Soil moisture is rapidly approaching a level to encourage field work that has been much delayed. We encourage extra caution as we approach long hours with heavy equipment and travel to make up for these delays.

Congratulations to Dr. Morgan on the success of the Global Soil Security Symposium. It proved to be an extremely stimulating conference with many ideas across a diverse array of speakers. Texas A&M faculty and students lead the charge for exploring many ideas on how to improve our management practices world-wide, and set in place a system that values our soil.

I had the opportunity to host the National Plant Germplasm Coordinating Committee this week and appreciate all who presented a portion of A&M efforts in this arena. It was a real opportunity to highlight both our ARS collaborations and our breeding/genetic efforts across many crops. I serve as the liaison from NAPB on this committee.

I had a great trip to Madison for the CSSA board meeting. It was an opportunity to focus on the strategic plan for CSSA and to handle more immediate issues. We continue to evaluate how to develop a long term financial model that will support the many member services provided.

We were active this month in meeting with several companies to discuss future collaboration including many aspects of research within our department. These programs vary from continuing long term relationships to developing new ideas. A special thanks to those that work so hard to make these visits a success.

This newsletter is coming early as Lauren is leaving for a new position and wanted to make sure our news was up to date as she headed out. Thanks to her for the newsletter efforts and her many other efforts on behalf of communicating the impact of our department.

Pre planning for our review process will be in full force through several venues in the coming weeks, including the annual Soils Critique scheduled for June 16-17, hosted by Anil Somenahally at Overton. Turf will also be planning as part of the Texas Turfgrass Association meeting on July 19-21, and Paul Baumann is coordinating TWIG meeting for October 1-2, 2015. Team leaders will be providing additional discussion and work times in the near future.
Howdy everyone! It has been my greatest pleasure to serve the Soil and Crop Sciences Department as your Communications Specialist for the past two years. This department is full of so many inspiring people. I’m extremely grateful I had the opportunity to work alongside and learn from many of you during my time here. I truly believe this department is paving the way in exemplary leadership, research, and outreach for Texas A&M University, Texas A&M AgriLife, and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The Soil and Crop Sciences Department is changing the world for the better and impacting people’s lives on a daily basis. I feel very fortunate I was able to play a part in communicating this message, and our department’s many accomplishments, to the public.

A special thank you to my supervisor, Jim Lukeman, and to Dr. Baltensperger, for hiring me in 2013; and for their patience and wisdom as I grew into my role here. Their guidance helped me advance both professionally and personally. I am thankful I was able to work under such great managers.

I will be moving into my new position as Marketing Assistant with the Texas A&M Health Science Center on June 8th. I am excited about my new role and will take many of the skills I developed here with me. The people in this department have all touched my life in some way, and I will miss all of you so much! Leaving SCSC was not an easy decision because of the lasting friendships I made with the faculty, staff, and Extension agents.

I don’t intend to disappear and will be sure to keep in touch. The HSC is not far away, so expect me to pop in for a visit every now and then! My new email is ltthompson@tamhsc.edu. Please shoot me an email if you have any questions or if you just want to say hello! I hope I will still hear from y’all after I leave :) I may also be reached at my personal email: lauren.thompson2011@gmail.com.

Thank you so much to everyone for your time, friendship, and laughter these past two years. I wish all of y’all and Soil and Crop Sciences the very best! I can’t wait to hear about your future accomplishments!
Sympathy

Please keep Jane Dever and her family in your prayers. Her father, John Edward Kveton, passed away on May 29th. Jane is a faculty member based in Lubbock.

John Edward Kveton was born on the family farm near Abernathy, Texas on November 15, 1930. He was the fifth of six children of Fred and Mary Kveton, who emigrated to Texas from Moravia (Czech Republic) in the early years of the twentieth century. He died peacefully surrounded by family and other loved ones on May 29, 2015.

John graduated as valedictorian of the New Deal High School class of 1948. He and Mr. Faubion ran the school. He enlisted in the army in 1950 and was stationed in El Paso, Texas. He married the love of his life, Jean Kitten, on January 26, 1954. He spent one semester at Texas Tech studying physics but then decided to follow his father and older brothers and become a farmer. John and Jean were founding members of Saint Isidore Catholic Church in Abernathy, Texas.

