Fifth Annual CEA Summit East Deepens Its Roots at the IALR CEA Innovation Center in Danville, Virginia

The 5th annual Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) Summit East closed out 2 days of connection and collaboration Sept. 15-16, 2026 at the IALR in Virginia



CEA Summit East includes tours of the CEA Innovation Center, giving attendees a firsthand look at both greenhouse and vertical farming environments



CEA Summit East 2026

DANVILLE, VA, UNITED STATES, September 18, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- The fifth annual Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) Summit East closed out two days of connection and collaboration Sept. 15-16, 2026 at the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR) in Danville, Virginia. Co-hosted by Indoor Ag-Con and the CEA Innovation Center, the Summit brought together growers, educators, researchers, extension professionals and government representatives for an event built around real conversation, hands-on learning, and direct access to the research shaping the CEA industry.

"Our exhibitors consistently tell us that the size of the event and the mix of people here - growers alongside researchers, extension professionals and students — leads to conversations they don't get anywhere else," said Brian Sullivan, CEO, Indoor Ag-Con. "Everyone actually gets to talk to everyone else over the two-day event, and those conversations often turn into lasting partnerships and new projects."

"The location itself is a core part of the experience," added Dr. Scott Lowman, Vice President of Applied Research at IALR and Co-Director of the CEA Innovation Center. "This year, we moved the sessions in one of our education tracks directly into our working research greenhouse, so

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growers and educators alike were learning in the same space where the research happens. Paired with guided tours of the CEA Innovation Center, it turns the Summit into more than a series of talks — it's a firsthand look at applied CEA research and technology in action."

Built for Conversation

CEA Summit East is built around a curated group of tabletop exhibitors and a program sized to give attendees more time for quality conversations. With everything — sessions, exhibits, meals and the CEA Innovation Center itself — housed within a single facility, growers running greenhouse, vertical farm and other protected cropping operations connect easily with educators, researchers, extension professionals, industry suppliers and government leaders throughout the two days.

Learning Inside the CEA Innovation Center

The IALR campus and its CEA Innovation Center, a joint project between the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and IALR, remain central to what sets the Summit apart. New for 2026, the Core Horticultural Skills deep-dive educational track moved out of a standard conference room and into the Center's working research greenhouses, giving growers and students hands-on exposure to the fundamentals of production in a real-life growing environment.

An Evening at Two Witches

To get things started, the new Uncork & Connect Happy Hour Welcome Mixer was held Monday, Sept. 14, the night before the Summit opened, at Two Witches Winery & Brewing Company in Danville. The gathering gave speakers, exhibitors and attendees a relaxed setting to connect ahead two full days of education and exhibits.

Keynotes

Day one's keynote, "Grow It, Then What? Building the Bridge to Market," featured Kathlyn Terry Baker, CEO of Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD), in conversation with Matt Lohr, President of VP Strategies and former Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry. The two discussed the role and work of ASD and practical steps growers can take to reach grocery, institutional and wholesale buyers for their produce.

Day two began with a fireside chat, "Beyond Leafy Greens: Lessons from Plenty's Next Chapter," with Plenty CEO Dan Malech and Tom Stenzel, Executive Director of the CEA Alliance, talking about Plenty’s shift to focus in on growing premium strawberries in Virginia.

2026 Exhibitors

From environmental controls and greenhouse structures to nutrient solutions, lighting and packaging, this year's tabletop exhibitors brought a range of solutions and new resources for growers navigating every stage of CEA production. This year's tabletop exhibitors included AmplifiedAg, Apogee, Berger, Dalsem B.V., Essentia Industrial Projects, Fork Farms, Green Laniel, Jack's Nutrients, JASA Packaging Solutions, KBC Specialty Seeds, Koppert Biological Systems, MicroClimates, Moleaer, NEW AGE Laboratories, Pace 49, Priva, Rimol Greenhouse Systems, TotalGrow Lights, and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Graduate Student Poster Competition
The CEA Summit's Annual Graduate Student Poster Competition continued its mission of supporting the next generation of talent, giving emerging researchers a platform to showcase their work and connect with industry leaders. Presented by Dr. Kaylee South, Virginia Tech, this year's winners included:
• First Place (tie): Samuel Mattia, California State Polytechnic University-Pomona, and Ellie Gregoire, Virginia Tech (not pictured)
• Second Place: Yuna Gaire, University of Georgia

In addition to celebrating these outstanding students, the CEA Summit also featured a special Scholarship recognizing the contributions of Extension personnel. The Cooperative Extension System plays a vital role in supporting greenhouse and vertical farm producers — identifying their needs, sharing research, and providing practical solutions that drive the CEA industry forward. The CEA Summit Extension Personnel scholarship program covered registration fees for 10 specialists to attend the 2026 edition.

Closing with a Look Inside the Research
The Summit concluded with guided tours of the CEA Innovation Center, giving attendees a firsthand look at both greenhouse and vertical farming environments — a closing chapter that put the research, science and technology discussed throughout the two days directly on display.

Plans are already underway for the 2027 edition of CEA Summit East. Details and dates will be announced soon at 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 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 the needs of the industry with research, education, and extension programs. For more information, visit www.ceaic.org

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