

# WIU AGGIES

Western Illinois University School of Agriculture

## WIU School of Agriculture Honors Six Alumni on Department's 101st Anniversary



**Cliff Becker, a 1984 graduate with a degree in agriculture:** Becker is senior vice president and publishing director for Farm Journal in Lenexa, KS. He is a fourth-generation agriculturalist that puts his passion for food and food production into supporting his audience and clients' needs in marketing, branding, sales and business development, charting a 37-year career within the food system.

Before joining Farm Journal, Becker was a consultant at CMA Consulting of Kansas City, where he worked with large agriculture and food companies. His prior experience includes a 22-year career with Vance Publishing Corporation, serving as vice-president, publishing director for their food360 division.

He has won multiple awards, including the National Agri-Marketing Association's Career Achievement Award and the Livestock Publication Council's Distinguished Service Award. He is also a nationally-recognized speaker on food and agriculture related issues.



**Larry Thurow, a 1977 graduate with a degree in agriculture:** Thurow is a professor at Parkland College in Monticello, IL. He is a member of WIU's Alpha Gamma Rho (AGR) fraternity.

Thurow went on to teach agriculture at the high school level before spending 10 years in agri-business and then returning to the classroom. Thurow taught at John Wood Community College, followed by a research position at the University of Illinois, where he received his graduate degrees. He spent 20 years at Parkland College, holding faculty positions as well as vice-president of institutional advancement.

Thurow retired in 2014, and resides in Monticello along with his wife, Cathy. They spend a majority of their time volunteering with the Florida State Parks in Key Largo, and with the Washington State Parks near Mount Rainier.



**Jeff Adkisson, a 1985 graduate with a degree in agriculture education:** Adkisson is executive vice president and treasurer of the Grain and Feed Association of Illinois in Springfield, IL. He is a member of Alpha Gamma Rho (AGR) fraternity, the Student Alumni Association, Blue Key Honor Society, Mortar Board and Order of Omega.

Adkisson has been with the association since 1987, and held his current position since 1999. He also serves as the chief lobbyist for the Grain and Feed Association of Illinois and is responsible for the overall operations of the organization.

Adkisson is a 1985 magna cum laude graduate of WIU, with a Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture education. He was a member of AGR fraternity and a variety of other college organizations. He graduated from the Institute of Organizational Management (IOM) in 1996, earned his Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation in 1999 and completed the Illinois Agricultural Leadership Program in 2004.

"I would like to thank the previous Distinguished Alumni for this honor. In addition, Dr. Baker and his staff need to be recognized for all of their accomplishments to keep the WIU ag department moving forward," said Adkisson.

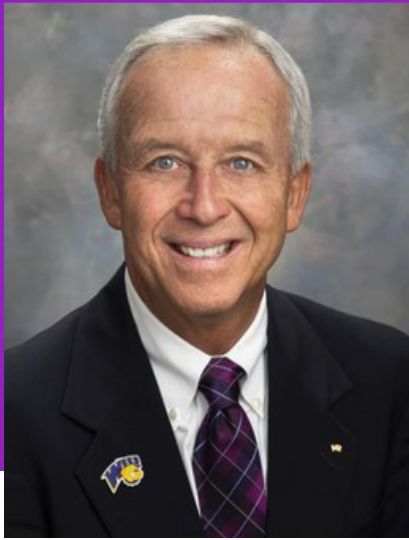


**Richard E. Horner, a 1974 graduate with a degree in agriculture:** Horner has been a Country Financial insurance representative for 37 years, servicing the insurance and financial needs of his customers in Vandalia, IL. He is a Life Underwriting Training Council Fellow (LUTCF), a member of Million Dollar Round Table (MDRT) and maintains emphasis on farm and crop insurance.

While at WIU, Horner served as vice president of Alpha Gamma Sigma fraternity, president of the Judging Club and Ag Council, and a member of the Intercollegiate Livestock Judging Team.

Horner and his wife, Brenda own and operate Horner Show Lambs in Vandalia, IL. They produce show lambs and have currently sold lambs in over 35 states. Horner Show Lambs has produced State Fair Champions or Reserves for over 15 years. These include the Grand Champion-Missouri State Fair, Reserve Grand - Oklahoma Youth Expo, Reserve Grand Champion - Missouri State Fair and three times Grand Champion Land of Lincoln - Illinois State Fair.

He loves the livestock business and has an incredible passion to see youth in agriculture succeed. He has provided showmanship clinics for his customers and also hosts 15-20 4-H, FFA and Collegiate Livestock Judging Teams for judging workouts at his farm each fall. Horner has a tremendous work ethic and does his work with the utmost integrity. In 2020, he was inducted into the Illinois Club Lamb Association Hall of Fame.



