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## Farm training, apprenticeship programs help new and aspiring farmers put local foods on local plates

Those whose hands yearn for the dirt can learn to farm with classroom training and practical experience in two Center for Arkansas Farms and Food programs.

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture center launches its first Farm School in January 2021. The second year of farm apprenticeships will begin in the spring. Registration for both programs begins Sept. 1.

The programs focus on small and mid-sized farms, specialty crop production and local markets in northwest Arkansas, said Heather Friedrich, program manager in the division's department of horticulture. Both programs are open to anyone from any area of Arkansas. "We have connections with farmers in many areas of the state," she said.

"Our goal is to increase the number of farmers and farms in Arkansas, improve farm viability and support our local food systems," Friedrich said.

CAFF uses division research and outreach to support local food entrepreneurs and increases small farm viability. It is a center of the division's Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station and envisions a vibrant and diverse farm and food economy statewide, Friedrich said. Division of Agriculture faculty and staff manage CAFF programs in partnership with Northwest Arkansas Food Systems.

"Our goal is also to get local foods on local plates," Friedrich said. "That's good for farmers, and it's good for consumers."

Friedrich said CAFF addresses the need for a new generation of farmers to feed the state's growing population. "The average farmer in Arkansas is age 57," she said. "New farmers entering



the field face significant obstacles, including a steep learning curve and access to land.

"CAFF's goal is to support and expand the Arkansas food and farm economy," Friedrich said. "These educational and mentoring programs will develop the next generation of Arkansas farmers and help them succeed."

The Farm School begins in January and is an 11-month, experiential learning program for beginning farmers of specialty crops or for those who want to learn how to grow food. The school includes both classroom curriculum and hands-on experience for integrating production, business and legal issues. Apprenticeships and outreach events offer continuing education to learn more about the skills needed for successful farming.

Students participate in approximately 350 hours of core knowledge in production, business and legal topics and

*Cont on page 2*

### THE INSIDE STORIES

**COVID time summer camp**  
**October Birthdays**  
**Message from the director**

**Scholarship donations**  
**New retirees**  
**Obituaries**

# 2

## Farm training, cont.

700 hours of hands-on field activities, Friedrich said. They will experience annual cropping systems on .5- and 5-acre scale fields, greenhouse production and perennial fruit production.

“Students gain an in-depth understanding of the farming production systems and business applications needed to succeed,” Friedrich said. “The Farm School prepares farmers to become specialty crop entrepreneurs, contributing to local and regional foodsheds in Arkansas.”

The apprenticeship program matches new farmers or those who want to begin farming with mentors in their area of interest, providing hands-on learning experience on working farms, Friedrich said.

“Apprentices are carefully matched to farms based on their interests and learn alongside successful farmers, getting a taste of farm life before starting their own farm businesses,” she said.


Agreements signed by farm mentors and apprentices outline the terms of employment, and each on-farm experience is different, Friedrich said. The CAFF apprenticeship program lasts one to two

seasons, depending on apprentice interests.

The program also includes education sessions at the Milo J. Shult Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Fayetteville, both before and during apprenticeships.

“Participants are required to take nine classes during the winter before their apprenticeships begin and three during the growing season,” Friedrich said. “This allows apprentices to share experiences with their classmates while applying what they learn in classes to real working experience.”

To learn more about the Center for Arkansas Farms and Food, or the Farm School and Farm Apprenticeships, visit the CAFF website: <https://caff.uark.edu>. Registration for the programs will be open Sept. 1 through Oct. 30. Online registration:

- Farm School: [https://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_6uk5zNcQdlbJr5X](https://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6uk5zNcQdlbJr5X)
- Farm Apprenticeship program: [https://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_odoZTMKBmZeO4Jv](https://uark.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_odoZTMKBmZeO4Jv) 

## Masks can't hide the laughter, enthusiasm during COVID time summer camp

Under blue skies and in blistering temperatures, youngsters squealed about the slippery fish they just caught, while others in their bright orange life jackets steered silver canoes around Lake Laverne. The Arkansas Outdoor School Adventure Day looked like any summer day camp.

Except for the masks and social distancing and all the sanitizer.

“Our campers are handling the ‘new normal’ well,” said Mike Simmons, Arkansas Outdoor School day camp coordinator for the Arkansas 4-H program. “We haven't had any complaints about masks or physical distancing. I think kids are just happy to be outside having fun.”

The COVID summer meant programs like Arkansas 4-H had to find new ways to deliver beloved camping experiences, either in-person or virtually. Arkansas 4-H is the youth development program of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

“At the beginning, I was holding on to hope that by the late summer we might be able to have camps,” said Eric DeVries, Arkansas Outdoor School program coordinator. “As the COVID situation progressed we realized the safer choice was to wait until we learned more. As more information came out the plans were modified to match best practices.”

