).



Mike Daniels accepts the Excellence in Extension Team Award from Damona Doye, chair of the Association of Southern Region Extension Directors.

## October Birthdays

Portia Short - Oct. 1	Sheila Whiteley - Oct. 5	Elinor Sue Coates - Oct. 13	Cecilia Harberson - Oct. 18
Larry Pryor - Oct. 2	James R. Lipsey - Oct. 7	Jack Carr Boles Jr. - Oct. 13	Hugh W. Plumlee - Oct. 19
Bobby Hall - Oct. 2	Suzanne Wiley - Oct. 8	Bruce Knox - Oct. 14	Mable Tate - Oct. 19
Frank T. Jones - Oct. 3	Al Rosendale - Oct. 9	Richard Lynn Poling - Oct. 14	Pam Cannada - Oct. 20
Gerald Klingaman - Oct. 3	Glen Ford - Oct. 10	Carroll R. Prewett - Oct. 15	Renee E. Myers - Oct. 20
Stanley D. Carter - Oct. 3	Billie Coleman - Oct. 10	Tom Troxel - Oct. 16	James A. Clower - Oct. 21
Paul Beck - Oct. 3	Lorene McGuire - Oct. 10	Carolyn A. Meeks - Oct. 17	Tom Riley Jr. - Oct. 22
Craig Randall Andersen - Oct. 4	Charlotte Gorman Trent - Oct. 10	Gail Torok - Oct. 17	Mark B. Bryles - Oct. 23
Jimmie Lee Bowling - Oct. 5	Debbie DeRossitte - Oct. 10	Ron Baker - Oct. 17	Wanda Snyder - Oct. 23
Judy M. Riley - Oct. 5	Judith R. Urich - Oct. 11	Victor Ford - Oct. 18	Janice B. Gooch - Oct. 27
Lazaro English - Oct. 5	Armenthia J. Willis - Oct. 12	Mary K. Parker - Oct. 18	Janella B. Pugh - Oct. 31

## Message from the director



As I sit down to write this article, rain is pouring down outside my window here in the Little Rock State Office. While the rain will be a welcome relief in much of the state, it will also force an unwelcome pause in what has been a busy harvest season. This has been a challenging year for our row crop producers. Excessive rainfall

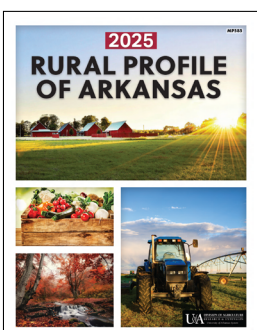
that delayed planting this spring across most of the state was followed up with hot, dry weather throughout the latter half of the growing season. Despite the challenges, yields appear to be generally good, though not great relative to recent trends (with soybeans being a notable exception: USDA forecasts a record state average yield for soybeans this year of 56 bushels per acre).

It is remarkable to me — having spent most of my career closely following acreage, yield, and price data on our major crops — how much more resilient to environmental stress our crop production systems have become over the years. This, of course, is a testament to the skill and hard work of our farmers. But those of us in Cooperative Extension, and the Land-Grant University system generally, have played a major role in developing and disseminating the tools and information that have supported that resilience.

I am afraid that in coming months, we will need to be focused on what we can do to support the resilience — not of our crop yields — but of our farmers, their families, and their communities. This year is shaping up to be the fourth consecutive year of very low or negative margins for many producers of our major commodity crops. If you are in the Delta or have spent any time at all there in the last few months, you know that tensions are high in the farming community. After this harvest wraps up, many families will be making very difficult decisions about how, or even if, they can continue farming. You may feel like any help you could give to someone facing that situation might seem inadequate. I can relate to that sentiment, but it is not true. Sometimes, the most important thing you can do for someone is to let them know they matter, to their families and communities, irrespective of their present circumstances. Letting the farmer know that he or she is more important, more valuable than their farm can make a world of difference in how they see their situation. We can all do that.

Over the last couple of weeks, Brittney Schrick in the FCS department has sent out links to a number of resources related to recognizing and appropriately responding to the signs of farmer stress. This is a great resource for all of our agents and specialists who work with farmers day in and day out. You may end up making an impact on someone's life that can't be measured in bushels or pounds.

## 2025 Rural Profile now available



Arkansas communities have changed greatly over the past decade. Many rural areas in the state continue to recover from the Great Recession while others grow and thrive.

The Rural Profile of Arkansas analyzes the trends of key indicators for communities in Arkansas, which include population, economy, infrastructure, social and economic stress, health, education, and local government.

The Rural Profile also compares trends in rural and urban counties and among regions of the state.

[View the 2025 Rural Profile here.](#)