

Iowa Specialty Producers Conference 2022

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SPEAKERS

Speaker 3, Christa Hartsook, Kendra Meyer, Nicole Eilers, Olivia Hanlon

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 interviewed Kendra Meyer, Executive Secretary for the Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association and Nicole Eilers, Director of Marketing for the Iowa Wine Growers Association. Today we are talking about the upcoming Iowa Specialty Producers Conference. I'm Olivia Hanlon, Farm Food and Enterprise Development Education Extension Specialist and welcome to the show. Kendra and Nicole, welcome both to the show. Thanks for being on.

K Kendra Meyer 00:54
Thank you for having us!

O Olivia Hanlon 00:55
To kick us off, Nicole, why don't you start by telling us a little bit about yourself and what you do in your role with Iowa Wine Growers Association?

N Nicole Eilers 01:03
Well, my like you said, is Nicole Eilers, and I'm the Marketing Director for the Iowa Wine Growers Association. The IWGA is a member based organization that is made up of wineries

Growers Association. The IWGA is a member based organization that is made up of wineries and grape growers in the state of Iowa and beyond. We do a lot of promotion of the industry. We host this annual conference and just do general promotions of Iowa wine and just to let people know that it's out there and to try it.

O Olivia Hanlon 01:27
Who doesn't love wine? Right, Nicole?

N Nicole Eilers 01:29
Exactly.

O Olivia Hanlon 01:31
All right. Now we'll go to you Kendra, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do in your role with the Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association.

K Kendra Meyer 01:39
I am the Executive Secretary for the Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association. So a lot of what I do is their marketing and communications work. We have a quarterly newsletter, we send out the IFVGA website, Iowa Specialty Producers Conference planning, I'm on that committee, and just a lot of engagement with our members and getting that marketing communications out there for them.

O Olivia Hanlon 01:58
Awesome. So we'll go back to you, Nicole to start this one. Can you each give us a little bit of information about your organization and what your role is in the conference?

N Nicole Eilers 02:08
Sure, in addition to some of the things that I mentioned earlier. It was a couple years ago when several ag related groups started meeting to kind of come up with the concept of hosting this joint conference, and it ended up that the Iowa Wine Growers Association and the Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association sort of made the perfect partnership to join forces and create this large all encompassing conference. And that's kind of how we got started. We host the event through support from IDALS, the Iowa Department of Ag and Land Stewardship. We're really appreciative of their support. But really, it's a great way for industry members to network and kind of get to know one another even though we're kind of on a little bit different sides. But our industries do crossover quite a bit.

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Olivia Hanlon 02:56

Absolutely. So Kendra, why don't you tell us a little bit about IFVGA and what their role is in the conference as well.

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Kendra Meyer 03:04

IFVGA is also a member based organization comprised of fruit and vegetable growers across the state and even beyond, fruit and vegetable growers of all sizes, really. We are trying to promote the industry, and I will just echo what Nicole said about you know, this conference, really, you know, we have a lot of differences in the growing techniques, but when it comes to the marketing and business, there's a lot of similarities on providing that information and the agritourism side of it. So it has worked really well the last couple years and we're just glad for this opportunity to be on board with the wine growers and have this conference together.

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Olivia Hanlon 03:39

Okay, so why don't we dive into the conference here? Could you give us a quick overview of what the conference will look like this year?

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Nicole Eilers 03:47

Yeah. So this year, we're hosting it again at the FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny, Iowa. We had it there in person two years ago, our first year in 2020. And then in 2021, we moved to a virtual event. So we're excited to be back in person again, and have that kind of networking opportunity for everybody. It just seems like there's more of an energy when we get everybody in the same room. We have a two day event. It's on February 9th and 10th again, and our conference is really unique in the fact that it is tailored towards kind of the grape growing and winemaking industry. But it also has this huge selection of other sessions and topics for small fruit and veggie growers. We've also featured random specialty crop areas as well. We've had hops in the past where we'll be having some a session on floriculture, which is kind of flower tourism, and we're having an exceptional keynote speaker this year. His name is John Kennedy, and he is a speaker and a strategist and an author and he is involved on kind of both sides of the spectrum here because he is involved with agriculture as well as kind of the wine side of things. So we are so excited to have John kickoff each day of the conference with his keynote sessions. We just can't say enough great things about him. And we think that attendees are really going to love it. In addition to our keynote speaker we'll have nearly 40 breakout sessions running the gamut on topics, like I said, so it's a lot packed into two days at the FFA center. So we're excited to see everybody there in February.

