

UofA **DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE**
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
University of Arkansas System



UNIVERSITY OF
ARKANSAS

Dale Bumpers College
of Agricultural, Food & Life Sciences

AGRICULTURE AWARDS CEREMONY

October 25, 2024

Don Tyson Center | Fayetteville

AGRICULTURE AWARDS CEREMONY

Welcome Deacue Fields
Vice President for Agriculture

JOHN W. WHITE AWARDS:

Outstanding Research Award

Kristen Gibson – Department of Food Science
presented by Jean-François Meullenet
*Senior Associate Vice President for Agriculture–Research
and Director, Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station*

Outstanding Teaching Award

Nathan Kemper – Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness
presented by Jeff Edwards
*Senior Associate Vice President–Academic Programs
and Dean of Dale Bumpers College*

Outstanding Extension State Faculty Award

Laura Hendrix – Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
presented by John Anderson
*Senior Associate Vice President for Agriculture–Extension
and Director, Cooperative Extension Service*

Outstanding County Extension Educator Award

Brad McGinley – Grant County
presented by John Anderson

Outstanding Team Award

Expanding the Fresh-Market Blackberry Industry Team: Aaron Cato, Jackie Lee, Amanda McWhirt, Margaret Worthington (Department of Horticulture); and Renee Threlfall (Department of Food Science)
presented by Deacue Fields

OUTSTANDING SUPPORT PERSONNEL AWARDS:

presented by Deacue Fields

Program Area Awards

Daniel McCarty – Rice Research and Extension Center
Julian Abram – Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering

Support Function Awards

Dwain Ober – Fruit Research Station
Karen DiCicco – Department of Information Technology

Support Staff Awards

Genean Butler – Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources
Tonya Foster – Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness

BUMPERS COLLEGE AWARDS:

unless otherwise noted, presented by Jeff Edwards

Outstanding Honors Thesis Mentor Award

Gisela Erf – Department of Poultry Science
presented by Lona Robertson
Associate Dean of Dale Bumpers College

Bumpers College Alumni Society Outstanding Advising Award

Stephanie Hubert – School of Human Environmental Sciences
presented by Scott Walnofer
Bumpers College Alumni Society Board President

Jack G. Justus Endowment for Teaching Excellence

Christopher Estopp – Department of Agricultural Education,
Communications and Technology

Bumpers College Dean’s Award of Excellence for Departmental Professional Staff Support

Kristin Seals – Dean’s Office

Spitze Land Grant University Faculty Award for Excellence

Walter Bottje – Department of Poultry Science

RECOGNITION OF ISSUED PATENTS:

presented by Parker Cole
Associate Director of Technology Commercialization

- **Burkholderia Cenocepacia and Pseudomonas Fluorescens Compositions and Methods of Using the Same:** Alejandro Rojas – Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology; and Ruben Morawicki – Department of Food Science
- **Table Grape Named A-1400 ‘Southern Sensation’:** John Clark – Department of Horticulture
- **Herbicide-Resistant Grain Sorghum:** Jason Norsworthy and Muthukumar Bagavathiannan – Department of Crop, Soil, and Environmental Sciences
- **Robust Water Trading and Irrigation Performance Meter Measurement System:** Christopher Henry – Rice Research and Extension Center
- **Pseudomonas Protegens and Products Thereof to Control Bacterial Panicle Blight of Rice:** Alejandro Rojas – Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology
- **Blackberry Plant Named ‘APF-404T’:** John Clark – Department of Horticulture
- **Blackberry Plant Named APF-409T:** John Clark – Department of Horticulture
- **Table Grape Named ‘Compassion’:** John Clark – Department of Horticulture
- **Novel Mucosal Adjuvants and Delivery Systems:** Amanda Wolfenden-Bray, Billy Hargis, Guillermo Tellez-Isaias, Marion Morgan, Neil Pumford, and Srichaitanya Shivaramaiah – Department of Poultry Science
- **Compositions and Methods of Enhancing Immune Responses to Eimeria or Limiting Eimeria:** Billy Hargis, Lisa Bielke, Olivia Faulkner, and Srichaitanya Shivaramaiah – Department of Poultry Science



Kristen Gibson

John W. White Outstanding Research Award

Kristen Gibson, a Professor of Food Safety and Microbiology, joined the Division of Agriculture in 2010 as a postdoctoral research associate in the Center for Food Safety. She was promoted to Assistant Professor in the Department of Food Science in 2012, Associate Professor in 2017 and to Professor in 2022. That year she was also named Director of the Center for Food Safety and the Donald “Buddy” Wray Endowed Chair in Food Safety.

