



Natural Resource News

Newsletter of the School of Agriculture & Land Resources Management
and the Agricultural & Forestry Experiment Station

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Correction: In the first issue of *Natural Resource News* the article "Home on the Tundra", describing Milan Shipka's research, incorrectly stated that the Palmer Research Center maintains a small herd of dairy cows. Although Shipka researches dairy cows, the Palmer cattle are Black Angus mixes. We extend our apologies to any nervous cows or disappointed milk lovers.

Editor's Note: You can find out more about SALRM research projects in our magazine, "Agroborealis". The next issue will be published fall of 2001. See back page of this newsletter for subscription information.

Stronger Partnerships For Agriculture

Colien Hefferan likes to focus on the three middle words of her agency's name. Hefferan is the administrator of the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES). Part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), CSREES performs cooperative extension in food and agricultural sciences.

Hefferan was the featured speaker recently for a colloquium on strengthening partnerships among universities and state and federal agencies involved in agriculture. Her agency has a budget of \$1.25 billion for research, extension and education efforts, and a staff of about 400 persons who work with thousands of scientists, educators and extension personnel each year.

Hefferan is convinced that the university system, combined with education and outreach, is the best way to advance agricultural research and development. As examples she pointed to impact papers on the agency's Web site (www.reeusda.gov) describing recent research advances in such areas as animal health and food safety.

So what does the focus on strengthening agricultural partnerships mean for SALRM and AFES? Carol E. Lewis, interim dean of the school, believes there truly is a tripartite partnership in Alaska among UAF's extension, education and research efforts. She looks for the school and experiment station to work even more closely with cooperative extension in the near future, and points to several recent developments.

The Agricultural Research Service (ARS), a branch of the USDA, is returning to Alaska after a hiatus of several years. The ARS conducts research in such areas as new food

products and integrated pest management (a mix of approaches that can include biological and chemical controls), and currently has four scientists based in Fairbanks and Palmer.

The service is adding three new scientists in integrated pest management, who will be housed in UAF's O'Neill building alongside AFES researchers. Researchers from the ARS work closely with the experiment station, and Lewis expects that Alaskans working in areas such as agronomy, horticulture and forestry will benefit from the partnership.

Lewis said the cooperative efforts in integrated pest management could also include the UAF Museum and the Institute of Arctic Biology, and in the future could involve other research groups in areas such as chemistry and engineering.

"The range of clients that an effort like this reaches illustrates the broad definition of agriculture," said Lewis.

Along with traditional agricultural clients agencies such as the National Park Service and the USDA Forest Service, and homeowners and landscapers stand to benefit from agricultural research in Alaska.

At one point in her talk, Hefferan joked about her agency's name being such a mouthful to say, and said she's encouraged by the current climate of blurring lines among agencies and organizations, and focusing on work that needs to be done. Lewis pointed to a statement that Hefferan made that she particularly liked.

"We want to fill needs rather than just [job] vacancies."

For UAF and Alaska, Lewis thinks that means good things to come.

Geography Professor Finding Sense Of Place

Cary de Wit says that growing up in a suburb of Kansas City made him curious about life in small towns. His interest led to several years of research in western Kansas and eastern Colorado. Based on that research de Wit, an assistant professor in geography, is now finishing a book titled "Sense of Place on the American High Plains."

De Wit found that in the small towns that dot the high plains of the central United States, people felt a sense of isolation, and viewed themselves and their communities as different from the rest of the country. He said this sense of place, which is sometimes expressed terms of "us versus them," permeates everything about small town life.

He finds the same general trends in Fairbanks — not surprising considering the geographic isolation and pioneer history of both areas. De Wit said people he interviewed often had "a culture of their own leftover from 50 to 100 years ago," when the area's population was made up almost entirely of farmers.

De Wit said his research consisted of mostly interviews, a commonly used method in ethnographic studies, and involved many hours of just "letting people talk." He said he sees the same sense of self sufficiency among people in Fairbanks as in the people he interviewed in the high plains region.

He is most interested in cultural geography, and is able to bring his research perspective to the regional

geography classes he teaches at UAF. The classes include students from Alaska, from states outside Alaska and from other countries.

De Wit said that he sees dramatic differences in the perceptions of his students on Alaska issues such as ANWR and the pipeline. Students from outside Alaska often have a lot of misconceptions, and after experiencing the state firsthand, say it's "not what they expected."

De Wit continues to be interested by how people think about the places they live. In Alaska he's collected examples of frontier iconography — photographing signs and murals, and identifying consistent themes ranging from Mount McKinley to moose antlers.

Shopping For A Good Deal On Irrigation

Although you can buy most things from a local store or a mail-order catalog, a linear irrigation system isn't one of them. So when the Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station needed an irrigation system for grasshopper research, the hunt was on.

The experiment station works with the Agricultural Research Service, a research branch of the USDA, on grasshopper research in Alaska. A recent \$200,000 federal grant was targeted for studying how irrigation affects grasshoppers.

The state provided 375 acres of land near Delta, which was cleared earlier this year. The research plan calls for grasshoppers to be introduced into strips of crops, both irrigated and non-irrigated. Scientists will then observe their feeding choices and behavior.