**Wayne Whipps, a 1977 graduate with a degree in agriculture:** Whipps, originally of Ursa, IL, currently works as an account executive for Coloff Media. Whipps was a former marketing consultant in Cedar Falls, IA.

Whipps spent the past 40+ years in marketing and sales, 26 of those years in the ag sector and the last 14 years with a home health company. He retired from the home health company a little earlier than he planned.

While at WIU, he also worked four years in the Sports Information Office, the WIU Boar Test Station and the Swine Farm. He was also a member of Alpha Gamma Rho, Interfraternity Council, the Livestock Judging Team, Alumni Council, Hoof & Horn Club, Agriculture Education Club, Intercollegiate Livestock Judging Team and WIU Young Republicans. His team won "Swine" and was the seventh team overall at the 1976 National Contest in livestock. He was a top individual in "Swine" and tied for third overall in the national contest.

Whipps has three daughters and six, soon-to-be eight, grandchildren, who live 10 miles away. He enjoys volunteering and giving back to the community. He has WIU football season tickets and when he is not back at "The Harvard on the Lamoine," you can find him cheering on the Iowa State Cyclones in Ames, or on a couple football road trips each year.



**Randy Frese, a 1981 graduate with a degree in agriculture:** Frese is a Illinois State Representative from Paloma, IL. Since 2015, he has served as an Illinois state representative for the 94th District.

Frese graduated from WIU in 1981, and was a member of Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity, Alpha Zeta, Blue Key Honor Society, Order of Omega and president of the Interfraternity Council and Greek Council.

Frese was owner of Frese's Video from 1985-2005. He was also a circuit clerk for Adams County from 2004-2012.

Frese is married to wife, Ronda (Husemann) Frese, who was also a WIU graduate in 1983. They are both members of the Saint Thomas Church, Camp Point, IL and Quincy Exchange Club. They have three adult daughters, and are grandparents to two grandsons.



# AGR's Smokin' Hog Event Raises \$10,000 for WIU School of Ag, Food Pantry

The annual Smokin' Hog fundraising event, put on by Western Illinois University's Alpha Gamma Rho (AGR) fraternity, raised \$10,000 for the WIU School of Agriculture and the WIU Food Pantry.

This was the 28th year for the event, which had to be altered slightly because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The food was delivered in a drive-through format from the AGR house on North Lafayette Street.



"We faced a lot of diversity this year due to current COVID-19 restrictions, not being able to have in person dining or a concert preceding the event," said AGR President Cameron Kessling, a senior agriculture major, of Edelstein, IL. "Our AGR house has the perfect driveway setup for a drive-through, with vehicles entering from the north and exiting out the south. Our Smokin' Hog drive-thru allowed us to follow all guidelines/restrictions and still be able to serve our awesome community."

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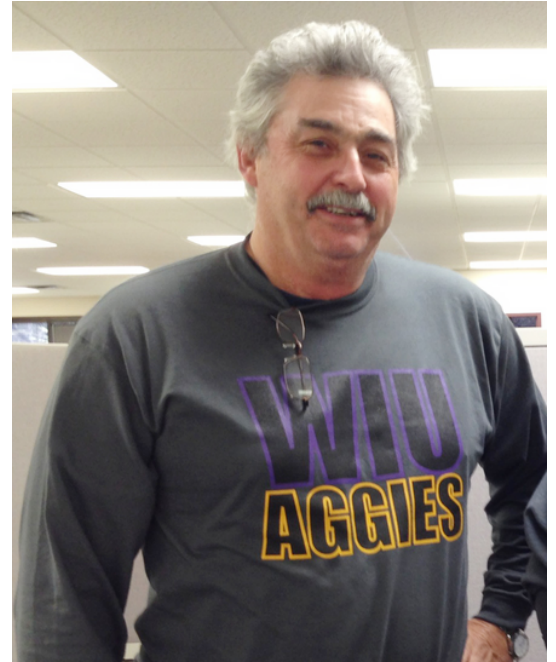
## WIU Alumnus Promoted to National Agriculture Position

Western Illinois University Agriculture alumnus Bryon Kirwan considers it a source of personal pride to give back to his alma mater and its School of Agriculture, including helping with research at the Allison Organic Research and Demonstration Farm.

The 1980 graduate was recently named a national economist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a division of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). He had been serving as the state economist in Illinois, but his new position allows him to oversee work in 15 states. It will also necessitate him commuting between his home in Seymour, IL and the Central National Office in Ft. Worth, TX.

