A Word From The Department Head

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The winter semester is moving quickly. We have a lot going on as a department with positions to fill in turfgrass extension, extension agronomist at Amarillo, research position in cropping systems at Uvalde and soils at Overton. We are preparing the first positions for research and teaching in the department based on our recently revised strategic plan. Thanks to all for the efforts required to search and identify the best candidates for these positions.

The administrative team met with AgriLife administration this semester to discuss the positions above, plans for moving the turfgrass facilities forward, the metrics produced by the department this year, constraints and opportunities as we move forward. The department is to be congratulated for the publications, grant productivity and new cultivars. We need to be cognizant that student numbers are decreasing, as increases in student numbers are becoming a bigger part of funding decisions. We are also encouraged to move forward with development efforts. It was really good to be able to share how much our unit accomplishes and how productive you are as research faculty, teaching faculty and extension faculty. While much of potential improvement is dependent on the legislative session our vision for the future stimulated very solid discussion of next steps.

A special thanks to Dr. Smith, Dr. Miller, Ms. Carol Rhodes, Jim Lukeman and Ms. Judy Young for their help on getting the review material put together and especially to all the faculty and staff for participating. It is extremely important to have your participation in identifying impacts, outputs and accomplishments. These are used frequently as our administration meets with corporate, state, federal partners and especially with our stakeholders.

Thanks to Dr. Murray for getting our seminar rolling. A quality seminar supported by faculty is essential to an outstanding graduate program.

The annual review process is now in full swing. I have completed trips to Amarillo, Vernon, Lubbock and Corpus Christi and have been in Beaumont this week. Thanks to all for working with Judy to facilitate the reviews in a timely manner. With both departments to complete reviews for, it will be very hectic between now and the end of May.

Special congratulations to all that were recognized at our departmental, vice-chancellor, Deans and Directors award celebrations. It is wonderful to see so many from our group recognized for their many and varied contributions! Thanks!

While many have been involved in corporate relations activities, a special thanks to Dr. Cristina Morgan for opening doors to discussions on precision soil technology. We continue to have a strong support for specific bioenergy projects and many inquest discussions from guar to rice are under discussion.

spring
forward
SUNDAY, MARCH 10
Smith was named Plant Breeder of the Year during the 67th Corn and Sorghum Seed Research Conference – American Seed Trade Association in Chicago. And the B.B. Singh award was made at the department’s annual meeting in College Station.

Dwight Bostick, chair of the National Council of Commercial Plant Breeders, said the public plant breeding award has been presented since 1963 in recognition of individual scientific contributions toward the betterment of American agriculture.

Smith, who has been with Texas A&M for the past 27 years, has committed his life as a plant breeder and scientist, Bostick said, in presenting the award.

“Dr. Smith is very active in promoting the education and training of the next generation of plant breeders,” Bostick said. “He’s already made an impact in the plant breeding community and his legacy will continue.”

Smith also is the recipient of the first B.B. Singh Crop Science Award. Dr. B.B. Singh is a visiting scientist from India who has been working in the soil and crop science department since 2007.

“Dr. Smith has excelled at many levels, including administrative, breeding, teaching and managerial duties,” Singh said, in presenting the award. “He leads one of the state’s and the country’s largest public cotton breeding programs while performing significant teaching and administrative duties as associate department head and graduate coordinator.”

In addition, Dr. David Baltensperger, soil and crop sciences department head, said, “Dr. Smith has truly made a difference for plant breeding through his own research, but it is especially significant to see Wayne recognized for his leadership in developing programs to train future plant breeders through the world’s first distance research-based doctoral program in plant breeding.”

Smith’s landmark achievements include the development of nine cotton germplasm lines that equal or exceed Pima cotton in terms of fiber length, according to the award recognition.

His primary research program focuses on cotton fiber quality improvement. He has released 128 improved germplasm lines and cultivars, and has authored or co-authored 97 refereed journal articles and 228 other research publications. He has written one textbook on crop production, co-edited four crop monographs, and authored or co-authored 11 book chapters.

He teaches three courses and has directed 30 graduate students as a professor in the department. He has been instrumental in establishing weekly meetings of plant breeding faculty and graduate students and creation of a distance master’s degree and doctorate program in plant breeding from Texas A&M.

Smith earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Auburn University, and his doctorate from the University of Tennessee.  