That left researchers looking for a linear irrigation system, which they concluded was the most effective way to irrigate the fields. Although the long structures consisting of pipes and wheels are a common sight across the Great Plains, nobody had one in Alaska.

Then Dr. Charles Knight got a tip from Hans Geier, another SALRM researcher, that Monsanto Chemical in Washington state was selling two irrigation systems. Monsanto was relocating its Pacific Northwest Agronomy Center and decided to sell the existing irrigation systems rather than move them. The larger linear irrigator was a 1997 system guided by a buried cable, making it highly adaptable; the smaller system was even newer. The cost of two such systems new would be more than \$150,000.

After a series of phone calls, Knight and the other researchers placed a bid of \$30,000 for the older system and \$20,000 for the newer, smaller system. An additional \$10,000 was earmarked for disassembly and transport.

Monsanto accepted both bids and the two systems were transported by flatbed truck to Alaska earlier this summer. Alan Tonne from the Fairbanks Experiment Farm traveled to Washington to observe the disassembly of the irrigation systems.

One of the linear irrigators was delivered to Delta Junction where the bulk of the grasshopper research will take place. The smaller of the two systems was transported to the Fairbanks farm. Farm personnel are setting up and testing the irrigation systems, and researchers will begin the grasshopper study next summer.

FALL SEMESTER REMINDER

—The first day of instruction for fall semester classes is Thursday, Sept. 6. The department office will be providing student contact forms to instructors. Contact Frances Bedel, 474-7188, for more information.

College Of Fellows Hosts Fund-raiser

Thanks to members of the Fairbanks community and a university fund-raising group, the Georgeson Botanical Garden has \$6,000 more to work with. On July 10, the UAF College of Fellows hosted a fund-raising dinner at the garden.

More than 100 people attended the outdoor dinner, which took place under a canopy set up next to the garden's extensive flower beds. Donations from the event went to the Georgeson Botanical Garden Endowment and the

Dorothy Beistline Memorial Garden Endowment.

The dinner was organized by event chair Carolyne Wallace and members of the College of Fellows. Ted Fathauer, chair of the college, said the group plans to host the fund-raising dinner as an annual event.

The garden, one of the Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station's most visible and popular features, is one of the premier horticulture collections in the Far North.

Station Records 90 Years Of Weather

The National Weather Service recently recognized the Fairbanks Experiment Farm for 90 years of continuous weather records. The farm, part of the Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, has been the site of a weather station since 1911. Station personnel at the farm take temperature and precipitation readings in conditions ranging from balmy round-the-clock daylight in summer to bone-chilling minus 60 F temperatures in winter.

The experiment farm's weather station is part of the Cooperative Weather Observation Program run by the weather service. The program is made up of more than 12,000 observers across the United States. Forecasters at the weather service office in Fairbanks use the records to create the forecast for northern Alaska. The readings also give forecasters a valuable long-term picture of the region's weather patterns.

Public Turns Out For Day At Garden

Several hundred people attended this year's "Day at the Georgeson Botanical Garden" on July 29. The annual event is hosted by 4-H and the Georgeson Botanical Garden. Local teens, working with adult mentors, led craft and nature activities ranging from making kites to viewing microscopic pond life.

Despite cloudy skies and intermittent rain, visitors arrived in steady numbers throughout the afternoon for the activities and to enjoy the botanical garden's showy flowers, in full bloom after a summer of near 24-hour growing conditions.

Event organizer Jan Hanscom, volunteer coordinator and a research assistant at the botanical garden, estimated the crowd number at nearly 500. She said that number was a bit less than previous years' attendance, but still represented a good turnout considering the weather and the late-July date, when several other Fairbanks-area events occur.

The public day showcases the botanical garden and the local 4-H. Those interested in either acting as a volunteer for the garden, or becoming involved in 4-H, can contact Hanscom at 474-6921.

Bulletin Board

STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF

—*The Back-to-School Barbecue is Friday, Sept. 14 at 6:00 p.m. The event is potluck and will be held at the Fairbanks Experiment Farm. Contact Barbara Pierson, 474-5276, for more information.*

STUDENTS IN NRM AND GEOGRAPHY

—*Come along for Natural Resource Experiences this fall. Jeff Werner and Barbara Pierson will be leading day trips to Angel Rocks (Chena River State Recreation Area) on Sept. 8, and Denali National Park on Sept. 15. Contact Jeff, 474-6932, or Barb, 474-5276, for details.*

PERSONNEL

—*Scott Rupp was recently hired as an assistant professor of Forest Measurements.*

—*Frances Bedel is the new administrative assistant for the PASS, Forest Sciences, and Resources Management departments.*

—*Kelly Mellard, CES/SALRM payroll technician, and Terry Lyle, administrative assistant to the SALRM Dean, recently left to pursue other professional opportunities. Thanks to Kelly and Terry and we'll miss you.*

—*Xiao Yen Dai (major professor Chien Lu Ping) completed her doctorate in soil chemistry. She is moving to Madison, Wisconsin for post-doctoral studies. Congratulations!*

—*Welcome aboard to Abe Smyth, research aide for Dr. R. Leiner at the Palmer Research Center.*

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