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**New crop, soil, and environmental sciences head aims to engage with students, stakeholders in first year**

By Nick Kordsmeier

U of A System Division of Agriculture

**Fast facts**

* Jeff Edwards named crop, soil, and environmental sciences department head
* Aims to engage students, industry and stakeholders
* Completed master’s and Ph.D. at the University of Arkansas

(760 words)

[Download a photo of Jeff Edwards](https://flic.kr/p/2mANn2P) (https://flic.kr/p/2mANn2P)

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. — Jeff Edwards plans to hit the ground running in his new role as head of the crop, soil, and environmental sciences department for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture and the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences.

Edwards, who takes leadership of the department on Jan. 10, said he wants his first year on the job focused on getting to know students and stakeholders.

“I want to interact with as many people as possible to learn more about the University of Arkansas System and the people we serve,” he said. “I want to learn more about our research and extension programs and how I might be able to facilitate them in accomplishing our mission.”

Edwards said that his long-term goals for the CSES department will build on a strong foundation. “Through the interview process, I was impressed with the investments being made in people and facilities,” he said.

“My goal is to build on current strengths and success to ensure the department remains a nationally and internationally recognized leader in improving agricultural systems and increasing environmental sustainability,” Edwards said. “I am very excited about this opportunity.”

Edwards’ role as CSES department head will encompass the three land grant university missions: research through the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station; extension activities through the Cooperative Extension Service; and teaching through the Bumpers College.

Deacue Fields, dean of the Bumpers College, said, “I’m extremely excited to have Jeff joining our team. I met Jeff in the Food Systems Leadership Institute a few years ago, and I was impressed with his accomplishments at Oklahoma State.

“You don’t often get a chance to hire someone with his reputation and proven track record for leadership success as a department head,” Fields said. “Jeff has the vision to continue building the national prominence of our department of crop, soil, and environmental sciences, and it is a bonus that he completed his graduate work here at the U of A.”

Edwards is coming to Arkansas from Oklahoma State University, where he has served as department head for the plant and soil sciences department since 2015. Prior to that, he was the Warth Distinguished Professor of Agronomy at OSU.

Edwards said that students became more connected to the plant and soil sciences department during his time as department head at OSU. “I worked to develop very much a family atmosphere, and we were all part of the family working for the same goal,” he said.

Edwards also said he was proud of the new faculty hires and faculty mentorship process he established at OSU, “to ensure that they are successful.”

“We feel very fortunate to have attracted someone with Jeff’s experience and stature in the scientific community,” said Jean-Francois Meullenet, senior associate vice president-agriculture and director of the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station. “Jeff is an experienced leader and we feel he is the perfect person at this time to lead the department and we look forward to Jeff’s arrival in January and to much needed faculty hires in CSES.”

Meullenet also praised the efforts of Experiment Station Assistant Director Nathan Slaton, who has served as interim head of the department since January 2021. “I want to acknowledge the excellent work Dr. Nathan Slaton has done in the interim for CSES,” he said.

Edwards’ appointment as CSES department head will bring him back to where he completed his graduate studies. After receiving a bachelor’s degree from Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky, Edwards earned his master’s in weed science and Ph.D. in crop physiology at the University of Arkansas.

“I have known Dr. Edwards since graduate school,” said Bob Scott, senior associate vice president-agriculture and director of the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. “He is a fellow weed scientist and comes to us with much experience in row crop production as well as administration from his positions at Oklahoma State. We are very excited to welcome Jeff to our Ag team.”

“I just have such a connection with Arkansas,” Edwards said. “I’m originally from Kentucky, but Arkansas is home in my book.”

“It’s like playing college athletics somewhere and getting to come back and coach,” he said.

To learn more about the Division of Agriculture, visit <https://uada.edu> and follow us on Twitter at [@AgInArk](https://www.twitter.com/AgInArk).

To learn more about Division of Agriculture research, visit the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station website: <https://aaes.uada.edu/> and follow us on Twitter and Instagram at @ArkAgResearch.

To learn about extension programs in Arkansas, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service agent or visit <https://uaex.uada.edu>. Follow us on Twitter and Instagram at @AR\_Extension.

**About the Division of Agriculture**

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture’s mission is to strengthen agriculture, communities, and families by connecting trusted research to the adoption of best practices. Through the Agricultural Experiment Station and the Cooperative Extension Service, the Division of Agriculture conducts research and extension work within the nation’s historic land grant education system.

The Division of Agriculture is one of 20 entities within the University of Arkansas System. It has offices in all 75 counties in Arkansas and faculty on five system campuses.

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture offers all its Extension and Research programs to all eligible persons without regard to race, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital or veteran status, genetic information, or any other legally protected status, and is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.

**About the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences**

Bumpers College provides life-changing opportunities to position and prepare graduates who will be leaders in the businesses associated with foods, family, the environment, agriculture, sustainability and human quality of life; and who will be first-choice candidates of employers looking for leaders, innovators, policy makers and entrepreneurs. The college is named for Dale Bumpers, former Arkansas governor and longtime U.S. senator who made the state prominent in national and international agriculture. For more information about Bumpers College, visit our [website](https://bumperscollege.uark.edu/index.php), and follow us on Twitter at [@BumpersCollege](https://twitter.com/bumperscollege) and Instagram at [BumpersCollege](https://www.instagram.com/bumperscollege/).

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