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WIU AGGIES

Gerry Salzman is Selected as the 2025 WIU Distinguished Alumni Award Recipient

Gerry Salzman has been selected as a 2025 WIU Distinguished Alumni Award by Western Illinois University and the WIU Alumni Association. Mr. Salzman was recognized as part of the commencement ceremonies on Saturday, May 10th, at graduation.

Mr. Salzman graduated in 1971 with an Agricultural Economics major.

In his professional career, Salzman draws on everything he learned at WIU, from general business fundamentals to character development for success.



"The environment at WIU brought not only an education but also the opportunity to be involved and lead in a number of organizations," Salzman said. "Building this confidence to interact and lead served well when entering the business world."

During his time as a student, Salzman was a member of Alpha Gamma Rho, Interfraternity Council (IFC), Blue Key Honor Society and Alpha Zeta. He also actively participated in the intramural sports organized by the Campus Recreation Center.

This prestigious award, the highest honor the Alumni Association can bestow on a graduate, is presented to individuals who have reached the pinnacle of their careers and brought credit to themselves and to Western through notable accomplishments in their careers, outstanding service to their communities, and service in support of the advancement of Western Illinois University.

The WIU School of Agriculture is proud of the accomplishments of our alumni and are grateful for all you have done.

Congratulations!



Agriculture Students Represent WIU at National PAS Conference

Western Illinois University Agriculture students Elleanor Robinson and Adam Vail participated in the 2025 National Professional Agricultural Student Organization (PAS) Conference held on March 17-20, in Sheridan, WY.

The PAS National Conference is a gathering of nearly 600 career-ready professional agricultural students, their collegiate advisors and industry representatives.

WIU made a good impression this year with the participation of two outstanding students, Elleanor Robinson and Adam Vail, who worked hard to represent the school in a strong positive manner.

"We are extremely proud of both Adam and Elleanor for taking the time and effort to prepare for this national competition and to showcase their skill sets at the national level," WIU Ag Director Andy Baker said. "This is a difficult competition as students are coming across the country to compete in different content areas. I



Agriculture students Adam Vail and Eleanor Robinson

certainly hope we can continue to support our students by providing opportunities, like the National PAS Conference, so they can attend professional development events and represent Western Illinois University at the national level."

Vail qualified to compete in the individual Prepared Public Speaking event and earned a 6th-place finish.

"Getting the privilege to compete in public speaking against the best of the best in the country was quite a fulfilling experience. PAS has allowed me to sharpen my skills as an agriculture student and provided me with memories that will resonate with me for the rest of my

life. If there is one thing I can promise, it's that the best is yet to come and we will be back next year," Vail said.

Robinson, also participated in the individual events, qualified to compete in Animal Health/Vet Tech Specialist and placed 11th.

"Being able to attend the National PAS was a tremendous honor, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to represent my school and community. This experience has not only allowed me to grow academically but also pushed me to connect with like-minded students. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to participate in such an incredible event and thankful to everyone who has supported me along the way," Robinson said.



Illinois Conservation Planners Enrolled in WIU Soils Class

A collaborative effort between the Western Illinois University School of Agriculture (Ag) and the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) will offer a unique educational opportunity for conservation planners.

The WIU School of Ag is exploring new territory by including conservation planners from across Illinois in an introductory soils class taught by Joel Gruver, professor of soil science and sustainable agriculture.

"We are thrilled to be asked to collaborate with the Illinois Department of Agriculture to bring this educational dream to reality for working professionals," WIU School of Ag Director Andrew J. Baker said.

Currently, 20 conservation planners employed by the Illinois Department of Agriculture participate asynchronously in Gruver's Fundamentals of Soil Science course. They have access to recorded lectures from Gruver's soils course to review weekly on their own time. They also complete assignments, quizzes and some laboratory activities. During Spring Break, the conservation planners will have the opportunity to meet with professor Gruver to complete a series of hands-on laboratory activities.

"I have been communicating intensively with the conservation planners and receiving positive feedback on the course but this is my first time teaching students who I can't picture in my mind as I read their work. I am looking forward to meeting them all in person during Spring Break," Gruver said.

Professor Gruver's commitment to advancing professional education was complemented by the collaboration of WIU alumna Whitney Miller, now an education coordinator with the Conservation Capacity Building Initiative, whose efforts helped bring this opportunity to life.

