



Keeping you connected

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Rice Discovery Program teaches agriculture from field to fork

At the Northeast Rice Research and Extension Center, the Rice Discovery Program provides hands-on agriculture education, taking students from the greenhouse to the kitchen.

Ashlyn Ussery, agriculture and natural resources educator at the Northeast Rice Research and Extension Center, or NERREC, for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said the goal of the center's Rice Discovery Program is to provide learning opportunities about agriculture "from the field to the fork."

"This program is one of a kind," Ussery said. "To have a classroom, an education-based greenhouse and a full demonstration kitchen right here in the middle of a rice field, where you can see our real farmers growing real rice, is a unique experience."

Ussery said that when developing plans for NERREC, the Arkansas Rice Research and Promotion Board made sure the educational space was a top priority.

"Those on the board had noticed a pattern of people not knowing where their food comes from, especially young people who live right here in northeast Arkansas and are surrounded by agriculture," Ussery said. "We grow the most rice in the United States right here, and people have no clue."

"With the new station being built, they saw a unique opportunity to bring hands-on agriculture education to the next generation," she said. "The Division of Agriculture really took that and ran with it."

An entire wing of the building is dedicated to education and outreach, including the greenhouse, classroom and demonstration kitchen. Since NERREC opened in 2024, Ussery said 250 students have participated in classroom



Ashlyn Ussery, agriculture and natural resources educator at NERREC for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, with a tour group at the center's educational greenhouse.

activities at the station, and 320 students and adults have participated in building and farm tours. Ussery also takes the Rice Discovery Program to local events, 4-H clubs and student groups, with 1,060 individuals having participated in the program off-campus.

"We want to be a resource for our agriculture teachers, but we also really want to be a resource for our non-ag teachers," Ussery said. "We want to reach teachers who may feel intimidated by bringing agriculture into their classroom or have no prior knowledge of agriculture topics."

Ussery said she is also available to develop custom lessons designed around a group's needs.

"We're an ever-evolving resource for people in northeast Arkansas and beyond," Ussery said. "We want to be flexible enough to reach people where they are, providing resources that involve all aspects of agriculture education."

Read more [here](#).

THE INSIDE STORIES

Gin City Reading Patch mini free library

Dinner at the Vines raises \$77k

Benefits of Volunteering

Ruben Johnson remembered

Message from the director

Little Rock Regional Retiree Meeting

Gin City 4-H Club celebrates new Reading Patch mini free library for community

Members of the Gin City community in Lafayette County, Arkansas, will now be able to enjoy a good book at The Reading Patch, a new mini free library created by the Gin City 4-H Club.

Four of the club's members cut a bright green ribbon to celebrate the site's dedication on Sept. 16.

The Reading Patch is located at Gin City Parts & Cafe, about four miles west of Bradley, Arkansas in the unincorporated community of Gin City. Jerri Dew, Lafayette County extension staff chair, said the county's 4-H club worked on The Reading Patch as a service project for the surrounding community.

"We began work on the project after receiving an Innovate Grant from the Arkansas 4-H Alumni Association at Ouachita District O-Rama in June," Dew said. "The idea for the library came from a brainstorming session the group had for proposal ideas to apply for the grant."

Dew said the project was funded in part by the \$200 grant from the Arkansas 4-H Alumni Association, as well as a \$200 contribution from the Community State Bank in Bradley.

"We have had more than twenty contributors to this project to date," Dew said. "Most of those have been in-kind donations, including books, paint, supplies, a bench and pavers for the site."

Through word of mouth, Dew said the group has collected more than 250 books for the free mini library. One grandparent of a group member reached out to Shelby Thomp-



Members of the Gin City community in Lafayette County, Arkansas will now be able to enjoy a good book at The Reading Patch, a new mini free library created by the Gin City 4-H Club.

son, a local children's book author, who donated several signed copies of his book "Freddie Finds His Glow" to the library and to the community's youth.

Gin City 4-H Club members involved in the project include Adryanna Burton, Billy Downs, Lena Downs and Sunnie

Downs. Members worked on the mini library site, painting a bright floral mural and planting new landscaping in the beds of the "patch." They also helped with the construction of the small house-shaped wooden library.

"It is a small group, but this project has really put the group on the map down here," Dew said. "I fully expect it to grow this year."

Dew said the club has plans to host book readings, workshops and other programming at The Reading Patch in the future.

Read the full story [here](#).

Dinner at the Vines raises \$77K for Arkansas 4-H Foundation



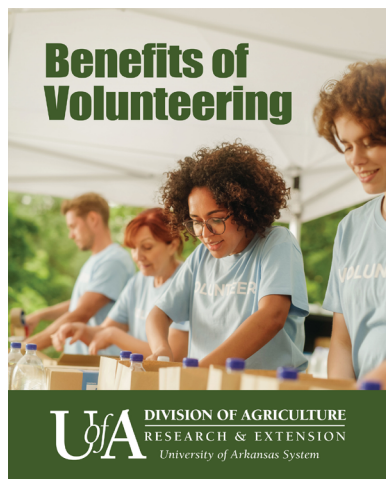
The 2025 edition of Dinner at the Vines raised more than \$77,000 for the Arkansas 4-H Foundation — money that will help fund scholarships and activities for the youth development group it supports.

"The generosity shown at Dinner at the Vines will ripple through every corner of Arkansas. Each dollar raised helps young people discover their potential, build confidence, and become leaders in their communities," said John Thomas, managing director for the Arkansas 4-H Foundation. "That's what makes this event so special — it's not just a dinner; it's an investment in Arkansas' future."

The total raised is the second-highest in the event's five-year history. The 2024 event earned more than \$86,000. Read more [here](#).



