



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, Gieringer'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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