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UT Martin Spring Enrollment Growth reported to UTM Advisory Board

MARTIN, Tenn. – Spring semester enrollment at the University of Tennessee at Martin will reach approximately 7,550 students, a more than 6% increase over spring 2025. The enrollment news was announced during the winter meeting of the UT Martin Advisory Board held Jan. 23 in the Boling University Center. The enrollment news was among several reports and updates provided to board members by university staff and UT Martin Chancellor Yancy Freeman. The meeting also marked board chair Art Sparks presiding over his final meeting with the advisory

group. The Union City resident is one of only two original advisory board members remaining from the original appointees and has served as the board's only chair since 2019. Hal Bynum of Dresden is the remaining original advisory board member and was elected by acclamation at the meeting's conclusion to succeed Sparks as chair. Advisory boards were created for each University of Tennessee campus under the UT FOCUS Act passed in 2018 during Gov. Bill Haslam's administration. Board members are appointed by the governor, confirmed



MARTIN, TENN., Jan. 26, 2026 – UTM ADVISORY BOARD MEETS – The UT Martin Advisory Board met for its winter meeting Friday, Jan. 23, in the Ed and Carolyn Boling University Center. Pictured from the meeting are outgoing chair Art Sparks and newly elected advisory board chair Hal Bynum. Sparks has served as the board's only chair since its creation.

by the Tennessee General Assembly, and advise the chancellors, UT president and UT Board of Trustees on matters related to the university campuses. Dr. Destin Tucker, assistant

vice chancellor for enrollment management, reported spring enrollment numbers, which will become official following the 14th day of classes later in January. The enrollment goal for

spring was 7,506 students or 5% above last spring's final enrollment of 7,092 students. The spring enrollment follows the university's second-highest enrollment in history when student numbers reached

8,101 in fall semester 2025, bringing the university closer to its strategic-plan goal of 10,000 students enrolled by 2030. The highest university enrollment was 8,469 students in 2010. "Of course we're pleased

UTM Enrollment continues on page Page 8



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ARS scientists develop innovative pipeline to analyze plant pathogens

By Tami Terella-Faram
tami.terella-faram@usda.gov

ARS scientists in Corvallis, OR, in collaboration with Oregon State University, developed a disease surveillance platform that could improve U.S. agriculture by unlocking the future of plant health. PathogenSurveillance is an innovative, open-source software tool that can quickly analyze and identify novel microbial variants based on DNA sequences.

The automated PathogenSurveillance pipeline is an innovative workflow tool to help scientists respond in real-time to emerging, or re-emerging, invasive pathogens and pests. The surveillance platform will improve plant health and aid in reducing the spread of new and emerging diseases in agronomic, urban, and forest ecosystems.

"This genomics pipeline revolutionizes plant health, allowing us to identify any microbe, pest, or pathogen in just minutes-to-hours once there is a genome sequence,"

said Nik Grunwald, ARS research plant pathologist at the Horticultural Crops Disease and Pest Management Research Unit in Corvallis. "The genomic pipeline can be used for real-time biosurveillance of known, or unknown, pathogens relatively quickly, which lessens the barrier to adoption and use of PathogenSurveillance drastically."

Grunwald added that, since everything is sequence-based, this tool can be used to monitor the evolution of pest/pathogens in real-time, providing insights into how populations change, variations emerge, and new invasions occur. The platform can also be easily deployed to identify a specific pathogen, or to monitor the emergence of new disease strains or variants.

"Samples are sent to a local lab, and the resulting genome is sequenced and uploaded to the pipeline software system for identification," Grunwald said. "Variation in genomes can thus be monitored over time and space by comparing genomes."

This allows

PathogenSurveillance to be used by labs or clinics with little computational experience, and it provides "unprecedented capability for in-field or point-of-care diagnosis of pests and pathogens," according to Grunwald.

The PathogenSurveillance platform also enables scientists to input one to several hundred population samples of small-to-modest genome sizes, including bacteria, fungi, insects, and nematodes for pathogen surveillance and identification.

The program output is also intuitive for the user because it can provide graphs of genetic diversity and

create reports in the form of an interactive HTML document.

"This will be a benefit to researchers,

disease clinics, and diagnosticians in their work to identify clonal, or other types of variants such as

the UG99 stem rust, or NA2 of sudden oak death," added Grunwald. pathogen surveillance/1.0.0/.



A Camellia plant infected with *Phytophthora nemorosa*, which causes leaf blight. (Photo by Nik Grunwald, ARS plant pathologist).

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The impact of downy mildew

A flavorful wine is a byproduct of a lot of careful attention to grape-growing, blending of flavors and masterful fermentation. Vintners know that everything from weather to pests can affect the finished product, and downy mildew is one variable such individuals may know all too well.

