In This Issue: Department Head’s Comments
2015 Accomplishments
Vice Chancellor’s Awards Winners
News and other Awards
Calendar of Events
Excitement is contagious and as we kick off the spring semester excitement is in the air. Thanks to the whole team for their efforts to pull our review documentation together for timely submission to the Provost, Dean and Review Team. Dr. Smith, Redmon and I recently had the opportunity to meet with our administration for our annual review and the accomplishments portion of our report is in this newsletter. We face the beginning of spring planting with a real enthusiasm for our efforts amongst both students and clientele subdued only by weak commodity prices as rainfall has been plentiful and temperatures make it feel a lot like spring. Welcome aboard to Brendan Kelly and Seth Byrd our new cotton fiber scientist and plains cotton specialist, respectively! We are currently completing the search and application process for soil fertility and hope soon to recruit for the position vacated by Dr. Redmon as he became Associate Department Head. I really appreciate your efforts to participate in these as they will make the new face of our department.

I had the opportunity to visit with the cotton industry at Beltwide Cotton Conference and with many of you during Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Conference and the many side events. Special congratulations to all our department award winners, vice-chancellors award winners and AgriLife award winners that were announced during this time frame (see articles inside). Later in the month Larry and I were able to meet with the Cotton Physiology group in San Angelo as well as the Small Grains Advisory committee in Amarillo. SRM, Southern ASA and the Soil Survey and Land Resource Workshop are all just around the corner. Congratulations to all of our scientists that help make these and many other great events happen. I am really pleased with the breadth and depth of our interaction with clientele and fellow scientist.

Industry interaction continues to be a big driver for our departmental success and in support of that we held key meetings with Panasonic, Bayer, Ceres, and Climate Corp in the recent month. Growth in our internal UAV program has been dramatic and we look for exciting successes in the grant world to come from this arena in the near future. Congratulations to the success of many scientists with competitive proposals in recent rounds. It looks like competitive funding was up significantly last year and is very positive for the current fiscal year.

BAM has brought a slow down to our accounting process. It seems that there may be software and hardware fixes coming, but currently we can process less than a 1/3 of the invoices per hour that we did previously. We anticipate that this has not yet bottomed out and that we may be dealing with late charges for the first time in many years. Please facilitate our efforts to overcome this by getting your information in to accounting as early as possible.

We continue to progress with the HEEP elevator renovation as they start on the second elevator this week. Air-conditioning and door closers continue to be worked on as well. We are excited that the turf facility work has finally been initiated and I am excited to report that an exterior renovation of HEEP windows and walls is now scheduled for this year.

A special note that Cindy Miller is rapidly recovering from extensive spine surgery in Austin. We wish her well as she continues the recovery process.

Don’t forget to mark your calendars to participate in the Departmental Review on March 7-9. The faculty engagement will be primarily on Tuesday, but will also include Monday afternoon and Wednesday morning.
Departmental Accomplishments for 2015

The Soil and Crop Sciences Department refilled critical positions in Vernon (agronomist Emi Kimura and Curtis Adams), Lubbock (agronomist Seth Byrd), and College Station (soil fertility Jake Mowrer, rice genetics and breeding (Michael Thompson – Beachell Chair and Endang Septiningsih) with support from Central Administration. In addition, the Soils position vacated by the retirement of Dr. Frank Hons is in-process along with the expected arrival of Dr. Sakiko Okumoto in August as a plant physiologist (tenure track). The Butler and Beachell chairs were filled by Dr. Seth Murray and Michael Thompson respectively and the Borlaug chair is still being recruited.

It is important to note that all of the positions were part of our strategic planning process and while they may be filling a position vacated by someone, they have been redesigned to keep the department competitive. These hires are critical to move all the missions of the department forward in the coming years. We continue to be pleased with advances in our female and international faculty, but look for opportunities to enhance our Hispanic and Black minority faculty to match more with Texas population.

We continue to be pleased with the contributions to the department through the development work. The Bamert’s completed funding of their graduate agreement, and the Smith’s and Loreli Brown completed major gift agreements in 2015, but we have expectations that endowed funding could increase significantly going forward.

Overall departmental management seems to be moving with limited issues, but increasing compliance efforts stress our staff and may require additional staff to keep our federal grants, corporate efforts, teaching and daily activities as efficient as possible. We continue to see HUB suppliers for our ag inputs that will move us forward in a very positive manner.

It was an exciting year as we began renovation of the cotton and peanut research support buildings and completed the “begin” work orders for our turf facility. Greenhouse, growth chamber/room plans for the future were initiated and remodeling of Heep growth chambers is moving forward, but greenhouse activity slowed with limited funds.

Teaching

SCSC experienced a 24% increase in undergraduate enrollment between Spring 2014 and Fall 2015: 21% increase in our Plant and Environmental Soil Science (PSSC) BS degree, which is a combination of PSSC and our old Agronomy degree which was dropped with the 2013 catalogue, and a 32% increase for our new Turfgrass Science (TGSC) degree. Equally exciting is that we experienced a 53% increase in enrollment of underrepresented ethnicities with a 56% increase in students self-designating as Hispanic or Latino. Our number of Black students was essentially static with 6 enrolled in Spring 2014 and 5 in Fall 2015.

Our UG recruiter continues to spread the message among high school counselors, 4H and FFA leaders, but mostly targeting community colleges with the message that SCSC is a career outlet for students interested in the biological sciences. Our UG advisor has been active in recruiting within the General Studies population at Texas A&M (17 students changed majors to SCSC for Fall 2015, with most from GEST). We have 36 female and 132 male students.

