

AG SCIENCES 2009

A Monthly Newsletter for the College of Agricultural Sciences

July 2009

News in Brief

Webinars on natural gas issues

The college and Cooperative Extension are offering monthly online seminars this summer addressing impacts of natural gas extraction from the Marcellus shale in Pennsylvania.

The one-hour “webinars” are designed to help communities and local leaders prepare for the potential impacts of gas exploration and development. They will be held at 1 p.m. on July 23, Aug. 27, Sept. 17. Information about how to register is available at <http://naturalgas.extension.psu.edu/Events.htm>. For more information, contact Joann Kowalski at (570) 278-1158 or by e-mail at jmk20@psu.edu.

To read more, go to <http://live.psu.edu/story/40169>.

Emerald ash borer surveys

Several state and federal agencies, in collaboration with Cooperative Extension, are on the lookout this summer for the emerald ash borer, a small beetle that is deadly to ash trees.

Survey crews will conduct searches around the five, core emerald-ash-borer-infested counties of Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, Lawrence and Mercer through August. The western counties of Armstrong, Cambria, Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Fayette, Forest, Greene, Indiana, Jefferson, Somerset, Venango, Warren, Washington and Westmoreland will also be a part of this survey, as well as Mifflin and surrounding counties in the central part of the state. Emerald ash borers were discovered in Mifflin County last February.

To detect the presence of emerald ash borers, survey crews have hung purple-panel, sticky traps in trees.

To read more, go to <http://live.psu.edu/story/40063>.

Polish Ag Minister Visits Creamery



▲ Berkey Creamery manager Thomas Palchak (left) gave Polish Minister of Agriculture Marek Sawicki a tour of the facility in late June.

Visitors to the Berkey Creamery for a cone of the university’s celebrated ice cream June 17 also got a taste of international diplomacy, as representatives of Poland’s Ministry of Agriculture came to the University Park campus for a visit that acknowledged Penn State Cooperative Extension’s contributions to that nation’s agriculture.

Polish Minister of Agriculture Marek Sawicki brought an eight-person delegation to Penn State on the second leg of a U.S. tour to gain a more personal understanding of American agriculture and food systems. The visit to Penn State was also in recognition of the college’s long-standing

contributions to Poland’s agricultural development through extension.

“The U.S. Embassy in Warsaw encouraged the ministry to send a delegation as that nation considers issues relevant to European agriculture trade and development,” said Lou Moore, professor of agricultural economics. “The U.S. agricultural attaché specifically encouraged Minister Sawicki to include Penn State in his itinerary because of the similarities between Pennsylvania and Poland. This is a great honor, and we’re hoping that this will help us continue the seminars, workshops and other things that we do in Poland almost every year.” ■

Saving paper, saving money, communicating better ...

Ag Communications and Marketing has embarked on a new effort to enhance the timeliness and two-way flow of communications between the Dean’s Office and the college at-large. We have launched a new Web page, called “The Dean’s Desk” (agsci.psu.edu/dean), where you’ll find the dean’s blog, opportunities for feedback and interaction, and other features. As a result, this is the last issue of the Ag Sciences 2009 newsletter. In the future, many of the newsletter’s Back Page items will found in the Office of Human Resources’ e-newsletter. For general college news, please subscribe to the Ag Sciences Newswire (<http://newswires.psu.edu/>). We hope you find the new Web site informative and useful, and we welcome your feedback.

Familiar Faces

QUESTION: A recent Annenberg Foundation Center study suggests that Internet use and the rise in online social networks are to blame for families spending less time together. Has that been your experience?



Mary Barbercheck, professor of entomology

“I spend most of my time on the Internet checking e-mail, which can become difficult enough to control, so I don’t have the extra time to manage social networking sites like Facebook.”



Jason Smith, graduate student in Entomology

“I have not joined Facebook, because I feel the people around me merit my direct attention. Social networking sites can enable us to keep in touch with distant friends, but it can also cause us to miss those in the room with us.”