The best practices meant new tasks and increased vigilance for camp counselors and supervisors. Among other things, COVID



safety protocols saw DeVries sanitizing arrows the campers had just used in their archery activity and Simmons spraying and wiping down kayaks. Program tech Jewell Miller made sure camper helmets and harnesses were wiped down, and that each camper got a handful of sanitizer after descending the indoor climbing wall.

Simmons said the hardest thing about camping during COVID-19 is “remembering not to touch my face ... and all the cleaning before, during and after the programs.”

Best practices also included small group sizes: 10 or fewer youngsters at a time.

“Keeping kids in masks and socially distant is difficult,” DeVries said. Still, “I have been amazed by the kids. They seem to adapt better than anyone. They are having fun, being kids, glad to finally be out of their homes and around someone their age.”

“It’s really fun to be out of the house and be able to be out here and do things I wouldn’t be able to do in my own backyard,” said camper Kylie Belverstone.

Creenna Bocksnick, the camping coordinator for the Arkansas 4-H program, took another tack with her programs, keeping the flames alive virtually.

Every week, she has offered a 4-H virtual camp through Facebook and Zoom. On Facebook, she published dates, times and lists of supplies for the projects they’ll complete together during the virtual camp.

Bocksnick has even brought the campfire online. Her Fourth Friday Virtual Campfires are broadcast live from a fire pit at the home she shares with husband Jesse, the 4-H outdoor skills coordinator. While no campfire is required of participants, it’s encouraged and campers are advised to enjoy a favorite snack. Zooming around the virtual campfire is an opportunity for the campers to share what they created in her other virtual camps and just connect.

The idea for a virtual campfire arose “from a conversation Jesse and I had,” she said. “We were trying to come up with a way for youth to engage their friends from across the state in an informal setting versus a structured program.”

Going online was not without challenges at a time when both adults and children worry about the amount of screen time they get every day.

“The most difficult thing was figuring out what activities would work well virtually as well as a time frame that would keep campers engaged but not overdo it and cause screen fatigue,” Bocksnick said.

Her interns, Zoe Pitman and Grace Shipman “did a house scavenger hunt with a couple of the camps,” Bocksnick said. “The kids, mostly preteen and younger, really enjoyed playing. They were all active, smiling and interacting.

“I have been offering weekly virtual camp sessions for 18 weeks, as of July 22,” she said. “They were open to anyone and were offered for free. These weekly sessions will continue until members return to school. We wanted to provide a constant experience that 4-H’ers could join when they otherwise were not able to attend meetings or school.”

“The kids handled it really well. They had already been doing things virtually so it wasn’t a big leap for them,” Bocksnick said.

The new format opened a new world for some of the youngsters.

“Around two-thirds of our virtual campers have never attended camp in the past,” she said.

“We plan to keep some kind of virtual programming in the future.” 

## To our Extension retirees

It is hard to believe that we have been living under some sort of COVID-19 safety protocols for the better part of 2020 with no end in sight. We continue to strive under these conditions to get our programs out into the counties and state to fulfill our mission to the people of Arkansas.

Recently, we began hosting more in-person meetings. This was done in conjunction with schools opening and a slight downward trend in number of COVID-19 cases in the state. In addition, we have seen the adoption of the wearing of masks and other personal protective measures on a large scale in the Natural State, which gave me the encouragement I needed to trust that we could host these meetings in a safe way while following guidelines set by the Arkansas Department of Health. To date, this decision has been well-received, as many 4-H, Master Gardener, AEHC and other groups have enjoyed some limited in-person meetings.

Our online efforts are in full force as well. We just completed the second of our four-part virtual field day series. We had good attendance for both our rice and corn field days. Next up is our soybean virtual field day on Sept. 17 followed by cotton on Oct. 1. In addition, we have had numerous other online events that have been successful. This includes the recent 4-H virtual Livestock Skill-A-Thon powered by Microsoft Teams. Chelsey Kimbrough, associate professor in animal science and specialty livestock, and Brad McGinley, CEA staff chair in Grant County, did a great job with this event. It was recently featured in our “Tech Tuesday” employee educational webinar organized by our IT department.

One of my favorite annual extension publications comes from our Public Policy Center, and I again am pleased with our ballot issue education efforts. I do not know of any other place where you can get nonpolitical, unbiased information about state ballot initiatives. This information can be difficult to understand at times, and this document helps make us all informed voters. I have admitted several times that prior to this document I was guilty of voting on some measures that I did not fully understand. A shout-out goes to Kristin Higgins in the Public Policy Center for leading this effort.



