

Outreach

Title: Developing a Southern Small Fruit Podcast

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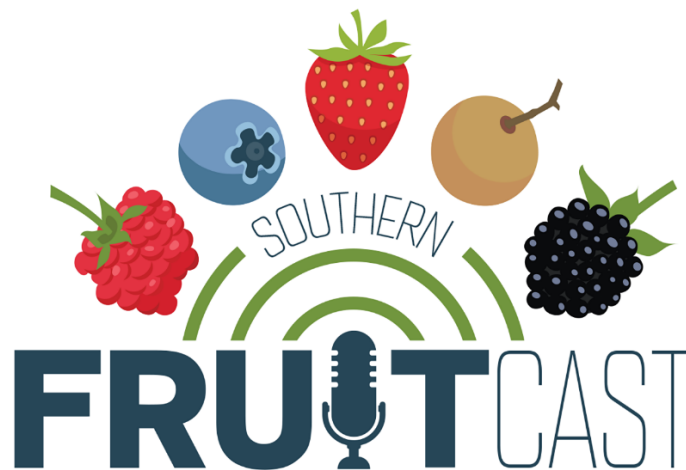
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Public Abstract

Small fruit growers in the Southeastern US increasingly rely on new media such as podcasts for information. A podcast pertinent to small fruit growers was created to provide an easily accessible information source that growers and extension personnel could access while working. The Southern Fruitcast is hosted by Aaron Cato and Amanda McWhirt, and aims to cover the people, technology and latest developments in small fruit production in the Southeast. Fourteen episodes have been produced and released for listening, with each featuring an interview with an expert specialist or grower. This podcast has been shared across many social media platforms, featured in small fruit newsletters, and the 14 episodes have been downloaded over 923 times. Future work is being done to increase the visibility of the podcast and episodes will continue to be recorded and uploaded monthly.

Introduction

Small fruit growers in the Southeastern US increasingly rely on new media and technology as a source for news and information that's pertinent to their operations. One easily accessible and increasingly popular form of media and knowledge exchange is podcasts. Extension specialists that work in small fruits should be capitalizing on growth in podcasts to supply their audience with research and science-based information.

We proposed to create a monthly horticulture podcast called "The Small Fruit Podcast" that focused on discussing pertinent and informative topics to act as an unbiased and scientifically-based source for southern small fruit growers. This podcast focused on supporting small fruit production by providing relevant updates and information about production and pest management practices and issues across a range of small fruit crops. Hosts also interviewed an expert guest on each episode to increase the value and relevance of the information provided.

Description of Outreach Activity

The Southern Fruitcast is hosted by Aaron Cato and Amanda McWhirt, extension IPM and production specialists for fruits and vegetables at the University of Arkansas. This podcast is recorded on a monthly basis and posted on the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture webpage at <https://www.uaex.uada.edu/southernfruitcast> and also on its hosting site of Podbean at <https://southernfruitcast.podbean.com/> This podcast aims to cover the people, technology and latest developments in small fruit production in the Southeast. These topics are covered in each episode by interviewing extension specialists, small fruit growers, or industry representatives to provide relevant information on specific topics.

Fourteen episodes of the Southern Fruitcast have been recorded and posted for listening. Summaries of each episode are listed below

- **Episode 1 – Blackberries with Dr. John Clark**

Episode 1 features an interview with Dr. John Clark, University of Arkansas fruit breeder and distinguished professor. John stops by to discuss commercial blackberry production and breeding efforts in the Southeast, give us some insight on his new releases, Caddo and Ponca, and add some perspective on the national market and new technologies.

- **Episode 2 – Grape Disease Management with Dr. Phillip Brannen**

Episode 2 features an interview with Dr. Phillip Brannen, extension fruit disease specialist at the University of Georgia, who discusses factors that influence disease management in Southeast vineyards. Phil provides excellent insight into problems plaguing Southeast grape and muscadine production and discusses a variety of solutions that growers can take advantage of to maximize their success and profitability.

- **Episode 3 – Strawberries and Blackberries with Dr. Gina Fernandez**

Episode 3 features an interview with Dr. Gina Fernandez, Professor of Horticulture and strawberry, blackberry, and raspberry breeder at North Carolina State University. Gina came on the podcast to discuss her new strawberry releases, Rocco and Liz, and how they fit in with current commercial cultivars. She also discussed her breeding efforts towards anthracnose resistance, as well as NC State's new blackberry cultivar, Von.

