



# 2026 MID-SOUTH BERRY CONFERENCE PROGRAM

January 22-24, 2026

Don Tyson Center for Agriculture  
1371 W. Altheimer Dr.  
Fayetteville, AR 72204



Arkansas  
Association  
*of* Grape Growers



**U of A**  
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE  
RESEARCH & EXTENSION  
University of Arkansas System



# SCHEDULE

## THURSDAY, JANUARY 22, 2026

- 11:00 AM-12:00 PM** Vendor Booth Set-Up
- 12:00-1:30 PM** Registration Open
- 1:30-3:00 PM** Grape Sessions
- 2:30-5:00 PM** Berry Basics for New Grower Workshop (*Paid ticketed event, pre-registration required.*)
- 3:00-3:30 PM** Coffee Break & Visit with Vendors
- 3:30-5:00 PM** Grape & Muscadine Sessions
- 5:00-6:30 PM** Welcome Reception (*drinks & appetizers provided*)

## FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 2026

- 8:00-8:30 AM** Registration Open; Coffee & Visit with Vendors
- 8:30-9:00 AM** Mid-American Strawberry Growers Association Annual Meeting
- 9:00-9:15 AM** Welcome Address
- 9:15-10:00 AM** Value-Added & Extension Resources Sessions
- 10:00-10:15 AM** Coffee Break & Visit with Vendors
- 10:15 AM-12:00 PM** Strawberry & Blackberry Sessions
- 12:00-1:30 PM** Lunch (*provided*) & Visit with Vendors
- 1:30-2:15 PM** Agritourism & Farm Liability Sessions
- 2:15-3:00 PM** Strawberry Session
- 3:00-3:15 PM** Coffee Break & Visit with Vendors
- 3:15-4:15 PM** Farm Diversification Sessions
- 3:15-4:45 PM** Blueberry & Raspberry Production Sessions
- 4:45-5:00 PM** Open Q&A Session
- 5:00 PM** End of Day (*dinner on your own*)



# AT A GLANCE

## SATURDAY, JANUARY 24, 2026

- 8:00-8:30 AM** Registration Open; Coffee & Visit with Vendors
- 8:30-9:00 AM** Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association Meeting
- 9:00-10:45 AM** Strawberry/Blackberry Session & Labor Grower Panel
- 10:45-11:00 AM** Coffee & Visit with Vendors
- 11:00 AM-12:00 PM** Strawberry Session & Grower Profile
- 12:00 PM** End of Conference
- 1:00 PM** Vendor Booth Breakdown

*Visit our vendors during the morning and afternoon breaks!*



# THANK YOU SPONSORS!



# 1:30 PM - 6:30 PM | Thursday, January 22

General Session

Grape/Muscadine

Multi-Crop

Strawberry

Blackberry

Blueberry

## Waldrip Hall/Breezeway

### Vendor Booth Set-Up

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

### Registration Open

12:00 - 1:30 PM

### Expanding Fresh-Market Muscadine and Muscadine Hybrid Grape Production in the Mid-South

1:30 - 2:00 PM

*Dr. Renee Threlfall, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

Opportunities, challenges, and production considerations for fresh-market muscadine and hybrid grapes in the Mid-South.

### Ensuring Success in Grape and Wine Industry Event Venues: Sassafras Springs Vineyard and Winery

2:00 - 2:30 PM

*Derek and Denton Kilpatrick, Sassafras Springs Vineyard & Winery*

A grower perspective on successful on-farm event venues, with lessons learned to enhance visitor experience and profitability.

### Supporting Industry through the University of Arkansas System Grape Breeding

2:30 - 3:00 PM

*Dr. Margaret Worthington, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

An update on University of Arkansas System grape breeding efforts and new cultivars supporting the regional industry.

### Coffee Break & Visit with Vendors

3:00 - 3:30 PM

### Muscadine Grapevine and Fruit Pathology

3:30 - 4:00 PM

*Bill Cline, North Carolina State University*

An overview of common muscadine grape diseases, symptom identification, and management strategies.

### Wine Grapevine and Fruit Pathology

4:00-4:30 PM

*Dr. Phil Brannen, University of Georgia*

A review of key diseases affecting wine grapes and practical strategies for scouting, prevention, and management.

### High Tunnel Grape Production

4:30-5:00 PM

*Taunya Ernst, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

An introduction to high tunnel grape production, including benefits and management considerations.

### Welcome Reception

5:00-6:30 PM

## Cochran's Corner

### Berry Basics for New Growers Workshop: Introduction to Strawberry, Blueberry and Blackberry Production

2:30 - 5:00 PM

*Dr. Amanda McWhirt, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

*Dr. Aaron Cato, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

An introductory workshop covering the fundamentals of strawberry, blueberry, and blackberry production for new and beginning growers. **Paid ticketed event, pre-registration required.**

# 8:00 AM - 1:30 PM | Friday, January 23

General Session

Grape/Muscadine

Multi-Crop

Strawberry

Blackberry

Blueberry

## Waldrip Hall/Breezeway

Registration Open; Coffee & Visit with Vendors

8:00 - 9:00 AM

Welcome Address from the Associations & Organizers

9:00 - 9:15 AM

**After Harvest: Opportunities for Value Added Products at Springcreek and Market Center of the Ozarks**

9:15 - 9:45 AM

*Dr. J.F. Meullenet, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

An exploration of opportunities for value-added berry products and considerations for processing, quality, and markets.