Gibson’s research focuses on the fate and transport of pathogens within food systems, including food handling and processing to improve public health, environmental health and microbial food safety. Her work has encompassed a variety of food safety issues, from investigating the safety of dining out during the COVID-19 pandemic to helping establish food safety guidelines for hydroponic produce growers and packers, pet food manufacturers and 3D food printing systems.

Gibson served in key roles of professional organizations like the International Association for Food Protection and has been a leader in developing the next generation of food scientists. In 2022, she secured a five-year, \$730,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture to conduct the Future of Food: Opportunities and Careers for Undergraduate Students program.

She earned a bachelor’s degree in microbiology and molecular biology from the University of Central Florida in Orlando and her Ph.D. in environmental engineering from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore.



Nathan Kemper

John W. White Outstanding Teaching Award

Nathan Kemper is an Associate Professor of Community and Rural Economic Development and the Director of Undergraduate and Online Programs in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness at the University of Arkansas.

His teaching philosophy is grounded in motivating students to embrace learning through perseverance, viewing failure as an essential part of growth. He focuses on fostering a supportive environment built on six principles: understanding students, sharing personal experiences, setting clear expectations, encouraging comprehensive learning, incorporating real research into the classroom, and demonstrating humility.

Since 2014, Kemper has pioneered the development of six online courses and an online Minor in Agricultural Business. In Fall 2023, he launched an online B.S. in Agricultural Business with a concentration in Agribusiness Risk Management. His recent research explores expanding online education into workforce development.

Committed to continuous improvement, Kemper completed the ACUE course on Designing Learner-Centered and Equitable Courses. He regularly presents his work on effective teaching strategies at national conferences such as the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association and Southern Agricultural Economics Association meetings, where he collaborates with colleagues on best practices for online education.



Laura Hendrix

John W. White Outstanding Extension State Faculty Award

Laura Hendrix first joined the Cooperative Extension Service as a Family and Consumer Sciences agent in 1990, while completing a master's degree in home economics at the University of Arkansas. Over the past 34 years, in addition to completing her Ph.D. in public policy, she has served extension in the roles of instructor, professor, interim department head of FCS, state advisor for the Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council and more.

Hendrix has authored more than a dozen extension publications, as well as multiple online courses, lesson guides, journal articles and conference presentations.



Brad McGinley

John W. White Outstanding County Extension Educator Award

Brad McGinley joined the Cooperative Extension Service in 2004, serving as both an agricultural and 4-H agent in Stone County. He later worked as an Extension Agent in Fulton and Montgomery counties. Between 2013 and 2024, McGinley has served as Staff Chair or Interim Staff Chair in Montgomery, Hot Springs, Pulaski and Grant counties.

In 2024, McGinley coached 11 separate teams competing in the SeaPerch challenge, which allows participating youth to put STEM skills into action. Over eight years, he raised more than \$100,000 for the Grant County 4-H program, more than tripling the program membership during that time.

McGinley's other accomplishments include co-creating extension podcasts, mentoring 4-H state officers, providing leadership for Master Gardeners, providing timely agricultural advice and more.

John W. White Outstanding Team Award

The 2024 John W. White Outstanding Team Award goes to the team behind the **Expanding the Fresh-Market Blackberry Industry through Research and Extension** project. The team includes Amanda McWhirt, Associate Professor of Horticulture and Extension Horticulture Specialist; Margaret Worthington, Associate Professor of Horticulture and Director of the Arkansas Fruit Breeding program; Renee Threlfall, Associate Professor of Food Science; Jackie Lee, Associate Professor of Horticulture and Director of the Division of Agriculture's Fruit Research Station; and Aaron Cato, Assistant Professor of Horticulture and Extension IPM Specialist.