- **Episode 4 – Muscadine and Blackberry Production with Ervin Lineberger**

Ervin Lineberger, owner of Kildeer Farms in Kings Mountain, North Carolina, joined us for episode 4. Ervin has been farming in the Southeast since the 1980s and is well known as one of the most influential blackberry and muscadine growers in the region. Ervin shares with us his experience with blackberries and muscadines, provides insight into the future of muscadines as a commodity, and offers advice for growers who are looking to tap into the small fruit market.

- **Episode 5 – Farm-to-school Marketing and Strawberries with Randy Arnold**

In episode 5 we were joined by Randy Arnold, owner of Arnold Farms in Alma, AR. Randy and his family have operated a highly diverse farm for over 20 years and are well known in the area for their "strawberry patch" which is an integral part of the community. Randy shares with us his experience with marketing to local schools in farm-to-school programs, as well his yearly on-farm festival called "fun on the farm" that hosts 1,000 students from area schools who visit the farm and learn about agriculture.

- **Episode 6 – Southeast Strawberry Disease Management with Guido Schnabel**

Dr. Guido Schnabel, a plant pathologist at Clemson, joined us for Episode 6. Guido has a wealth of experience in strawberry disease management and provides excellent insight that is highly relevant for Southeast growers. Topics discussed include fungicide selection, common resistance issues, dip applications before planting, when to use soil applied fungicides, options for fumigation, and much more. Also discussed is the MyIPM app, which was developed by Guido and is a great source of information for both growers and agents.

- **Episode 7 – Blueberry Planting Rejuvenation and White Drupelet Disorder of Blackberry with Dr. Eric Stafne**

Dr. Eric Stafne, extension and research professor in fruit crops at Mississippi State University, joined us for Episode 7 to discuss a range of topics. Eric leads a diverse program where he works in several crops including muscadine, blueberry, blackberry, pecan, and more. The main topics of this episode revolve around Eric's work in blueberry planting rejuvenation and white drupelet disorder in blackberry, where Eric provided excellent insight into his most recent findings and offered some recommendations for Southeastern growers. We also talked at length about the small fruit industry in Mississippi, his efforts in passionfruit breeding, and what fruits he thinks could be grown more in the Southeast.

- **Episode 8 – Substrate Production of Small Fruits with Dr. Ryan Dickson**

Dr. Ryan Dickson, Horticulture professor at the University of Arkansas, joined us for Episode 8. Ryan is an expert in the area of greenhouse and protected agriculture production of both floriculture and food crops, and currently is doing groundbreaking work in the areas of substrate production of small fruit crops in the Southeast. Ryan gave us an excellent explanation of substrate production, as well as pros and cons of this type of production system vs. production in field soil. We also covered the feasibility of soil-less substrate production systems for small fruit crops in the Southeast and why Southeastern growers would look to adopt such a system.

- **Episode 9 - Marketing Small Fruits with Ekko Barnhill**

In episode 9 Ekko Barnhill from Barnhill Orchards in Lonoke, AR joined us on the podcast. Ekko helps to manage a diversified farm just north of Little Rock, AR with her brother and parents. The farm grows fruits and vegetables with sales all 12 months of the year to farmers markets, restaurants and through their farm store. Ekko is the powerhouse behind their marketing and came on the podcast to share her insights into the subject. We specifically discussed considerations for marketing small fruit, how small fruit can help boost the sales of other commodities, and unique ways to bring products into the marketplace.

- **Episode 10 - Small Fruit Production in Louisiana with Mary Helen Ferguson and Kiki Fontenot**

In episode 10 we took a trip to Louisiana to learn more about their small fruit production. We were joined on the podcast by Mary Helen Ferguson, Associate Extension Agent for Horticulture at LSU, and Kiki Fontenot, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist at LSU. Mary Helen and Kiki gave us the low-down on strawberry and blueberry production in the state. They provided excellent insight into their production practices, how they may differ from other growing regions in the Southeast, and talked about many of the challenges that Louisianan producers face.