"This new position allows me to take my economic skills and practices and do cost returns and conservation work on the ground at a much higher level," said Kirwan.

After graduating from WIU, Kirwan worked in multiple counties within the state's Extension Service, and with Illinois Crop Improvement, which included research in the Puerto Rico winter farm. He has also worked with Champaign Soil and Water and Richland Community College, and began working at the USDA-NRCA in 2010.



After receiving his bachelor's degree from WIU, where he was a member of the Alpha Gamma Rho (AGR) fraternity, Kirwan went on to get a master's degree in agriculture economics from the University of Illinois and an MBA from Illinois State University.

In his new position, Kirwan said he works with nutrient management in the multiple states he covers and uses his background in economics, through a production perspective. He also examines the costs and benefits of changes farmers can make in their operations so they can make informed decisions.

Most of his current work load includes production and management economics, cover crops, water quality and nitrogen management. He also developed a cover crops tool with a colleague that allows farmers to download an Excel spreadsheet with formulas to help with decision making.

One of Kirwan's professional areas of interest includes applied research, something he has used to help agriculture researchers at WIU over the years. Kirwan has worked with WIU Agriculture Associate Professor Joel Gruver and Allison Farm Faculty Assistant Andy Clayton to see the impact of possible changes at the University's research farm near Roseville, IL.

Kirwan said he credits WIU for giving him the educational foundation and leadership development he needed to excel in his career.

"WIU set the baseline for me in anything I have been able to achieve," he said. "I was also in the Ag Mech Club and helped out with activities in the Hoof and Horn Club. It was a great time to be an undergrad."

# WIU School of Agriculture Part of Second Pennycress Research Grant

Just 12 months after Western Illinois University Agriculture Professor Win Phippen announced the award of a \$10 million federal grant to investigate the use of Pennycress as a commercial cash crop, a second grant has been awarded that dovetails into the initial grant and helps ensure a consistent version of the alternative crop is produced.

WIU will receive just under \$1 million of a \$13 million U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) grant aimed at genetically strengthening pennycress plants for use in sustainable energy work.

For WIU's portion of the grant, the University Farm will act as a "grow-out" site for pennycress, along with sites at Illinois State University, the Ohio State University, the University of Minnesota, the University of Wisconsin-Platteville and Washington State University. Research includes using a variety of growing locations to test the environmental impacts on the pennycress plants.

Plants grown at each of those locations will be sent to WIU for oil content testing. Genetic testing on the plants will be done at ISU in an effort to improve oil content and create plants that are resistant to stressors, such as drought and extreme heat.

"We want to look at plants that are grown in diverse environments and make sure we really understand the different stresses on the plants and create plants that are more resilient to environmental stresses," said Phippen. "We want to make sure the plants will make a good fuel."

The five-year cycle of the new grant begins Tuesday, Sept. 1. Other institutions taking part include the Carnegie Institution for Science, the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center, the DOE Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the DOE Pacific Northwest National Laboratory EMSL.

WIU School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker said the grant is a great honor.

"This grant is a continuation of the efforts put forth by Dr. Phippen and his group in the commercialization of Pennycress as an official agricultural commodity," said Baker. "The USDA sees great potential in this crop in fulfilling the future needs in the biofuel industry. We appreciate the continued support from the University's administration on this project."

Part of the research includes "borrowing" ideas from other crops, such as canola and cabbage, to see how those plants deal with the same environmental issues.

"We want to look at the plants at a molecular gene level," said Phippen.

The \$10 million U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) grant aims to refine the oilseed crop, which can be converted into biodiesel and biojet fuel. The grant research focuses on improving Pennycress genetics for plant breeding and preservation, agronomic management, ecosystems and supply chain management for post-harvest seed control.

Phippen said the goal is to produce 50 billion gallons of biofuel in the next 25 years.

Pennycress can be integrated into existing corn-soybean rotations to extend the growing season on farmland and can positively impact profits for producers, as well as decreasing soil erosion and nutrient runoff. The oilseed crop is typically planted after the corn or soybean harvest.

Trial pennycress plantings began last year and the hope is to launch the crop commercially in 2021. Phippen is working with a St. Louis, MO-based company for the breeding and post-production portions of the research. Oil and meal from the plants is being studied to determine its uses in fuel, feed and food.

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## WIU Offers Opportunities to Students in Emerging Cannabis Industry

This fall, WIU Senior Biology Instructor Tom Vogel is teaching classes on cannabis and, with Assistant Professor of Agriculture Shelby Henning, is researching industrial hemp production and uses. Vogel is also conducting pancreatic cancer research with Assistant Professor of Chemistry Mette Soendergaard, cannabinoid extraction and identification with Forensic Program Director Assistant Professor Ligu Song, and gene expression research with Biology Professor Sue Hum-Musser.



