

U.S. Sen. Mark Pryor speaks about the Farm Bill at the 2013 Arkansas Rice Expo, on Friday, Aug. 2, at the Grand Prairie Center in Stuttgart, Ark.
U of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture photo by Fred Miller



2014 Rice Expo Set For Aug. 1

STUTTGART, ARK.

From a senator's perspective on farm policy to a look at new and in-development apps for agriculture, some 1,500 people took it all in at the 2013 Arkansas Rice Expo at the Grand Prairie Center in Stuttgart.

The Arkansas Rice Expo began life as a traditional field day, where producers could walk research fields and hear from the scientists working to improve crop production. The tours are still the anchor for the event, which now covers two locations and includes more than 50 booths and exhibits, a rice recipe contest, plus activities for families.

Next year's event is set for Aug. 1 at the Grand Prairie Center.

"We are pleased with the community's interest and participation in this event," said Chuck Wilson, director of the Arkansas Rice Research and Extension Center. "We hope to continue to present ideas, issues and activities that will keep the event meaningful for our neighbors."

Keynote speaker Sen. Mark Pryor praised the agriculture industry in Arkansas and the U.S., while expressing frustration about Congressional gridlock over the new farm bill. The Senate passed its version of a new farm bill in June. The House passed a stripped down version that excluded the nutrition programs that had been paired with the farm component for decades.

The current farm bill expires Sept. 30. If allowed to do so, the law reverts to the Agricultural Act of 1949.

"When you look at farm policy ... like we say here in Arkansas, 'if it ain't broke don't fix it,'" he said. "We always have things we can work on, but it ain't broke, and it's been hugely successful. Our farmers and our nation need a comprehensive farm bill to keep that domestic food crop safe and affordable and reliable to feed our families and also to grow our economy."

Pryor said there's no doubt that agriculture is important to the nation and to Arkansas.

"Nobody does agriculture half as well as the United States," he said "This is a core strength in the U.S. economy.

"Arkansas is a powerhouse when it comes to

agriculture," he said, adding that "it contributes \$17 billion annually to our economy and it's one-fourth of all economic activity in this state.

"Agriculture pay the bills for hardworking Arkansans. Why put all of this at jeopardy?" he asked.

This year's Rice Expo also featured USA Rice Federation President and CEO Betsy Ward, offering producers an overview of policy and technological progress, and a presentation on raised bed gardening by Janet Carson, extension horticulture specialist for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

Expo visitors also saw an overview of the Division of Agriculture's rice breeding program with new faculty, Xueyan Sha, and Greg Berger. Sha is focused on medium grain rice, which is grown on 10 to 20 percent of Arkansas' rice acres. The market for medium grains includes breakfast cereal makers Kellogg's and General Mills. Berger is working to improve the quality of hybrids grown in Arkansas.

"Dr. Sha has taken aggressive steps to expedite medium grain releases and has been able to produce multiple generations in a single year," Wilson said. "Dr. Berger is working to breed hybrids with good quality to enable Arkansas growers to demand premium prices for their rice and maintain our competitive edge in the export market."

Dharmendra Sarawat, extension engineer for the U of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture previewed ag apps he's currently developing in collaboration with other division faculty, and Poinsett County Extension Agent Mike Hamilton showed current apps on mobile devices that growers could use to improve efficiency.

The Rice Expo was sponsored by RiceTec, Producers Rice Mill, Farm Credit, Specialty Rice, Riceland, Ag-Pro, Dow AgroSciences, Stratton Seed Co., Holt Agribusiness, Koch Agronomic Services, Progeny, Greenway, RiceCo, Heritage Agriculture of Arkansas, Gowan, Syngenta, Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation, Cache River Valley Seed, Prairie Implement Co., Arkansas Rice and USA Rice Federation. Δ

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