

CEA Summit East Opens with Keynote Tackling Agriculture's Toughest Challenge: Getting Crops to Market

Appalachian Sustainable Development CEO Kathlyn Terry Baker and Matthew Lohr to headline Sept 15 fireside chat

DANVILLE, VA, UNITED STATES, August 10, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Indoor Ag-Con](#) and the [CEA Innovation Center](#) today announced the opening morning keynote for the Fifth Annual Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) Summit East, taking place September 15-16, 2026, at the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR) in Danville, VA.

The Summit will open with a fireside chat titled "Grow It, Then What? Building the Bridge to Market," featuring Kathlyn Terry Baker, CEO of Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD), in conversation with Matthew Lohr, President of VP Strategies LLC and Virginia's former Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry. The session takes place Tuesday, Sept. 15, from 8:45 to 9:30 a.m.

Most growers assume the hard part is growing more. Baker, who has spent years working alongside growers across Appalachia, has learned otherwise: finding a buyer is often harder than growing the crop, and market development has to happen before a single seed is sown. In the session, Lohr will draw out what it actually takes for small and mid-sized growers to reach grocery, institutional and wholesale buyers, including food safety, consistency, packaging



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OPENING MORNING KEYNOTE

**GROW IT, THEN WHAT?
BUILDING THE BRIDGE TO MARKET**

SEPT 15, 2026
8:45 AM - 9:30 AM
IALR, DANVILLE, VIRGINIA

MATTHEW LOHR
VP STRATEGIES

KATHLYN TERRY BAKER
APPALACHIAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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INDOOR AG-CON **CEA INNOVATION Center**
the INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED LEARNING AND RESEARCH
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CEA Summit East 2026 Partners



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SEPT 15-16, 2026
IALR Conference Center
Danville, VA

CEA Summit East 2026



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Brian Sullivan, CEO, Indoor Ag-Con

and communication, and what a grower not yet ready for wholesale should do first.

The conversation will also cover how ASD's Appalachian Harvest food hub model works and why Baker argues that no two food hubs look alike. Baker will also discuss a new agricultural campus underway in Bristol, Va., that will expand what's possible for growers — including an Herb Hub built to help small medicinal-herb producers meet buyer standards, and a controlled-environment production space where ASD plans to grow goldenseal, a medicinal root that traditionally takes four to seven years to mature in the wild, in about six months. Time will be reserved at

the end of the session for audience questions.

"This keynote gets right to a question every grower in the room has asked themselves at some point: 'I grew it, now what?' This session brings real answers to that question, and there is no better way to open the Summit," said Brian Sullivan, CEO, Indoor Ag-Con.

"What makes Kathlyn's perspective so valuable is that it calls upon years of hands-on lessons about what actually works for growers trying to connect to market, including the hard parts. That kind of honest, real-world insight is exactly what our research and education mission is about," said Dr. Scott Lowman, Vice President of Applied Research at IALR and Co-Director of the CEA Innovation Center.

Deep-Dive Tracks, Panels, Showcase Sessions and Tours

The keynote opens two full days of programming built around four 90-minute deep-dive breakout tracks covering everything from launching a CEA operation to core horticultural skills, technology and data management, and food safety and pest management — with select sessions held directly inside the working greenhouse of the CEA Innovation Center. Special panel presentations round out the general session lineup, including a dedicated session on Strengthening the Workforce Ecosystem on Day 1 and a panel on What's Next in CEA Crops – Breeding and Variety Development on Day 2. The popular CEA Industry & Research Showcase Sessions also return across both days with fast-paced presentations from industry innovators and researchers.

The Summit closes on the afternoon of Sept. 16 with a guided tour of the CEA Innovation Center, included with every conference pass. Attendees will explore the research greenhouse, automation systems, and ongoing trials shaping the future of CEA, led by the researchers and specialists doing the work.

The full schedule, speaker roster, networking events, tabletop exhibits and registration are

available at www.ceasummit.com. For exhibitor and sponsorship inquiries, contact Suzanne Pruitt at suzanne@indoor.ag or 404.452.1884.

About [CEA Summit East](#)

The CEA Summit East is an annual conference bringing greenhouse growers, vertical farm operators, and controlled environment agriculture (CEA) professionals together with researchers, extension professionals, suppliers, and industry leaders. Produced by Indoor Ag-Con and the CEA Innovation Center — a joint project of IALR and the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences — the Summit focuses on the intersection of protected cropping, production science, and emerging technology. Held at IALR in Danville, Va, the event includes keynote presentations, panel discussions, breakout sessions, tabletop exhibits, and guided tours of the CEA Innovation Center's working research facility. For more information, visit www.ceasummit.com

About Indoor Ag-Con

Now in its 14th year, Indoor Ag-Con is the global event for protected ag, greenhouse growing and CEA, connecting growers, suppliers, researchers, and technology leaders across the full agriculture supply chain. Indoor Ag-Con 2027 takes place March 24-25, 2027, at the Westgate Las Vegas. Indoor Ag-Con also presents CEA Summit East, held each fall in Danville, VA, in partnership with the CEA Innovation Center, a joint project with Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and IALR. For more information, visit www.indoor.ag

About the CEA Innovation Center

The CEA Innovation Center is primarily housed in Danville, Virginia, on the IALR campus and in Blacksburg, Virginia, on the Virginia Tech main campus. It is a joint project between the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and IALR to serve the growing controlled environment agriculture industry. It addresses industry needs through research, education, and extension programs. For more information, visit www.ceaic.org

About Appalachian Sustainable Development

Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) works to build a resilient regional economy through sustainable agriculture and forestry. Through its Appalachian Harvest food hub, ASD connects small and mid-size producers across Southwest Virginia, Northeast Tennessee, and beyond to wholesale buyers. ASD is currently developing a new agricultural campus in Bristol, Va., that will house an Herb Hub and a controlled-environment production space. For more information, visit www.asdevelop.org

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