We are also excited that this growth in enrollment has occurred concomitantly with the full implementation of our revised curriculum featuring more academic rigor and labs.

During this time frame, we have worked to reduce the number of students on academic probation. This past year, the University dismissed six SCSC students, the department dismissed another five, and two withdrew.

As of January 2016, we have only 18 of 168 students on probation with most no more than 10 points below non-probation status. We have established honors sections in SCSC 301, 302, 310, 405, 410, and 491. Additional high impact numbers were 13 students taking 491 research during the summer and fall of 2015, 35 conducting internships (most with 484 hours and most during the summer months), and 15 students taking study abroad during summer 2015 and spring 2016. Dr. Hague’s 305, Production Ag Experience, is identified as a HIP class that averages 10 students and involves considerable travel.

We are asking faculty to teach more and we are at capacity for multiple sections of 205, 301 (additional section added Fall 2015), 302, 405, 307, and 309 labs, and
at capacity for lecture only classes such as 444 (moved to our largest classroom Spring 2015), 455 (moved to 224 with 46 student capacity and we could not handle all who wanted to register), 458, 302 (R. Jessup teaches a web based section has 150 for spring 2016), 311, and 410.

The increase in teaching expectation with increased student numbers will eventually impact the amount and level of research that is expected for our campus faculty. This is a serious concern if SCSC is to continue to grow in enrollment and maintain its international reputation in quality research. Critical needs are renovation of labs for maximum utilization of existing space, and improvement of and expansion of our greenhouse and growth chamber facilities.

At the graduate level we have 117 total on campus graduate students, down from the recent high of 132 in 2010 when the Monsanto PhD Plant Breeding gift added 12 in the area of plant breeding. Demographically there are: 71 males: 46 female--54 MS: 63 PhD--26 AGRO: 25 SOSC: 40 PLBR: 26 IDP--77 domestic: 40 international.

Our graduate students have won national recognition at ASA, SSSA, CSSA, and Beltwide Cotton Conferences. Our PLBR graduate students initiated contact/proposal with DuPont Pioneer in 2014 and established the DuPont Pioneer Event Series Graduate Student Plant Breeding Symposium. The first event, in February 2015, was a huge success, and the second annual event is scheduled for February 2016. This event brought in renowned speakers from across the U.S. and attracted attendees from SHSU and TTU, as well as across campus and across the nation via webinar.

Our Distance Plant Breeding Program, the only such program in the U.S., continues to grow with 4 MS-NTO, 4 MS-TO, and 12 PHD Distance Plant Breeding Students across the globe. Seventeen of these students are SCSC and three are HRSC. Our Continuing Ed PLBR program had 73 individuals participating in 165 units (equals a SCH in academic terms) during calendar year 2015.

Our student clubs continue to flourish and this year was a great year with our first corn maze.

Extension

The SCSC Extension Unit continued to deliver high quality, impactful educational programs and materials to Texas agriculture and turf producers. This included 2,690 face-to-face educational activities and 35 interactive electronic events impacting 49,962 clientele with over 27,500 contact hours in direct support of county programs. Additional impact was also achieved through the delivery of over 500 extension publications, 149 popular press articles, 95 radio broadcasts, nearly 28,000 phone calls and emails, and 76 news releases.

Grants for 2015 totaling nearly $1 million dollars were secured by SCSC Extension faculty with over $740,000 going directly to Extension. Additionally, SCSC Extension faculty obtained $379,000 in cash gifts during 2015. The SCSC Extension Unit continues to deliver high quality educational programs related to barley, canola, corn, cotton, forages, grain sorghum, guar, oat, soybeans, sunflowers, turf, water quality, weed management, and wheat.

Program highlights for 2015 include:

Cotton Variety Trials: Results from the Texas Panhandle trial, demonstrated a 150% increase in lint yield, which could potentially increase regional cotton production by over 77,000 bales.

Forage Sorghum Silage Trial: The data generated by the AgriLife Forage Sorghum Silage trial provides producers with limited well valuable varietal information for silage options on approximately 400,000 silage acres. Because forage sorghums use approximately 50% less water than corn silage, adoption of quality forage sorghum silages can attribute to significant regional water savings (~2.4 million acre inches of water per year).

Turf: Launch of the new SCSC Extension Turf website. Has received great response.

Bennett Trust Ladies Conference: The SCSC Extension Unit manages the Bennett Trust endowment program delivering land stewardship programs related to the Edwards Plateau. For the inaugural Ladies Conference, a total of 152,446 acres were represented by the 82 attendees at the October program in Fredericksburg. An economic benefit due to attending of $3.42/acre was anticipated, for a total anticipated economic impact of $521,365.

Herbicide Resistance of Weeds: Several of our specialists continue to work on herbicide resistance in weeds and identify new methods of combating weed problems in crops.

The SCSC Extension Unit has hired outstanding young assistant professors/extension specialists over the past few years, with three hires during 2015. All new assistant professors are showing exceptional progress related to program...
and educational material development and grants acquisition. Funding related to the new cotton specialist position in Lubbock needs to be reviewed to ensure this position has adequate financial support for the first two years. The department is preparing a position description for the recently vacated state forage specialist position and anticipates filling this position by 2016 year end. Additionally, position descriptions have also been developed for two additional extension specialists; an agronomist to work in Northeast Texas and a soil scientist for South Texas.