"We are proud to offer conservation planners the chance to earn soil science credit through Dr. Joel Gruver's course at Western Illinois University. Learning from one of Illinois' foremost leaders in soil health and conservation agriculture prepares them to make a lasting impact on our state's natural resources," Miller said.



WIU Celebrates Distinguished Agriculture Alums for 2025

Western Illinois University recognizes the outstanding achievements of its distinguished Agriculture (Ag) alumni, who have excelled in diverse fields and made significant contributions to the industry. The 2025 Distinguished Alumni Class includes Edward Breece, Dawn Driscoll, Mark Herrmann, Jennifer Beard and Darrin Dodds.

Breece began his academic journey at WIU in 1954, pursuing a degree in Agricultural Education. Due to a transfer agreement, he completed his bachelor's

degree at the University of Illinois in 1958 and a master's degree in 1959. He taught agriculture at Elmwood and Cambridge high schools before joining WIU's School of Agriculture faculty in 1967. During his 31-year tenure, Breece served as department chair for 12 years and helped establish the Agricultural Education program. In 1970, he collaborated with students to launch the Ag Expo, which continues to thrive, celebrating its 53rd year in 2025.



Edward Breece, Class of '54

Driscoll, a sixth-generation farmer, earned a bachelor's degree in Agronomy from WIU. At the university, she was active in multiple organizations, including Sigma Alpha and the Livestock Judging Team. Now residing in Iowa, she chairs the Iowa Senate Agriculture Committee and has successfully passed several agriculture-related bills, including the Meat Integrity Bill. Driscoll also actively supports her community through volunteer efforts.



Dawn Driscoll, Class of '00

Herrmann, a 1983 graduate in Agricultural Business, has built a career in agriculture and technology. As President and CEO of S&W Seed Company, he has advanced global seed industry initiatives. Herrmann previously held leadership roles at Monsanto and AgReliant Genetics, contributing to innovative advancements in agriculture.



Mark Herrmann, Class of '83

Beard, a 1992 graduate in Agricultural Business, has demonstrated excellence in agricultural banking and leadership. Currently the president and chair of the board for Farmers State Bank in Elmwood, Beard has played a key role in empowering women in banking. She also serves as the secretary of WIU's School of Agriculture Advisory Board.



Jennifer Beard, Class of '92

"My time at Western Illinois University was truly transformative. Being actively involved in various organizations and immersed in the Agriculture Department gave me invaluable experiences and knowledge. The department's hands-on learning opportunities and dedicated faculty prepared me for my career and helped lay the foundation for who I am today. WIU gave me the tools to grow, lead, and succeed," Beard said.

Dodds, a 1999 WIU graduate in Agriculture, is a professor and associate director at the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station at Mississippi State University. He has authored numerous research publications, secured significant grants and engaged in international collaborations to improve agriculture and food security.



Darrin Dodds, Class of '99

"The roots of where I am today begin at Western Illinois University. I have often told folks, that one phone call can change the course of your life. Dr. Gordon Roskamp made that phone call for me in the fall of 1998 and that was the first step to continuing my education and being presented opportunities I never thought possible. Throughout my career, I have tried to pay forward the blessings that I was given by Dr. Roskamp and Western Illinois University," Dodds said.

These distinguished alumni reflect the excellence of WIU's School of Agriculture and the impact of its programs on the agriculture industry.



WIU Ag Hosts Successful Bull Test Sale

The Western Illinois University School of Agriculture successfully hosted the 53rd Annual Bull Test Sale on March 7 at the WIU Livestock Center. The evening showcased high-quality bulls, including Angus, Simmental, Percentage Simmental and Red Angus, along with WIU replacement heifers and bred cows, all contributing to a strong and well-attended sale with over 60 registered bidders and over 150 people in attendance.



The bulls averaged \$6235, bred cows averaged \$3300 and replacement heifers \$2133. Two bulls and four females selected from WIUs' own herd performed exceptionally well in the sale. The top-selling bull was Lot two - WS Knock Out 19 consigned by Bill Washburn of Onley, IL. Lot two was a percentage Simmental bull that brought \$9000 and is headed to his new home in Indiana. The volume buyer with three bulls and thress



females was Jon Davis from Elmwood, IL.

