

2021 SRSFC Outreach Report

Title: 2021 Virtual Southeastern Strawberry School

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Public Abstract:

A Virtual Strawberry School was conducted in 2021 covering the major aspects of strawberry production in the Southeastern US. The school consisted of six 90-minute webinars offered to county extension agents and growers during the course of the year. Topics included site selection and soils; crop establishment, cultivars, plant development and physiology; disease, insect and weed control; drip and freeze protection, food safety, high tunnel production and budgets. More than 550 people participated in the live webinars. Recorded presentations are available for viewing on YouTube, at the SRSFC

website, and at University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension (www.uaex.uada.edu/strawberry-school) and to-date the videos have been viewed more than 6,500 times.

Introduction:

Demand for locally grown berries continues to increase as consumers seek out healthy and “local” foods. Growers increasingly turn to strawberries as an annual crop since they are well-suited for agritourism and local sales due to their high demand by consumers. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, many small growers saw demand increase further as consumers looked for outdoor activities and early fluctuations in national food supply chains renewed interest in locally grown foods. As a result, many growers increased their planned strawberry acreage for the 2020-2021 season to meet expected increases in demand.

Growers seeking to fill these markets needed basic training on crop physiology, fertility management, and integrated pest management strategies. A cohesive course that can offer answers to basic questions related to strawberry production for the Southeast was not readily available or reliably offered across the region. The Southeastern region has a strong team of researchers and specialists with nationally recognized expertise who together could help fill this need for up-to-date information and training. Our proposed solution to this issue was to conduct a “Virtual Strawberry School” during 2021 that would be available for free to growers and agents across the region. The school will consist of webinars that combine PowerPoint presentations and “virtual” tours of strawberry plantings aimed at increasing knowledge of strawberry production throughout the season. The course spanned the major seasons of crop management and production and will feature experts from across the Southeast. The course was originally planned to consist of a series of webinars hosted by the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Zoom staff and small fruit specialists (Amanda McWhirt and Aaron Cato) with close collaboration, coordination, and support from the gathered team of regional specialists.

Description of Outreach activity:

The 2021 Southeastern Plasticulture Strawberry School was a webinar series made up of six 90-minute webinars, held throughout 2021. The series followed the growing season of strawberries in the Southeast. The webinar series featured 17 specialists from across the region to discuss topics relevant to the corresponding season. The six webinars were:

- Dormancy (February 16)
- Bloom (March 18)
- Fruiting (April 20)
- Pre-Plant Part One (July 29)
- Pre-Plant Part Two (August 12)
- Fall Management, Tunnels and Budgets (October 28)

Each webinar was compiled of pre-recorded presentations that were then posted on YouTube, the Strawberry School webpage (<https://www.uaex.uada.edu/strawberry-school>), and the Southern Region Small Fruits Consortium website.

Webinar & Recording Reach

The six live webinars had a total of 587 participants from 33 states and 32 countries outside of the U.S.

Number of Live Attendees					
Dormancy (February 16)	Bloom (March 18)	Fruiting (April 20)	Pre-Plant Part One (July 29)	Pre-Plant Part Two (August 12)	Fall Management (October 28)
198	112	60	86	69	62

Overall, the states with the most participants across all webinars were Arkansas, Tennessee and North Carolina, but all Southeast states were represented as were several other states (WV and MO).

10 States with Highest Number of Attendees									
AR	TN	NC	GA	AL	WV	MS	SC	LA	MO
106	82	61	42	30	27	25	23	20	16

The recorded presentations for each class were added to a YouTube playlist which have, in total, been viewed more than 6,500 times.

Number of Recording Views*					
Dormancy (February 16)	Bloom (March 18)	Fruiting (April 20)	Pre-Plant Part One (July 29)	Pre-Plant Part Two (August 12)	Fall Management (October 28)
2,630	1,081	1,135	712	694	334

*As of 11/30/2021, earlier classes have been online for longer, therefore have more views

Post-Webinar Satisfaction Survey

After the final webinar ended, participants from all six webinars were asked to take a short survey, asking their opinions on different aspects of the series.

Demographics

- Of the 59 survey participants, 38% were commercial growers (18% established growers, 20% new growers), 34% were extension personnel, 6% were industry consultants and 22% were home gardeners.

Attendee Satisfaction

- 77% of survey participants reported that the training had a “good” or “excellent” impact of their ability to understand and answer questions about strawberry production.
- 69% of participants reported that the value of the information learned in the webinar in terms of potential impact of their operation or a client’s operation would be \$100-\$500, while 19% placed the value at over \$500.

Zoom Webinar Format

- In this series, each of the six webinars was 90 minutes long, averaging about four presentations per webinar. 93% of survey participants reported that this course format was “satisfactory” or “very satisfactory,” and 93% of participants reported that they “learn efficiently” using this webinar format.
- 86% of participants said they would be “likely” or “highly likely” to participate in future extension-presented webinars after their experience with the 2021 Southeastern Plasticulture Strawberry School.