## October Birthdays

Portia Short - Oct. 1  
Charlotte Gorman Trent - Oct. 1  
Bobby Hall - Oct. 2  
Pat Hayden - Oct. 2  
Larry Pryor - Oct. 2  
Stanley Carter - Oct. 3  
Paul Beck - Oct. 3  
Frank Jones - Oct. 3  
Gerald Klingaman - Oct. 3  
Craig Randall Andersen - Oct. 4  
Jimmie Lee Bowling - Oct. 5

Lazaro English - Oct. 5  
Judy Riley - Oct. 5  
Sheila Whiteley - Oct. 5  
James R. Lipsey - Oct. 7  
Suzanne Wiley - Oct. 8  
Billie Coleman - Oct. 9  
Glen Ford - Oct. 10  
Lorene McGuire - Oct. 10  
Judy Urich - Oct. 11  
Armenthia Willis - Oct. 12  
Jack Boles - Oct. 13

Sue Coates - Oct. 13  
James Hood - Oct. 14  
Richard Poling - Oct. 14  
Carroll Prewett - Oct. 15  
Frank Roth - Oct. 16  
Tom Troxel - Oct. 16  
Ron Baker - Oct. 17  
Carolyn Meeks - Oct. 17  
Gail Torok - Oct. 17  
Mary Parker - Oct. 18  
Hugh Plumlee - Oct. 19

Mable Tate - Oct. 19  
Pam Cannada - Oct. 20  
Renee Myers - Oct. 20  
Mary Shaver - Oct. 20  
James Clower - Oct. 21  
Tom Riley - Oct. 22  
Mark Bryles - Oct. 23  
Wanda Snyder - Oct. 23  
Janice Gooch - Oct. 27  
Janella Pugh - Oct. 31

## Obituaries

### Elizabeth Jewell “Beth” Roberts passes

Elizabeth Jewell “Beth” Roberts, 82 of McGehee, Arkansas, passed away peacefully with her family by her side on Sept. 5, 2020. Beth was born in Lake Village on Oct. 10, 1937. She was an administrative specialist with the Southeast Research and Extension Center at her retirement in 2009. Her greatest accomplishment was fervently serving the Lord as a prayer warrior, pianist and vocalist. A graveside memorial service was held Sept. 10 at McGehee Cemetery in McGehee.

### Kathryn M. Lynch passes

Kathryn M. Lynch, 85, of Little Rock passed from this life on Sept. 4, 2020 at her home. She was born April 6, 1935, in Wesson, Mississippi. Her hobbies included flower arranging, working in her yard, and creating works of art with pastels, but her greatest joy was found in her family. Kathryn was a loving wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, sister, and friend who will be dearly missed by all who were privileged to know her. Graveside services were held Sept. 10, 2020 at Pinecrest Memorial Park.

## Scholarship donations

The following gifts were recently received to support professional development opportunities for faculty and staff of the Cooperative Extension Service.

### Extension Service Retiree Scholarship Fund


#### James Barrentine

*In honor of Minter Appleberry*

#### Mark Keaton

#### Martha May

*In honor of Collen Owen*


Honorary or memorial donations should be forwarded to the Development Office, ATTN: Brian Helms, Cooperative Extension Service, 2301 South University Ave., Little Rock, AR 72204. If joint recognition is desired, please indicate. To ensure proper notification is sent, please also include in whose honor or memory the gift is made and the mailing address of the person to receive the notification. 

## Welcome new retirees!

### June Moody, Lafayette County – Lewisville

June began her career in June of 1994 with extension and retired Sept. 1, 2020. June was an administrative specialist III and had 25 years of service in the Lafayette County Office.

### Debra Schneider, Crawford County – Van Buren

Debra began her career in March of 1980 with extension and retired Sept. 1, 2020. Debra was the administrative support supervisor and had 40 years of service in the Crawford County Office. 

## Message from Director, cont.

This past month, I met with some retired extension folks who are serving on the 4-H Foundation Board, the LeadAR selection committee and the Extension Cord’s editorial board. I am so pleased that we continue to engage former employees so that we can hold on to some of that wisdom and experience. Let me be the first to congratulate and welcome June Moody (Lafayette County) and Debra Schneider (Crawford County) to our retiree ranks! I’ll ask them, like I do all retirees, to stay involved in Extension programs through this publication and maybe by serving on one of these boards.

I also want to thank all of you who contribute to the 4-H Foundation. COVID-19 has been especially hard on 4-H, the kids and the center. Fundraising is crucial right now. With that in mind, I am pleased to report that the Rick and Lynette Cartwright Endowed Scholarship is now fully funded! This fund will honor my predecessor and his accomplishments as both director and pathology specialist.

Once again, I look forward to the time when we can resume some form of normal business. In the meantime, I feel confident that we are moving forward and discovering new ways to meet the needs of Arkansans. Please consider joining me online for upcoming events including field days and other programs.

As always, I look forward to hearing from you. You have helped shape the dynamic extension service we have today, and your work is much appreciated. I hope you will always feel welcome to reach out to me with your ideas and feedback. You can reach me at [bscott@uaex.edu](mailto:bscott@uaex.edu). 