Downy mildew is caused by *Plasmopara viticola*. Native to North America, this oomycete even spread to Europe inadvertently in the late nineteenth century. It remains one of the most economically devastating plant diseases among global viticulture. Unlike true

fungi, downy mildew is a "water mold" and it thrives in warm, humid conditions.

Horticultural experts say the disease cycle begins with oospores overwintering in leaf litter on the vineyard floor. According to Cornell University's Fruit Resources guidelines, infection requires temperatures of at least 10 C (50 F) and 10 mm of rainfall, all within a 24-hour period. These conditions trigger the release of spores which are splashed and spread into the vine canopy. Once established, the downy

see MILDEW,
page 4

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MILDEW,
from page 3

mildew enters the plant through stomata, which are tiny pores, mostly on the leaf undersides. An "oil spot" that looks like yellowish, translucent lesion on the upper leaf surface may be an early warning sign. Under high humidity, the mildew produces a white, cottony substance on the underside of the leaf.

If left unchecked, downy mildew can lead to leaf loss on the plant and the rotting of grape clusters. This affects the vine's ability to store carbohydrates and can affect both current and future yields.

While it once was common to rely on widespread copper-based fungicides to treat downy mildew, the University of California Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program says an emphasis on more holistic strategies is best to reduce pathogen resistance and soil toxicity. These steps include:

- Increasing air flow and sunlight penetration to the

grapevines by pruning and leaf pulling. This reduces leaf wetness duration required for the mildew to take hold.

- Avoid overhead watering and apply water directly to the soil at the base of the plants.

- Scientists are developing fungus-resistant grape varieties and crossing them with North American species through modern breeding programs. This may be a possibility for those just starting their vineyards.

- Vintners are now utilizing weather station data and computerized models to time any fungicide treatments precisely

to do pre-symptomatic interventions instead of broader spraying. Penn State Extension says downy mildew can begin to affect plants in the spring, so it's best to get a jump on treatment. Typical fungicides include a combination of copper sulfate and lime, according to the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

- Remove and destroy infected plant debris at the end of the season so it does not serve as a source of spores for the next growing season.

Downy mildew is a problem that affects a variety of plants, but notably grapevines, which can adversely affect yields and cut into profits.



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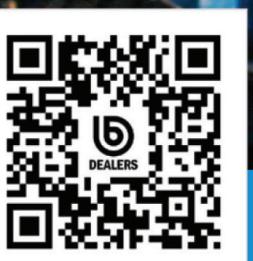
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2020 KENWORTH T680, Good truck, fleet maintained, runs great, clean, air seat air brakes, tilt/tele, power windows, power/heated mirrors, super nice truck, 455 HP. Stk. #20MX529T680DC.....\$25,000



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A rundown on glyphosate

Herbicide use sometimes is required to keep crops thriving. Glyphosate is a broad-spectrum systemic herbicide and crop desiccant that has been used for decades. However, glyphosate is a much-litigated and debated topic due to its link to health and environmental concerns.

Glyphosate has been registered as a pesticide in the United States since 1974. When glyphosate is used in accordance with its current label, the Environmental Protection Agency has repeatedly found that it poses no risks or concern to human health. The agency also found glyphosate is unlikely to be a human carcinogen. But that conclusion is not shared by all regulatory agencies.

What is glyphosate?
One of the most widely used products for both commercial and home properties, glyphosate is an ingredient most often associated with the weedkiller Roundup®. The product kills plants by inhibiting a specific metabolic pathway called the shikimate pathway and blocking an enzyme called EPSPS. Plants use this enzyme to synthesize three essential amino acids. Without them, a plant cannot produce proteins and essentially starves to death. Since humans do not have this shikimate pathway, and people obtain amino acids

from the food they eat, scientists have made the argument for glyphosate's safety for use around humans.

With the combination of glyphosate and the development of genetically modified crops that were bioengineered to be immune to glyphosate, farmers have been able to spray entire fields with the herbicide to kill off weeds and leave the desired food crops unharmed. Soy, corn, canola, and cotton were some of these engineered varieties to be glyphosate-immune. With weeds eradicated, less time is needed for mechanical tilling, which also reduces soil erosion.

The health controversy

Various major national regulatory bodies have concluded that glyphosate is not a danger to humans when used as directed. Both the EPA and the European Food Safety Authority conclude that there are "no critical areas of concern" regarding its impact on human and animal health. Despite this, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a branch of the World Health Organization, begs to differ. It is their belief that glyphosate is "probably carcinogenic to humans," and the organization cited "limited evidence" of glyphosate's link to non-Hodgkin lymphoma and "sufficient evidence" of such a link in



animal experiments. As of 2024, Bayer, the manufacturer of Roundup®, has faced tens of thousands of lawsuits, primarily from individuals claiming the herbicide caused their non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

Many have settled out of court, but the company still stands by the safety of its product.