As WIU launched two cannabis-related minors this semester, "Cannabis and Culture," and "Cannabis Production," and as cannabis is now legal in Illinois, the industry is spurring a range of academic opportunities for WIU students.

"The new cannabis minor within the School of Agriculture is certainly opening doors for our students," said School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker. "The new curriculum is providing students with research opportunities that have the potential to change the industry. The hands-on curriculum allows the students to work the plant in academic and research settings to solve some of the issues in growing and processing of cannabis."

Vogel's program focuses on growing cannabis plants and networking with growers to explain the planting process as a cash crop. While both are cannabis, he likens the differences in hemp and marijuana to the differences between field and sweet corn.

"It's the same plant," he said. "However, the THC is low in hemp (less than .3 percent) and produces no euphoric affect. The Delta 9 THC is one of the many (greater than 150) cannabinoids found in the plant. Some of the many varieties we're growing this semester are very high in CBD, another cannabinoid that has a myriad of positive effects. Some of the varieties are grown more for the fiber and are used to make things like cloth, animal bedding, paper and concrete additives; however, the growing industry for fiber is still in its infancy."

As cannabis became legal in Illinois, Vogel said many see the booming industry as a way to make money quickly. But he compares growing cannabis more toward gardening instead of farming.

The harvested cannabis must have a CBD percentage of 12 or higher to be processed and sold. Vogel added that cannabis is projected to be a \$25 billion industry in Illinois by 2022, but less than 5 percent of that total is earmarked for the farmers. He suggests one person, part-time, can handle about one acre of plants.

"I think this research is greatly needed for Illinois growers and potential growers," said Henning. "Not much information has been published currently regarding cultivar performance of hemp in Illinois. Our work is going to ultimately help Illinois' growers make informed decisions on how to cultivate hemp using best management practices."

"These students will be trained in cannabis management and appropriately positioned to enter the booming job market in cannabis production successfully," he said.

Students in Vogel's botany classes this semester are helping maintain the industrial hemp field on the University farm as part of their coursework, learning about sexing plants and how to maintain optimal grow distances.



# WIU Commodity Trading Team Places 43rd in the World

For the third time in three years, a team of Western Illinois University students have finished high in the CME Group Trading Challenge, a four-week, international electronic trading competition.

This year's team was made up of Cooper Bounds, a master of business administration (MBA) graduate student from Taneytown, MD; Amy Johnson, a senior agriculture major from Cambridge, IL; Matthew Swanson, a senior agriculture major from LaHarpe, IL; and Arthur Wasilowski, a master of business administration (MBA) graduate student from Des Plaines, IL.

The team finished in the top 8 percent of the competition, 43rd of 503 teams worldwide. In 2019, the WIU team finished 44th out of 409 teams, in the top 11 percent, and in 2018, the team finished 18th out of nearly 600 teams.

"The CME Group University Trading Challenge is a simulated, electronic trading competition that allows students from around the world to experience the excitement, energy and decision-making environment of real-time futures trading using the CQG electronic trading platform," said WIU team advisor Associate Professor of Agriculture Jason Franken. "The competition ran from Oct. 4-30 this year. Teams consist of three-to-five students from the same university."

Franken said each team started the competition with \$500,000 in "play money" to trade with, and WIU students turned that into over \$595,082 by the end of the contest.

"Teams from WIU have placed around the top 10 percent in the competition for three years straight now, so we're proud of this group carrying on what seems to be becoming a tradition here, and even improving a bit on last year's finish," Franken said.

The CME Challenge simulated trading contracts in commodity futures markets using CQG trading software.



# IAVAT, WIU Alumni Host Meeting at Hart's Nursery

The student branch of the Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers (IAVAT) hosted an Oct. 22 meeting at Hart's Nursery in Bushnell, IL.

The IAVAT organization is for agriculture teachers in the state of Illinois and hosts events for pre-service teachers to help them gain networking skills and further their education in areas not covered by traditional class curriculum.

Those who attended learned about utilizing soil science skills, textures, and plant propagation and the instructional methods they could use to teach that curriculum.

Several WIU School of Agriculture helped host the event including 2009 graduate Cynthia Feltmeyer and 2017 graduate Colton Downs. Hart's Nursery is owned by WIU alumni Jeff (1989) and Pam Vancil (1986).