The project represents a collection of research and extension efforts, including blackberry variety development, postharvest research, and production and pest management research and extension support.



(top to bottom, left to right) Expanding the Fresh-market Blackberry Industry Team: Aaron Cato, Jackie Lee, Amanda McWhirt, Margaret Worthington (Department of Horticulture); and Renee Threlfall (Department of Food Science)



Division of Agriculture Outstanding Support Personnel Awards – Program Area

Julian Abram is completing 20 years of service as a Program Technician in the Biological and Agricultural Engineering Department. In this role he supports the Division of Agriculture's research, teaching and extension missions.

Julian Abram

His current position involves maintaining and optimizing the department's 30,000-square-foot facility, the department's vehicle fleet, ensuring the safety and efficiency of the laboratories, as well as helping plan for any renovations and construction of these spaces.

Abram began his career with the Division of Agriculture in 2004 after spending more than two decades in the poultry industry where he managed various poultry production facilities including one of the largest automated hatcheries in the country.

Abram holds a bachelor's degree in animal science and a master's in poultry science from the University of Arkansas.

After completing his master's, Abram served as a Benton County Extension Agent for the working with beef, dairy and poultry farmers. In this role, Abram also worked with the 4-H program.

Agriculture has always been a part of Abram's life. He grew up on his family's cattle farm in central Arkansas, also raising corn, soybean and hay.

Those who work alongside Abram say his work has helped optimize processes, reduce waste and create a supportive environment where faculty and students can excel. Colleagues praise his dedication, work ethic and playing a key role in improving the department's research and teaching facilities, including recent upgrades to faculty labs and student spaces.



Dwain Ober

Division of Agriculture Outstanding Support Personnel Awards – Support Function

Dwain Ober II has served as the Farm Foreman at the Fruit Research Station in Clarksville since 1993. During this time, Ober's dedication and creativity has played a key role in the research conducted on the station. He has designed complex irrigation systems to fit the needs of a unique farm layout, he has engineered and built equipment to help achieve research objectives including sprayers, planters, and row covering systems, and he has designed a large-scale pest management plan to minimize damage from crows, bears, racoons and coyotes. Ober's support has been instrumental in the success of the breeding program which has generated more than 25 fruit variety releases and millions in royalty income for the breeding program and the university.

Although Ober has been in his role for over 31 years, he is not set in his ways. He is dedicated to learning and implementing new and innovative tactics to elevate research projects, support faculty and keep the Fruit Research Station productive.



Karen DiCicco

Division of Agriculture Outstanding Support Personnel Awards – Support Function

Karen DiCicco has served as the Cooperative Extension Service Assistant Director of Information Technology since 2022. She joined the extension service in 2017 as a Professional Assistant while earning her bachelor's degree from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. With degree in hand, she was promoted to Digital and IT Innovation for Extension. DiCicco went on to earn a master's in 2019 and then a doctorate in computer and information science.

She has been praised for her leadership and vision for new and emerging technologies and their application to land-grant institution use, as well as being able to streamline operational support. Additionally, DiCiccio has skillfully managed and supported a significant portfolio of web applications for the extension service. She meticulously monitors the department's budget, data security management, and the intricate software acquisition process. Her tireless efforts in software acquisition encompass managing software requests, coordinating vendor demonstrations, negotiating contracts, and navigating the procurement process. Furthermore, DiCiccio plays a crucial role in managing software licensing assignments.

One of DiCiccio's most significant achievements has been securing a pivotal technology grant for the extension service. Her success in securing the grant was instrumental in obtaining funds for critical technology upgrades for 33 rural county extension offices in Arkansas.



Genean Butler

Division of Agriculture Outstanding Support Personnel Awards – Support Staff

Since joining the Cooperative Extension Service as Administrative Support for Animal Science in 2009, **Genean Butler** has become an exemplary leader among her peers. Known as a go-to expert on Workday, her skills play a critical role in extension operations. She regularly guides and mentors both new and existing administrators.