Environmental scrutiny

Beyond the implications that

the product, forcing farmers to use older, more toxic chemicals. By reducing weeds in general, those that are beneficial to certain insects, especially pollinators like the Monarch butterfly, are less populous. In addition, a primary metabolite from glyphosate called AMPA is frequently detected in surface waters and can persist in the environment, raising environmental concerns.

Glyphosate is very effective at reducing weeds and unwanted plant growth, both at home and in commercial agriculture outfits. However, the environmental implications require further study to determine if glyphosate has any direct ties to cancer in both humans and animals.

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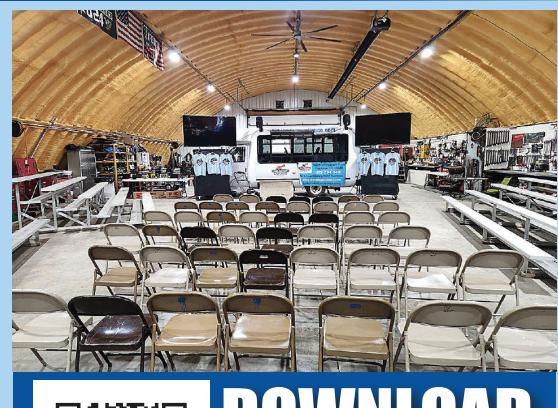
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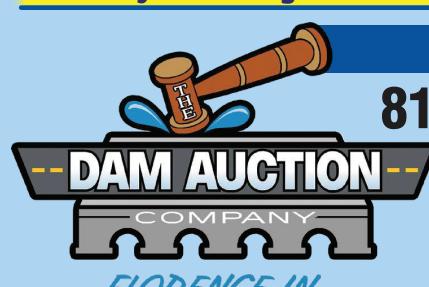
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UTM Enrollment continued from Front Page

to have exceeded that overall (spring) enrollment goal," Tucker said. "We do have some work to do in some of our student categories ... but overall, the progress towards that goal of 10,000 students is very positive." Tucker pointed to continued strong student retention, which indicates students who remain enrolled at the university year to year, as a major contributor to enrollment success. She highlighted the new Library Learning Commons that opened fall semester in the Paul Meek Library and the added tutoring and academic support that the learning commons has created for students as factors for stronger student success.

In other reports:

- Petra McPhearson, senior vice chancellor for finance and administration, offered an unaudited FY 2025 year-end budget overview that showed a \$175,648 surplus of revenue over expenses and transfers based on a total unrestricted
- Kurt McGuffin, vice chancellor and athletics director, reported a successful fall for Skyhawk student-athletes, who achieved a cumulative 3.39 Grade Point Average, 94 students who achieved 4.0 GPAs and 323 athletes who earned recognition on the Athletic Director's Honor Roll. This marked 12 consecutive semesters in which student-athletes have achieved at least a cumulative 3.2 GPA dating back to spring 2020. He also offered an Ohio Valley Conference update, news on Name Image Likeness and progress with athletics facilities projects.
- Jake Bynum, UT Martin chief of staff, reported progress made with the university's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, including fall enrollment exceeding projections by 7.9%, housing occupancy reaching

university budget of \$135,037,805.

- Dr. Jeffrey Bibbee, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Dr. Allan Sterbinsky, director of the new J. Houston and Debbie Gordon Center for Rural Innovation, offered an overview of the new center's work in assisting rural communities through economic development and cultural preservation. UT Martin students will benefit from this work by serving as interns in local government.

Chancellor Yancy Freeman followed individual reports by reminding board members of the ongoing 125th anniversary celebration recognizing UT

a record 98.62%, international student enrollment increasing 51% (37 to 56 students), 193 new wireless access points installed across campus, and the inaugural Chancellor's Leadership Academy class for emerging university leaders.

Martin's founding in 1900 as Hall-Moody Institute. Board members received a personal copy of the new history book written to commemorate the milestone. He credited Samuel Richardson and Karen Elmore of the Paul Meek Library and Nathan Morgan in the Office of University Relations for writing and compiling the book. Freeman also reviewed major capital projects, including planning for a new College of Business Administration Building. The current building will be closed and demolished after spring semester, and the new building will be constructed on the existing site. Projected completion is in 2029. In addition to a new Business Administration Building, a new 400-bed residence hall will be built to replace Browning Hall that will be closed and demolished following the 2026 spring semester. The new residence hall is expected to open in fall 2028. He also reported that some occupants of the Hall-Moody Administration

Building are scheduled to return to the building in March following building improvements. Work in other portions of HallMoody will continue. Freeman concluded the meeting by thanking Art Sparks for his advisory board service and many years of support for the university. Sparks is a 1976 UT Martin graduate and partner in ATA Advisory, LLC. "Thank you for your leadership and for what you've done for this institution (and) what you'll continue to do for UTM," Freeman told the outgoing chair. "You're stepping away from this (the chair position) but not away from us, and so we absolutely appreciate that effort and the work." While thanking everyone for his experience with the board, he also challenged members to continue their important work of promoting the university. "We're the people that need to go out to our communities and talk about what a great institution this is," he said. "We're the ones that also need to talk to students and

potential students ... to help this university grow. That's our responsibility."