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## WIU Senior Named Reserve World Champion at Oklahoma Horse Show

Western Illinois University senior agriculture major Sydney Riden, of Good Hope, IL, was named the Reserve World Champion Novice Amateur Showmanship this weekend at the National Snaffle Bit Association's World Show in Tulsa, OK.

Riden's horse is named "Cool Lopin Lady," with a barn name of "Willow." Riden and the 9-year-old American Quarter Horse mare ride with Clint Ainsworth Show Horses.

"I would like to thank everyone for their support, including my dad, mom, sister, grandpa, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, and everyone from the Clint Ainsworth Show Horses group," said Riden. "I also want to thank everyone back home in Illinois for their support. I truly could not have done it without them."



# WIU Campus Grass to be Baled for Livestock Feed at University Farm

During a time of stretching budget dollars, two Western Illinois University administrators have come up with a creative way to reduce mowing on campus and provide food for livestock at the University Farm at the same time.

Facilities Management Executive Director Troy Rhoads and School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker collaborated on the project, which sets aside approximately 32 acres of University property to be baled instead of doing traditional mowing.

"I mentioned to him, if he would let the grass grow out to maturity, we would bale and use it for the beef herd in the winter months," said Baker. "He began to map out areas that could be baled, which came close to 32 acres. We are estimating there will be 50 or 60 large bales produced from these acres. The hay will be a grass/clover mixture on most of the acres."

Rhoads said there are several areas that will be baled, including Vince Grady Field, an area near Q-Lot, property near Higgins Hall and a section behind the Western Illinois Credit Union. He added that Vince Grady Field will be returned to normal condition in July, while other areas listed will remain on the reduced service designation to allow them to become productive and not reducing aesthetics.

"Typically, the University farm will utilize 300-plus large, round bales to feed the beef herd and the bulls that are on test during the fall and winter months," Baker added. "We were going to be short on hay this winter, so these bales will certainly help us out."

# WIU Livestock Judging Team Named Reserve National Champions at the 2020 NAILE

The WIU Livestock Judging Team travelled to the 2020 NAILE in Louisville, Kentucky where they were named Reserve National Champions.

Results as follows:

Team

1st in Swine

2nd in Cattle

2nd in Reasons

3rd in Sheep and Goats

Individual:

Kylee Myers

3rd High Swine

4th High Sheep and Goats

5th High Reasons

9th High Individual Overall

Tucker Schlipf

High Individual Performance Cattle

6th High Individual Cattle

17th Overall

Lindsey Pugh

7th High Cattle

9th High Swine

Jenna Girman

3rd High Reasons

7th High Individual Overall



# CONGRATS

**Once again, congratulations to this outstanding team!**

# WIU Livestock Judging Team Named Reserve Champions in Sioux Falls



The WIU Livestock Judging Team travelled to the Sioux Empire Livestock Judging Contest in Sioux Falls, South Dakota where they were named Reserve Champion Team Overall.

Results as follows:

Team  
3rd High Team Overall Swine  
3rd High Team Overall Sheep/Goats  
5th High Team Overall Cattle  
2nd High Team Overall Reasons

Individual:  
Kyle Webster  
6th High Individual Swine  
6th High Individual Cattle  
8th High Individual Overall

Leremy Jackson  
High Individual Swine  
4th High Individual Sheep/Goats  
2nd High Individual Reasons

Wesley Moore  
9th High Individual Sheep/Goats  
9th High Individual Reasons

Isaac Gehret  
High Individual Cattle

# WIU School of Ag Participates in Soil Bucket Program for Third Year

For the third year in a row, the Western Illinois University School of Agriculture is partnering with the Illinois Corn Marketing Board (ICMB) to provide programming for high school agriculture classes across the state.

Through the Soil Health Bucket program, 90 schools receive a five-gallon bucket of supplies for evaluating soil functions and a comprehensive curriculum for engaging

students in employing the interacting impact of soil type and soil management. Topics covered in the curriculum include water filtering and storage, nutrient provision and cycling and conversion of crop residues into soil organic matter.



"Over this three-year period, this project will have placed a Soil Health Bucket into 140 different agriculture programs across the state of Illinois," said WIU School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker. "This curriculum project is helping agriculture instructors at the secondary and post-secondary levels to teach students about basic principles of soil health and sustainability. We appreciate the continued support from the Illinois Corn Marketing Board, and its members, in this educational endeavor."

The WIU program is run by Associate Professor of Agriculture Joel Gruver, who said its goal is to provide every secondary and post-secondary agriculture program in Illinois with a bucket and to "foster a science-informed and youth-led dialogue within agricultural communities across Illinois about the benefits of soil health enhancing practices." This year an effort will be made to video some of Gruver's laboratory activities, so teachers will have access to them to help with their related activities.