"The annual Bull Test Sale has been a mainstay event within the School of Agriculture for 53 years. Faculty, farm staff and students have organized and conducted this event for over five decades. This is the first year that WIU-bred heifers and cows were sold at the sale. We truly appreciate our dedicated consignors who put their trust in us to care for the health of their animals and we also want to thank our buyers who attended the sale. It was one of the best sales on record," WIU Ag Director Andy Baker said.

The School of Agriculture utilizes this event as a hands-on teaching tool. While The consignors (bull owners) receive the check from the sale of their animals, WIU will receive payment for their animals sold along with yardage and labor fees associated with developing the bulls and hosting the event. Proceeds from the sale support the WIU School of Agriculture, reinforcing the University's commitment to livestock excellence and experiential student learning.

The event was made possible through the hard work of Keela Trennepohl, WIU's dedicated farm staff and a strong team of students who played an integral role in conducting the sale.



WIU Livestock Judging Team Earns Fifth Place at American Royal, Angotti Named High Individual

Western Illinois University's Livestock Judging Team recently showcased their talent and expertise at the American Royal event in Kansas City, MO, bringing home a remarkable fifth place finish in a fiercely competitive field. The team's outstanding performance has also secured them a solid fifth place ranking in the Collegiate Judging Rankings, a reflection of their dedication and skill throughout the season.

In addition to the team's impressive ranking, WIU student Grace Angotti earned the title of High Individual at the American Royal, setting a high standard of excellence for her team and establishing herself as a formidable competitor in the judging arena. This accomplishment highlights the commitment and hard work of each team member and positions WIU as a strong contender in collegiate livestock judging.

As the season draws to a close, WIU's team is gearing up for their final competition, the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) in Louisville, KY. Often referred to as the "Super Bowl" of livestock judging, NAILE presents an exciting challenge for the Leathernecks as they aim to build on their season's successes.

WIU congratulates the entire WIU Livestock Judging Team on their achievements!



New Vertical Mixer Arrives at University Farm

New equipment arrived at the Western Illinois University farm in December.

The WIU School of Agriculture received a new vertical mixer to aid in feeding the cattle herd, purchased through financial support from the Illinois Farm Bureau and the help of Sydenstricker Nobbe Partners.



Each year, the Illinois Farm Bureau requests items or activities to financially support to assist the School of Agriculture at WIU, and the vertical mixer was selected this year.

"This took a few months, but ultimately a vertical mixer was found and refurbished to fit our needs," WIU Director of Ag Andrew Baker said. "The vertical mixer was requested this year to assist in reducing our feed costs within the beef herd and prevent waste. We certainly do appreciate the annual financial support that Illinois Farm Bureau provides the School of Agriculture as it allows us to have the tools available to help our students."

Once funding was approved, WIU worked with Sydenstricker Noble Partners to fulfill the order. John Crubaugh, Director of Strategic Initiatives with Sydenstricker Nobbe Partners, said helping WIU continue to advance its program is important to the students attending the University and the community as a whole.

"We are proud to support Western Illinois University by providing equipment to assist students for years to come," Crumbaugh said.



WIU Alumnus Taber Names Region 4 NAAE Outstanding Agriculture Teacher



Trenton Taber, a 2015 graduate of Western Illinois University's Agriculture Education program, has been named the Region 4 Outstanding Agriculture Teacher by the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE).

"My career as an agriculture teacher wouldn't be anything without the mentors and support I've received throughout Illinois Ag Education, including, but not limited to: Dr.

Andrew Baker, Dr. Jay Solomonson, Joe Steffen, Scott Riden, Mindy Bunselmeyer, Lisa Oellerich, John Heiser, Kindra Callahan, Casselyn Shimmin, and my wonderful teaching partner Haley Gruber," Taber said.

Taber, who teaches agriculture at Cambridge High School, was recognized for his dedication, innovation and commitment to providing students with exceptional learning opportunities.