O

Olivia Hanlon 05:24

Yeah, Nicole, we're really excited to be back in person this year. Why don't you give us a general overview of what kinds of topics people could expect to be covered by some of those breakout sessions.

K

Kendra Meyer 05:35

So we have six different tracks that were featuring viticulture, enology, fruit, vegetable, business and marketing, and then specialty crops. So that covers a wide range of topics like grape growing, winemaking, strawberries, sweet corn, pumpkins, business and law. Really just a whole variety of topics that will be covered at our conference.

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Olivia Hanlon 05:55

It sounds like someone should be able to find anything they want at the conference. Kendra. Nicole, I know you mentioned the dates and where it would be earlier. But can you just give us a quick reminder of when and where the conference will be held this year?

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Nicole Eilers 06:07

Yes, we're having it Wednesday, February 9, and Thursday, February 10th 2022. And it's going to be held at the FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny, Iowa.

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Olivia Hanlon 06:17

Okay, so if people are wanting to attend, do our listeners need to get registered for the conference? And if so, where can they register at?

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Kendra Meyer 06:26

You can register by visiting IowaSpecialtyProducers.com. And we also have an event on Facebook that you can search it there. And we have early bird specials going until January 11. So the earlier you register, the better deal that you will get for the conference.

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Olivia Hanlon 06:44

Awesome. So aside from attendees, if we would have any potential sponsors listening, is sponsorships still open? And if so how do they go about getting registered as a sponsor?

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Nicole Eilers 06:55

Yeah, absolutely. We have a really great exhibitor trade show that we have running both days of the conference. In 2020, we had, I think, more than 20 different exhibitors, like I said, that covers all kinds of areas of our agritourism industry. So it's a great way to find new vendors, new business relationships, that type of thing for attendees. And it's also a great way to get new clients. If you're looking for exhibiting your product or service, and we do have booth spaces open still. And there's several different sponsorship options. If you want to learn more,

you can find all the information on our website. Again, it's IowaSpecialtyProducers.com. And when you get on there, you can click on the exhibitor and sponsor link, and it will take you to where all the information is.

O Olivia Hanlon 07:44

Awesome. So there seems to be a theme here of looking for more information, go to the website. But if people are looking for any more information on the conference, or if they're looking for a full list of speakers and topics, where could they find that? Or who should they get in contact with with any questions?

N Nicole Eilers 07:59

Yeah, they can, they can find all of our information on our website, we're still wrapping up a few sessions. But we have all of our speaker bios and our schedule all online, including our hotel accommodations, a little bit about our venue and a little bit about each of the associations. So again, IowaSpecialtyProducers.com. And something else I wanted to mention is that our Association members do receive an exclusive discount for registration for the conference. And so on top of the early bird registration that will end January 11, our IWGA and IFVGA members get a really, really good discount on attendance. So we would encourage any association members to attend. If you're considering joining now would be a great time so you can take advantage of that discount, for sure.

O Olivia Hanlon 08:45

All right. Well, thank you very much to both of you for joining us today. Is there anything that we didn't cover today that you'd like to add in before we move upon the conference?

N Nicole Eilers 08:54

Something else I want to mention is in between the first day and the second day of the conference on Wednesday evening, we host an awards banquet each year, and so this year, we're hosting the Iowa Wine Awards Social, it's a really great event. We have a lot of fun. It's kind of an industry thing that people look forward to we'll have lots of Iowa Wine, we'll be giving out some industry awards, we'll be recognizing some volunteers and it's just really, really fun. And tickets are \$20 each and can be purchased online as well.


O Olivia Hanlon 09:24

Awesome.


K Kendra Meyer 09:24

I'll just add that we are having our IWGA and IFVGA annual meetings on the first day over the

lunch hour. And then before the Iowa Wine Awards Social that Nicole mentioned, there is an exhibitor happy hour from 4 to 5pm, and so there's lots of opportunities for networking and engagement at this conference. And that's what we're excited to have back this year at our event. If there is extra questions, we do have a contact section on our website. So I'd encourage you to fill out that and we will get back to you with any of your questions you have.

 Olivia Hanlon 09:54


All right. Well, I myself am very excited to attend the conference in February and we look forward to hopefully seeing a few of our listeners there thank you guys.

 Kendra Meyer 10:03

Thank you.

 Nicole Eilers 10:03

Thank you so much.

 Speaker 3 10:04

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