Ken Takagi, graduate student in Soil Science

“I have a Facebook profile, but I don’t use it too much. It doesn’t detract from the time I spend with others, because I only check it two or three times a day for a minute or so, and I typically do not post.”



Heather Dale, program assistant in Dairy and Animal Science

“I use social networking sites, but I don’t believe I spend any less time with my husband. In fact, he is also on Facebook, so we use it as a way to keep in touch during the day. It’s an easy way to communicate with friends and family you don’t see too often.”



Peg Shuffstall, education technology coordinator in Information Technologies

“Technology is changing all the time, and doing so faster than ever, so we need to find a way to keep up with the first generation. I added my son, daughter, and even a few of their friends to keep in touch with them. However, posting comments doesn’t take the place of communicating directly.”

New Center Aims at Unraveling Mysteries of Plant Cellulose

Jeffrey Catchmark sees the quest to unlock the mysteries of lignocellulose synthesis and assembly as one of the most important research pursuits of the next century.

And the associate professor of agricultural and biological engineering is on a mission to find the key. Co-director of the university’s new Center for Lignocellulose Structure and Formation, Catchmark is determined to help answer the long-standing question of how our civilization can produce food, fuel and fiber more efficiently and sustainably.

The structure of cellulose—the rigid material that makes woody plants hard and stiff and protects their sugars that scientists covet to produce biofuels—holds the answer, he believes. “Even after decades of research, cellulose synthesis is not very well understood,” Catchmark said. “We don’t know how the cells assemble this chemical barrier to weather, insects and other organisms. The cell wall is very difficult to degrade.”

Catchmark and colleagues at the

center will have substantial resources to aid their study of the molecular biology of cellulose. The U.S. Department of Energy recently awarded the center a \$21 million, five-year “Energy Frontier” grant to learn more about the physical structure of the bio-polymers in plant cell walls and improve methods for converting plant biomass into fuel. The funding for this center is contained in the economic stimulus bill, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

“Cellulose is the most abundant biopolymer on Earth,” Catchmark pointed out. “More wood is used than all other materials, except those mined like the ingredients in concrete. If we could more efficiently use this fiber, it would have huge impacts. The question is, how can we better use the cellulose that we get from plants?”

The Center for Lignocellulose Structure and Formation will be one of few places where research is truly focused on unraveling the secrets of lignocellulose, according to Catchmark. ■



Memorial Tree

This tree, near the side entrances to the Agricultural Administration Building, was planted last fall in honor of Marsha Shivery, a long-time employee in the Office of Administrative Services, who passed away in December 2007. Staff in the Office of Administrative Services, including the Publications Distribution Center, placed a plaque at the base of the tree, which bloomed this spring.

College, State DCNR Team Up to Keep Plant Invaders Out of Parks

The college and the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources have extended for 18 months a collaborative effort to stop the spread of invasive plant species in state parks.

Plants such as Japanese stiltgrass, mile-a-minute weed and multiflora rose have been taking over the ecosystems of many state parks in recent years, according to Art Gover, a research support associate in the Department of Horticulture. He is on the Vegetation Management Project team funded by the \$128,000 contract extension.

“To the untrained eye, Japanese stiltgrass creates a carpet of green in a forest understory, but that carpet of green also inhibits forest regeneration,” Gover said.

Invasive species are making parks less biologically diverse, explained Gover. “Losing plant diversity means losing the species-specific insects that eat those plants and in turn losing the birds that eat the insects,” he said. “Now, even though the forest looks healthy, a seemingly innocent shift in the plant population can have impacts on the food chain.”

The state parks project follows the model established by the Vegetation Management Project’s 24-year affiliation with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation addressing invasive plants and problem vegetation along highways. Penn State provides training, operational demonstrations and research to the transportation department to deal with invasive plant species.

The joint project between Penn State and DCNR is aimed at assessing invasive species conditions and developing park-specific management plans. Under the contract, researchers select parks from different regions across the state for evaluation, target high-priority areas and train park staff in the most effective management techniques.