**Tips for Utilizing the Plant Health Clinic**

9:45 - 10:00 AM

*Dr. Taylor Klass, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

An overview of the Plant Health Clinic, including how to submit samples and how results can support management decisions.

Coffee & Visit with Vendors

10:00 - 10:15 AM

**Strawberries and Neo-P: Round-Table Discussion**

10:15 - 11:00 AM

*Dr. Aaron Cato, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

*Dr. Phil Brannen, University of Georgia*

*Bill Cline, North Carolina State University*

A panel discussion on the management of *Neopestalotiopsis* in strawberries, featuring expert insights and grower questions.

**Updates from the University of Arkansas System Blackberry Breeding Program**

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

*Dr. Margaret Worthington, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

Updates from the University of Arkansas System blackberry breeding program, including new selections and research progress.

Lunch

12:00 - 1:30 PM

Lunch provided; Visit with Vendors

## Cochran's Corner

**Mid-American Strawberry Growers Association Annual Meeting**

8:30 - 9:00 AM

Annual meeting for the Mid-American Strawberry Growers Association; Opportunity for new and current members to pay dues.



# 1:30 PM - 5:00 PM | Friday, January 23

General Session

Grape/Muscadine

Multi-Crop

Strawberry

Blackberry

Blueberry

## Waldrip Hall/Breezeway

### Liability Issues in Berry Agritourism

1:30 - 2:15 PM

*Rusty Rumley, The National Agricultural Law Center*

An overview of common liability concerns associated with agritourism operations and practical steps to reduce legal risk.

### Strawberry Variety Update: Observations from the Field

2:15 - 3:00 PM

*Bill McNitt, McNitt Growers LLC, Carbondale, IL*

*Dr. Amanda McWhirt, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

*Danny Van Meter, VanMeter Family Farm, Clarkson, KY*

*Frank Gieringer, Geiringer's Family Farm, Edgerton, KS*

Grower and researcher observations on strawberry variety performance, focusing on yield, quality, and disease tolerance.

### Coffee & Visit with Vendors

3:00 - 3:15 PM

### Quick Tips to Maximize Success with Blueberries

3:15 - 3:45 PM

*Patrick Byers, University of Missouri Extension (retired)*

An overview of practical, research-based tips to improve blueberry establishment, management, and long-term productivity.

### How to Combat the Most Common Blueberry Pathogens

3:45 - 4:15 PM

*Bill Cline, North Carolina State University*

Identification and management strategies for most common blueberry diseases, with a focus on prevention and management.

### How to Be Successful with Raspberries

4:15 - 4:45 PM

*Dennis (Buddy) McGarrah, Rivercrest Orchard, Fayetteville, AR*

A grower's perspective on raspberry production, including variety selection, pest management, and marketing considerations.

### Open Q& A Session

4:45 - 5:00 PM

*Conference Speakers*

An open forum for attendees to ask questions and engage directly with speakers from the day's sessions.

## Cochran's Corner

### How to Choose the Right High Tunnel for Your Farm

3:15 - 3:45 PM

*Taunya Ernst, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

Considerations for selecting a high tunnel, including size, structure, cost, and how align options with farm goals and crops.

### Farm Diversification with Cut Flowers

3:45 - 4:15 PM

*Dr. Anthony Bowden, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

An overview of cut flowers as a diversification option, including production considerations and marketing opportunities.

# 8:00 AM - 12:00 PM | Saturday, January 24

General Session

Grape/Muscadine

Multi-Crop

Strawberry

Blackberry

Blueberry

## Waldrip Hall/Breezeway

Registration Open; Coffee & Visit with Vendors

8:00 - 9:00 AM

### What is Bugging Your Berries? Control of Insects and Mites in Blackberry and Strawberry

9:00 - 10:00 AM

*Dr. Aaron Cato, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

An overview of insect and mite pests affecting blackberries and strawberries, including identification and pest management.

### Managing Labor on Small Farms: Grower Panel

10:00 - 10:45 AM

*Chris Linam, Linam Family Farm, Alma, AR*

*Mark Newell, Irongate Berry Farm, Eldridge, MO*

*Ekko Barnhill, Barnhill, Orchards, Cabot, AR*

A grower-led panel discussion on managing labor challenges, sharing strategies for efficiency on small farms.

Coffee & Visit with Vendors

10:45 - 11:00 AM

### Strawberry Spray Recommendations & Spring Clean-Up

11:00 - 11:30 AM

*Dr. Aaron Cato, U of A System Division of Agriculture*

Season-specific strawberry spray recommendations and spring practices to prepare fields for the upcoming growing season.

### Farm Profile: Goober Bub's Orchard

11:30 AM - 12:00 PM

*Tim Sutton, Gooberbubs Orchard, Justin, TX*

A grower spotlight on Goober Bub's Orchard, highlighting their operation, production practices, and lessons learned.

End of Conference

12:00 PM

### Vendor Booth Breakdown

1:00 PM

## Cochran's Corner

### Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association Annual Meeting

8:30 - 9:00 AM

Annual meeting for the Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association; Opportunity for new and current members to pay dues.



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