"The project provides the necessary curriculum and lab resources for teachers to instruct their students on the importance of soil health with several hands-on activities that demonstrate the importance of understanding the health of soil and its impact on soil productivity," added Baker. "We are grateful that Illinois agriculture teachers have embraced the new curriculum materials to further educate their students on new soil science principles that improve the productivity of Illinois soils."

# Federal Agriculture Grant to Elevate Hydroponic Lettuce Production at WIU

WIU Agriculture Assistant Professors Shelby Henning and Dan Atherton began collaborating two years ago, when Henning and his horticulture students, along with technical assistance from Atherton, built a small hydroponic lettuce production system in the Ag Mech Shop in Knoblauch Hall's basement. The system was constructed of inexpensive materials, the bulk of which was PVC pipe, silicone caulk and recycled lumber. A single horticultural LED lamp served as the only light source for the lettuce grown in the student-made system.



The two professors quickly learned the expertise each possesses melded together naturally into the indoor lettuce production project – Henning contributing (soft science) vegetable production expertise and Atherton with (hard science) computer science and precision agriculture components.

Henning and Atherton have since been refining the production of 'Rex' butterhead lettuce using two prototype lettuce production systems that use rectangular, commercial-grade hydroponic channels in lieu of round PVC pipe, and multiple LED lighting units, to provide sufficient light for all of the growing plants. Atherton and students in his shop skills class constructed the second prototype system, using the first system Atherton had created as a model.

"The nutrient solution within the system is replaced at set dates to determine the optimal time frame for replacement," Atherton said. "Some advantages of the lettuce grown in this hydroponic system are that no pesticides are used, the timeframe from planting to harvest is greatly accelerated and the shelf-life of the crop far surpasses that to lettuce grown in the field."

From about three weeks after seeding to harvest, the growing channels housing the lettuce are disconnected from the system and placed in a custom-made stand to flood the lettuce plants with light. For each lettuce plant, a hyperspectral spectrometer is used to repeatedly capture spectral reflectance signatures (curves) for each plant.

The curves display the reflectance percentages from roughly 350 – 1000 nm, which includes both visible and near-infrared wavelength regions. The curves are then analyzed using advanced software algorithms. The end result is the early detection of nutrient deficiencies in the lettuce crop far before they become visible to the human eye.

The awarded grant, about \$26,000 from the United States Department of Agriculture and awarded by the Illinois Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Grant Program, will facilitate construction of a new system double the size of the existing prototypes. The new system will be located on the first floor of Knoblauch Hall and will include many refinements to the lettuce production and data acquisition process. Also, additional lighting technologies will be evaluated for lettuce production in the new system.

"This system has the potential of growing 400 heads of lettuce per month," Dr. Andy Baker said. "It also has the potential of assisting with WIU's food pantry, if there is a surplus of produce. I appreciate both Dr. Atherton and Dr. Henning for their efforts in their awarded grant to provide a unique learning opportunity for our students and the potential of providing fresh, local produce for our food services on campus."

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## Heaton Named September Employee of the Month at WIU

Western Illinois University Associate Agricultural Research Technician Brent Heaton has been named the Al and Elaine Goldfarb Civil Service Employee of the Month for September 2020.

Heaton was hired in June 1999 and had his classification changed to assistant agricultural research technician in April 2010. He audited to his current position in September 2014.

According to Heaton's nominator, he always arrives at work early, and works hard in extreme temperatures without complaint.

"He takes excellent care of the mechanical equipment and has saved the University a lot of repair costs because of his mechanical skills," said his nominator. "Most importantly, he is willing to help any faculty, staff or student, who needs assistance."





# Macomb Hy-Vee Now Selling Sausage Produced by Leatherneck Country Meats

Leatherneck Country Meats (LCM), a product of the Western Illinois University School of Agriculture, is now for sale at Hy-Vee in Macomb.

The store, on East Jackson Street, is selling pork sausage in links, patties, or ground sausage, in traditional or zesty flavors.



Leatherneck Country Meats-The Purple and Gold Standard of Western Illinois is a student-run organization that offers pork sales to the public. The organization, which sells pork products raised at the University Farm, was started in 2019.

"The School of Agriculture is very excited about getting our Leatherneck Country Meats products into the local Hy-Vee store, so consumers can purchase locally-raised pork," said School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker. "Having the opportunity to sell pre-packaged pork products in Hy-Vee is a dream come true. We work directly with Farmhouse Meats in Carthage, IL, to process our pork and our students have helped design our Leatherneck Country Meats label and website. We hope our working relationship with Hy-Vee continues to grow and prosper as we grow our retail sales. We appreciate Hy-Vee's desire to provide locally-grown products in the store."