He also noted the importance of giving back to others for blessings received. "The repayment of your blessings is not an obligation – it's an honor," he said. "It's an honor to be able to go back and help this institution, and it's an opportunity to help the students that are here now and the ones that will be here in the future." Sparks will remain as a board member, and in addition to new board chair Hal Bynum, other members are Jennifer Hampton, a new board appointee from Martin; Darby Self, student representative, Fayette County; Dr. Dan McDonough, faculty representative, Martin; Stefan Maupin, Dyersburg; and Dan Strasser, alumni representative, Chapel Hill. The full board meeting is archived for viewing at www.utm.edu/abmeeting. The UTM Advisory Board's next meeting will be May 15, 2026, in Martin.

UTM Entice Series releases 2026 Schedule of Events



JONES, Van – A photo of CNN commentator and political analyst Van Jones is provided. Jones, a 1990 UT Martin graduate, will be a guest speaker in the UT Martin ENTICE Series on Tuesday, Feb. 17.

MARTIN, Tenn. – The schedule for the 2026 UT Martin ENTICE Series features discussions from CNN commentator and political analyst Van Jones, who is a UTM alumnus, and former U.S. Department of Education representative Chase Moore. Now in its 26th year, ENTICE stands for "Evolving Narratives: Tennessee Initiative for Civic Engagement." The theme of this year's conference is "Come Together." Dr. Henri Giles, assistant professor of African American studies, is the coordinator for the ENTICE series. "We are thrilled to welcome Van Jones back to campus," she said. "We've followed Van's work for years as an environmental

advocate and political analyst. He is from Jackson and has strong ties to West Tennessee. This is a great opportunity for our students to meet one of the country's leading media personalities who is a graduate of UTM. "The theme 'Come Together' was inspired by a desire to help build community. In our fastpaced lives, everyone is moving in different directions with little time to stop and engage. The ENTICE Series presents many ways we can connect with each other. There will be music, film, dance, art, food, historical presentations and conversations about our current world. We'll come together in the spirit of understanding our past and future as

Americans."

The schedule of events for the 2026 ENTICE Series includes:

- Tuesday, Feb. 3, 6 p.m., 206 Dr. Edward J. and Carolyn P. Boling University Center: "Dreaming Out Loud: The American Dream Under Review," a student panel exploring the attainment of the American dream today and an examination of America's promises to its citizens.
- Thursday, Feb. 5, 6 p.m., Phillip W. Watkins Auditorium, Boling University Center: "Community Celebration of Music," a musical collaboration featuring The New Pacer Singers, The UTM Gospel Choir and the Discovery
- Thursday, Feb. 12, 6 p.m., Watkins Auditorium, Boling University Center: "The Divine Nine: Legacy, Unity and Impact," a presentation by members of the UTM National Panhellenic Council highlighting historical and cultural contributions

continues on next page

UTM Entice Series continued

of Black Greek organizations.

- Tuesday, Feb. 17, 6 p.m., Watkins Auditorium, Boling University Center: Van Jones, CNN commentator and political analyst and 1990 UTM alumnus discusses navigating journalism and news cycles.
- Thursday, Feb. 19, 6 p.m., Watkins

Auditorium, Boling University Center: "Night of Dance," UTM dance students present a choreographed overview of various African American dance eras and legends.

- Thursday, Feb. 26, 6 p.m., Nick and Cathy Dunagan Alumni Center: Student Pop-Up Art Event, featuring

artwork created by UTM students that embraces the "Come Together" theme of the series.

- Saturday, March 7, 9 a.m., Watkins Auditorium, Boling University Center: Student Leadership Summit, with sessions focusing on building and sharpening leadership skills among college

students and local high school students. The keynote speaker is Chase Moore, a national education advocate who formerly served in the U.S. Department of Education.

- Tuesday, March 10, 6 p.m., Watkins Auditorium, Boling University Center: Screening

of "Echoes of the Forks of Cypress," featuring director Frederick Murphy. He will discuss his film that explores the shared pasts of Black and white descendants of a plantation in Florence, Alabama. Two of those descendants will join him.

Other events may be added to this schedule. Times and locations of events are subject to change. For more information, visit www.utm.edu/visit-ut-martin/entice.php. For more information about UT Martin, visit www.utm.edu or call 1-800-829-UTM1 (-8861).

Tennessee Business Briefs

Growth, Jobs, and Economic Momentum

Tennessee's economy continues to show dynamic growth in 2025-2026, driven by major corporate expansions, new investments, workforce development programs, and strategic initiatives designed to enhance resilience and competitiveness statewide. From manufacturing and logistics to innovative business support and emerging tech interest, the Volunteer State is attracting investment and creating jobs across sectors.

