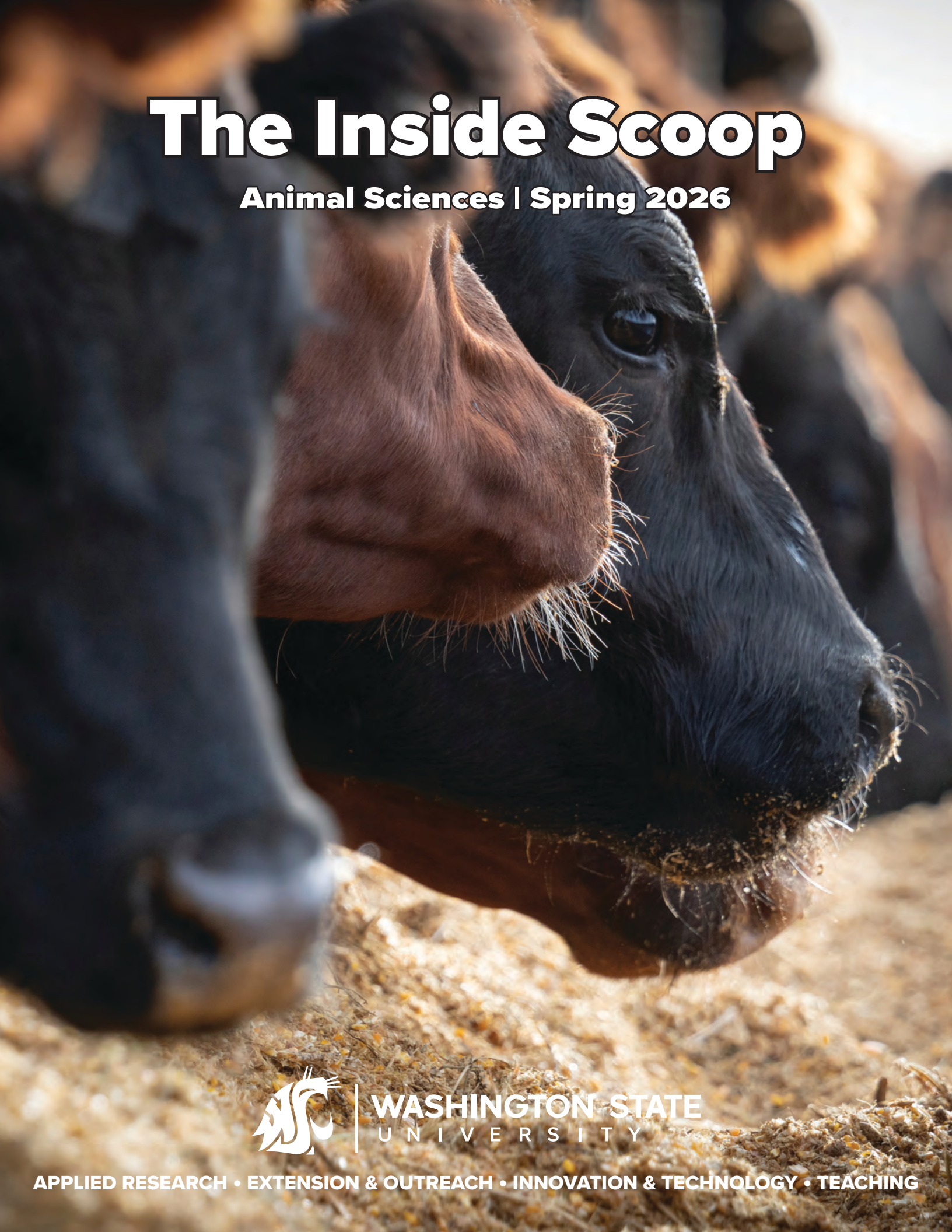
The Inside Scoop

Animal Sciences | Spring 2026



WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

APPLIED RESEARCH • EXTENSION & OUTREACH • INNOVATION & TECHNOLOGY • TEACHING

Go Cougs!

Notes from Gordon Murdoch, Chair

Change is, in fact, one of the things we can be certain of year over year in academia and life, for that matter. This year is no different, and the Animal Sciences department observed the retirement of two extremely impactful faculty members, Dr. Kristen Johnson and Dr. Nancy Irlbeck. These individuals have positively impacted the lives of countless students, the livestock industry, and the general public, and they will be sincerely missed. On the bright side, we have made some tremendous new additions to our faculty and staff that you can read about in the forthcoming pages (suspense effectively established). We officially moved our heifers and dry cows into our new barn at the Knott Dairy Center, dramatically improving their housing while adding some flex space for future research trials. We had the privilege of hosting the Dairy West/Build Dairy group, the Washington State Beef Commission, American Wagyu Association, and the Washington Swine Producers on campus in Pullman, which presented opportunities to reinforce our strategic efforts to serve these livestock sectors. We were also able to participate in other important annual meetings across the state, including dairy, sheep, swine, and cattlemen's/cattlewomen's, Pacific Northwest Annual Nutrition meetings, presenting invaluable time to listen and align our programmatic vision with industry needs. Our ears remain open, our aspirations to serve remain steadfast, and our commitment to excellence endures. I encourage all of you with vested interest in the success of our program to voice your needs, mentor our faculty and staff, and support the Animal Sciences department. We remain the largest undergraduate program in our college. We have observed unprecedented year-over-year budget cuts, but we draw strength from the industry that we serve. We have witnessed you weather the challenges and changes so effectively. May we be strong, innovative, passionate, and successful in our mission to support the animal industry by improving the quality of life for people and animals and enhancing local and global economies through knowledge of animal sciences.

