



AG SCIENCES 2008

A Monthly Newsletter for the College of Agricultural Sciences

December 2008

News in Brief

Professor Appointed to Task Force

Agricultural engineering professor Eileen Wheeler was recently appointed to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Air Quality Task Force.

One of the founders of Penn State's Odor Assessment Laboratory, Wheeler has been involved in agricultural emissions and air-quality research for more than 10 years.

The task force, which consists of leaders in farming, industry, health and science, was created by Congress.

Specialty Crop Research Initiative

The college will play a key role in a new research effort to support and enhance the nation's specialty-crop production.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Specialty Crop Research Initiative—authorized in the 2008 farm bill—has allocated \$28 million nationally for this federal fiscal year, and Penn State is the lead institution or partner on three projects funded for about \$7 million of that total.

The funding will help researchers address challenges faced by specialty-crop producers, including rising energy costs, labor shortages and evolving consumer demand.

5th Annual Calf Sale a Success

The Snider Agricultural Arena on Oct. 25 was packed with 4-H and FFA members looking for next year's market steer project.

Twenty-nine high-quality steers and six heifers were consigned to the Fifth Annual Penn State Block & Bridle Club Calf Sale, which proved to be one of the highest selling in the club's history with steer lots averaging \$1,149 and heifer lots averaging \$962.



▲ Kristen Saacke Blunk, director of Penn State's Agriculture and Environment Center, updates the Penn State Agricultural Council on developments in nutrient management and water-quality issues.

Ag Council Hears Watershed Report

"Upstream Practices, Downstream Effects" was the theme as members of the Penn State Agricultural Council were updated on developments in agricultural nutrient management and water quality issues at the council's recent meeting in State College.

Kristen Saacke Blunk, director of Penn State's Agriculture and Environment Center, highlighted the center's programs aimed at helping Pennsylvania's agricultural producers reduce nutrient run-off into the Chesapeake Bay and other watersheds.

The center targeted the nutrient and sediment load that agriculture contributes to the Chesapeake Bay as a starting

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Food-Safety Hearing Held Here

The invisible nature of microbial pathogens means food inspectors need the latest detection technology to keep food safe for consumers, a researcher in the college told state officials during a hearing on food-safety issues Nov. 7 at the University Park campus.

Stephen Knabel, professor of food science, noted that because we cannot see how and where foods become contaminated, Penn State researchers are pioneering advanced DNA fingerprinting techniques, which will help detect and identify dangerous pathogenic strains at points where they could enter the food supply.

"Scientists in our department have applied this new approach to *Listeria monocytogenes* and *E. coli* O157:H7 and are in the process of applying it

to salmonella and methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* or MRSA," Knabel said. "We intend to use these methods to establish the routes by which these dangerous pathogenic strains are transmitted to foods and humans, which will then allow food industries in Pennsylvania to implement effective intervention strategies to prevent that from happening."

Knabel was part of a faculty panel that presented testimony as part of the Strategy for Agriculture and Food Excellence, or SAFE, initiative, a joint effort of the state departments of Agriculture and Health in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency and the state Office of Homeland Security. The SAFE initiative is a comprehensive plan to address food safety and security from the farm to the table. ■

Familiar Faces

QUESTION: Has the economic downturn affected your holiday spending plans?



Tom Weber, manager in Information Technologies

"We budget with a Christmas club, and we'll try to make it go as far as possible."



Debbie McAllister, support staff in the Office for Undergraduate Education

"No, my spending will probably be just the same."



Jess Mannion, junior Animal Sciences major

"I always plan on spending less money each year and never do, but because of the state of the economy and the fact that I live on a student's budget, I need to be more cautious with my funds."



Joyce Cingel, business manager, Department of Food Science

"I plan on spending less this year, but that doesn't mean I will do it."



Bill Sackett, research support technologist, Department of Plant Pathology

"Not really. I think our family is planning on spending about the same as normal. Lower gas prices have really helped us."



Charles Heuser, professor of horticultural physiology

"No, we set aside our funds for spending, so our habits will be dictated by what we have saved."



Anita Sprankle, administrative assistant, Department of Agricultural and Extension Education

"Yes, we're raising a grandson, and we will be getting him presents based more on need than want. A lot of novelty stuff is out. We may put together baskets with a collection of passes, gift certificates, magazine subscriptions and other activities that he can do with his friends through the winter months."

Ukrainian Greenhouse Owners Tour College's Horticultural Facilities

Sixteen members of the Ukrainian Greenhouse Association visited Penn State in October to learn about the greenhouse industry in the United States and new horticultural technologies being developed.