Farmer John was Superman. His family believed that he was the strongest, smartest, hardest-working, best farmer on the South Plains. He traveled the world with Mama Jean. And before that, he brought the world to his farm. He and Mama Jean raised a brood of overachievers, helped put 23 kids through college, fed countless people, made folks laugh every day, and accumulated an amazingly diverse tribe of an extended family over the decades. In 2008, John Kveton was named Father of the Year by the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal.

Please keep Glenda Kurten and her family in your thoughts and prayers. Glenda’s father, Oscar “Mickey” Christensen, 93, passed away on May 27th. Glenda is an Administrative Coordinator in the Instruction Office.

Oscar V. “Mickey” Christensen, 93, of Danevang passed away on May 27th, 2015. He was born in Danevang on October 31, 1921 to the late Christian J. and Marie Jensen Christensen. Mickey was a farmer/rancher and the owner of OK Farms. He was an active member of Danevang Lutheran Church where he served as president and treasurer. He was also a member of Danevang Farmers Co-op and served as president, the WCEC Board where he served as treasurer, Tidehaven School Board, Community ASC, Cen-Tex Oil Board, Gulf Marketing Board, Danevang Historical Preservation Society where he served as president and treasurer, and he was a U.S. weather man.
Congratulations to **Muthu Bagavathiannan** and his wife, Nithya Subramanian, on the arrival of their son: Aadhav Bagavathiannan. Aadhav was delivered at St. Joseph’s hospital in Bryan on April 29, and weighed 6lbs 9 oz. Muthu said that mom and baby are doing fine!

Congratulations to **Charles Fontanier** and his wife on the arrival of their son, Avery! He was born on April 20, 2015.

Congratulations to **Matt Brown** and his wife on the arrival of their baby girl! Allie Brown was born at 10:20 p.m. on April 15. Matt is a program specialist under Dr. Redmon.
Dr. Terry Gentry and Dr. Steve Hague recently traveled to the new Hacienda Santa Clara Center near San Miguel de Allende. The purpose of their trip was to develop teaching and research programs for our department in Mexico.

During their trip, they met with faculty from the Universidad of Guanajuato, toured a vegetable canning factory, and visited one of the Mexico’s largest vegetable farms. Dr. Hague will be leading an undergraduate study abroad group to the area this summer, and plans are to substantially expand the teaching program by the summer of 2016.
Soil scientists, researchers and foundations are working to draw attention to long-term global soil security challenges and to encourage producers to implement practices that reduce soil erosion and improve water quality.

Texas A&M University hosted the Global Soil Security Symposium this week to highlight the importance of protecting the productivity of global soils. The United Nations has designated 2015 as the International Year of Soils and the conference included speakers from 10 countries reporting on the state of global soils.

“I firmly believe a global approach to soil health is needed for our well-being,” said Michael Jeffery, Australia’s national advocate for soil health. Jeffery and others hope global soil security becomes the focal point later this year when world leaders meet in France to discuss how to deal with greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

Soil security revolves around main themes that are becoming more central to American agricultural productivity. Global population continues to grow, which is driving demand for more food. Yet the amount of arable land is shrinking by an average of 1% globally every year. In the U.S., about 41 million acres of rural land has been lost to urban sprawl over the last 30 years; approximately 14 million of those acres were considered prime crop land. Soil erosion remains a problem for farmers facing hotter temperatures and more weather volatility as climate changes.

The conference’s lead organizer, Christine Morgan, a soil science professor at Texas A&M, noted a wide range of people are becoming more interested in soil health, but there are questions about how the topic continues to advance. She thinks grassroots efforts to protect soils are going to improve as farmers and landowners see more measurable reasons for management decisions oriented around improving soil health. She pointed to efforts such as Field to Market that are coalescing various groups around soil health.

“That’s where the biggest advances are going to happen,” she said.

Morgan noted scientists know what needs to be done. She believes work revolving around soil health will expand on the farm as people are rewarded for those practices.

Morgan added, “I’m hoping we make changes before a big catastrophe occurs.”

Deputy Chief of Science and Technology at USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service Wayne Honeycutt noted the need to increase crop productivity also translates into greater demand for water. That requires boosting water-holding capacity of soils.

There is a nexus between soil health, water demands and water quality. Nationally, 78% of streams and rivers are classified as in fair or poor condition. When the carbon content in soil is increased, the water-holding capacity of the soil also increases. Most studies show that one of the best ways to increase carbon content is to reduce or eliminate soil tillage.

“When we can say with pretty good assurance that we know how to increase the carbon in the soil,” Honeycutt said.

