The Chair's Message, Chris Kucharik

Greetings from a home office where I, like most everyone else in our department and university, has been operating from since mid-March when the global COVID-19 pandemic started dominating the news. As the university and many of our faculty transitioned to online learning to finish the spring 2020 semester, there was great uncertainty regarding how research and extension activities would be able to continue during a crucial time of the year for agronomic research. While the majority of us greatly scaled back our activities in the field and labs, we were able to maintain a modest amount of work while striving to protect everyone’s health. But it has not been an easy time. Everyone has made great sacrifices but the department has worked together effectively as a team to navigate the uncertainty and confusion over what we could and could not do.

During summer, the university transitioned to Phase 2 of research reactivation which brought back more researchers to campus, and now we are working towards the Smart Restart for fall semester as we are getting ready to welcome back thousands of students to campus. The large majority of current research and extension activities in agronomy will continue as we have been operating for the past several months during fall. Most people will continue to work remotely, including all office staff. Those that have been working on site in labs and at research stations and other field sites will continue to do so adhering to strict social distancing measures and other guidelines. Many of our course offerings will be offered in an online/virtual format, with one offered in the classroom. All courses at the university will transition to an online format after Thanksgiving break. There has not been any discussion about what will happen when we turn the calendar to 2021. If history repeats itself, plans will have to be adjusted and decisions won’t be made until we learn from what happens during fall semester.

The department has also been responding to concerns about racism and social inequities, which were once again brought to the forefront with the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery (February 23 2020), Breonna Taylor (March 13 2020), and George Floyd (May 25 2020). While the department and university has been working on addressing these issues for several years, our graduate student groups from Agroecology, Agronomy, and Plant Breeding and Plant Genetics all submitted letters to the department in June expressing their own concerns and suggesting many ideas of how we can work towards eliminating...
Making Headlines…

UW Dept. of Agronomy faculty, students, and alumni were busy in March visiting congressional offices in Washington DC to advocate for USDA research funding with American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America. Dr. Shawn Kaeppler is currently serving as the President of CSSA and Haleigh Ortmeier-Clarke, grad student with Shawn Conley and Rodrigo Werle, was chosen as one of 18 graduate students from across the country to attend as a Future Leader in Science award recipient. Alumni Nick Goeser, PhD (CEO of the societies) and Lauren Jorgensen, as well as Director of Government Relations Karl Anderson rounded out the group. The delegation had the opportunity to meet with the offices of Senators Baldwin and Johnson, as well as Representatives Gallagher and Pocan. They also met with staff from both the Senate and House Agricultural Appropriations Committees. USDA programs support important research at UW and beyond.

Welcome!

Sarah Striegel, MS Agronomy 2020, academic staff, Werle group

Jose Junior Nunes, visiting scholar, Werle group

Alden Perkins, research assistant, de Leon group

Caitlyn Emrick, academic staff, Gutiérrez group

Clarissa Dietz, research assistant, Jackson group

Greta Landis, PhD Env & Res 2020, staff, Jackson group

Martin Costa, research assistant, S. Kaeppler group

Dylan Schoemaker, research assistant, S. Kaeppler group

Erica Shoenberger, research assistant, Picasso group

Calli Anibas, academic staff, Tracy group

Hunter Mackin, research assistant, Kucharik group

Garrett Imhoff, research assistant, Renz group

Yuebo Su, visiting scholar, Renz group

Sarika Marathe, visiting scientist, Tracy group

Alexandre Tonon Rosa, visiting scientist, Werle group

My name is Dylan Schoemaker, and I am a new Ph.D. student here at UW-Madison in the Plant Breeding and Plant Genetics Program under Shawn Kaeppler! I am originally from Reading, PA, and just graduated with my bachelor’s degree in Plant Sciences from Penn State University. In my free time I enjoy spending time outside with my family or friends hiking, kayaking, or running!

Chair, continued from pg. 1

racism, bias, and inequities in the department and beyond. The department has held several meetings over the summer to discuss these concerns and show solidarity in moving forward to address these long term issues. We are really only getting started and have a long way to go to solving these problems, but we are gaining momentum and will continue these discussions in the coming months.

While it has been a challenging year to all, I can also share some real positive news about our faculty. I am happy to report that the faculty position request submitted to CALS for a forage systems agroecologist was approved. While the position is currently on hold due to the pandemic, we have a committee that is working towards drafting the position vacancy listing so we are ready to go when a search is able to commence. We also learned that Prof. Natalia de Leon and Prof. Molly Jahn were elected as fellows to the Crop Science Society of America! The Fellow designation is the highest recognition bestowed by the Crop Science Society of America.