The visit featured a tour of greenhouses and other horticultural facilities on the University Park campus, as well as discussions with faculty. The stop at Penn State was part of a larger Pennsylvania tour organized by the Ukrainian Federation of America, based in Philadelphia.

The group learned about management strategies employed in the United States. "What we need to see and learn in the states is how to 'feel' the market and provide what the customer wants, and understand the whole chain," said Oleksander Tomliak, president of the Ukrainian Greenhouse Association.

The Ukrainians had an opportunity to learn about cutting-edge research involving greenhouse-grown vegetables and flowers, according to Anatoliy Tmanov, program coordinator for Central and Eastern Europe in the college's

Office of International Programs.

One highlight of the tour was a demonstration of "plastofuel" technology, which is being developed by the Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering. The technology enables the creation and burning of plastic pellets made from waste plastic to provide heat for greenhouses.

"This is of special interest to us because we are looking to decrease our dependence on fossil fuel," said Bogdan Zelinshyy, director of a Ukrainian agricultural company.

Ukrainian Greenhouse Association members participated in a roundtable discussion with faculty members, including Kathleen Kelley, associate professor of horticultural marketing and business. "She provided excellent examples of how to introduce new products in a way that would make customers trust the brand," said Tmanov.

George and Nina Woskob of State College hosted the Ukrainian delegation for a dinner. The visit was supported by the Woskob New Century Fund. ■

▼ Bill Lamont, professor of vegetable crops, discusses advancements in horticultural techniques and the use of high-tunnel greenhouses with members of the Ukrainian Greenhouse Association, who visited Penn State this fall. The visit was supported by the Woskob New Century Fund.



From Dean Steele

As we near the end of November, we continue to ride the economic roller coaster with the end of the ride still not in view. We in the college and at Penn State in general continue to manage our resources very conservatively in anticipation that conditions will likely get worse before they get better. We are working through the 4.25 percent rescission with our units, and we are taking measures to deal with another rescission should it occur later in the fiscal year. Although we remain committed to investing in our priorities, our resources are far short of being able to fund all that we would like. If it's any consolation, all of higher education is experiencing similar challenges, with many states feeling the economic pain much more than in Pennsylvania.

The beginning of December brings us to the close of fall semester classes. This is an especially stressful time for our students. Please take every opportunity to help our students through this period, even if it's just an encouraging word or smile. They appreciate it and remember it. Thank you for your patience and support, and have a Happy Holiday Season. As always, I appreciate hearing your thoughts (rsteele@psu.edu). ■

Ag Council Hears . . .

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point, Saacke Blunk says, and it initiated several activities to address those topics, starting with the state's first "Agriculture and Environment: Achieving Balance" conference.

"The conference surpassed our expectations for the numbers of participants who attended, representing most of the major agricultural and environmental arenas," she says. "It brought together engaged stakeholders to identify genuine problems and possible solutions. It also shifted the discussion from scientific issues to presenting a vision of what agriculture in balance would look like for Pennsylvania."

Several areas of potential emerged from the conference, including improved calculations of ecosystem benefits that working lands provide, such as the value of open space, carbon capture potential, water-quality improvements, habitat and wetland banking and more. ■



Name: Ellen Manno

Hometown: Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., and grew up in Queens. "As of September 2008, I have lived half of my life in State College."

Job title, description: Assistant director for special programs in the School of Forest Resources. "I serve as executive director of the SFR Alumni Group, publish the school's newsletter for alumni and friends, conduct alumni employment surveys, maintain the school's Web pages, coordinate our unit's scholarship awards."

Office: 416A Forest Resources Building

Working at Penn State: "I came to the School of Forest Resources in August 1984 as a graduate student

(from a job in Washington, D.C.), and never left. After completing my masters degree, I was hired by the school and have worked here (happily) ever since. Ten of those years (1997–2007), I worked part-time."

Children: Daughter Grace, age 12, and son Gregory, age 9.

Pets: "We adopted our cat, Rocky, about 2 ½ years ago. I never had a pet as a child, so it took me a few weeks to get used to having a creature in the house, but now he's part of the family."

Last book read: *A Century of Forest Resources Education at Penn State* by Henry Gerhold.

CD(s) currently in your car's player: "More often than not, the radio and CD player are off. Right now there's a MercyMe CD in the player."

Favorite musician: "I don't spend much time listening to music, but I've always liked Neil Diamond, and I enjoyed his concert at the Bryce Jordan Center six or so years ago."

Favorite actor: Julia Roberts.

Favorite food: Bread. "All kinds!"