Baker added that the WIU administration has been very supportive as LCM branches out into retail sales.

Macomb Hy-Vee Store Director Melissa Worley, a 2010 graduate of WIU's management program, said Baker approached her and Hy-Vee Meat Department Manager Scott Vogler about the possibility of a partnership.

"Through further discussion we were able to work out the details and are excited to carry their products," said Worley. "We love to support Western Illinois University as much as we can."

# WIU Ag Professor Studying High Tunnel Impact on Crop Growing Season

One yardstick Western Illinois University Assistant Professor Shelby Henning uses to measure the results of his vegetable research is how full the harvest makes the bed of his vintage Chevrolet El Camino.

The production of tomatoes and numerous varieties of bell peppers is part of federally-funded grant research into the use of a high tunnel to extend the growing season for vegetable farmers. The United States Department of Agriculture grant helped build the 30-foot by 100-foot plastic-covered structure on the University's agricultural research farm, which is used to protect plantings from weather and extend the growing season.

"This is the Cadillac of high tunnels," said Henning. "It's not a greenhouse; those have heaters and electricity, and this has neither. We can plant tomatoes in early April and still be harvesting into October. There is no way to do that in the field."

Twenty-two varieties of tomatoes and 15 varieties of peppers were planted in the high tunnel facility this season. Henning said each tomato plant yields an average of 15 pounds of product and there are between 600-700 plants. The plants are watered by drip irrigation and an underground fertilizer injection system keeps the plants robust.

"We did two harvests this year; one early and one before school started," said Henning. "Through our research we can tell growers which varieties performed really well and rank them. The results will be published the Illinois Fruit and Vegetable News for commercial growers so farmers can access them."

Most recently, Henning's research produced hundreds of pounds of tomatoes and bell peppers, all of which were donated to the Genesis Garden food distribution effort in Macomb.

"We had about 100 students out here last week for labs," he said. "They can learn about this kind of training in class, but there is no replacement for this type of hands-on work."

Funding for erecting the high-tunnel, and conducting tomato and pepper research, was provided by Illinois Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant SC-19-04, "Variety Selection and Integrated Pest Management for Production of High-Value Crops in High-Tunnels in Illinois."

# WIU Offers Foundational Education Needed to Pursue Career in Veterinary Medicine

The Western Illinois University School of Agriculture offers a pre-professional program designed to meet the requirements for admission to a school of veterinary medicine after graduation. Numerous University alumni are currently enrolled in veterinary school, building on the educational foundation they received from WIU.

Due to intense competition for admission to schools of veterinary medicine, most students first complete a four-year bachelor's degree program prior to admission. Those students considering a career in veterinary medicine should have a good foundation in biological sciences and chemistry, including biochemistry, as the minimum knowledge base for success in the curriculum.

In addition, a course or courses concerning livestock production and animal ethology are highly desirable. Those seeking a career in veterinary medicine, related to agriculture, should consider additional background in nutrition, livestock management and the economics of production by working toward a degree in agriculture prior to admission to veterinary school. Students may also pursue other major fields of study.

The pre-veterinary medicine program at Western has provided a solid foundation for numerous students and alumni who want to further their education. A common thread between these students is the way they decided to pursue careers as veterinarians.



For 2020 graduate **Taylor Carey**, originally from New Boston, IL, she has known since she was a young child what her future career goals were.

"Once in high school, when I was seriously considering my future, vet med was not on my list because I was afraid I wouldn't be able to do it," she said. "It was not until the first semester at WIU where I realized I was capable of becoming a veterinarian and actually began to pursue it."

For 2019 graduate **Luke Daniels**, originally from Strasburg, IL, his path was a bit different.

"I made the decision to pursue a degree in veterinary medicine after graduating from Lake Land College with an associate degree in agriculture production and management," he said. "This is far from the normal path of pre-vet students, but at the time I was not planning on continuing my education at a four-year university. My plan was to enter the workforce and find a job that was related to the livestock industry, more specifically the cattle industry."



Daniels said he had always liked the idea of becoming a veterinarian, but felt that it was out of reach for him.

"After my two years at Lake Land College, I decided that if I did not set this as a goal for myself and work toward achieving it, I would always regret it," he added. "That is where Western came in."

For **Ryan Ackman**, a 2019 WIU graduate originally from Galesburg, IL, deciding to become a veterinarian was a long time coming.