- **Episode 11 - Fungicide Resistance Testing with Dr. Emran Ali**

In episode 11 we were joined by Dr. Emran Ali, plant pathologist at the University of Georgia. Emran is currently the director of the Plant Molecular Diagnostic Lab at UGA. Emran came on the podcast to talk about how fungicide resistance comes about, what farmers can do to prevent or slow down the formation of resistance, and why it is important to know whether you are dealing with fungicide resistance on a farm level. Emran also discussed fungicide resistance testing that the Plant Molecular Diagnostic lab has to offer for strawberries, how to send in samples to assure you get good results, and limited funding for free tests provided by the Southern Region Small Fruit Consortium.

- **Episode 12 - Spotted Wing Drosophila with Dr. Hannah Burrack**

Episode 12 features Dr. Hannah Burrack, Professor of Entomology and Extension Specialist at North Carolina State University. Hannah's research for the last 15 years at NC State has focused on understanding the ecology of arthropod pests in a variety of specialty crops including small fruit, which has helped shape many of the pest management approaches that we recommend across the Southeast today. Hannah came on the podcast to give us the low-down on spotted wing drosophila, and discuss other arthropod pests in a variety of small fruit crops. Specifically, Hannah provided wonderful insight into the last 10 years of spotted wing drosophila research and did an excellent job telling us what that research means for people trying to manage this pest.

- **Episode 13 - Strawberry Fertility and Disease Management with Dr. Jayesh Samtani**

In episode 13 we were joined by Dr. Jayesh Samtani, Assistant Professor and Small Fruit Extension Specialist in the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, at Virginia Tech. Jayesh conducts research and extension outreach on strawberries and other small fruit crops and joined us to talk a bit about his research relating to strawberries. Topics covered in this episode include pre-plant nitrogen rates, using the SAS fungicide scheduling system in a new growing region, alternatives to fumigants for strawberry producers, and an ongoing survey relating to fertility practices in blackberry.

- **Episode 14 - Arkansas Quality Wine with Dr. Renee Threlfall and Amanda Fleming**

In episode 14 we were joined by Dr. Renee Threlfall and Amanda Fleming from the University of Arkansas. Renee is a Research Scientist in the Food Science Department at the University of Arkansas, and Amanda is a former winemaker at Post Winery and current graduate student working with Renee. Renee has been working with Arkansas grape growers and winemakers in Arkansas for over 25 years and is currently the director of the Arkansas Quality Wine Program. Renee and Amanda provide excellent insight into commercial wine production in Arkansas, commercial wine grape production in Arkansas, and discuss their newly launched program, the Arkansas Quality Wine Program. Tune in to learn about the goals of this program, how wines were judged, and how they hope to elevate the value of locally produced wine through this endeavor!

Results or Outcome

Fourteen episodes of the Southern Fruitcast have been published with a total of 923 downloads (total number of times listened to) as of 11/29/2021. Efforts are being made to increase the number of downloads per episode and the overall reach of the podcast. Currently episodes are shared on Twitter and Facebook when posted and are also sent to pertinent commodity groups across the southeast after each posting. Additionally, efforts are being made to feature the podcast in newsletters and trades magazines to increase visibility.

In addition to the podcast episodes that were published, funds provided by the SRSFC continue to fund an Ag communications Intern to work with hosts to edit and publish the podcast. This was an integral part of the podcast as editing in a remote setting is a challenging task that needs a deft hand to achieve.

Efforts were also made to solicit feedback from small fruits growers and other listeners to help ensure the format of the podcast is amenable to listeners needs. A form for feedback is featured on the podcast page <https://www.uaex.uada.edu/farm-ranch/crops-commercial-horticulture/horticulture/southern-fruitcast-podcast.aspx> and another survey was produced for the Fall edition of the small fruit news in 2020 <https://smallfruits.org/2020/10/provide-feedback-to-the-southern-fruitcast-podcast/?cat=26>.

Feedback example:

"Suggest interviewing a nursery or grower that is selling plugs / plants (strawberries / blackberries) in the southeast. "

Feedback from these forms and personal communications have helped us to make the podcast more easily digestible for listeners and have resulted in shorter podcast episodes with a much more succinct message.

New podcast episodes are currently being planned after a small hiatus in the Summer/Fall of 2021. Funds still remain from the original grant that are being used to support editing of the podcast episodes, as well transcription of the episodes to ensure they are available to all stakeholders, including those that may be hearing impaired.