Four parks were included in the original \$150,000, two-year contract: Ohiopyle in Fayette County, Kettle Creek in Clinton County, French Creek in Berks and Chester counties and Canoe Creek in Blair County. “We are not necessarily going to move into four new parks,” said Gover. ■



Name: Hunter Carrick.

Hometown: Born in Youngstown, Ohio, grew up in Yorktown Heights, near the Hudson River, in Westchester County, New York.

Job title: associate professor of aquatic ecology, teaching Limnology and Ecosystem Management. “My research helps develop an understanding of how human activities influence the biodiversity and productivity of aquatic ecosystems (lakes, streams, coastal ocean) beyond natural variation.”

Office: 434 Forest Resources Building.

Working at Penn State: Since 2002.

Spouse: Wife Kim is a hairstylist at Elaine’s in Boalsburg. “The best day of my life was August 19, 2006, when I married her. My second best day was when I met her over a pint at Otto’s brew pub.”

Pets: Bear, a 13-year-old Labrador retriever, and Lilah, a 10-year-old border collie-lab mix.

Last book read: “Trout streams and hatches of Pennsylvania” (3rd Edition, Back Country Guides), by Charles R. Meck.

CD currently in your car’s player: Harvest Moon by Neil Young.

Favorite musicians: Bruce Springsteen, John Prine and Pink Floyd.

Favorite movies: Jeremiah Johnson, Groundhog Day, The Godfather.

Favorite actor: Robert Redford.

Favorite food: Italian.

Favorite restaurants: Maria’s Pizzeria (Yorktown Heights, N.Y.), Kimchi Korean Restaurant, Home Delivery Pizza (with friends after hockey).

Hobbies: Playing ice hockey, fishing, hunting, traveling, painting, writing.

Little-known claim to fame: “After a 20-year layoff, I play competitive hockey as a goaltender. This year, I served as goaltenders coach for the Penn State Lady Icers (club team).”

Things you are proudest of: “I value my marriage and friendship with Kim. I share good friendships with a diversity of people in my life, several friends I have known since childhood. I have been successful at a number of jobs. The research we do in my lab helps people live in greater harmony with the environment.”

How do you relax: Watching movies, spectator at sports events (avid Pittsburgh Penguins fan), reading, visiting with friends, walking in the woods.

Favorite part of job: “There are times when you stumble upon something that offers a glimpse into how nature functions. This job presents these opportunities once in awhile.”

Up and Coming...

July 4. Independence Day holiday.

July 7-9. Family and Consumer Sciences Summer Workshop 2009, 252 Food Science Bldg., UP. Contact Office of Conferences and Short Courses, (814) 865-8301.

July 11-13. Ag in the Classroom, Ag Arena, UP. Contact Mary Seaton, (814) 865-8236.

July 14-16. Stream Restoration Workshop II: Elements of Effective Design, 114 Ag Engineering Building, UP. Contact Office of Conferences and Short Courses, (814) 865-8301.

July 28-30. State 4-H Achievement Days, Ag Arena, UP. Contact Phil Hoy, (814) 863-7872.

FACULTY/STAFF ALERTS

Lost and Found Items

The university is host to a large number of people on its campuses. Inevitably, many lost personal belongings are discovered in university facilities and property and are submitted to the university in anticipation that the owners will claim the items. There are certain issues that employees must be cognizant of and certain obligations that must be fulfilled with respect to lost and found items.

University policy requires that "a person who comes into control of property of another that he knows to have been lost, mislaid, or delivered under a mistake as to the nature or amount of the property or the identity of the recipient is guilty of theft if, with intent to deprive the owner thereof, he fails to take reasonable measures to restore the property to a person entitled to have it."

Employees of the university (which includes student employees and volunteers who are working on behalf of the university) must turn in all personal items found, either to a supervisor or directly to a lost and found repository. Employees have no claim on items found while performing their duties. This includes items in refuse or recycling containers on university property; items cannot be taken

from university receptacles for personal use. More information can be found online at Policy AD13 Lost and Found Items at <http://guru.psu.edu/policies/Ad13.html>.