"Mr. Taber is one of many WIU Agricultural Education alumni who have worked tirelessly as an educator to uncover the true potential of their students. As an institution, we have been very fortunate to have been the institutional choice of many exceptional educators. This recognition truly reflects Mr. Taber's work ethic, dedication, and commitment to the teaching profession in so many ways. His students will never forget the educational opportunities Mr. Taber has presented to them during their years at Cambridge High School through leadership and personal development activities. Mr. Taber has also been very willing to give back to WIU through professional development activities for pre-service teachers. We are truly excited he was recognized by NAAE for his educational accomplishments," WIU Ag Director Andrew Baker said.

WIU's Agriculture Education program has the highest teacher placement rate among agriculture institutions in Illinois. The field-based curriculum provides hands-on, real-world experience before teaching. WIU students score an average of 10 points higher on the edTPA performance assessment required for Illinois teaching licensure. With over 17 active agriculture-based student organizations, the program prepares graduates for success in teaching and leadership.



WIU Livestock Judge Named Finalist for “Best Sr. College Livestock Coach” in 2024 Sullivan’s Best of the Barns Awards

Mark Hoge, a Livestock judging coach with Western Illinois University's Agriculture program, has been named one of four finalists for the prestigious "Best Sr. College Livestock Coach" category in the 2024 Sullivan's Best of the Barns Awards. This national awards program recognizes leading professionals and organizations within the livestock and agriculture industry.



Hoge's fellow finalists represent programs at Texas Tech University, Oklahoma State University and Kansas State University. Being named a finalist highlights the excellence of WIU's Agriculture program, which is a competitive force in the livestock industry despite being a smaller institution than its peers.

Sullivan's Best of the Barns Awards is regarded as one of the most prestigious honors in the livestock industry. Winners are chosen by peers in the industry and will be announced in the coming weeks. The program celebrates individuals and organizations that demonstrate exceptional contributions and leadership in their respective fields.

WIU's Agriculture program is known nationally for its ability to recruit and develop outstanding livestock judging team members and prepare students for success in the livestock and agriculture industries. This nomination reflects the program's dedication to excellence, consistency and the strong leadership provided by coaches like Hoge.



WIU Agriculture Alumni and Students Honored at National FFA Convention

Western Illinois University Agriculture (Ag) alumni and students were recognized nationally for their leadership, achievements and dedication to advancing agricultural education at the 2024 National FFA Convention. WIU alumni were integral to this year's top awards, with both current agriculture educators and active students receiving significant honors.

The Cambridge FFA Chapter, led by WIU alumnus Trent Taber, received the prestigious National Chapter Award in Growing Leaders, recognizing their exemplary efforts in leadership, personal growth and career success among students. Taber, the current agriculture teacher at Cambridge High School, has made a lasting impact on his chapter and community, showcasing the leadership principles taught within WIU's School of Ag.

WIU alumni were also influential in shaping FFA's national leadership. Thaddeus Bergschneider, from the Franklin FFA Chapter, was elected as the National FFA President for 2024-2025. Bergschneider was mentored by agriculture teachers Brent Nelson and Kaitlyn Kane, both proud WIU graduates, who have inspired and guided him through his journey with FFA.

WIU's contributions to FFA's mission through Steve Sargeant, the agriculture teacher at Bushnell-Prairie City High School and a distinguished WIU alumnus, who was awarded the Honorary American FFA Degree. This honor acknowledges individuals who have provided exceptional service to agricultural education and the National FFA Organization. Under Sargeant's guidance, the Bushnell-Prairie City FFA Alumni Chapter was recognized as one of the top three FFA chapters in the nation this year, a testament to his and WIU's impact in fostering leadership and excellence in agriculture.

In addition, five current WIU agriculture students were awarded the American FFA Degree, the highest level of recognition for active FFA members. This esteemed award celebrates their dedication, skills, and leadership in the field of agriculture. The honored recipients include:

Kendyl Kane – Monmouth-Roseville

Kayla Davis – Macomb

Adam Vail – West Prairie

Madilynn Barry – Payson

Maddison Oliver – Fairfield

Andy Baker, director of WIU's School of Ag, shared his pride in the university's extensive representation and ongoing impact on FFA's legacy.

"I am inspired every year by how impactful a teacher is on their students. This year is no different as several of our Agricultural Education alumni were recognized for their efforts in guiding and facilitating the career path of their students and

recognizing the potential in each student. Congratulations to our alumni and their students for their outstanding achievements at the 2024 National FFA Convention," Baker said.



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