~ Kay Ledbetter ~
Congratulations to the following Genetics grad students who participated in the Graduate Student Poster Session Competition son Friday, February 8 during our Graduate Student Recruiting Symposium:

First Place - Amanda Hulse - Localization of Interspecific SNPs in Gossypium Allotetraploids using the D5 Diploid Reference Genome  
Advisory Chair: David Stelly, Department of Soil & Crop Science

Second Place - Adam Salazar - M. tuberculosis pre-phenate dehydrogenase (TyrA): genetic insights, characterization, and structure determination  
Advisory Chair: Jim Sacchettini, Department of Biochemistry/Biophysics

Third Place - Chuck Goldsmith - Defining a mechanism of circadian output in Neurospora crassa: temporal regulation of a MAPK kinase pathway  
Advisory Chair: Deb Bell-Pedersen, Department of Biology

Fourth Place - Ryan Doan - Genome-wide SNP Development and Validation for Allotetraploid Gossypium  
Advisory Chair: Scott Dindot, Department of Veterinary Pathobiology  
Hao Ching Hsiao - Ultrabithorax, an intrinsically disordered protein, selects protein interactions by topology  
Advisory Chair: Sarah Bondos, Department of Molecular & Celluar Medicine (HSC)  
Rachel Jordan - Silent chromatin at the ribosomal DNA locus of Saccharomyces cerevisiae is not uniform  
Advisory Chair: Mary Bryk, Department of Biochemistry/Biophysics

Also, awards were given to first-year Genetics graduate students for:  
Exceptional Performance for Teaching - Sandra Truong & Ryan McCormick  
Outstanding Performance in Teaching - William Skiles  

*Congratulations* to Carol Rhodes, David Baltensperger, Kathy Schmitt, and Wayne Smith on being the first recipients of the B.B. Singh Crop Science Award.

A fine job done by all!
I wanted to send a brief note to all thanking Tami Hons for her departmental efforts. As you are aware, she went to a part time assignment a couple of years ago.

This week she had an outstanding opportunity come up and she will no longer be leading our communications team. In the interim, while we develop a plan to move forward, Jim Lukeman will be coordinating the team.

The opportunity came quickly and so we will have a farewell scheduled sometime after she gets her new career up and going. Please join me in sending best wishes and thanks for her many efforts in our behalf.  David Baltensperger
2013 Student Contest SSLRW

At the 50th annual Soil Survey and Land Resources Workshop, 16 students from 4 schools (Tamu, Baylor, Texas Tech, and Stephen F Austin) presented their research. The winners of the student contest were:

1st - Liz Marley, TAMU, “Distinguishing Subsurface Characteristics of Soils Using Electrical Resistivity Tomography”

2nd - Mart Berg, TAMU “An intensive new approach to tracking long-term soil loss and sediment transport on rangelands”

3rd - Justin Von Bargen, Baylor University, “Charcoal Chemistry: Developing a Proxy for Paleofire Regimes”

Noland won 1st place in the Crops Division Graduate Student Poster Competition

Reagan Noland won 1st place in the Crops Division Graduate Student Poster Competition at the Southern Branch meeting of the Agronomy Society of America held in Orlando, FL, February 3-5, 2013. Noland presented data from his research project titled ‘Effect of an integrated strip-tillage and cover cropping system on crop yield and soil moisture in a semi-arid environment.’ This research is conducted in both Beeville and Uvalde, TX. Jamie Foster and Cristine Morgan serve as his co-chairs.

“Congratulation to Reagan and to the team of advisors, Thank you for making us look good.” - Juan Landivar

“I wanted to let you know that Reagan won the Crops Graduate Student Poster Competition at the Southern Branch Agronomy Society of America meetings. He worked hard on the poster and preparing to answer questions and it was well deserved. Thank you for your input for preparations. Congratulations and good job Reagan!” - Jamie Foster
Sean M. Thompson, a Plant Breeding doctoral student has been named a 2013 U.S. Borlaug fellow in Global Food Security.

US Borlaug Fellowship in Global Food Security, Sean M. Thompson

The U.S. Borlaug Fellows in Global Food Security program is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to expand the pool of U.S. food security professionals who have the scientific base needed to effectively study and manage the global landscapes in support of sustainable food systems.

Pictured with the 2009 World Food Prize winner and U.S. Borlaug Fellows in Global Food Security Program Director Gabisa Ejeta, Thompson’s research focuses on development of new heat-tolerant wheat cultivars through a focused program of optimized phenotyping utilizing remote sensing technologies in crop breeding; he is co-chaired by Dirk B. Hays and Amir M.H. Ibrahim.

Thompson was awarded for his graduate research work at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (commonly called by its Spanish acronym CIMMYT for Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maíz y Trigo), one of the 15 non-profit, research and training institutions affiliated with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research.

Rudd Recognized with Texas A&M Regents Fellow

Writer: Kay Ledbetter, 806-677-5608, skledbetter@ag.tamu.edu

AMARILLO – Dr. Jackie Rudd of Amarillo was among the distinguished honorees when Texas A&M University Chancellor John Sharp presented Regents Professor and Fellow Service Awards at a recent banquet in College Station.

Dr. Jackie Rudd is the recipient of a Regents Fellow Award. (Texas A&M AgriLife Research photo by Kay Ledbetter)

Sharp said during the presentation that these awards recognize faculty members and agency professionals who have made outstanding contributions to their university or agency and the people of Texas and beyond.