Research

Utilization of sensors in agriculture is a rapidly increasing area of focus whether mounted to a UAV, ground based or greenhouse based. This effort was advanced rapidly thanks to the leadership of Dr. Seth Murray from our unit and an investment by AgriLife Research and now includes several of our faculty, including significant effort in soils and agronomy. We have rapidly moved to a world leader in this area and it will be the focus of significant grant activity in the coming year. It will also play a role in our proposed hires as we search for faculty to complement this effort.

Water remains a key priority of the department and we are excited to have new TWRI leadership to partner with in increasing the funding available in this area.

Our commodity breeding programs continue to have a large impact and with the recent hires we expect the rice program to increase. The wheat team continues to perform at an outstanding level, but is faced with the renewal with Bayer.

Our research program has been highly successful in translating our new trait technology into improved cultivars with increased royalty and licensing revenue. This year we had releases of Cotton: CA4003 and 4004 germlasm; Sorghum: Tx3408 and 3409 germlasm; and Zoysiagrass: KSUZ0802 cultivar. Our TAM wheats continue to perform at the most widely grown in the nation.

Grant funding was back to near our high levels even with ongoing reduction in corporate sponsorship for bioenergy, but federal competitive funding is up and opportunities in UAV and plant improvement bode well for the future.

We expect similar success in production agriculture related soils issues as we move into greater spatial capacity in the department in terms of understanding the underlying pedology and physics of soil variability and their application by farmers. We continue to grow in recognition as a leader in soil security, sustainable and reconstructed soils to complement our reclamation work, long term systems work and efforts in contaminated soils.

Turf research continues to move forward with the construction of a new research, teaching and extension facility on F&B Road.

SCSC faculty continue to lead across a broad range of service including Editor in Chief for all CSSA Journals, Geoderma and several associate editor roles. Dr. Bill Rooney was recognized as fellow of CSSA and Dr. Frank Hons received the SSSA education award. Cristine Morgan chaired the International Soil Security Conference. Dr. Larry Redmon and Dr. Bill Rooney were recognized as Regent Fellow and Professor, respectively, and Gaylon Morgan was recognized as outstanding cotton extension specialist. Diane Boellstorff was honored by ASA for publications more than 10p.

The “Good Housekeeping Award” Returns

The “Turf Crew” under the supervision of Bruce Vento have earned the Good Housekeeping Award for this month.

Dr. David Baltensperger named them for this award stating, “They have the plot areas picture perfect”.

Pictured are Justin Blum (L) and Nick Hoelscher. Also on the crew is Jed Smith.
SAVE THE DATE!

The Department of Soil and Crop Sciences is hosting a retirement dinner for

Dr. Frank Hons in celebration of his long, prosperous career here at Texas A&M and the impact his research has made worldwide.

February 26, 2016
Pebble Creek Country Club
6:30 p.m.
More information to follow

With our deepest Sympathy

Please keep Dennis Pietsch and his family in your thoughts and prayers as they mourn the loss of his mother Mrs. Helen Pietsch.

Dennis Pietsch’s mother (Helen Pietsch) went to be with her Lord the evening of January 21, 2016. Funeral services were held Monday, January 25th at 10 AM at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Warda, Texas.
Several members of our faculty and staff recently received Vice Chancellor’s Awards.

Congratulations to:

Dr. Sam Feagley, Award in Excellence for Teaching
Dr. Paul Baumann, Award in Excellence for Extension Specialist
Dr. David Baltensperger, Award in Excellence for Administration

The Lubbock Cropping Systems Research Team, including Dr. Wayne Keeling, Dr. Jane Dever
Award in Excellence for Team Collaboration

Dr. Jackie Rudd, Texas A&M Research Fellow
Awards in Excellence for Administration

COLLEGE STATION – Dr. David Baltensperger, head of the Texas A&M University department of soil and crop sciences in College Station, has received the Texas A&M AgriLife Vice Chancellor’s Award in Excellence for administration.

The Vice Chancellor’s Award in Excellence recognizes the commitment and outstanding contributions of faculty and staff across Texas A&M AgriLife. The award was presented Jan. 14 at the AgriLife Center on the Texas A&M campus in College Station.

Baltensperger has been department head since 2006 and served as interim head of the Ecosystem Science and Management department from 2012 to 2014.

During that time, he had administrative responsibilities over approximately 100 faculty on campus and within Texas A&M AgriLife Research and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service across the state, according to his nomination.

Faculty members deal with a wide range of issues, including crop improvement, production, genetics, crop physiology, agronomy, water quality, water microbiology and soil mineralogy.

Baltensperger is actively involved in all aspects of the department, from research to Extension to undergraduate and graduate education, said Dr. Sam Feagley, AgriLife Extension state soil environmental specialist in College Station, in his nomination. During his tenure, the department experienced stagnant or declining budgets and the loss of senior faculty through retirements, death and resignations.

“David has been a steadying influence on the department, constantly encouraging faculty, mentoring young and new faculty members, aggressively seeking cooperative support for our research, teaching and Extension programs, and advocating for our department with administration,” Feagley said.

“We have seen excellent growth in our department under David’s leadership with the number of statewide faculty increasing, undergraduate enrollment increasing, cooperative research and Extension support increasing, and endowments to the department increasing significantly.”

Feagley continued, “David truly believes that our mission alleviates poverty and hunger around the world by training plant breeding scientists who can apply that knowledge in developing improved crop cultivars. He has strengthened our AgriLife Extension programs by advocating and soliciting partnerships with different clientele groups and industries served by our state and regional specialists and program specialists across the state and nationally.”