Key Business Advancements & Investments

Major Manufacturing Expansions: Several global

and national manufacturers are expanding operations in Tennessee, signaling strong industrial confidence. Korea Zinc announced plans to invest more than \$6.6 billion in new production facilities in Clarksville and Gordonsville, marking its first U.S. operations and underlining Tennessee's manufacturing appeal.

Growth in Logistics & Distribution:

Axle Logistics, LLC is set to expand its Knoxville headquarters, adding 651 new jobs over five years and tripling its workforce, enhancing the region's logistics capacity.

Meanwhile, Japan-based DENSO is expanding its logistics operations

in Lebanon with a \$69 million investment, retaining 100 jobs and bolstering supply chain infrastructure.

Manufacturing Footprint Expansion: Companies including Aqua Membranes, CDF Distributors, and Hitachi Energy are investing in Tennessee manufacturing facilities, reinforcing a trend of industrial growth and regional job creation across multiple counties.

Petainer Manufacturing USA will invest \$10 million in Maury County, doubling its Tennessee workforce.

Custom Foods of America plans a significant expansion in Knox County, adding 249 jobs and nearly 200,000 sq ft

of production and distribution space.

Aerospace Sector Growth: West Star Aviation announced a \$32 million expansion in Chattanooga, creating 200 new jobs and strengthening the region's aerospace maintenance and repair ecosystem.

Small Business & Regional Dynamics

Business Preparedness Program

The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency launched the ReadyTN Business Program, providing free education and resources to help business owners prepare for disasters,

emphasizing resilience and continuity planning.

Pro-Business Environment:

La Vergne has been recognized as Tennessee's top city for pro-business policies and low taxes, highlighting local government efforts to attract and support enterprises.

Banking & Financial Services Expansion:

WesBanco, Inc. expanded its operations in Tennessee with a new commercial loan production office in Knoxville and a retail banking center in Chattanooga, part of efforts to deepen financial services in growing markets.

Economic Impact & Innovation

University Economic Contribution: Vanderbilt University's extensive research, construction, and innovation activities contributed over \$22 billion to Tennessee's economy, fueling job creation, new startups, and high-skill talent development.

From large-scale industrial projects and strategic logistics expansions to enhanced business support programs and investment in innovation, Tennessee's business landscape is robust and evolving—creating opportunities for workers, attracting global companies, and reinforcing the state's reputation as a competitive place to do business.

Tennessee News Briefs

Tennessee Sports Briefs

Tennessee athletes and teams remain active across collegiate and professional stages, with recent results, coaching news, and roster developments capturing attention statewide.

Volunteers Basketball - Mixed Results in February

The Tennessee Volunteers men's basketball team secured a solid 77-69 victory over the Auburn Tigers, propelled by Nate Ament's 22 points despite a rough shooting night. The win keeps Tennessee competitive as the season progresses and helps build momentum toward crucial conference matchups.

In women's college basketball, No. 1 UConn delivered a historic 96-66 victory over No. 15 Tennessee, setting new rivalry records for margin and scoring. The Lady Vols battled back from an early deficit to tie at halftime—the first time UConn had ever not led at the break this season—but were overpowered in the second half.

SEC Showdowns and Conference Play

In a tightly contested SEC clash, the Volunteers edged the Georgia Bulldogs 86-85 in overtime, highlighted by J.P. Estrella's clutch five points in the extra session. Ja'Kobi Gillespie and Nate Ament led Tennessee's scoring efforts en route to the triumph.

Elsewhere in

collegiate action, Tennessee linebacker Arion Carter announced he is returning to the Volunteers after a brief transfer portal entry, reinforcing the team's defensive depth.

NFL Spotlight – Titans Coaching Move

The Tennessee Titans made a significant offensive coaching hire, naming former New York Giants head coach Brian Daboll as offensive

coordinator. Daboll's arrival in Nashville ignites optimism for improvements in the Titans' offensive execution, particularly in quarterback development.

Looking Ahead

Tennessee teams prepare for key matchups and postseason positioning as the college basketball regular season nears its late stages. Fans can expect rivalry clashes and

conference showdowns to shape March ambitions.

On the pro side, Titans fans will watch how Daboll's system influences offensive production as the NFL offseason continues.

Tennessee's sports landscape is defined by high-stakes collegiate competition, milestones

in historic rivalries, and strategic moves in the professional ranks, keeping fans engaged across disciplines. Whether it's dramatic victories, record-setting performances, or notable coaching shifts, the Volunteer State continues to be a hotbed of athletic activity.

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How STEM powers modern agriculture

The image of farmers clad in flannel shirts while livestock pull plows through the fields

may still be foremost on the minds of individuals asked to imagine farm life. But such images may

no longer reflect an industry increasingly governed by advanced technology.

