

Growing Utah's Fruit Industry: Brent Black Earns USU Extension's Highest Honor

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For more than 20 years, Utah fruit growers have turned to Professor Brent Black for answers in their orchards. Now, Utah State University Extension is recognizing his impact with its highest award.

USU Extension has named Black as the 2026 recipient of the E.G. Peterson Award, its highest award, given yearly to honor individuals who provide outstanding service to the state of Utah.

As a USU Extension fruit specialist, professor in the Department of Plants, Soils and Climate, and a third-generation Aggie, Black has dedicated his career to serving Utah's growers and strengthening the state's fruit industry.

"The opportunity to work directly with growers and students made for a fulfilling career and ultimately made me a better scientist," Black said. "My career at USU has exceeded my expectations for being able to positively impact an industry, shape future leaders, and build on the strengths of Extension."

Black's research and outreach have helped growers navigate some of the state's toughest agricultural challenges, from alkaline soils and water scarcity to shifting markets and climate pressures. His leadership in multi-state research initiatives, including a nearly \$2 million

project focused on precision orchard management, has brought cutting-edge tools and strategies directly into the hands of producers.

But his impact extends far beyond large-scale agriculture. Black has also championed small farms, backyard growers, and emerging producers. He has developed widely used fact sheets and organized educational programs that connect growers to knowledge and to each other. His Extension publications have been downloaded more than 100,000 times, reaching audiences worldwide.

"He exemplifies the very best of Extension," said Melanie Stock, USU Extension small farms specialist. "He is deeply trusted by farmers, is a highly productive scientist, and a dedicated mentor whose work has a lasting impact on the sustainability and success of Utah agriculture."

That trust is echoed by growers who have worked alongside him in the field. Utah County fruit grower Phil Rowley credits Black's expertise with helping producers make critical decisions.

"His vast experience and common-sense approach to solving fruit industry challenges have benefited the entire Utah fruit industry," Rowley said. "Other growers that I have talked to agree that Dr. Black's influence has filled an important need."

A hallmark of Black's career is his commitment to student mentorship. He has guided dozens of undergraduate interns and graduate students, many of whom now serve as Extension faculty, educators, and industry leaders. By integrating research with real-world application, he has helped shape not only the future of Utah agriculture but also the people who will lead it.

Black's work has also opened new doors for diversification in Utah's agricultural economy. From exploring native fruit crops like elderberry and chokecherry to investigating cold-hardy almonds and pistachios, his research continues to create opportunities for growers to adapt and thrive.

The E.G. Peterson Award celebrates a legacy of service, innovation, and commitment to Utah communities. In honoring Black, USU Extension recognizes not only a distinguished career, but a lasting impact rooted in science and dedication to the people and the land of Utah.

Click to see the [video about Black's award](#).

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