Baltensperger promotes and participates in workshops that almost all of the AgriLife Extension state specialists coordinate, such as the Texas Weed Information Group, Ranch Management University, Turf Field Day, Turfgrass Short Course, Surface Mine Reclamation Workshop, Watershed Management, and Soil Survey and Land Resource Workshop as well as most research and Extension field days.

Baltensperger previously served the agricultural industry as professor at the University of Nebraska from 1989-2006, and as an assistant/associate professor of agronomy at the University of Florida from 1981-1986. He was a visiting scientist at Colorado State University in 1988.

Baltensperger is a member in a number of professional societies, including American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society, Wheat Industry Resource Council, Society of Range Management, and the American Forage and Grasslands Conference.

He has served on more than a dozen committees within Crop Science Society and the Agronomy Society. He served as president of the Crop Science Society of America in 2014, as well as president-elect and past president. For his service to the profession, he has received numerous awards and recognitions, including the prestigious Fellow recognition in the Crop Science Society and in the American Society of Agronomy.

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Dr. Paul Baumann, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service state weed specialist in College Station, has received the Texas A&M AgriLife Vice Chancellor’s Award in Excellence for AgriLife Extension specialists.

The Vice Chancellor’s Award in Excellence recognizes the commitment and outstanding contributions of faculty and staff across Texas A&M AgriLife. The award was presented Jan. 14 at the AgriLife Center on the Texas A&M University campus in College Station.

Baumann joined AgriLife Extension in 1989 and has devoted his career to addressing and solving weed management and environmental issues facing the agency’s stakeholders, according to the nomination made by Dr. David Baltensperger, head of the department of soil and crop sciences, where Baumann is also a professor.

Weed management issues in corn, sorghum, cotton, wheat, peanut, soybean, turfgrass and pasturelands have been solved through Baumann’s 1,465 research demonstrations over his career, Baltensperger said.

Data generated from these studies have provided the foundation for more than 1,300 educational programs, over 30 publications, graduate student training and consistent program financial support, he said.

“The level of this activity is testament to his prowess as an educator and that people want to hear what he has to say,” Baltensperger wrote. “He has garnered over $3.3 million in sole program support and collaborated on another $1.2 million-plus in financial support.

“With few exceptions, his support was confined to numerous small research grants targeted toward getting herbicides cleared for use and addressing specific, pernicious weed management problems.”

Specific challenges addressed by Baumann’s program include the potential loss of the herbicide atrazine; finding herbicides for consistent grassbur control and acceptable forage tolerance; and determining the value of jatropha as an oilseed biofuel.

Additionally, Baumann has partnered with other specialists to address the issue of glyphosate or Roundup-resistant weeds in Texas. He has written AgriLife Extension publications and conducted county meetings educating clientele and recommending solutions.

“Most importantly, he has developed solutions through several research trials that are now being adopted by our crop producers,” Baltensperger said.

Baumann has engaged with agencies and foundations such as the National Park Service, conducting weed surveys and providing recommendations for management in National Parks. Internationally, he has consulted for the Borlaug Institute in Guatemala and dairy farms in Mexico. He has also presented research papers on two visits to Germany and Mexico.

“The impact that Dr. Baumann continues to make on Texas agriculture and especially in the area of weed science can be seen across the many facets and faces in our industry,” wrote Eric Castner, DuPont Crop Protection regional development manager in a letter of support.

“I feel that one of Dr. Baumann’s greatest contributions lies in his ability and the enthusiastic manner in which he shares innovative solutions with the Texas farmer,” Castner wrote. “Dr. Baumann is a trusted resource for unbiased information as well as an advocate for the innovation and technology necessary to address the challenges we face in agriculture.”

Baumann earned his bachelor’s degree in plant and soil science from Missouri State University, his master’s in agronomy from Texas A&M and his doctorate in agronomy from Texas Tech University.

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Vice Chancellor’s Award in Excellence for Teaching

COLLEGE STATION – Dr. Sam Feagley, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service state soil environmental specialist in College Station, has received the Texas A&M AgriLife Vice Chancellor’s Award in Excellence for teaching.

The Vice Chancellor’s Award in Excellence recognizes the commitment and outstanding contributions of faculty and staff across Texas A&M AgriLife. The award was presented Jan. 14 at the AgriLife Center on the Texas A&M campus in College Station.

Feagley has been at Texas A&M in the soil and crop sciences department since 1995. With nine soil scientists retiring from 1999 to 2011, Feagley eventually moved from 100 percent AgriLife Extension to 75 percent teaching and 25 percent AgriLife Extension.

Feagley’s philosophy of teaching is that students are here to learn and it is his responsibility and passion to present learning opportunities in and out of the classroom and laboratory, said Dr. David Baltensperger, head of the Texas A&M department of soil and crop sciences in his nomination letter.

“Dr. Feagley's goal is for each student to learn and succeed at A&M and in their careers.”

Since 2000, he has taught about 1,275 students. Many former students have said his classes helped them obtain a job with an environmental firm and/or has helped them when working with state and federal guidelines, rules and regulations.

“Dr. Feagley has a passion for teaching, students and soil science,” Baltensperger said. “He wants students to be successful in class and in their careers. He is dedicated to this through his studies, interactions with students, interactions with state and federal agencies, and industries related to soil science, environmental sciences, remediation and reclamation.”

Student Daniel Hillin wrote in a letter of support, “When I attended his soil science class, to say that I had a rough time with it at first is putting it mildly. So I went to Dr. Feagley for help and he went out of his way to help me learn the vast amount of material that his class requires.”

Hillin said Feagley would come in the evenings to the soil lab to help students who were struggling with parts of his class.