Thing(s) you are proudest of: "My parents, my children, and being part of the School of Forest Resources Centennial Celebration last year."

How you relax: "I recently started taking walks, either with or without the kids, and they've been quite relaxing."

Favorite part of job: "The people I interact with—alumni, students, parents, faculty, staff, employers—the variety of the assignments I work on, and the satisfaction when tasks are well done and/or a help to others."



◀ Donna Hawbaker, staff assistant in the Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Department, was presented with the college's Ella Reagle Staff Assistant Award by Dean Robert Steele at the college-wide staff meeting in early November for her "commitment and dedication to her department and the college, and her exceptional skill, professionalism, and being a cooperative team leader."

Up and Coming...

December 4-7. Festival of Trees, Ag Arena, UP. 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday. Call Jennifer Corman at (814) 237-7717 or visit www.scaymca.org.

December 10-11. Pennsylvania Natural Gas Summit: Challenges and Opportunities, Ramada Inn, State College. Call (800) 778-8632 or go to www.program.psu.edu/natural-gas.

January 4-10, 2009. Ice Cream Short Course, Nittany Lion Inn, UP. Call Bob Roberts at (814) 863-6132 or visit www.foodscience.psu.edu.

January 10-17, 2009. Pennsylvania Farm Show, Harrisburg. Call (717) 787-5373 or go to www.farmshow.state.pa.us.

FACULTY/STAFF ALERT

Holiday Seasonal Decorations in University Buildings

Holiday trees are permitted in university buildings. If lights are used on trees, they should be Underwriters Laboratories (U.L.) approved cool bulbs. This and other holiday tree decoration information can be found at "Guidelines for Holiday Trees in University Buildings," online at www.ehs.psu.edu/help/info_sheets/Holiday_Trees_Bulletin.pdf.

Candles, incense burners and other open-flame devices are prohibited in all university facilities. Policy SY30, "Open Flame Devices," establishes a policy to eliminate a potential fire hazard to students, faculty, staff and guests occupying university-owned or university-operated facilities. It can be found online at guru.psu.edu/policies/SY30.html.

ON THE MOVE

New Faces

Alisha Everly, administrative support assistant level 2 in conferences and short courses

Maryann Smith, nutrition education advisor in Dauphin County

Kelly Snyder, nutrition education advisor in Lebanon County

Sarah Snyder, administrative support assistant level 2 in veterinary and biomedical sciences

Carol Spotts, financial and accounting assistant in conferences and short courses

Cheryl Vonada, administrative support assistant level 2 in cooperative extension administration

Ines Walther, research assistant in veterinary and biomedical sciences

Partings

Milea Perry, program aide in Philadelphia County

Jamie Smith, administrative support assistant level 3 in horticulture

Thomas Weber, information technology manager in information technologies

Retirements

Richard Kuzemchak, unit manager in dairy and animal science

Promotions

Svend Pedersen, administrative support assistant level 4 in food science

MORE ABOUT US

Deaths

Joseph Harrington, professor emeritus of agronomy and general manager of Ag Progress Days from 1957 until his retirement in 1992, died Oct. 17 at the age of 82.

We're on the Web: www.cas.psu.edu

Richard A. Keppeler, associate professor of agricultural engineering from 1962 until his retirement in 1982, died Oct. 10. He was 91.

Theola Thevaos, research assistant in rural sociology from 1955 until her retirement in 1979, died Aug. 26 at the age of 94.

Noteworthy

Herbert Cole, professor emeritus of plant pathology, has been honored with the 2008 Distinguished Service Award by the PennAg Industries Association, a non-profit, member organization that works to create and maintain an effective, viable and competitive environment for Pennsylvania agribusiness to grow and prosper. Cole has dedicated a lifetime of service to research, teaching and extension, according to PennAg. At Penn State, his research interests focused on the control of plant disease through low-cost and environmentally safe systems, the fate of pesticides in soil and water, and agricultural policy.

Mary Ehret, interim county extension director in Luzerne County, has been recognized by

the American Evaluation Association with the 2008 Outstanding Program Evaluation Award sponsored by the Extension Educational Evaluation Topical Interest Group.

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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▲ Thirteen employees of the college accepted 25-Year Awards from Dean Robert Steele (front row, far right) at the college-wide staff meeting in early November. They are (from left, front row): Beth Irvin, Kathleen Demchak, Fred Gildow, Amy Pyle, Ellen Johnson, Kim Ripka, and Virendra Puri. (Back row, from left): J. Lynne Brown, Jeannine Richlin, Chris Mullin, Greg Roth, Bob Lumley-Sapanski, and Bill Weaver.