

Fruit and Vegetable Field Day

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SPEAKERS

Speaker 3, Christa Hartsook, Dr. Ajay Nair, Olivia Hanlon

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- C** Christa Hartsook 00:15
Hello, and welcome to the Small Farms Podcast, a production of the Small Farms Program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life.
 - O** Olivia Hanlon 00:29
In this episode, I interview Dr. Ajay Nair, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Vegetable Specialist, and talk about the upcoming Fruit and Vegetable Day. I'm Olivia Hanlon, Farm Food and Enterprise Development Education Extension Specialist, and welcome to the show. Ajay, welcome to the show. Thanks for being on.
 - D** Dr. Ajay Nair 00:46
Thank you very much, Olivia.
 - O** Olivia Hanlon 00:48
So Ajay, we've had you join us many times before, but can you remind all of our listeners or tell our new listeners, what exactly your role includes here at Iowa State?

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Dr. Ajay Nair 00:58

Sure. Thanks, Olivia. I am in the Department of Horticulture. I'm an Associate Professor and Extension Vegetable Specialist, working on commercial crops and partner with several growers in the state and help them optimize their production system. It could be soil, it could be nutrients, it could be insect disease, high tunnels. So working with commercial vegetable growers.

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Olivia Hanlon 01:20

Awesome. So one of your big projects every year, Ajay, is this field day. So can you tell us a little bit about what will be covered at your Field Day this year?

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Dr. Ajay Nair 01:29

Sure. It's a special Field Day for us. Given that we were not able to host the Field Day last year due to the pandemic. So we're very excited to welcome commercial growers, Master Gardeners, extension folks, regional food systems working groups, you know anybody who has interest in, you know, commercial vegetable and fruit production to this Field Day at the ISU Horticulture Research Station. The Field Day is going to be on the 22nd of July, Thursday, it starts at 2pm and goes till about 6:00, 6:30, and then we have supper after that and discussions with the growers after that. Some of the things which we are excited about highlighting during the Field Day this year, there are several fruit and vegetable projects, one of being the use of biochar in commercial vegetable production system. How what is biochar? What does it do to the soil? Does it impact the growth and the yield and the quality of the produce? In our case, the study is going to highlight the use of biochar on cauliflower and pepper. We have studies that are focusing on winter squash production and we are addressing different issues there. Weed management in that system, we are looking at biodegradable plastic mulches in winter squash system, and maybe also looking at some innovative approaches of using biodegradable mulches that have organic insecticides built in them. So that's a unique and a new project. We are experimenting few other projects, a project that is highlighting and investigating the effect of 363 cysts, maize, corn, squash, and beans and how does it affect the soil? This project, you know, we are partnering with several Native American communities here in Iowa, Nebraska, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. So we'll be talking about that project at the field. Another project looks at the integration of poultry in vegetables. We always have the fear of whenever poultry comes in the produce world, there could be contamination and salmonella equalized. So how can we integrate both of them not at the same time, but one after the other and document the effect on soil, document the effect on bird growth and welfare, and meat quality, economic analysis. That's an interesting study we are conducting this year. In addition to other projects are looking at new Apple cultivars that

are suitable for Iowa growing conditions. We are looking at insect management using mechanical interventions like using protect net are kind of a row cover material and how that affects muskmelons and squash production. And also, a big portion of the Field Day is the demonstration of equipment. We are going to demonstrate a new reader, a mechanical reader, informational production and also a precision guided Apple sprayer and how that can help Apple growers optimize their spraying, reduce insecticides and fungicides, and help them be more environmentally sustainable. So many of the focus have an underlying emphasis on sustainability. And we are very excited that we are able to do that with this Field Day.



Olivia Hanlon 04:34

Sounds like you've got a lot of cool projects going on over there, Ajay. Can you explain to us how the Field Day will work and when folks get there kind of how the day will go?



Dr. Ajay Nair 04:43

Sure. The field day starts at 2pm. And the first thing we are doing is we are bringing all the growers and participants under a big tent where we have some folks who provide services to growers. For example, the Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinic here at Iowa State folks from the clinic will be there answering questions on insect disease and letting them know of how growers can use the facility. We are also inviting Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association and the Practical Farmers of Iowa to be there to help growers or get them more informed about the organizations in the state. And what they do. After that everybody is we have several people movers, we got to load everybody on those and we got to go around the farm and take individual stops, pitstops, learn about the project 10-15 minute question and answer, move to the next one, and then so forth. So and then by about six 6:00-6:15, we should be done. After which, everybody will join for supper at the farm, there are a few announcements. And that's more of a casual environment where a lot of peer to peer learning happens, a lot of interactions and grower, you know comments and we also think of or ask participants about future research or future extension projects that Iowa State and the partners should be involved with. So that way we get some relevant and useful feedback from our stakeholders and participants at the Field Day.



Olivia Hanlon 06:04

Okay, so what can people expect to gain from this Field Day after they attend?

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Dr. Ajay Nair 06:10

Many of the commercial growers who attend the Field Day also are regional food systems, working group people, extension staff, graduate students, we have Master Gardeners, community volunteers who join, they all will get a good handle of how Iowa State is working on a fruit and vegetable production with a more sustainability focus in the in the middle, we want to come up with practical approaches of addressing grower problems and challenges. And how we are doing that. The Field Day also provides an opportunity for participants to interact with specialists, interact with extension folks, interact with their peers, also with graduate students. And that goes both ways. You know, students gain a lot of experience of how to mingle and talk and relay their research to participants. At the same time audience also loves to interact with these grad students, you know, who are at the forefront of research. I forgot to mention, we're also having a booth that will highlight the importance of honeybees, in addition for making honey. So that will be an interesting stop and and people will get a good idea of how beekeeping works and how these bees are vital to our you know, specialty crop industry. And, you know, hopefully with the supper and the discussion after that we give an opportunity for our stakeholders to shape and to guide us in our future research and let us know of what are some of the challenges out there so that we can work as a team on on several grants in the future or projects or on farm trials where we can address those rural issues and concerns.