July 2009 Learning Lunch Topic: Elder Care Strategies

In this month's Learning Lunch, participants will learn to negotiate the public and private service mazes of elder care, cope with long-distance care-giving responsibilities, and plan for long-term needs. "Caring for Aging Relatives: Resources & Strategies" will be presented by an affiliate from ValueOptions, a Penn State Employee Assistance Program provider, on July 8 from noon until 1:30 p.m. in Room 115 of the 329 Building at Innovation Park on the University Park campus.

For more information, contact Outreach Professional Development by e-mail at opdevents@outreach.psu.edu or call (814) 863-9846.

ON THE MOVE

New Faces

Kimberly Boonie, staff assistant VII in agricultural and extension education.

Genevieve Christ, assistant extension educator in Cumberland County.

Melissa Sankey, assistant herd manager in dairy and animal science.

Partings

Kenneth Bailey, professor of agricultural economics.

Irwin Banks, associate extension educator in Allegheny County.

Jacklyn Bruce, assistant professor of agricultural and extension education.

Ronald Taverno, associate extension educator in Juniata County.

Sherri Taylor, staff assistant VII in agricultural and extension education.

Retirements

Patricia Alters, administrative support coordinator in dairy and animal science.

Pamela Hollobaugh, senior accountant in administrative services.

Kathleen McCartney, administrative support assistant in communications and marketing.

Wayne Myers, professor of forest biometrics.

Janis Pruss, senior instructor of crop and soil sciences.

Roxanna Smith, database specialist in entomology.

MORE ABOUT US

Births

Shelby Mae Corl was born on April 10 to Christine Corl, 4-H youth development extension educator in Huntingdon County, and her husband, Jeremy.

Deaths

Lucy M. Williams, staff assistant in the College of Agricultural Sciences from 1962 until her retirement in 1993, died April 30 at the age of 66.

Larry Jordan, manager of agricultural research farms from 1963 until his retirement in 2003, died May 27 at the age of 66.

Noteworthy

Epsilon Sigma Phi, the national extension professional organization, presented its 2009 ESP Recognition Awards to several college employees. Mary Jo Depp Nestlerode, Central Region director of extension, received the Northeast Region Distinguished Service Award. Robin Kuleck, extension director in Elk County, received the Northeast Region Mid-Career Award. Elise Gurgevich, state coordinator for Penn State Nutrition Links, was presented with the Northeast Regional Early Career Award.

H. Grant Troop, regional extension educator in Lebanon County, received an award for Innovative and Assertive Community and Farm Leadership for completing the 2009 American Soybean Association/DuPont Young Leader Program. The award recognizes participation in and completion of the ASA/DuPont Young Leader Program, an educational leadership experience for soybean farmers.

Mary Alice Gettings, nutrition and health extension educator in Beaver County, contributed a chapter titled "Food Safety and Older People" for the book, "Food in the Aging Population,"

a reference for those involved in the research, development and provision of food products for the older generation. Gettings also was selected as the 2009 Outstanding Dietitian of the Year in Pennsylvania by the Pennsylvania Dietetic Association.

Devin Peterson, associate professor of food science, has been presented with the Pan-American Nutrition, Food Science and Technology Award 2008 (U.S.A. zone, professional category) by Grupo Bimbo. The award comes with a \$5,000 stipend.

Stephan Goetz, professor of agricultural and regional economics and director of the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development, has co-edited "Targeted Regional Economic Development" with Steven Deller of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Thomas Harris, director of the Center for Economic Development at the University of Nevada.

Deanna Behring, director of international programs, discussed America's efforts to develop a strategic approach to countries regarding direct and capacity-building food aid for the Clarence D. Bell Public Lecture Series at Penn State Brandywine. The lecture series was established in memory of the late Sen. Clarence Bell, the longest-serving public official in Pennsylvania.

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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