

Farm

Sense

January 2022

UAPB Small Farm Program

Dates to Remember

January 6-8 - Southeast Regional Fruit and Vegetable Conference, Savannah, Georgia.

January 13-14 - Horticulture Industries Show (covering fruits, vegetables, hydroponics, local foods, organics, etc.), Graduate Hotel, Fayetteville, Arkansas.

January 18-20 - Arkansas Crop Management Conference, Wyndham Riverfront Hotel, North Little Rock, Arkansas.

January 27-28 - ALFDC-ALCDC 41st Annual Conference and Membership Meeting, Fargo, Arkansas.

January 31-February 2 - 25th Annual National Conservation Systems Conference (row crops), Jonesboro, Arkansas.

February 28 - Deadline or Sales Closing Date for obtaining crop insurance for soybeans, corn, rice, cotton and sorghum.

February 28 - Deadline for enrolling in the Noninsured Assistance Program (NAP) for spring planted crops like southern peas, squash, watermelons, sweet potatoes, cantaloupes and cucumbers.

Extension Helps Producers Obtain EQIP Funds, Improve Farm Operations

In his work with the UAPB Small Farm Program, Dameion White, Extension associate, has noticed one positive change brought on as result of the pandemic. More Arkansas producers are signing up for and taking part in educational programming that benefits their operations.

Because most of the UAPB Small Farm Program's face-to-face programming was called off for a year due to social distancing protocols, program personnel conducted a series of educational webinars for small-scale and underserved producers, allowing them to obtain the knowledge and tools to stay profitable. White and other program personnel connected with producers through Zoom meetings and phone calls to help them apply for several disaster relief programs to offset losses caused by the pandemic.



EQIP funding allowed Kenneth and Jacqueline Carswell to accomplish their goal of developing newly-purchased land into an organic farm. From left: Kenneth and Jacqueline Carswell and the couple's son Keith Carswell.

"Many Arkansas producers who stayed home in the height of the lockdowns were stuck at home with little to do, so they started surfing the internet and seeking out educational opportunities," he said. "We noticed that attendance for our workshops started going up from 20 in-person to around 70 online attendees. I think the pandemic made many producers sit down and want to work on enhancing some parts of their businesses they might not have had time for in the past."

One of White's main responsibilities is helping producers apply for and receive cost-share assistance funded through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). He is often on the road, visiting small producers on their property to understand their operations, short and long terms goals and areas for improvement on their land.

"I may visit a farm and see 10 resource concerns – or in other words, opportunities for the farmer to install conservation practices that make the land more sustainable and profitable," he said. "We then connect farmers with local NRCS personnel who can assist in applying for EQIP funds to make the necessary changes."

Producers can pick up and submit an EQIP application at their local NRCS office. The application form is also available online at www.nrcs.usda.gov. UAPB Small Farm Program Extension personnel can assist participants in filling out applications and selecting practices to apply for if needed. Producers can contact Karen Lee at leek@uapb.edu or (870) 575-7225 for assistance.



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Outbreak Presents Opportunity for Livestock Producers to Sell Meat Locally

The COVID-19 outbreak has coincided with a demand for locally-sourced meat, Dr. David Fernandez, Extension livestock specialist and interim dean of graduate studies for UAPB, said. Livestock producers who are planning their fall marketing strategy can consider selling their meat locally to take advantage of the opportunity to capture more of the retail dollar and develop customer loyalty that will last after the pandemic.

“The pandemic has caused a lot of people to start looking for locally-sourced meat because the traditional production and distribution system involving large slaughter and processing units is having difficulty keeping up with demand,” he said. “As employees at these facilities become infected and cannot come to work, or as an outbreak occurs in a plant and the plant has to be shut down, disruptions are caused in the meat supply.”

Because of these industry challenges, consumers are increasingly buying from farmers markets and small grocery stores that source local meat products. This represents a great opportunity for producers to capture the retail price of their meat and even charge a premium price, Dr. Fernandez said.

“The popularity of farmers markets continues to increase as consumers shop for quality, locally-sourced products,” he said. “By including local and regional farmers markets as part of their marketing plan, producers have the opportunity to develop brand recognition, which could translate to reliable sales year after year.”

Dr. Fernandez said those who want to sell meat at farmers markets are required to slaughter and process their animals under U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspection. Producers should remain aware of

coming changes to the current system. Arkansas passed law A.C.A. § 20-60-201 recreating state meat inspection to make it less expensive for meat packing and processing plants to begin operation under inspection. Rules and regulations must still be developed by the Arkansas Secretary of Agriculture before state inspection will become available.

According to guidelines by the Arkansas Department of Health and Arkansas Agriculture Department, after commercial slaughter under USDA inspection, pre-packaged meat products must be passed and labeled. Each item sold must be commercially packaged and correctly labeled (including common name of product, net weight and USDA safe handling instructions) and bear the mark of USDA inspection, unless exempt. All products must be kept in freezer units capable of keeping the products frozen until sold.