Please see Chair, pg. 7
Werle receives Second Mile Award
By Greg Blonde, WACAA Public Relations Committee Chair

The Wisconsin Association of County Agricultural Agents (WACAA) recently recognized several members during their annual awards and recognition program. An affiliate of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA), WACAA is a professional organization for county, area and state Extension professionals to encourage excellence and professionalism in their work; improve effectiveness of Wisconsin Extension programs; provide assistance for agents to seek and participate in professional improvement opportunities, and recognize and promote superior achievement.

Rodrigo Werle, UW-Madison Extension Agronomy Weed Scientist, was recognized for his outstanding support of Wisconsin County Agricultural Agents.

The WACAA annual awards are sponsored by Hoard’s Dairyman; WI Agriculturist; the WI Broadcasters Association and A & T Industries.

Ané receives Postdoc Mentoring Award

The UW–Madison Postdoctoral Association, a volunteer-led advocacy group for UW–Madison postdocs supported by the Office of Postdoctoral Studies, established the Postdoc Mentoring Awards in 2015 to encourage and reward excellence, innovation, and effectiveness in the mentoring of postdocs.

Current or former postdocs nominated their mentors with letters of support detailing how they have exemplified exceptional mentorship. An association committee was then tasked with selecting those mentors who have gone above and beyond in contributing their time, knowledge, energy, and enthusiasm to advance the next generation of researchers and scholars on campus. These mentors embody the ideals of the association and the University of Wisconsin, and their dedication is inspiring and worthy of recognition.

Jean-Michel Ané, Professor of Agronomy and Bacteriology, was selected to receive this award.

Please read the full article here.

Werle receives Toepfer Faculty Fellow Award
Submitted by Chris Kucharik, Agronomy Department Chair

Rodrigo Werle has been selected to receive a 2020-2021 Alfred Toepfer Faculty Fellow Award. This award supports the development of promising CALS faculty as they progress toward tenure. This is a great honor as it recognizes accomplishments and impact to date, and his high potential for continued growth and success.

Werle credits his team, #WiscWeeds, as the reason for his award. L-R, kneeling: Nick Arneson, Madison Melms, Felipe Faleco, Victor Ribiero. L-R standing: Ryan DeWerff, Werle, Kolby Grint, Haleigh Ortmeier-Clarke, Sarah Striegel, Nicola Arsenijevic, Max Oliveira, and Dan Smith.

Congratulations!
Congratulations…continued

Crop Science Society Fellows

Professors Natalia de Leon and Molly Jahn have been selected as CSSA Fellows for 2020! The Fellow designation is the highest recognition bestowed by the CSSA. Members of CSSA nominate worthy colleagues based on their professional achievement and meritorious service, and each year only a select few are bestowed with this designation. It is a huge honor for Natalia and Molly and for the Agronomy Department.

Submitted by Chris Kucharik

Michel wins awards

Kathryn Michel received the 2020-2021 D.C. Smith Wisconsin Distinguished Graduate Fellowship and the 2020 UW Outstanding Agronomy Graduate Student Award.

She was also named a Borlaug Graduate Scholar. The Borlaug Graduate Scholars program is established by the National Association of Plant Breeders (NAPB) and funded through the Agronomic Science Foundation (ASF) to develop the plant breeding science professions by strengthening the next generation of leaders.

Don Jones, Chair of the NAPB Borlaug Scholars Committee, says, “Kathryn's resume reveals an outstanding student with the potential to follow closely in the footsteps of Dr. Norman Borlaug in relieving hunger and poverty through plant breeding.”

You can view all the scholars’ profiles here.

Kathryn is a PhD candidate under the direction of Shawn Kaeppler and Natalia de Leon. She deploys cutting-edge analytical tools to characterize the genetic architecture of maize yield components in multiparent and diverse populations across environments.

Sanford earns CALS award

Gregg Sanford, Associate Scientist in Randy Jackson’s group, received the CALS Academic Staff Excellence Award. This award is given to academic staff who make outstanding contributions to the college and their respective areas of work. The award includes a stipend. View the article here.

Grad Student Spotlight

Hello! My name is Alden Perkins. I’m excited to be a new graduate student with Natalia de Leon. I recently finished my master’s at Penn State studying maize roots and nitrogen acquisition with Jonathan Lynch. When not doing research, I like vegetable gardening, baking, and hiking. I’m looking forward to meeting more members of the department!
McNamee receives award

The American Society of Agronomy awarded Elizabeth O. McNamee the Nelson Yield-Limiting Factors Graduate Student Scholarship.