“The sheer amount of work he puts into ensuring that each individual student understands the material at this level is not seen very often,” Hillin wrote. "His class was not easy, but he has a way of taking very difficult concepts and making them easier for all of us to understand. In addition, he would never give up on you or let you give up on yourself during any part of this process, no matter how painful it was.

“I consider myself a better student and a better person overall for having been able to know and learn from Dr. Feagley. I only hope that one day I will be able to fill his shoes as a fellow Aggie and uphold his legacy of excellence, integrity and selfless service.”

Feagley has been awarded the Special Achievement Award for Teaching in Soil and Crop Sciences, Outstanding Teacher in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Gamma Sigma Delta and Honor Professor Award in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

He is involved in several national societies, and has received the Soil Science Society of America Council of Soil Science Examiners Outstanding Service Award. He also was honored with that society's Irrometer Professional Certification Service Award and the American Society of Agronomy Fellow.

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Awards for Excellence - Team Collaboration

COLLEGE STATION – A team of Texas A&M AgriLife scientists at Lubbock has received a Texas A&M AgriLife Vice Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in the collaboration awards team category.

The Lubbock Cropping Systems Research Team, headquartered at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center, is comprised of Dr. Wayne Keeling, Texas A&M AgriLife Research professor-cropping systems and weed science; James Bordo-vsky, AgriLife Research senior research scientist; Dr. Terry Wheeler, AgriLife Research professor-plant pathology; Dr. Megha Parajulee, AgriLife Research professor, Faculty Fellow and Regents Fellow-cotton entomology; Dr. Jason Woodward, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service plant pathologist, and Dr. Jane Dever, AgriLife Research professor-cotton breeding.

The honor was presented Jan. 14 during the 2016 the Vice Chancellor’s Awards in Excellence Ceremony in College Station.

Dr. Jaroy Moore, the center’s resident director of research, wrote in his letter of nomination that the team was assembled to address the unique crop-production challenges producers face on the Texas High Plains. Their objective has been to address important cotton production decision-making issues at the farm level. The overall goal has been to assure the profitability and future viability of cotton production in the Texas High Plains.

Moore wrote that the team has successfully partnered with Lamesa Cotton growers in utilizing their 160-acre farm for long-term research for over two decades. The partnership has allowed the scientists to expand their research from the small-plot level to larger scale experiments to demonstrate the outcomes to farmers. The team’s success led to the establishment of the Helms Farm in Hale County in 1999 and to the 2008 purchase of additional land and the installation of 22 acres of drip irrigation in Hale County.

“The producer-led initiatives in securing these research sites indicate producers’ enthusiasm and confidence in our scientists working as a team to provide additionally sound and economically viable production systems,” Moore wrote.

A few of the team’s notable achievements Moore cited, included a recent four-year study that showed limiting early season cotton irrigation could potentially reduce annual water requirements by more than 27 million gallons of water per year on the High Plains with only a relatively small decline in lint yield. He also noted their work to increase sustainable yield and quality of cotton, their work with new root-knot nematode resistant cotton varieties and a six-year Lygus bug damage study.

“I strongly believe that this team has been the most cohesive and productive group of scientists who exemplify the value of team research,” Moore concluded.

The Vice Chancellor’s Awards in Excellence were established in 1980 to recognize the commitment and outstanding contributions of Texas A&M AgriLife faculty, students and staff statewide.
Texas A&M AgriLife Research Faculty Fellow

COLLEGE STATION – Dr. Jackie Rudd, Regents Fellow and Texas A&M AgriLife Research wheat breeder in Amarillo, has been named a 2016 Faculty Fellow by AgriLife Research.

AgriLife Research established the Faculty Fellows Program in 1998 to acknowledge and reward exceptional research faculty within the agency.

“Dr. Rudd heads the renowned Texas A&M AgriLife hard winter wheat breeding program for the High Plains and Rolling Plains of Texas,” according to the award presentation. “Called the best U.S. wheat breeder in our modern time, he is said to have changed the landscape of the Texas wheat industry.”

Since arriving in Amarillo from South Dakota State University in 2001 as an associate professor of wheat breeding, Rudd has provided extraordinary leadership to the statewide wheat breeding program through varietal development and releases, according to his nomination.

He was promoted to professor of wheat breeding at AgriLife Research-Amarillo and in the Texas A&M soil and crop sciences department in 2009, and has developed the vision for the statewide wheat breeding and genetics program.

The first wheat cultivars released under his tenure at AgriLife Research were TAM 111 in 2003 and TAM 112 in 2005. Gaining rapid popularity with wheat producers, these currently are the predominant varieties grown in Texas and western Kansas, according to the nomination.

Rudd has said drought tolerance, stripe rust resistance, greenbug resistance, wheat streak mosaic virus tolerance, high yield and excellent bread-making quality are some of the reasons for this high rate of adoption.

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service conducted an economic impact study in 2009 and concluded that the adoption of higher yielding wheat varieties resulted in an increase in net returns for growers in Texas of $20.2 million.

Since that study, new varieties that have been licensed and will begin to show adoption in the next few years are TAM 203, TAM 304, TAM 401 and TAM 113.

Rudd’s program has also gained recognition in wheat genetics and genomics, and his team’s research has led to collaboration with Bayer CropScience. He is involved with growers, seedsmen, and the milling and baking industries, and he travels worldwide representing the U.S. wheat industry.

He was named a Texas A&M Regents Fellow in 2013. The Texas Wheat Producers Board and Association named him the “2010 Wheat Man of the Year,” and the TAM varieties he helped develop were recognized as the highest quality wheat in 2007 with the Wheat Quality Council “Best of Show” award.