Even small-

scale family farms have recognized the advantages of embracing technology to help

make their operations more efficient and successful. Manual plows and tractors largely have been replaced by fleets of autonomous machines and precision farming technology.

Experts agree that the evolution of modern farming is a case study in the application of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. STEM is helping to address the problem of global food security and widespread climate change. U.S. News & World Report says 27 percent of new high-skills jobs in agriculture will require a STEM education. There are many ways STEM is utilized within the agricultural sector.

farming based on observing, measuring and responding to within-field variability through crop management. Precision farming utilizes remote sensing from satellites and drones, sensors embedded in the soil or devices worn by livestock to provide real-time data. AI tools also are used to predict harvest yields and optimize fertilization and irrigation.

• Robotics: Automation and robotics fills a void created by human worker shortages. Agricultural engineers help design machinery or focus on the physical infrastructure of the farm. Engineers also are the minds behind innovative farming practices like vertical farming and controlled environment agriculture, which encompasses hydroponic and aeroponic systems.

• Genomics and biotechnology: Scientists can now identify specific traits in plant DNA that will allow for more drought-resistant crops or those better equipped to tolerate problems like downy mildew. Other traits may make plants more capable of thriving in saline soils. Soil science also enables farmers to learn more about the complex microbiome of the soil, which ultimately can help to maximize nutrient uptake.

• Mathematical analysis: Math is vital in the agricultural sector. Statistics, predictive modeling, accounting, and risk management, are types of mathematical analysis employed to forecast global food supplies and profits.

The link between STEM and agriculture is undeniable. STEM is an important driver of the industry and only stands to gain influence in the years to come.

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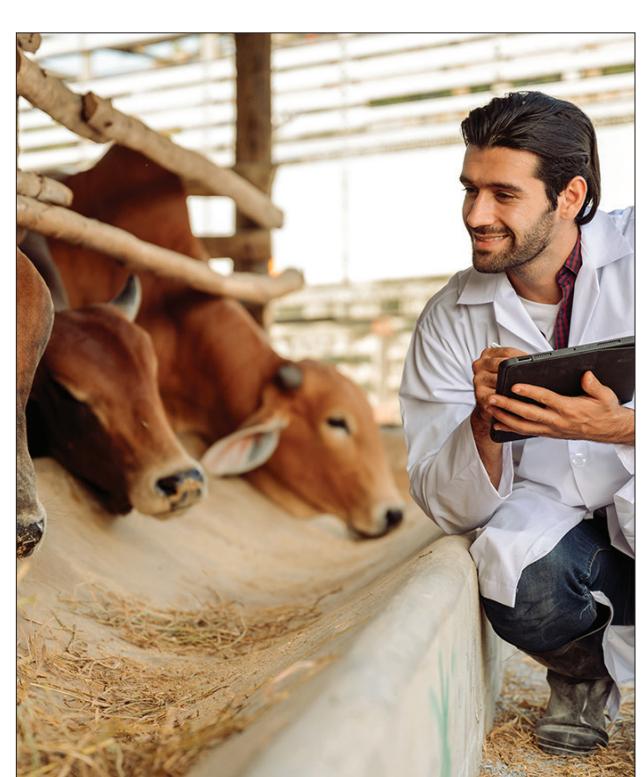
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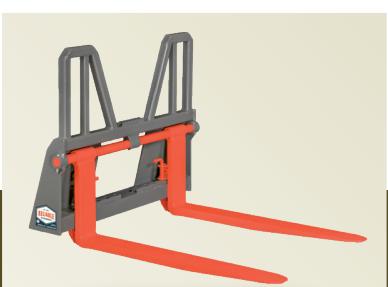
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what to know before a wedding gown shopping trip



Weddings mark a turning point from one stage in life to another. The significance of that transition is perhaps one reason why couples and their guests dress so nicely for a wedding ceremony and reception. Formal garb is a wedding tradition, and guests anxiously await seeing which type of gown a bride will wear. In western cultures, white wedding gowns have been the standard since the nineteenth century and are believed to symbolize purity and grace. In eastern cultures, wedding gowns often have been elaborate, colorful creations that have their own symbolic meanings unique to various areas of the

world.

Shopping for a wedding gown can spark mixed emotions. While it is exciting to try on some remarkable garments, there also is the pressure of knowing all eyes will be on you while wearing this couture creation. Narrowing down wedding gown prospects can take vision, time and patience. The following pointers can help when it comes time to visit bridal shops.

Make an appointment

Many bridal shops operate by appointment only. That's because the staff wants to devote complete attention to a client, and having people simply walk in from the street can draw their attention away and/or lead to long wait times. Identify the stores you want to visit, and then call to secure your time slot.

