

Arkansas Diamond Plant Demonstration in Arkansas County

phorton@uada.edu

Horton, P.¹; Bowden, A²; Forst, R.³

¹CEA- Agriculture, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture (UADA), DeWitt, AR.72024

²CES - Horticulture, Assistant Professor, UADA, Little Rock, AR. 72204

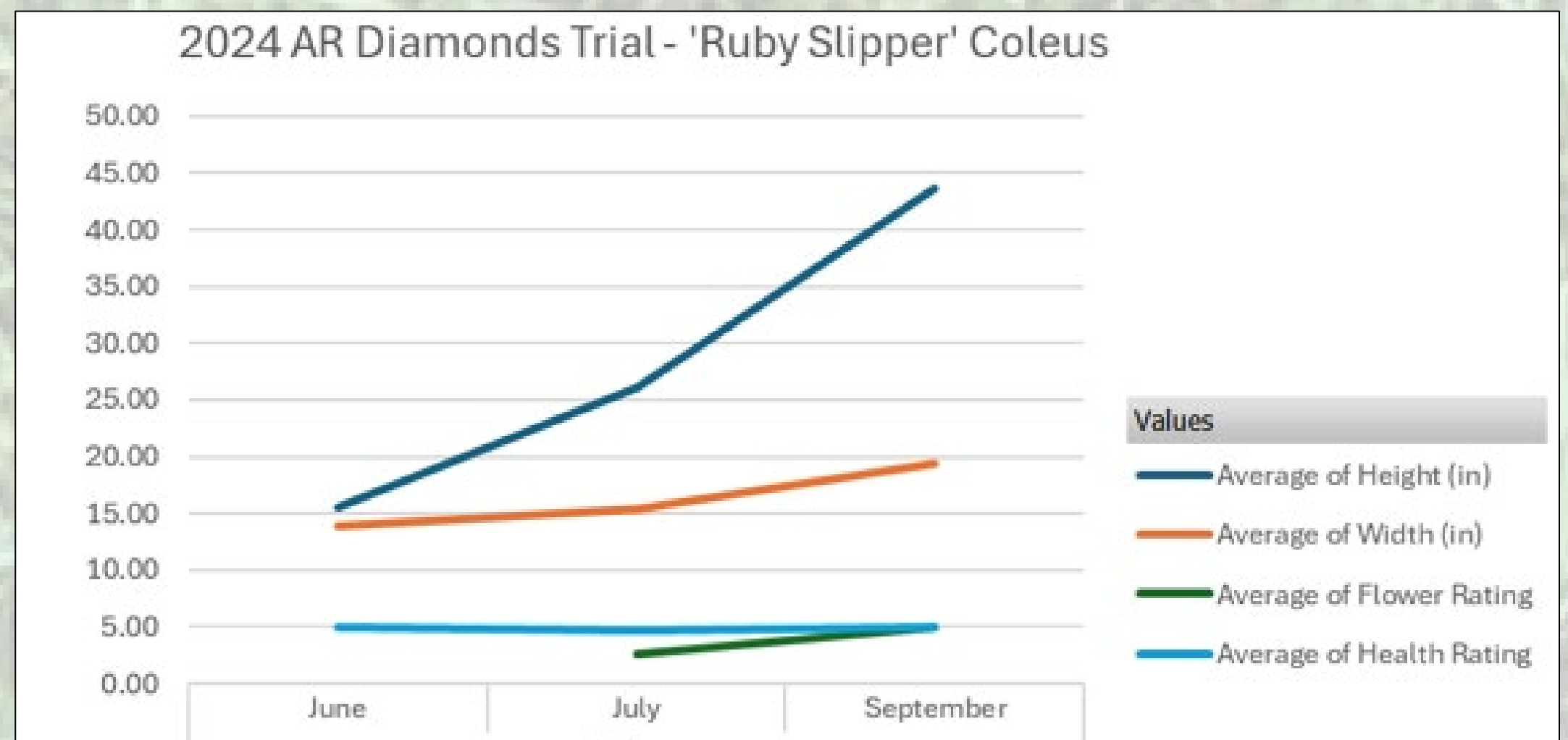
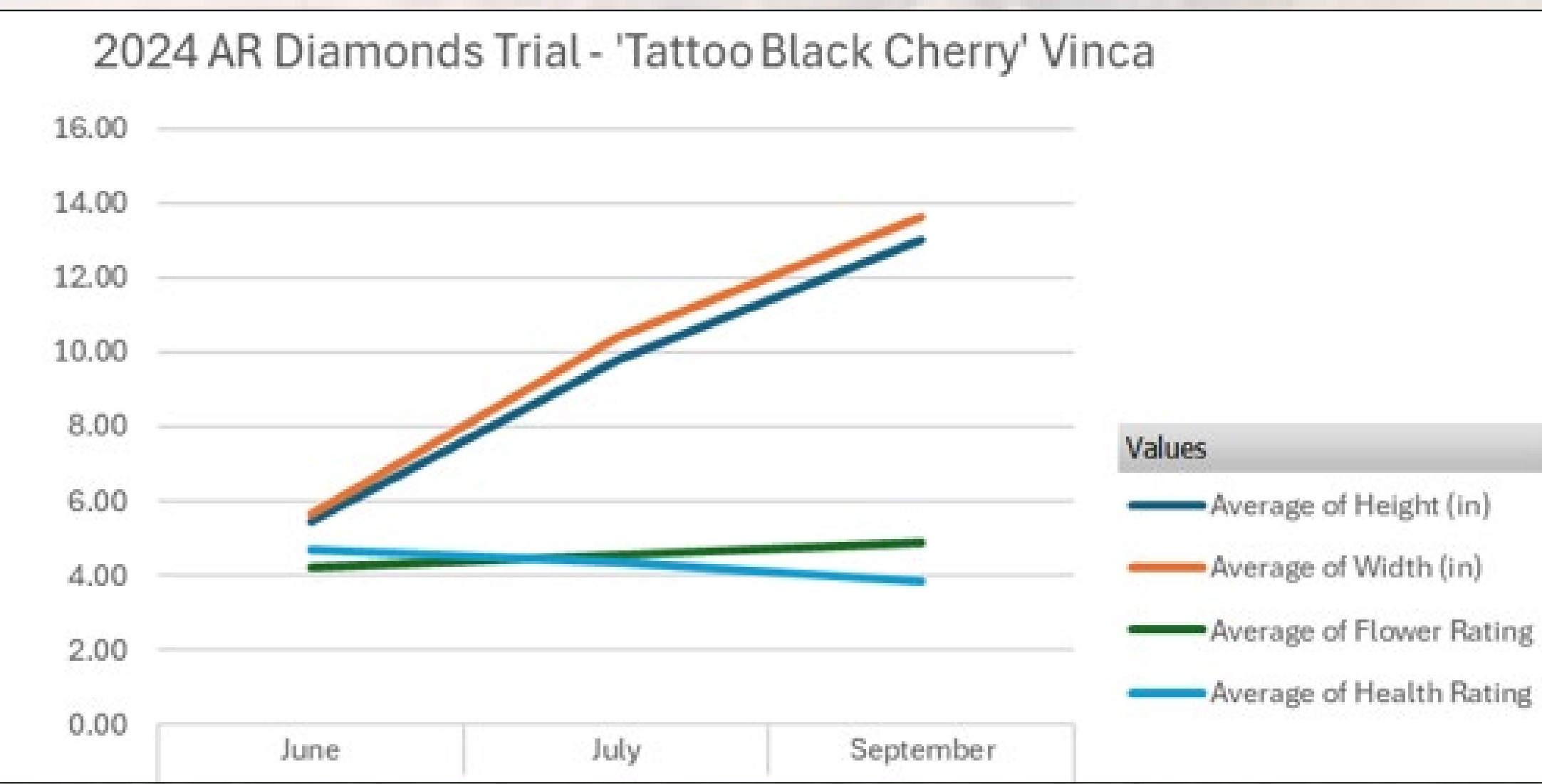
³CES – Horticulture, Extension Educator, UADA, Little Rock AR. 72204