Extension expert shares benefits of volunteering



When deciding where and how to lend a helping hand, it's important to identify your interests, skills and the issues you are passionate about. Or consider the "AAA" approach: aid, action, and advocacy.

Nina Roofoe, assistant vice president of family and consumer sciences, said she began volunteering as a teenager as a candy striper at a local hospital and later in community service projects

as part of her school's home economics club.

"These experiences compelled me to step out of my comfort zone, acquire new skills, and meet people I would not have met otherwise," Roofoe said. "Volunteering allows you to be in a setting where you are not expected to already 'know everything.'"

"You can try new things and gain knowledge and experiences to take into your future, and build your resume for future success," she said.

Roofoe said that according to a 2020 review of research published in the [Social Issues and Policy Review](#), volunteering can uplift one's spirits.

"Helping others, feeling useful, engaging in meaningful work, and participating in purposeful and intentional activities can lead to feelings of happiness," Roofoe said.

A [2021 journal article in The Gerontologist](#) also reports that volunteering is associated with less depression and self-directed ageism among older adults. According to a 2023 article published in the [Journal of Service Theory and Practice](#), Roofoe stated that research suggests volunteers "perceive the world differently."

Roofoe said there are many opportunities to get involved as a volunteer through your local extension office. In 2024, the estimated economic value of Cooperative Extension Service volunteer efforts exceeded \$10 million.

Contact your local county extension 4-H, family and consumer sciences, or agriculture agent for more information about the following programs:

- **4-H:** Roofoe said 4-H volunteer leaders "use their knowledge and diverse skills in youth development, organizational planning and program management to provide positive experiences for Arkansas youth." Learn more at [4-H Volunteering Training and Resources](#).
- **Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council:** As the largest volunteer organization in the state, EHC members have a three-pronged mission — promoting lifelong learning, engaging in community service, and fostering leadership development. "EHC is dedicated to improving the lives of individuals, families, and communities," Roofoe said. Learn more at [Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council](#).
- **Extension Get Fit:** Volunteers are Extension Get Fit participants who have a desire to help others improve their health. "These volunteers act as community contacts to expand program participation with their social media skills and organizational abilities," Roofoe said. Learn more at [Extension Get Fit Program Teaching Resources](#).
- **Extension Health Ambassadors:** Roofoe said these volunteers work in six rural Arkansas counties to address "health challenges, assets, and capacity within their communities, utilizing all factors to build a healthier population." Learn more at [Extension Health Ambassadors](#).
- **Arkansas Master Gardeners:** Master Gardeners are horticulture volunteers who use their skills and knowledge to "extend research-based information demonstration and educational programs that utilize best practices, thereby strengthening communities and families throughout Arkansas," Roofoe said. Learn more about the [Arkansas Master Gardeners Program](#).

Ruben Johnson remembered for a lifetime of service to Arkansas agriculture



Ruben Johnson, who directed the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service from 1981 until his retirement in 1989, died Sept. 23. He was 95 years old.

R.H. joined the University of Arkansas Agricultural Extension Service as an associate county agent in 1955, becoming a district agent in 1970, and retiring in 1989 as State Leader for Agriculture and the interim Extension Service Director.

His many contributions to agriculture in Arkansas resulted in his induction into the Arkansas Agriculture Hall of Fame in 2014.

Read more [here](#).

November Birthdays

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

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

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

Message from the director



I had the opportunity to drive through eastern Arkansas earlier this week. It was clear that farmers had been busy. On my route, about all that was left to be harvested was the tail end of the cotton crop. When I got back to my office, curious about harvest progress across the Delta after my drive, I wanted to pull up the

weekly *Crop Progress* report to check it out. For many years, reading the *Crop Progress* report on Monday afternoon was a weekly ritual for me. (You can tell a lot about where market sentiment is heading by keeping up with crop progress and condition ratings.) But right now, *Crop Progress* is nowhere to be found. USDA reports are not issued during a government shutdown — a small but tangible reminder (at least for an old Extension economist) that not everything is currently business-as-usual.

Fortunately for Extension, and for UADA generally, things have been business-as-usual during the shutdown. As Dr. Fields has recently communicated, we continue to be able to draw on our previously awarded and appropriated federal funds, so we are in good shape. Right now, there is no indication that that will change. It could be that by the time you are reading this, the shutdown will be over, and this will all be moot. I guess the fact that I am writing this tips my hand that I personally think we still have at least another week or two to go on this one. We'll see; as an agricultural economist, I have a long track record of making predictions, and I've been known to be wrong.

As for business-as-usual, this has been a characteristically active October in CES, but I want to point out a couple of events that were not part of the normal calendar. On October 13, UADA leadership participated in a ceremony to mark the launch of the Snowden Waterfowl Center of Excellence and the Dyke-Snowden Endowed Chair of Waterfowl and Wetlands, a new UADA center that will be housed at the University of Arkansas – Monticello as an addition to the Arkansas Forest Resources Center. This center, whose \$5 million endowment has been funded through private donations, will be one of the premier institutions for wildlife management teaching, research, and outreach in the country.

Also in October, UADA hosted the Southern Region Business & Personnel Officers annual meeting in Rogers. Our finance/HR team put together an outstanding program for their colleagues from around the region. It's always a pleasure to bring people to our state so they can see the great things going on here.

As always, thank you for all that you do.

Little Rock Regional Retiree Meeting

Wednesday, Nov. 5, 10AM | Little Rock State Office

Connect with friends, hear Extension/Division updates, enjoy an interesting program, and have lunch at the 2025 Little Rock Regional Retiree Meeting!

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