Elizabeth is an Agronomy Ph.D. candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in Chris Kucharik’s group. She studies irrigation methods to conserve water in Central Wisconsin. Elizabeth received her B.S. from McGill University (Geography) and M.S. from UW-Madison (Soil Science and Agroecology). She finds working on applied science, science communication, and collaborating with people incredibly rewarding. Elizabeth plans to harness these passions through a career in agricultural extension or in a technical advisory role in the public sector. Elizabeth is fascinated by soil water dynamics, plant growth, and farmer decision making, and ultimately aims to help reshape the food system in a positive way in her lifetime. Over the course of her Ph.D., Elizabeth has been involved in several organizations and initiatives to increase science accessibility, build community among graduate students, and advocate for science-driven policy. Elizabeth loves growing food for people and hiking with her dog, Gus.

The Yield-Limiting Factors Scholarship encourages students to pursue research and careers in support of the diagnosis yield-limiting factors in agronomy. The focus of the scholarship is on leadership and accomplishments and the nominee’s long-term personal goals to research and develop improved diagnostic techniques and solutions to yield-limiting factors in agronomy. The scholarship is provided through the Agronomic Science Foundation by the Werner L. Nelson Fund and administered through the American Society of Agronomy.

New Grazing Shelters at WICST

Submitted by Maggie Phillips and Gregg Sanford

Agronomy’s Mark Walsh spent the past winter and much of this spring building permanent grazing shelters and new fences at the Wisconsin Integrated Cropping Systems Trial (WICST). These shelters replace a portable sunshade and feeding station and will provide the heifers that rotationally graze WICST pastures and prairies protection from the sun, wind, and mud. They also streamline loading and unloading cattle during weekly moves, reducing stress on both cattle and crew.

Rotational grazing has been a part of WICST since Josh Posner started the experiment in 1990. The rotationally-grazed pasture system is designed to represent a custom heifer-raising operation. Heifers are typically brought on to pasture in early May and returned to Marshfield ARS at the end of the season (October), eventually entering the UW’s milking herd. Managed grazing is used to improve the productivity and health of both the heifers and pasture and has provided valuable insight into the productivity, profitability, and environmental performance of perennial grasslands.
COVID-19 made things like lab meetings look a little different this year. It forced everyone to wear a mask and social distance (6’ apart)—even outside.

Submitted by Natalia de Leon

Grad Student Spotlight

Martin Costa is from Buenos Aires, Argentina. He is pursuing his Ph.D. under the direction of Dr. de Leon and Dr. Kaeppler. Martin finished his master’s program studying organic cotton breeding at Texas A&M University under the direction of Dr. Steve Hague. Martin came to Madison to follow his passion for breeding maize. Prior to beginning his studies in the United States, Martin worked for Monsanto as a field supervisor where he began his love for maize production. As a child, his mother and family always worked in the agricultural sector, which is what led to Martin’s passion for the sector, being raised by agronomists and breeders who encouraged and inspired him. Outside of work, Martin follows his life-long passion for soccer, gardening, barbequing, and running. He also has a deep passion for travel, languages, and community development.

As a person, Martin considers himself to be energetic, driven, and optimistic. Martin believes everything happens for a reason. Giving proof to this fact, he met his better half, Micah, in an elevator in Argentina, while she was doing her Ph.D. in political science. Martin and Micah moved to the U.S after she received her Ph.D., and for him to pursue his Ph.D. As Martin likes to say, this is because “it is no fun unless one of us is a stressed grad student”. Together Martin and Micah enjoy running, entertaining, participating in community events, and playing fetch with their golden doodle, Mana.

Find more CALS news on Twitter (@UWMadisonCALS) and Facebook (UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences).
In February 2020, the Agronomy and Horticulture Curriculum Committees met to discuss future collaboration in courses and curriculum for undergraduate and graduate programs.

Chair, continued from pg. 2

Dr. Rodrigo Werle was selected to receive an Alfred Toepfer Faculty Fellow Award! This award supports the development of promising CALS faculty as they progress toward tenure. This is a great honor for Dr. Werle - it recognizes his accomplishments and impact to date, and his high potential for continued growth and success. Our newsletter also highlights many awards and other accomplishments of students and staff so please take a close read!

In closing, I want to emphasize that many department activities cannot happen without your continued support. As always, we are extremely grateful for the continued support of our alumni, emeritus faculty, staff, and other friends. I wish you all well and hope for continued good health!

Chris Kucharik

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Deadlines to apply to the Agronomy Graduate Program or the Plant Breeding Plant Genetics Graduate Program:

September 1 for spring entry

December 1 for summer and fall

GRE no longer required!

For more information please contact:
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