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Congratulations to our 2015 Departmental Award Recipients!!

BB Singh Award for Outstanding Achievement
by Non-Academic Support Staff
Kelli Norman

Administrative Support
LeAnn Hague

Administrative Support
Linda Francis

Extension Specialist Award
Dr. Diane Boellstorff

Research Faculty Award
Dr. Nithya Rajan

Graduate Research Award
Silvano Ocheya
Graduate Teaching Award
Keya Howard

Research Support - Field Award
Daniel Hathcoat

Teaching Award
Dr. Joseph Awika

Technical Staff Support - Field
Kirk Jessup

Special Service Award
Rio Farms - accepted by Matt Klostermann
Technical Staff Support - Laboratory
Ruth Maddox

Undergraduate Student Support
Kimberly Nutter

Longevity Award - 35 Years
Dr. James Heilman

Longevity Award - 50 Years
Dr. Lloyd Rooney

Certificate of Appreciation - Retiring after 37 years: Dr. Frank Hons

Not Pictured are: Fr. Chor Tee Tan who received the award for Research Collaboration and Corrie Bowen, who received the Collaborating County Agent Award
The Aggie Turf Club meets every other Wednesday during the semester from 5-6:30 pm in 440 Heep. Anyone with interest in learning more about turfgrass or opportunities in the turfgrass/landscape/green industry is invited to attend.

During the spring, the club hosts guest speakers from various facets of the turf and landscape industry.

Some of our scheduled speakers this semester include:
Matt Cimino, Senior Technical Advisor with Intelligro (2/17)
Tim Schnabel- Owner of AggieLand Green Lawn care (3/9)
Kenneth Cook- CEO of WaterCentric (3/23)
and Ricky Heine- GM at Star Ranch Golf Club (4/6)

The Turf Club has several travel opportunities planned for this spring.
These experiences offer our students a great opportunity to network with other students, engage prospective employers, learn about new advances in the industry, attend educational sessions, and compete in the turf bowl competitions.

We will be sending four students to San Diego, CA, to participate in the Golf Industry Show this month, and also making plans to send a group of students to volunteer at the PGA World Golf Championships, held at Austin Country Club in March.
TAMU Soil Judging Team

The Fighting Texas Aggie Soil Judging Team is preparing for the 2016 National Collegiate Soil Judging Competition. The contest will be hosted by Kansas State, April 2-8.

The team, under the supervision of Dr. Cristine Morgan, qualified for nationals last October after finishing second in the regional competition.

This is the team’s first trip to nationals since the 2013 contest, held in Platteville, Wisconsin, where they placed 23rd overall.

Contact Info: Dr. Cristine Morgan - cmorgan@tamu.edu or Michael Bartmess - Mikeb284@tamu.edu

Mill Creek Watershed Protection Plan to be Finalized

BLEIBLERVILLE — The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service will hold a meeting of the Mill Creek Watershed Partnership on Feb. 29 to finalize the Mill Creek Watershed Protection Plan, coordinators said.

The meeting, which is open to the public, will be held at the Bleiblerville Volunteer Fire Department, 3342 Farm-to-Market Road 2502, Bleiblerville. Registration and refreshments will start at 5:30 p.m., with presentations from 6-8 p.m.

The agenda includes discussion on proposed changes to the plan aimed at meeting Environmental Protection Agency guidelines as well as an update on the status of implementation efforts. A facilitated group discussion regarding these topics will be held to gather stakeholder input and affirm proposed edits to the plan.

According to Galen Roberts, AgriLife Extension water quality program specialist, College Station, making changes to the plan as suggested by the EPA will result in the acceptance of the plan by EPA and make plan eligible for federal Clean Water Act grant funds.

The Mill Creek Watershed plan is non-regulatory and will use best management practices to restore and protect the creek.

For more information, go to http://millcreek.tamu.edu/ or Contact:
Travis Gonzales, AgriLife Extension agent for Austin County, at 979-865-2072 or Travis.Gonzales@ag.tamu.edu, or Kara Matheney, AgriLife Extension agent for Washington County, at 979-277-6212 or kjmatheney@ag.tamu.edu.

To read Paul Schattenberg’s entire article Click Here
Nelson to be honored with turfgrass association’s 2015 Breeders Cup

CREDIT: PHOTO BY JASON CLARK, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY─COLLEGE STATION

COLLEGE STATION – Dr. Lloyd Nelson, Texas A&M AgriLife Research ryegrass and turfgrass breeder, will be awarded the 2015 Breeders Cup by the Turfgrass Breeders Association during their meeting Feb. 10 in San Diego, California.

Nelson is being recognized for his development of the Panterra ryegrass variety, a turf-type annual ryegrass that was developed specifically for winter overseeding of warm-season grasses on athletic fields and home lawns.

Nelson said to receive the selective award was certainly an honor, especially for someone who started with AgriLife Research almost 40 years ago as a small grains breeder in Overton. It wasn’t until half way through his career that he began selecting for turfgrass, in his ryegrass breeding program.

Nelson, a Texas A&M Regent’s Fellow and Fellow in both the Crop Science Society of America and the American Society of Agronomy, is a native of Cumberland, Wisconsin. He earned his bachelor’s degree at Wisconsin State University at River Falls, Wisconsin; his master’s degree at North Dakota State University in Fargo; and his doctorate at Mississippi State University.

He began working with Texas A&M AgriLife Research in Overton in 1976 as the wheat and forage breeder. He moved to College Station about five years ago, shortly before retiring in 2011 and assuming the professor emeritus status.