No-till, combined with cover crops, builds resiliency in the cropping system. Honeycutt pointed to a survey following the 2012 drought showing corn farmers who grew cover crops produced an average of 114 bushels per acre compared to 103 bpa among those who did not.

NRCS has put greater emphasis on soil health in the last couple of years. The agency is developing a new soil health division headed by Bianca Moebius-Clune. She came out of academia, having spent 11 years at Cornell University where Moebius-Clune worked on the Adapt-N nitrogen management strategy for corn that has been embraced by some major seed and agronomy companies.

The soil health strategy at USDA highlights four basic management principles: minimize soil disturbance;
maximize diversity of plants, inputs and animals; keep the soil covered; and maximize living roots.

“We know that it’s really critical to incentivize our farmers to put these better management practices on the ground,” Moebius-Clune said.

Moebius-Clune acknowledged there are regions and systems where producers cannot go all the way to no-till or it may not be economical to do that. But minimizing disturbance is a critical component of improving soil health, as well as keeping a shield on that soil, she said.

“The devil is in the details, but we need to keep our soils covered is the principle,” she said.

NRCS is hiring and reassigning staff to create a soil-health division of 20 people who will be spread around the country and work with various state staffs.

One potential incentive is to offer a crop-insurance discount for soil-health practices. The Natural Resources Defense Council is in the initial stages of proposing a pilot project in as many as 30 states to provide discounts on crop insurance to farmers who plant cover crops. NRDC has hired an actuarial firm to look at the situation before putting together a proposal for USDA’s Risk Management Agency to consider.

“Our idea is to do what we call a ‘good-driver discount’ in our analogy,” said Lara Bryant, who works on agricultural issues for NRDC. “This could be implemented over the next three years and we are in the very beginning stages.”

Paul Smith, a policy analyst with the Ontario, Canada, Ministry of Agriculture, said the economic rationale for implementing better conservation practices has to be at the center of the discussion.

“This is a fundamental argument to a farmer, ask why I should make these investments,” Smith said. “If it makes sense from an economic point of view and from a soil health point of view, the arguments against it begin to fall away.”

Thus, there’s a growing understanding that the value of soil health needs to have some dollar benefits to go along with the conservation argument. Chuck Benbrook, a consultant on the Soil Renaissance project, noted there is essentially no dollar value given to measuring the economic benefits of soil-health practices.

This has got to change in order to bring the kind of investment capital into the area that we all recognize is badly needed,” Benbrook said.

Bill Buckner, president and CEO of the Noble Foundation, is spearheading the Soil Renaissance effort and looking to broaden that initiative. Noble recently announced a partnership with Texas A&M to form the Center for Private Lands Stewardship. Buckner stressed that efforts around soil health need to embrace a form of “free-market environmentalism” that avoids increased regulation of farmers.

“They shouldn’t be told what to do, and at all cost, we must avoid government intervention and regulations,” Buckner said.

Buckner instead wants the Soil Renaissance project to focus on helping farmers see the economic opportunities as well as identifying gaps in research that will expand conservation in agriculture. Asked to summarize his perspective on the three-day conference, Buckner said scientists need help explaining the importance of the mission.

“There’s a collective understanding of the challenges that we have communicating up and down the line from international, national, state and local levels on health of our soils in this context around the world,” Buckner said. “But there’s also a lot of passion and understanding about the state of soil health, but we lack standards globally. We have a lot of work to do to elevate that, and it’s going to take a collective effort in research to verify, and data management. We heard a lot here that managing all of this data is going to be challenging.”

People don’t want to ring alarm bells because soils can be improved and protected if the work is put into it, Buckner said.

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# Calendar

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 6</td>
<td>Dallas Turf Field Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 9</td>
<td>Faculty Meeting - 10 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 15</td>
<td>Seminar - Candidate for the Assistant Professor &amp; Extension Specialist in Nutrient &amp; Water Resource Management - 9 a.m. - Heep 440</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 16</td>
<td>Stiles Farm Field Day</td>
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<td>June 16-17</td>
<td>Soils Critique</td>
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<td>June 19</td>
<td>Seminar - Vernon Asst. Professor/Cropping Systems Agronomist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug. 5-7</td>
<td>Faculty Retreat</td>
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**Dr. Srirama Krishna Reddy**, Texas A&M AgriLife Research assistant research scientist in Amarillo, shows off an early version of his walk-behind phenotyper.