Pandemic Related Food Safety Training Conducted

The UAPB Small Farm Program is conducting a produce food safety training program that includes safety practices specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, Karen Lee, Extension assistant for UAPB, said.

“When it comes to food safety, farmers should always implement Good Agricultural Practices that reduce the risk of the vegetables becoming contaminated with pathogenic bacteria such as E.coli, Salmonella or Listeria, as they are

dangerous for consumers and can cause financial difficulties for the farm,” she said. “A COVID outbreak on a farm or ranch can also cause tremendous financial strain to a farming operation. The new food safety course provides different practices that can be used to reduce the risk of an outbreak occurring.”

Lee said there are plans to expand the program to include education related to small livestock processing facilities. The training is part of a \$1 million grant entitled, “Reducing the Impact of SARS-CoV-2 and Related Disruptions on Local Food Supply Chain in Minority Communities in the 1890 Land Grant Regional Network.” All the nation’s 1890 land grant institutions are conducting the training. For more information, contact Lee at (870) 575-7225 or leek@uapb.edu.



UAPB and the nation’s other 1890 land grant institutions are implementing the food safety program, which provides different practices that can be used to reduce the risk of COVID outbreaks occurring on farms.

Producers Should Protect Farm Workers from COVID-19

Growers are not immune to challenges posed by COVID-19 as they strive to keep their farm workers safe, Dr. Henry English, director of the UAPB Small Farm Program, said.

Fortunately, there is no evidence of the spread of the virus in food and produce, he said. “However potential transmission of the virus among workers is of great concern.”

Some growers must contend with family members, year-round employees, seasonal and even temporary non-immigrant agriculture workers. The first thing growers should do is educate workers on COVID-19 symptoms and how it spreads and encourage them to get fully vaccinated.

“If the grower provides housing, it should allow for social distancing,

Dr. English said. “Instruct workers to stay home if they are sick and reassure them that they will not be punished for missing work if they are sick.”

Growers should monitor employee health for COVID-19. Growers should follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Federal Drug Administration (FDA) guidelines for screening employees for symptoms before starting work. Advise those with a fever and symptoms to contact a doctor for evaluation, he said. Growers should be aware of healthcare screening organizations that serve migrant farmworker communities and be informed of current COVID-19 testing sites in their areas.

“Growers should provide training on personal hygiene and sanitation. Stress that all workers must wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds throughout the day – upon arrival for work, before handling food, after breaks and using the restroom and after any contamination event,” Dr. English said. “Train workers to refrain from touching their eyes, nose and mouth throughout the day. If workers share a vehicle, they should wear a mask when doing so.”

Provide workers handling produce in packing areas single-use gloves and advise workers to change them when hands touch skin or the ground. If gloves interfere with a worker's task, they should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer frequently. If working close by others, workers should wear masks. Be sure to instruct workers how to wear masks, advises Dr. English.

Instruct workers to keep 6 feet away from each other. Limit one employee per vehicle at a time and have drivers disinfect frequently touched surfaces before their shift ends, he said.



Stephan Walker, Extension associate, met with a producer in his office. Both are wearing masks to help prevent the spread of COVID 19.



In keeping with COVID protocols, the Small Farm Limited Resource forestry staff met with a participant outside of his workplace to discuss his forestry operation.

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Farmers, Community Members Urged by CDC to Ignore Vaccine Myths

Too many community members in south Arkansas are falling victim to myths and misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines, Dr. Henry English, head of the UAPB Small Farm Program, said. The false information they read online is causing them to delay getting the vaccine, which puts them and their families at the very real risk of falling ill to and possibly dying from COVID-19.

Iris Crosby, Extension associate, said she has heard some dangerous myths circulating in the farming communities she serves. These falsehoods include that the COVID-19 vaccines could cause someone to be magnetic, cause problems with pregnancy or fertility, or alter human DNA.

“Arkansas’ rural residents need to ignore the lies they read on Facebook and other social media platforms,” she said. “For reliable information about vaccines and COVID-19, they should refer to information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and

Prevention available online at www.cdc.gov. This unbiased information will help them vaccinate with confidence.”

Crosby said farmers are at risk of contracting COVID-19 because of the nature of their job. Close proximity with other people, sharing tools and farm equipment, frequent traveling and demanding working conditions could put them at greater risk of infection.

Dr. English said farmers are also at greater risk because they tend to be older – the average age of the American farmer is 60. Also, many people visit producers – family members, veterinarians, Extension personnel, customers, utilities individuals, equipment repair individuals and volunteers. This puts them at a greater risk of infection.

Farmers should also consider the financial risk of them or someone who works for them getting sick, he said. If people on a small farm opera-



UAPB’s Small Farm Program employees are urging farmers and the community to get their COVID vaccines.

tion start getting sick, the farmer is at risk of losing their harvest crews for a time – this could spell financial disaster.

“To me vaccination is a matter of life or death,” Dr. English said. “It is also a human risk management strategy. Reduce your chances of getting the virus and becoming very ill or dying by taking the vaccine.”

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