The Board of Regents established naming of Regents Professors in 1996, later adding the Regents Fellow Service Award to recognize exceptional service by professionals in the seven Texas A&M System agencies in 1998.

Rudd was the recipient of a Regents Fellow Award. To date, 166 faculty members have been named Regents Professors and 96 agency professionals have been named Regents Fellows.

To read entire article go to: http://today.agrilife.org/2013/02/18/rudd-recognized-with-texas-am-regents-fellow-award/)
Texas A&M faculty member takes soil judging skills to international level

COLLEGE STATION – Dr. Cristine Morgan took her soil expertise “down under” and came back with a request to help coordinate an international collegiate soil judging contest in Korea in 2014.

Students assess the soil properties under the guidance of Texas A&M University soil judging coach Dr. Cristine Morgan during a judging competition. (Photo by Dr. Cristine Morgan)

Morgan, a Texas A&M University soil and crop sciences department associate professor, traveled with two students, Haly Neely and Dianna Bagnall, to New Zealand for the Soil Science Society of America’s 2012 Kirkham Conference in Soil Physics.

The team then traveled to Tasmania, where they assisted with the first collegiate soil judging contest at the Joint Australian and New Zealand Soil Science Conference.

“Their conference officials had visited some of our contests, and they invited us to come assist them and be ambassadors,” said Morgan, who is the Texas A&M soil judging team coach. She also helped coach the University of Sydney’s team after the team’s coach couldn’t be there.

“The fun thing about these contests is they really generate enthusiasm for soil sciences,” Morgan said. “It reminds me of why I got into the discipline.”

Now, she said, soil judging is going international, and Texas A&M, under Morgan’s leadership, will be coordinating the contest at the International Union of Soil Sciences 20th World Congress of Soil Science in June 2014 in Jeju Island, Korea.

“Soil judging gets the students into the field, looking at soils and assessing appropriate land management,” Morgan said. “It helps them know both the limitations and resources that the soils on that particular piece of land provide. It’s important to be able to look at soil, assess the properties and understand what type of septic system is right. That’s what soil judging does.”

Morgan’s specialty is soil hydrology and pedology, working with sensor development for proximal sensing of soil properties. She has joint projects with scientists in Sydney. Neely and Bagnall are working on the hydrology of cracking soils, something that Texas and Australia have in common.

A vertisol is a type of soil with a high clay content that is prone to cracking, and “we work in modeling that hydrology and the water movement through those cracks,” Morgan said. “These soils either infiltrate water very slowly or infiltrate high volumes of water rapidly, depending on soil moisture.

“We don’t have a good model of how the water moves through these soils, so we are trying to identify that process.” - Kay Ledbetter, skledbetter@ag.tamu.edu

http://today.agrilife.org/2013/02/18/texas-am-faculty-member-takes-soil-judging-skills-to-international-level/
CAREER CELEBRATION

for

Carol Jean (C. J.) Rhodes

Please join us as we congratulate Carol on FORTY years of dedicated service to Texas A&M and Soil & Crop Sciences and wish her an awesome retirement!

March 28, 2013
3:00 PM - 4:30 PM
Heep Center
4th Floor Atrium

It’s Time To Garden!
March 11-15 Student Spring Break
March 15 Spring Break - Faculty & Staff On Campus
March 28 Career Celebration for Carol Rhodes Retirement - Heep Center 3:30 p.m.
March 29 Reading Day, no classes
April 2 Last day for Q drops, official withdraw from the University withought penalty
April 11 Annual Awards & Recognition Banquet
April 11-26 Pre-registration for summer & fall 2013
April 12-14 Parents weekend
April 15-16 Rio Grande Basin Project - San Antonio
April 22-23 Texas Pasture & Forage Workgroup & Southern Pasture & Forage Crop Improvement Conference - Overton and Tyler
April 30 Last day of spring semester classes
May 1-2 Reading days, no classes
May 3, 6-8 Final Exams
May 11 Graduation Reception - 7:00 PM (appetizers 4:30 to 6:30)
May 27 Memorial Day Holiday
June 18 Stiles Farm Field Day - Thrall
June 25 TX AgriLife Research & Extension Center Field Day, Eagle Lake, TX
July 11 TX AgriLife Research and Extension Center Field Day, Beaumont, TX

ParkMe App
New parking app for cell phones. The app will provide real time parking information about our garages, parking lots, as well as information from cities across the country. To access, visit the transportation website. http://transport.tamu.edu/parking/ParkMe.aspx

Office of Sponsored Research Services
The Office of Sponsored Research Services (OSRS) has a new web site. The site offers a variety of information including funding opportunities, proposal preparation and submission instructions, contract negotiation regulations, OSRS forms, staff directory, and much more. http://osrs.tamus.edu/