Genean has served as a Fiscal Support Analyst for Financial Services, as Associate for Administration for Family and Consumer Sciences and, since 2022, as Associate for Administration for Agriculture and Natural Resources. With her experience in multiple extension departments, Genean's expertise has helped operations run smoothly, especially in times of transition. In prior years she has provided crucial support for Family and Consumer Sciences, 4-H and the Lonoke Agriculture Center when those departments experienced

high turnover and a shortage of experienced administrative specialists. Genean's support tasks included travel arrangements, budget reports, management of fleet vehicles, spending authorizations and more - all in addition to her existing duties.

Genean also compiles all Division of Agriculture proposals and numerous reports for the Soybean and Wheat Promotion Boards, which result in more than \$3 million in funding annually. Genean's tireless efforts and commitment to extension help connect administrators, faculty and staff to the resources needed to do their work. She regularly answers the call to go above and beyond her duties.



Tonya Foster

Division of Agriculture Outstanding Support Personnel Awards – Support Staff

Throughout her 19 years of service to the Division of Agriculture, **Tonya Foster** has navigated countless changes and challenges with ease. As the Administrative Manager for the Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness Department at the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences, Foster has become known for her dedicated work ethic and extensive knowledge of University and Division policies.

While the AEAB department has faced significant office reduction and faculty turnover in recent years, Foster has managed multiple faculty searches and the onboarding of new hires. When the department recently lost most of its office staff, Foster took on the duties of those roles while managing her own. Foster has also been heavily involved in onboarding graduate students, supporting significant growth in the program over the past three years.

Foster has twice filled in as the Administrative Manager for the Entomology and Plant Pathology department and has assisted in covering those duties for the Animal Science Department as well. During the past four years, Foster has served on several search

committees, including the Division of Agricultural ROPE Award Committee, which was created to recognize staff early in their career. Respected as a leader among administrative personnel, Foster exemplifies the mission of the Division of Agriculture and contributes greatly to its growth.



Gisela Erf

Bumpers College Outstanding Honors Thesis Mentor Award

Gisela Erf is an Immunologist and holder of the Tyson Endowed Professorship in Avian Immunology in the Department of Poultry Science and with the Center of Excellence for Poultry Science. Erf is also a Fellow of the Poultry Science Association.

Erf has dedicated more than three decades to research and education, earning the respect and admiration of those in her field. In recognition of her commitment to teaching, she was awarded the Purina Mills Poultry Science Association Teaching Award in 1999. In 2005, her efforts in graduate mentorship and providing research opportunities to students were recognized by the Poultry Science Association's Helene Cecil Leadership Award.

Originally from Germany, Erf earned an associate's degree at Nova Scotia Agricultural College in Animal Science before moving to the University of Guelph to earn a bachelor's degree in Animal Science and a master's in reproductive physiology. Erf earned her Ph.D. in Immunology from Cornell University. Both her thesis and dissertation dealt with chickens.

She joined the University of Arkansas in 1994 as an assistant professor after teaching at Smith College. Erf was promoted to professor in 2004.

One of the letters of support for Erf's nomination included this: "As the former Chair and Secretary of the Bumpers Honors

Student Board, I have read countless nominations for the Outstanding Honors Thesis Mentor award ... I can confidently say Dr. Erf is truly one of the most deserving mentors to receive this award. Beyond being an outstanding mentor, she is truly a saint of a person. Had I not been a part of the selection committee, I would have nominated Dr. Erf each year."



Stephanie Hubert

Bumpers College Alumni Society Outstanding Advising Award

Stephanie Hubert is a Senior Instructor of Apparel Merchandising and Product Development in Bumpers College's School of Human Environmental Sciences.

As an advisor, she knows every student has their own unique strengths, challenges, and aspirations, and her role is to guide and facilitate, helping them navigate their academic journey while encouraging personal and professional growth.