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Olivia Hanlon 07:40

Okay, so what I'm hearing from you Ajay is that this should be a great opportunity for networking, if nothing else.

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Dr. Ajay Nair 07:46

Absolutely. I mean, all the growers, grower organizations, university staff, extension staff, field specialists, you know, farm staff, people who have a lot of knowledge on equipment and how to use it and so it will be it'll be a wonderful day and a lot of horticulture conversation.

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Olivia Hanlon 08:04

Yeah, it sounds like it. So I know you mentioned it earlier, but could you tell us again when this Field Day will happen and tell us where it will be?

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Dr. Ajay Nair 08:12

The Field Day is going to take place at Horticulture Research Station. The address is 55519 170th Street, Ames, Iowa, the field day will start at 2pm and go to about 6:30 and Horticulture Research Station is a great resource for us here researchers. And also the for everyone in the state. It's a public institution, it's a public place where we can disseminate research based information.

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Olivia Hanlon 08:38

For sure. So I know you have a couple partners on this Field Day Ajay. So could you tell us a little bit about who you're partnering with?

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Dr. Ajay Nair 08:45

Yes, we are thankful as always to our broader organizations in the state. Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, Practical Farmers of Iowa, they help disseminate the information about the Field Day and many of our growers I work with and many of my colleagues work with are part of these organizations. So a big thank you to them. Also to the funding agencies that helped to cover the cost of this Field Day, USDA North Central SARE has been very active and helpful for many of the projects we are highlighting are part of the USDA SARE Projects we have here at Iowa State. So funding support from USDA North Central SARE and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship Specialty Crop Block Grant, thankful to them we are highlighting that project here. Also to federal agencies, USDA-NIFA, the organic extension initiative, The Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, NIFA-OREI Project, so that project has helped to support this Field Day. So we are excited you know that we have the support and we are able to bring value and bring research based information for our stakeholders.

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Olivia Hanlon 09:47

Okay, Ajay, so if people are wanting to attend to do they need to register for your Field Day?

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Dr. Ajay Nair 09:52

Yes, registration is free but required so that we can account for food and other logistics, and the registration is available. There's a link out there, but it's a pretty long link for me to spell. But what I would suggest folks, if they go to this website, extension.iastate.edu/vegetablelab. It's all one word vegetable lab, and that's my lab webpage. And on the front page itself under the tab called events, the Field Day is listed

there. So all they have to do is click there, go in there and click the registration link, we need the name, we need email who is coming. And that's it. That's all we need. So again, extension.iastate.edu/vegetablelab.

 Olivia Hanlon 10:37

Okay, and I will go ahead and put a direct link to registration as well that big long one that we don't need to say out loud in the show notes here so that people can click on that as well. That link is, <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/vegetablelab/2021-isu-fruit-and-vegetable-field-day>. If listeners are looking for more information on the Field Day, Ajay or a full list of projects that will be covered? Where would they be able to find that? Or who should they get in contact with?

 Dr. Ajay Nair 10:55

Sure, they can always get in touch with me, I'm more than happy to answer questions. And in that registration page, we have listed all the projects we are going to highlight, we have added a few more. But that page has a good idea of some of the main projects that we will make stops and learn more about.

 Olivia Hanlon 11:11

Alright, Ajay this sounds like a really great opportunity. If you had to choose one reason to tell the producers out there why they should attend what would it be?

 Dr. Ajay Nair 11:19

You know, it's all about learning. You know, we all are in here to learn. I learned a lot when I visit grower plots. And I hope through my research, I'm able to provide information to our growers as well. So this Field Day is a diaspora of all the relevant and sustainable research which is happening here at Iowa State University, in partnership with our grower organizations, with our funding agencies, and anybody who attends will get a good idea of some of the practical implications and usefulness of the research we are doing and how that can be incorporated in you know, personal farms or other organizations or community gardens. So we hope we are able to provide relevant production based research based information to whoever who's attending, so there'll be a lot of learning, and they'll be a lot of excitement interacting with so many people. And it will be a great day. And you know, whenever people get together when they start talking, everybody learns. So I hope it will be a day of learning.



Olivia Hanlon 12:14

Is there anything we didn't cover today Ajay, that you'd like to add on here?



Dr. Ajay Nair 12:18

No, I think we covered everything. Again, a big thanks to all our partners, your organization too Olivia, the FFED, you know, you all do a great job, you know, connecting with our growers, helping them with their budgets and financial plans and all that so and many of our growers are aware of FFED and we directly work with them. So thanks to you, thanks to all our partners, thanks to the funding agencies and also the ISU Horticulture Research Station for hosting us that day.



Olivia Hanlon 12:45

Yes, well thank you Ajay for putting this together for everyone and thank you for joining us today. I know I will be there and I'm looking forward to it and I hope now a couple of listeners are looking forward to joining us there as well.



Dr. Ajay Nair 12:55

Thank you very much Olivia.



Speaker 3 12:56

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