Narrow down styles

Think about what your personal style might be and how you want to look on your wedding day. If you're not sure about the vocabulary surrounding dress silhouettes, visit Pinterest or Instagram and save images of dresses that you love. Then you can show the sales staff what you are thinking instead of going in empty-handed.

Keep an open mind

Try on a few different styles even if you have a particular dress in mind. You never know if something might be a better fit for your body type or the scope and style of your wedding.

unless you give it a go.

Start the process early

Unlike off-the-rack clothing, most wedding shops will have to order your dress and have it shipped. Then comes a few weeks for alterations. KWH Bridal notes eight to 12 months before a wedding is a good time to choose and order a dress. Brides magazine says most made-to-order wedding gowns take about six to nine months to create. There also are three separate fittings to ensure the gown will fit like a glove.

Invite a handful of confidantes

It's best not to arrive at the shopping appointment with an entire entourage. Pick, at the most, four people whose opinions you trust; otherwise, it could be a case of too many cooks in the kitchen. As a bride-to-be you'll already be anxious, and you'll want soothing, supportive people with you.

Plan your budget

Know well in advance what you can afford to spend. According to data from The Knot, wedding attire accounts for 7 percent of the average couple's budget. Most wedding gowns are in the range of \$2,000. Don't forget about additional costs, such as veil, shoes, alterations, undergarments, and any add-ons.

In addition to these tips, arrive to an appointment well-rested, fed and comfortable.

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Why it pays to trust a pro with wedding photography

User-friendly technology and greatly enhanced connectivity has changed the way people approach various tasks. The do-it-yourself home improvement trend is a testament to that shift, as homeowners now have access to professional grade tools and can easily take to social media for inspiration and instructions for renovations that were once the domain of experienced contractors.

Though it can be fun and budget-friendly to embrace a DIY approach in many settings, that strategy is not ideal for every situation, including the day couples tie the knot. A couple's wedding day is one to cherish forever, which is why it pays to rely on skilled professionals. That's particularly so with wedding photography, which will serve as the official record of a day filled with love and laughs. Modern technology may compel some couples to think they can go without the services of a professional photographer on their wedding day, but there are many reasons to trust this important job to an experienced pro.

- Photographers can get great shots no matter the conditions. There's a difference between snapping great shots of an idyllic setting on a smartphone and taking wedding day photographs couples will look back on for years to come. Experienced photographers have cameras capable of far more than those on a smartphone,



and these skilled professionals also possess the knowledge of how to get great shots in settings that might not be so conducive to photography. A dimly lit reception hall dance floor may prove challenging for untrained amateurs, but professional photographers know what to do to get great shots in such settings. Professionals also know how to utilize natural light to their advantage when taking shots outdoors.

- Photographers free up time. Many newlyweds note their wedding day

seemed to fly by and was over before they knew it. Such sentiments may be

even stronger when couples take on too much responsibility come the wedding day. A professional photographer will coordinate shots and timelines with couples prior to the big day and take over getting bridal party members where they need to be when they need to be there. That frees up time for couples to spend more time with each other and their guests come the day of the wedding, which in turn can make it feel as though the day didn't fly by.

- You get a professionally finished product. Amateur photographers

simply won't produce as stunning a finished product as professionals who take and touch up photos for a living. A wedding day photo album is a keepsake couples will look back on for years, so it's best to ensure its contents include photos taken and touched up by a skilled professional.

Couples can find ways to cut costs with their wedding budgets. But it's best to avoid cutting corners regarding photography, as there's no way to turn back the clock and get better shots if the efforts of amateurs fall short of expectations.

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A beginner's guide to engagement ring shopping



wide will tie the knot this year. Weddings join two lives together and often culminate with a lavish party that sees extended family and friends gather around tables enhanced by floral arrangements and delicious food. But long before guests can choose chicken or beef or newlyweds mail the final thank you note, couples must first take the initial step on the road to the wedding. That means getting engaged. Traditionally, engagements involve a sparkling gem that symbolizes love, fidelity and a whirlwind series of months poring over every possible wedding detail.

Shopping for

an engagement ring is a unique experience. A ring requires a significant financial investment and serves as a lifelong symbol of commitment to another person. To navigate this sparkling world of diamonds and settings, shoppers can focus on key areas, notably budget, gem classification and finding a reputable jeweler.

Establish an engagement ring budget

Those ready to pop the question need not adhere to the outdated "three months' salary" rule when selecting an engagement ring. Instead, the ring should be chosen based on financial realism and means. The Knot's 2024 Jewelry & Engagement

Study indicates the average cost of an engagement ring in the United States comes in at approximately \$5,200. However, many couples spend less, showing that a marriage need not start on shaky financial footing due to the cost of a ring. If cost is a factor, lab-grown diamonds often cost 50 percent or more less than natural diamonds, yet they are chemically and physically identical to mined diamonds. One also can consider another gemstone, particularly if diamonds are beyond a budget or seem too traditional.