“Over the years, as we made crosses of ryegrass forage varieties, I saw the small plants and always discarded them. But one year I decided to select some of the smallest and cross-pollenate them,” Nelson said. “I planted them in a forage trial, and it was much smaller and dwarfer than the forages.”

After visiting with AgriLife Research’s turfgrass breeder at the time, Dr. Milt Engelke, they decided it had potential as a turfgrass. From 1995 to 2000, Nelson made selections of these dwarf ryegrasses and finally released Axcella, a turfgrass that had all the benefits of traditional winter ryegrasses, but none of the disadvantages.

He continued to cross and reselect for dwarf characteristics, darker green color and high turf qualities over the years until Panterra was released by AgriLife Research in 2003.

Nelson said Panterra’s major advantages were its dwarf growth habit, rapid germination, good green color and ability to transition out as an annual or in mid-May in Texas.

“It provides green turf all winter while the warm-season grasses go dormant, but then finishes its lifecycle as the warm-season grass begins to green up again,” he said. “That was one of its major advantages, it dying out and not having to be chemically treated to kill it off and prevent damage to the emerging warm-season turfs.”

Panterra’s rapid germination was demonstrated on an Alaskan football field where a high quality turf was useable in only 14 days after seeding, Nelson said. It has been used on Kyle Field at Texas A&M University, as well as St. Louis Cardinal and Pittsburg Steeler practice fields, and at the World Cup Soccer Games in South Africa and Brazil.

Panterra was licensed by Barenbrug, USA, with its major marketing effort in the early 2000s. Depending on the year, Nelson said about 5 million pounds of seed are still produced annually in the Willamette Valley in Oregon and sold worldwide.
NEW ORLEANS – Dr. Gaylon Morgan, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service state cotton specialist, was recently recognized as the 2016 Extension Cotton Specialist of the Year by Bayer at the 2016 Beltwide Cotton Conference in New Orleans.

The prestigious award is voted on annually by Extension cotton specialists who represent every cotton-producing state across the U.S. Cotton Belt, according to Bayer officials. Each year, the recipient’s peers evaluate and select a winner based on a number of considerations including exceptional leadership and outstanding industry service.

Morgan earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in agronomy from Texas A&M University, and his doctorate in horticulture/plant pathology from the University of Wisconsin. He began working in AgriLife Extension in 2003 as an assistant professor in the department of soil and crop sciences and as the AgriLife Extension state small grains specialist. He was named the state cotton specialist in 2009.

As the state cotton specialist, Morgan is involved in multi-disciplinary fields of research pertaining to cotton production as well as the practical implementation of those scientific advances to the field in the largest cotton production state in the U.S.

“At Bayer, we have the privilege to work with some of the brightest and most dedicated individuals in the cotton industry,” said Steve Nichols, head of Agronomic Services for Bayer in a press release. “Dr. Gaylon Morgan represents the very best of scientists involved in U.S. cotton research and outreach.

“He is a standard-bearer of the partnership between science and industry, with the mutual goal to preserve the viability of the U.S. cotton industry today while simultaneously laying the groundwork for future excellence. His dedication to parlaying that scientific knowledge and experience to the grower is a critical component to the continued success of our industry.”

Morgan leads the award-winning Replicated Agronomic Cotton Evaluation, or RACE, trials, which are a collaborative effort among private seed companies; local, regional and state AgriLife Extension personnel; and local cooperators.

He also maintains the cotton website, http://cotton.tamu.edu/, which provides rapid access to a large quantity of information pertaining to cotton production systems.
Chase Vasbinder, who is working on his MS in Agronomy, recently received first place on both his poster and presentation in the Cotton Agronomy and Physiology category at the Beltwide Cotton Conference in New Orleans.

Vasbinder, who works under Dr. Gaylon Morgan, earned his BS in Agronomy from A&M in 2013. His primary research is to determine the application method and rate for potassium that will optimize cotton yield and fiber quality in the Texas Blacklands and coastal plains regions.

Lorin Harvey, a Master student since 2014, created the first place Cotton Improvement poster at the Beltwide Cotton Conference.

Harvey, who works with Dr. Steve Hague, earned his Bachelors in Agronomy from Iowa State University in 2014.

His poster was titled the “Molecular Mapping of Yield Component Traits Using an Ultra-High-Density SNP Genetic Map of Cultivated Tetraploid Cotton”.

Through his research using pre-existing genotypic information and five years of phenotypic data collected from several locations nationwide, Harvey has identified 44 QTLs related to lint percent and seed index.

Dr. Matt Elmore helped John Walter Ayers celebrate his 100th birthday in January.

Ayers is the Soil and Crop Sciences Department’s oldest living graduate.

“John appreciated the card and the visit from A&M”, Elmore stated. “Among all of his kids and grandkids, somehow he and I were the only Aggies in the room.”
Eight members of the Agronomy Club attended the Students of Agronomy, Soils, and Environmental Sciences meetings in Minneapolis, MN on November 13-16. Club members participated in numerous professional development activities and competitions including the Quiz Bowl, in which the club won 1st place. Quiz Bowl team members (pictured above) were: Matt Killian, James Lenart, Kayla Howard, and Matthew Wilhelm. Congratulations!!

The Agronomy Club meets every other Tuesday at 5:30 in Heep Center 440. Next meeting - Feb. 9th

Rice Breeders Rally to Design Better Varieties

For the scientists who spend a lifetime figuring out ways to create new varieties to feed more people, weird weather and market movements are welcomed for the lessons they teach.