"I've always known that I wanted to work with animals," she said. "When I was growing up, my family bred Australian shepherds, and we fostered kittens, so I've always been around, and taken care of, animals. However, my final decision to become a veterinarian wasn't made until high school, when I realized my strong interest in medicine."



A similar story is shared by 2019 graduate **Cassidy Tarter**, originally from Canton, IL.

"I've known since I was little that I wanted to be a veterinarian," she said. "I know it sounds very cliché, however, my love for animals, and helping them, started with my show cattle around the age of 3, and blossomed from there."



For many veterinary and agricultural students, one of the biggest factors contributing to their decision in becoming a veterinarian was the resources WIU made available to them.

"I was enrolled in an intro to animal science class with Dr. Mark Hoge my first semester at WIU," said Carey. "We had a substantial amount of hands-on experience in this class that really pushed this to happen. Our first lab involved giving iron shots to piglets, as well as ear-notching them for identification purposes. I was so nervous to participate, but once I did, I realized how much I loved it and immediately contacted my advisor afterward to see what I needed to do to pursue the pre-veterinary track."

For Daniels, discovering WIU's agriculture department was the biggest step in making the decision to become a veterinarian.

"The entire experience I had at WIU was extremely helpful as I started my journey," he said. "The science classes that were offered helped to get me thinking in a different way than what I was used to. In a way, I think that is one of the reasons they require those courses to get in. They changed the way I looked at most things and encouraged a deeper, more professional way of thinking. The ag classes, and the ag department, were the reason I came to WIU. I had heard that the ag department at WIU was the best around, and I have to say I agree."

For Ackman, a closer relationship with one of the many talented advisors at WIU was what made all the difference.

"My advisor, Ember Keithley, was a huge help. She helped me to align the classes that I chose at WIU with the prerequisites for the veterinary schools that I applied to," said Ackman. "Also, being in the Honors College gave me many opportunities to add to my vet school applications, such as extra-curricular activities and taking interesting classes that I otherwise would not have had access to. I also joined clubs that allowed me to indulge my interest in animals. Additionally, many classes such as genetics, animal breeding, and various biology classes enhanced my interest in animal science and gave me knowledge that I still utilize in some of my classes at vet school. Finally, I found the professional development classes that I took through the agriculture department to be extremely helpful in preparing for my vet school interview."

Tarter said WIU's School of Agriculture helped guide her path through the variety of classes that were offered.

"The animal science classes taught by Dr. Trennepohl were especially helpful and gave me a better grasp of the knowledge we are being taught while here," she said. "It gave me a leg up to know some of the information prior to learning it recently in the heavy course load we have here at school. The relationships I developed with the teachers, and networking opportunities also helped. WIU Farm Manager Jay Pittman also gave me the confidence that I could succeed by allowing me to help on the farm and gain experience that I previously hadn't had access to."

The stories of these students and their successes are just a few examples of how WIU's agricultural department offers a chance at becoming a part of something greater.

"We are extremely proud of our graduates who pursue being a doctor of veterinary medicine," said School of Agriculture Director Andy Baker. "It takes a special type of student, with enough drive and commitment, to endure the rigor of veterinary medicine school. Their passion for animals is usually the catalyst, but it is the mentoring and educational experiences that finishes the race for these students. It is our caring, committed faculty that encourage these students to pursue their life-long dreams of being a doctor of veterinary medicine. We are thrilled to have had the opportunity to work with all of these exceptional students."



**Western Illinois  
University**

**SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE**

# WIU School of Agriculture Legacy Sale Brings in \$65,200

The Western Illinois University School of Agriculture's Hoof and Horn Club hosted its annual Legacy Sale Tuesday, April 27. The sale was hosted on SC Online Sales.

This is the seventh annual sale, which includes donation lots of all kinds, ranging from live animals to frozen genetics to seed corn.

Money raised through the sale will help cover travel expenses for the WIU Livestock Judging Team and with improvements at the University Farm. Each year, the program is organized by the WIU Livestock Merchandising class, taught by Associate Professor of Agriculture Mark Hoge.

The sale includes 119 items, including a wooden bar, hand-crafted by senior agriculture major Stewart Andres, of Woodland, CA, and made from part of the former basketball court flooring taken from Western Hall.

Andres found the wood floor for sale while he was browsing on Facebook Marketplace, and didn't realize it was from WIU until he picked it up from a local seller.

The bar's top is made up of the basketball court material from Western Hall and Andres added a metal decal, made by the WIU Engineering Technology department, to the front. He also added purple lighting to the finished piece.