Choose a reputable seller

It's best to choose a gem that has been graded by an independent laboratory like the Gemological Institute of America. Customers also should select a jeweler they trust, which may require some research and word-of-mouth recommendations. A knowledgeable jeweler also can make suggestions on setting and gem shape. Upon purchasing the engagement ring, one also might consider having it independently appraised for further purchase protection.

An engagement ring purchase requires careful consideration and a significant investment. But once the stress of purchase wears away, the lasting memories of the engagement and wedding to come will make everything well worth it.

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The Impact of Heart Disease on Women

Heart health is vital. Despite widespread recognition of the importance of a healthy heart, cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death around the world. CVD includes coronary artery disease and other issues affecting the heart or blood vessels. Even though heart disease affects both men and women, it's often mistakenly seen as a condition that mostly affects men. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that heart disease, namely coronary artery disease, is the leading cause of death for women and those assigned female at birth. It occurs when plaque develops in the walls of the arteries and slows down the flow of blood supply to the heart and other parts of the body. Women are particularly at risk because, after menopause, hormone changes like a reduction in the production of estrogen can cause higher risk of coronary heart disease, especially in smaller blood vessels. In addition to hormonal changes after menopause, the risk factors for heart disease in women include:

- Diabetes: Women with diabetes are more likely to develop heart disease than men with diabetes. There's also an increased risk of silent heart attack since diabetes can change the way women perceive pain.
- Mental health: Emotional stress and depression can affect women's hearts more than men's, as depression may compromise a woman's ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- Smoking: Smoking is another risk factor for heart disease.
- Inactivity: A sedentary lifestyle increases heart disease risk.
- Inflammatory diseases: Individuals with arthritis, lupus and other inflammatory conditions may be at an elevated risk for heart disease.
- Learning about the warning signs of heart attack and stroke can help women stay on top of their health. Here's what to look for, courtesy of GoRedForWomen.org.

Warning signs for

heart disease

Heart attack:

- Uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain in the center of your chest. It lasts more than a few minutes or goes away and comes back.
- Pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
- Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort.
- Cold sweats, nausea or lightheadedness.
- Chest pain or discomfort.

Stroke:

- Sudden numbness or weakness in the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- Sudden confusion or trouble communicating.
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause.
- Women mindful of the risk factors of heart disease as well as the symptoms of heart attack and stroke may be better positioned to protect their long-term heart health.



Heart disease is the leading cause of death across the globe. Data from the World Health Organization indicates that cardiovascular diseases, which are a group of disorders of the heart and blood vessels, claim roughly 18 million lives each year. More than 80 percent of those deaths are due to heart attacks and strokes that oftentimes can be prevented. The right lifestyle choices, which include eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly, can help people reduce their risk for cardiovascular disease. Learning to recognize warning signs of heart disease is another way individuals can reduce their risk of developing this global but often preventable threat.

Chest pain:

Chest pain is widely recognized as a sign of heart attack. However, many people experience chest pain without ever suffering a heart attack. So how can individuals distinguish chest pain suggestive of heart disease from less threatening types of pain in their chest, such as stiffness after strength training or discomfort stemming from a pulled pectoral muscle? According to the British Heart Foundation, chest pain related to heart attack is marked by feelings of heaviness, tightness or pressure in the chest. Pain or tightness in the chest that subsides after a few minutes may be indicative of angina, which the Mayo Clinic notes is a symptom of coronary artery disease caused by a reduction of blood flow to the heart.

Stomach pain: People may not instantly associate stomach pain with heart disease, but in certain instances such discomfort might indicate a heart problem. The BHF notes that a painful or burning feeling in the stomach can be indicative of a heart problem, including heart attack. Though it's not easy to distinguish between heartburn, which in spite of its name is a digestive issue, and stomach pain indicative of heart attack, it's best to avoid writing off abdominal pain as heartburn.

The Mayo Clinic notes that many heart attacks do not involve sudden, crushing chest pain, and are instead characterized by a host of warning signs, including abdominal pain. The BHF advises anyone experiencing stomach pain who are unsure of its origins to contact a health care professional immediately.

Arm pain: Pain in the arm is another potential indicator of heart disease. According to the Mayo Clinic, arm pain that appears suddenly and is severe could be a symptom of heart attack. This pain may occur alongside feelings of pressure, fullness or squeezing in the chest. The BHF notes that a heart attack is more likely to occur if the pain is going down the arm, particularly the left arm, or into the neck.

Swelling in the lower legs: The National Library of Medicine notes that swelling in the legs, ankles or feet is indicative of a heart problem. Blood flow is adversely affected when the heart is not working at peak capacity, and that can contribute to what's effectively a traffic jam involving the blood in the veins of the legs. That backup causes the buildup of fluid in the tissues. Heart disease is a formidable and deadly foe. Learning to recognize the warning signs of heart disease might prove lifesaving.

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