Her philosophy centers on individualized support, holistic development, and empowerment through knowledge and resources. She created Hubert Family Advising meetings where all advisees are given information to help prepare them for advising season. She developed a checklist of discussion items for each meeting, completes a degree plan each time so students are aware of progress, and she's currently developing a webpage to share advising information.

Hubert also implemented classroom projects to build community and confidence. The ENCLOTHE fashion show allows students to work on a project for development of problem solving, time management, and interviewing skills. Students create a garment from concept to creation, and develop a portfolio of their work.

Hubert has served as advisor to the Walmart Mentoring Circle since 2018, the Fashion and Apparel Board since 2022, and Phi Upsilon Omicron since 2021. Her semester advisee list has grown from 20 in 2013 to 47 in 2015 and 51 in 2022. Hubert advised 48 in spring 2024 and 41 in fall 2024.



Christopher Estep

Jack G. Justus Endowment for Teaching Excellence

Christopher Estep is an Associate Professor in the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology, working with the agricultural education concentration.

Estep works with students who are preparing to become secondary agriculture teachers.

He teaches courses in Instructional and Presentation Strategies, Curriculum Development and Assessment, Issues in Agriculture, Methods of Teaching in Ag Laboratories, and Philosophy of Agricultural and Extension Education, while also supervising student teachers.

He regularly attends and has facilitated professional development workshops on teaching and learning, has authored numerous articles and presentations on the subject of teaching methodology, co-authored and co-produced a podcast for high school agriculture teachers, and was principal author and PI on a large USDA grant on experiential education and pedagogy to retain and engage students.

Estep has been recognized by the U of A Teaching and Faculty Support Center with a commendation for excellence in teaching. Other awards include the Bumpers College John W. White Award for teaching, induction into the U of A Teaching Academy, the American Association for Agricultural Education-Southern Region Distinguished Teacher Educator award, and the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture Teaching Scholar award.



Kristin Seals

Bumpers College Dean’s Award of Excellence for Professional Staff Support

Kristin Seals is Associate Director of Facilities and Special Events with the Bumpers College Dean’s Office.

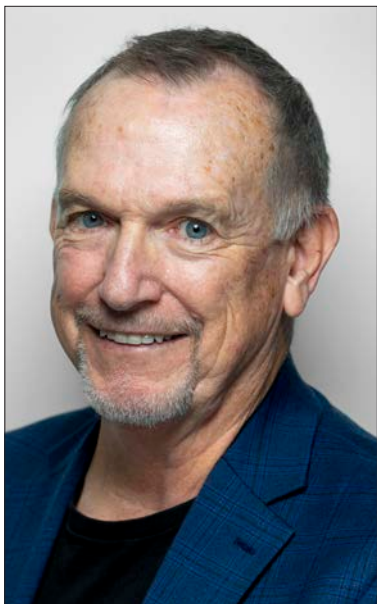
She has overseen more than \$10 million in facility improvements. She worked to develop proposals securing approximately 75 percent of the funding for those projects through campus support, grants and donors, including all improvements to the Home Economics Building over the last eight years, the creation of the Waldrip Center, improvements to air quality in the Agriculture Building and improvements to the Pauline Whitaker Animal Science Center.

As a member of the U of A Building Facilities Committee, Seals lobbied to move the AGRI Building from No. 8 to No. 1 on the list of “Institutional Priority Ranking for Higher Education Bond Capital Requests.” Her service on various committees has led to better relationships across campus with FAMA, Parking and Transit, UAPD, athletics, classroom scheduling, UITS, Arkansas Alumni Association and University Advancement.

For the past five years, Seals has helped evolve events. Changes to tailgates and major recruiting events resulted in an increase of more than 150 percent in attendance and more engagement. She has helped define goals and developed evaluation metrics for ROI with best practices and guidelines.

Seals has served as an ex officio member of the Bumpers College Alumni Society Board, and provided guidance and direction to redefine its purpose and expand impact. She led creation of the Golden Boot Challenge with LSU, and the restructure of the alumni tailgate to financially support itself and raise funds for student scholarships, including more than \$8,000 last year.