Introduction:

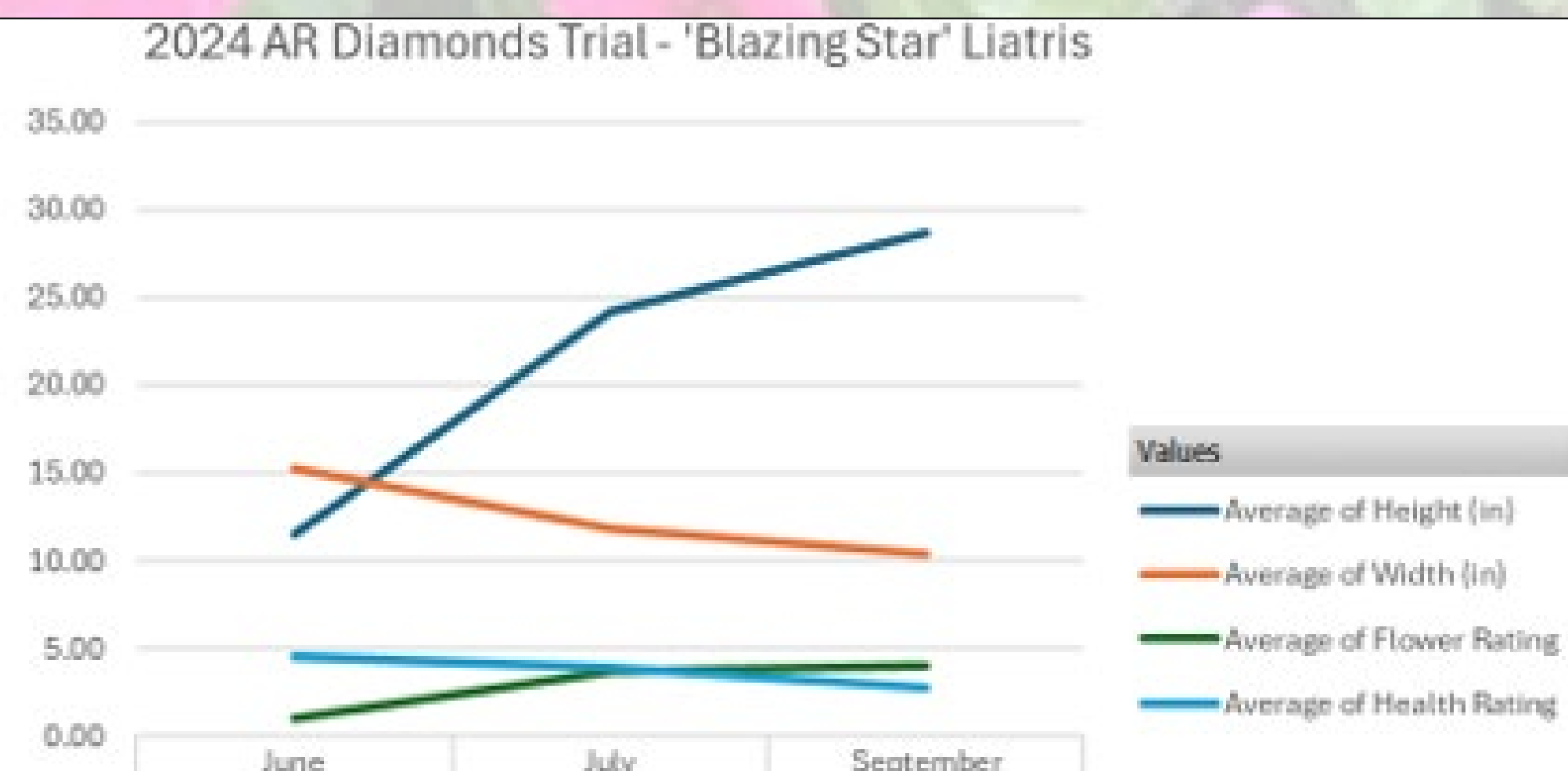
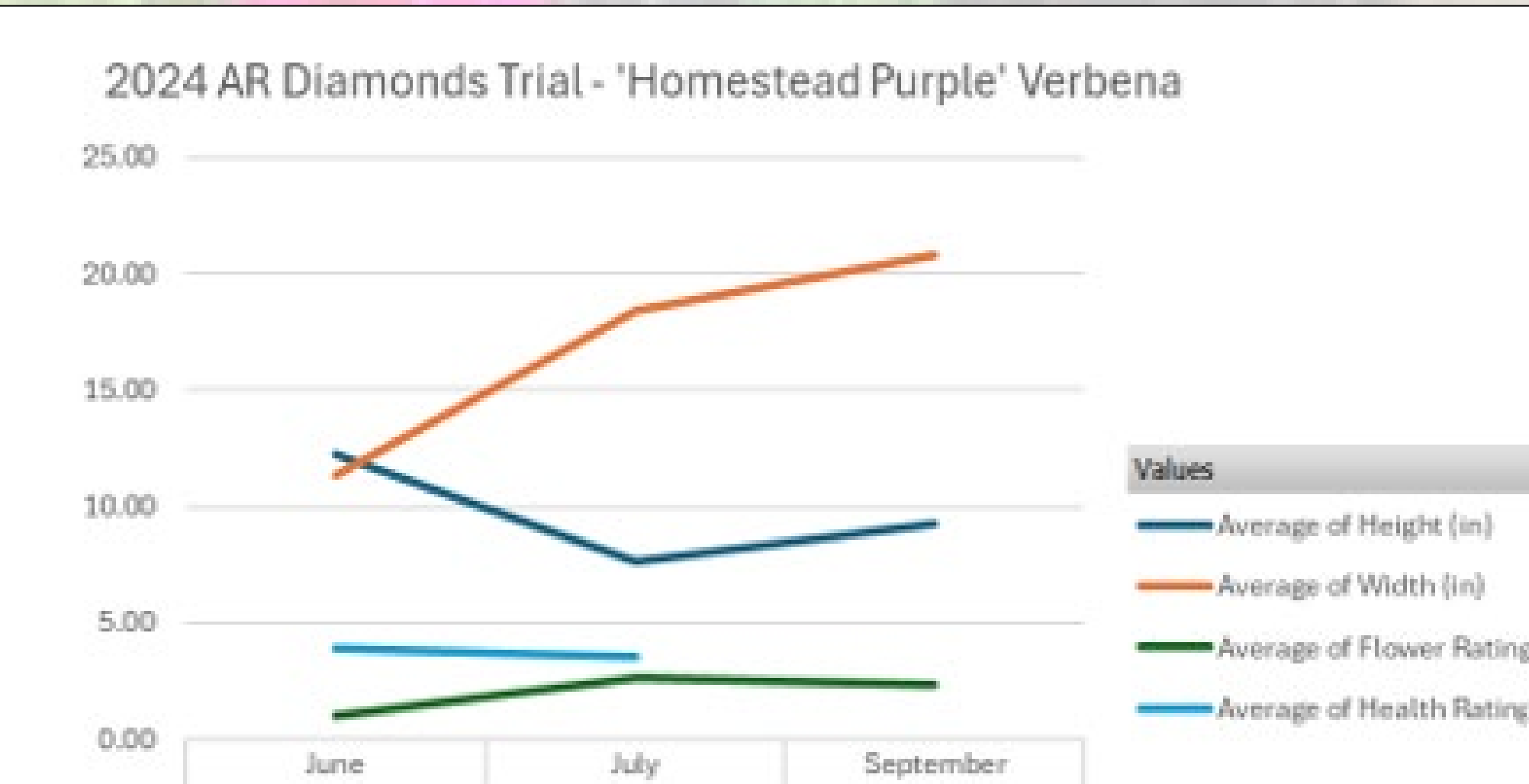
Arkansas Diamonds are locally grown plants that are proven to be tough and to thrive in Arkansas. New plant varieties are chosen and released every year. This program is a partnership between the Arkansas Green Industry Association (AGIA), The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture (UADA), local growers, and local independent garden centers. The goal is to educate Arkansas gardeners about annual bedding plants, commonly referred to as ‘annual color’, that consistently perform well throughout the state so that gardeners are more successful. In 2024, the statewide Arkansas Diamond trials were conducted in 29 counties and consisted of the two annual and two perennial plant species. For the annual varieties, agents were provided with nine plants of each species, while only four of each perennial species were planted. The annuals varieties trialed were ‘Tattoo Black Cherry’ annual vinca (*Catharanthus roseus* ‘Tattoo Black Cherry’ and ‘Ruby Slipper’ coleus (*Solenostemon scuttellarioides* ‘Ruby Slipper’), while the perennial varieties were Liatris (*Liatris spicata*) and ‘Homestead Purple’ Verbena (*Verbena canadensis* ‘Homestead Purple’). For the annual varieties, agents were provided with nine plants of each species, while only four of each perennial species were planted. All trials were planted in a 3 ft. x 3 ft. square bed. Agents were asked to plant the trial on or around May 15th to correspond to the average last frost date for NW Arkansas. During the study, agents were asked to take the following data twice a month through October 15th:

- Plant height and width
- Photographs taken at planting and then once/month around the 15th
- Insect and disease issues
- Flower Rating
 - 1 = 0%, 2 = 1 – 25%, 3 = 26 – 50%, 4 = 51 – 75%, 5 = 76 – 100%
- Health Rating
 - 1 = Poor, 3 = Average, 5 = Excellent

Arkansas County Results: Annuals



Arkansas County Results : Perennials



Discussion and Conclusions:

Despite the extremely dry and hot conditions in Southeast Arkansas during 2024 the annual varieties in the Diamond trials performed well. The flowering and health ratings held steady throughout the summer months. It was proven that ‘Ruby Slipper’ Coleus and ‘Tattoo Black Cherry’ Vinca are excellent choices for Arkansas. Perennial plants such as ‘Blazing Star’ Liatris and ‘Homestead Purple’ Verbena typically perform much better after their first year because they spend their initial growing season establishing a strong root system, which allows them to produce more foliage and flowers in subsequent years, making them more resilient and requiring less maintenance once established; this is often described as the "sleep, creep, leap" cycle where the first year is "sleep" as the roots develop, the second year is "creep" with moderate growth, and the third year is "leap" when they reach full potential.