That was the message recently when about 40 rice breeders from four states converged at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Beaumont to compare notes about the most recent growing season and what promising varieties might be emerging from their programs.

“Every time a new variety of rice gets released by a breeder, it has gone through a gauntlet basically of having been grown multiple years in multiple locations to see how well it performs,” said Dr. Ted Wilson, center director at Beaumont. “It’s a process of weeding out those varieties that are likely going to have problems somewhere down the road because of grain quality, because the yield is just not quite there, or because disease resistance is not high enough.”

“By exchanging information, rice breeders learn similarities and dissimilarities and that helps explain what and why things went wrong or what and why things went quite well.” Wilson said.

Wilson told the rice scientists at the meeting that the trend among Texas growers is moving more toward planting hybrid varieties, which have only been available for little more than 10 years.

“The fact of the matter is that maybe in some situations the genetics is more important and in some situations management is more important,” he added. “What is really important is that both of them are needed to make rice production profitable anywhere in the world.”

Dr. Ted Wilson, Director Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center-Beaumont
After many years of discussion, planning and paperwork, the groundwork has begun for the Scotts Miracle-Gro® Lawn and Garden Research Facility on F&B Road in College Station.

Two buildings will be erected on the property near the Equine Center. The facility already includes infrastructure to study surface water runoff and a variety of research plots built during Phase I of the project.

The headquarters will house offices for the technical support staff, faculty and graduate students, a laboratory and a conference room for classes and educational workshops.

“The conference room will seat about 75 people which will be great for short-courses and seminars”, stated Dr. Richard White, Turfgrass Science professor and team leader.

The second building will be for the maintenance and storage of equipment; and the storage of fertilizer, irrigation supplies, tools, plot signage and product inventory.

It has been nearly six years since the original “ground-breaking” ceremony for the facility, which is now expected to be finished by mid-November of this year.

“This building will allow us to better support research activities and and provide top notch educational programs,” White stated.

The renewal of a Master Research Agreement between Texas A&M AgriLife and the Scotts Company LLC, and the initiation of a Master Service Agreement will continue a strong partnership that will benefit A&M students, the turfgrass industry, turfgrass professionals and the environment.
Watershed planning efforts continue for Navasota River

The Texas Water Resources Institute, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board are hosting two watershed meetings on February 18, for anyone interested in improving and protecting water quality in the Navasota River and its watershed downstream of Lake Limestone.

The first meeting will be from 1:30–3:30 p.m. at the Carters Creek Wastewater Treatment Facility Meeting Room, 2200 N. Forest Parkway, College Station. Registration begins at 1 p.m.

The second meeting will be from 6:30–8:30 p.m., that evening at the Franklin Room at Pridgeon Community Center, 351 Cooks Lane, Franklin. Registration begins at 6 p.m.

Homeowners, landowners, business owners and city and county officials are invited to attend either meeting, said Lucas Gregory, Texas Water Resources Institute project specialist, College Station.

“At the meetings, attendees can take part in discussions on planning efforts to improve and protect water quality in the Navasota River and its watershed,” Gregory said.

He said since 2002 the river and several tributaries downstream of Lake Limestone have been considered impaired due to elevated levels of bacteria. In response, an effort to create a locally developed plan to improve and protect water quality is now underway.

To read entire article click here

For more information, go to http://navasota.tamu.edu or contact Gregory at 979-845-7869 or lfgregory@ag.tamu.edu.

Welcome to the Department!

Two new faces have joined the faculty in Lubbock

Brendan Kelly is an Assistant Professor and Extension Cotton Fiber Specialist whose appointment is 25% TAMU 75% Texas Tech.

He received his PhD in Plant and Soil Science from Texas Tech University in 2014.

Seth Byrd is an Assistant Professor and Extension Plains Cotton Specialist. His appointment is 100% Extension.

Seth received his PhD in Crop and Soil Science from the University of Georgia in 2015.
Team Award for the Texas Well Owner Network

Dr. Diane Boellstorff, Dr. Drew Gholson and Dr. John Smith are all part the Texas Well Owner Network which received a Superior Service Award in the Team Catagory from the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service during the Extension Conference in January.

Superior Service Awards recognize AgriLife Extension faculty and staff members who provide outstanding performance in Extension education and service.

According to Dr. Boellstorff, the three SCSC faculty members partner with TWRI (Texas Water Resource Institute) to receive funding from EPA through the TSSWCB to provide the Texas Well Owner Network programs across the state.

The Texas Well Owner Network helps landowners manage and protect the quality of water in their private wells.

To read Paul Schattenberg's entire story  

Calendar

February
2 - 5 - SRM Meeting
4 - East Texas Turfgrass Conference - Overton
   Contact: Dr. Randy Reeves dr-reeves@tamu.edu
5 - 24th Annual Gulf Coast Grape Grower Field Day - Cat Spring
   Contact: Dr. Justin Schneider jscheiner@tamu.edu
7-9 - Southern Regional Branch of ASA - San Antonio
15-16 - Department Heads’ Retreat
18 - Plant Breeding Symposium Texas A&M Memorial Student Center
   Contact: http://plantbreedingsymposium.com/
18 - Navasota River Watershed Meetings
   Contact: http://navasota.tamu.edu/
26 - Frank Hons Retirement Party - Pebble Creek Country Club
29 - Mill Creek Watershed Partnership Meeting
   More Info: http://millcreek.tamu.edu/

March
6-9 - APR Review  (Faculty are encouraged to attend!)
14-18 - Spring Break