SPITZE LAND GRANT UNIVERSITY FACULTY AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE



2025 AWARD RECIPIENT

Walter Bottje

Walter Bottje is a Professor in the Department of Poultry Science, and has been a member of the U of A faculty since 1985.

Originally in Animal Science, he was actively involved in the conceptualization and establishment of the poultry department, the undergraduate and graduate programs, the recruitment of faculty, design of laboratory space, and writing equipment grants.

His physiology course is cross-listed with animal science and is a central course in both programs, especially for students in pre-professional tracks. Bottje has advised and mentored seven master's degree and 12 Ph.D. students. He has published 167 peer reviewed journal articles, six book chapters, and made 22 national and international presentations. His scholarly contributions to science have been funded and recognized by federal (NIH, NSF, USDA), national (U.S. Poultry and Egg), state (ABI), and university (Chancellor's) grants, as well as funding from national, and international poultry, and allied companies. He received nearly \$3M as PI/Co-I, and nearly \$10M as project director of a USDA NIFA Sustainable Agriculture Systems grant (2019-24).

His split appointments to research, teaching and advising, and service cover all facets of the land-grant mission. He also served as both department head and director of the Center of Excellence for Poultry Science from 2002-08.

Spitze Land Grant University Faculty Award for Excellence Recipients

1995 – James N. Moore	2010 – Eric J. Wailes
1996 – George E. Templeton	2011 – John R. Clark
1997 – Justin R. Morris	2012 – Donna L. Graham
1998 – Ronald E. Talbert	2013 – Yanbin Li
1999 – Fred Stephen	2014 – Navam Hettiarachchy
2000 – John Kirkpatrick Skeeles Sr.	2015 – Pengyin Chen
2001 – Robert D. Riggs	2016 – Fred Bourland
2002 – Lawrence R. “Dick” Oliver	2017 – Michael Richardson
2003 – Terry J. Siebenmorgen	2018 – Larry Purcell
2004 – Max V. Meisch	2019 – Don Johnson
2005 – Derrick M. Oosterhuis	2020 – Kristofer Brye
2006 – Sung Man Lim	2021 – Jason Norsworthy
2008 – Duane Wolf	2022 – Mary C. Savin
2009 – Park Waldroup	2024 – Michael Popp

SPITZE LAND GRANT UNIVERSITY FACULTY AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE



*Robert G.F. Spitze,
Ph.D., BSA 1947*



*Hazel Taylor Spitze,
Ph.D., BSHE 1943*

The Spitze Land Grant University Faculty Award for Excellence recognizes meritorious and comprehensive scholarly performance in the areas of academic responsibility unique to the Land Grant mission: teaching and advising, research and

publication, extension and public service, and participation in professional associations and faculty governance. Tenured faculty members with at least 10 years of continuous service with the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences or the Division of Agriculture are eligible for consideration.

The award includes an unrestricted cash award of \$6,500 from a fund established by the late Robert G.F. Spitze and the late Hazel Taylor Spitze. The Spitzes have also provided generous endowments for student scholarship funds. Bob Spitze, a native of Berryville, and Hazel Spitze, a native of DeQueen, were both graduates of the college with B.S. degrees in general agriculture and home economics, respectively. They went on to earn doctoral degrees, hers in education from the University of Tennessee and his in agricultural economics from the University of Wisconsin. As professors at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, they have made lasting, nationally recognized contributions through the Land Grant University System.

ADMINISTRATION

Vice President for Agriculture	Deacue Fields
Senior Associate Vice President for Agriculture – Extension and Director, Cooperative Extension Service	John Anderson
Senior Associate Vice President for Agriculture – Research and Director, Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station	Jean-François Meullenet
Senior Associate Vice President for Agriculture – Academic Programs and Dean, Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences	Jeff Edwards

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Carmen Alessi
Samantha Barker
Christina Breckenridge
Robby Edwards
Catering Unlimited
Amy Hedges
Andrea Price
Dianne Saffire
Allie Speed
Demetra Stacey
Dianne Vaughan
The Division Communications Team

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Dale Bumpers College
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