The Inside Scoop

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We invite you to visit us in person or online.

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On the cover: Angus cattle feeding in a feedlot at sunset

Academic Advising in Animal Sciences

The Importance of Academic Advisors

Many undergraduates consider their academic advisor one of the most important people on their path to completing a degree. Academic advisors guide students through requirements, prerequisites, and internships. They also help students explore animal science careers and connect them with resources such as research labs and livestock facilities. Building a strong relationship with an advisor helps animal science students make informed decisions and optimize their educational and career prospects.

Welcoming New Advisors

We are pleased to announce that in October 2025, Nancy Hernandez and Lisa Hunter, two highly qualified academic advisors joined our team to fill Scott Brown's position. Their expertise will allow us to provide students with more personalized support and guidance as we continue to support their success.

Nancy Hernandez is a first-generation college graduate from Rupert, Idaho. She earned both her BS in child development and family relations and her MS in family and consumer sciences at the University of Idaho. During her graduate research, she focused on Latina entrepreneurs in Idaho. She is well equipped to support families with her first-generation, multilingual perspective.

During graduate school, Hernandez discovered her passion for advising. She started as a part-time retention counselor, helping students find essential resources for their success. Throughout, she has remained dedicated and committed to supporting students.

"I really enjoy helping people find resources so they're aware of what's available," Hernandez explained. "It feels like putting together a puzzle, matching academic options with social activities to support student success."

Prior to her position in Animal Sciences, Hernandez provided advising and support to students for five years. Her work included serving in the TRIO Student Support Services program, a federally funded program designed to assist first-generation, low-income, and students with disabilities to successfully complete their post-secondary education. Similarly, for students in Animal Sciences, she is committed to providing support and showing them the resources they need to reach their academic goals.

Her advice to students is straightforward: remain open-minded, keep learning, and stay innovative. She also urges students to explore career options, attend department events, pursue internships, and seek guidance from faculty or advisors. "Investigate all career options. Know some jobs are unique," she says. "The Department of Animal Sciences has a supportive team of advisors ready to help you succeed in your career path."

Beyond her career, Hernandez values spending time walking, watching movies, and making memories with her family and their two Chihuahuas.

Lisa Hunter, a proud Cougar alumna, earned her BS in kinesiology from WSU in 2000. She began supporting students at WSU in 1998 at the College of Communication, serving as an academic coordinator until September 2011. Hunter then joined the Carson College of Business, where she oversaw the dual degree program with Cesar Ritz Colleges & the School of Hospitality Business Management, and served as registrar at WSU Everett until 2025. During this time, her efforts were recognized with the WSU Administrative Professional award in May 2021 and the Outstanding Staff award in the Carson College of Business in 2020-2021.

For nearly 30 years at WSU, Hunter has focused on guiding students through academic requirements, helping them discover suitable paths to their career goals, and fostering a sense of belonging. She is adept at navigating the university's academic policies, has strong listening skills, and provides students with honest, timely feedback.

Her advice is straightforward: "Do things to help you understand if you really enjoy your chosen career path and to bring you closer to your goals."

During her free time, Hunter is active in her Idaho community, volunteering as an EMT and serving on the Troy School Board. In addition, she likes gardening and spending time outdoors. Meanwhile, her husband works as an engineer at Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories in Moscow, Idaho, and their grown children are building their careers in the area.

From Muddy Moorit to MinION

Undergraduate Researchers Explore the Genetics of Heritage Wool Color

In a genetics laboratory, undergraduate researchers are examining a key question in the genetics of heritage livestock. They are investigating what genetic factors underlie the rare moorit (brown) wool color and the recently observed blue-gray variation, known as 'muddy moorit,' in Wensleydale sheep.

Wensleydale ewes with the Moorit color. Photo credit: Nancy Irlbeck

Meet the Team

Dr. Kim Davenport leads a team of undergraduate animal sciences students: Jocelyn Brown, Avery Lyons, Chad Knox, Anais Atilano, Kimberly Zapata, and Elisa Macbean. Together, they quickly formed a cohesive group focused on investigating the genetics of heritage livestock.

The Power of Mentorship

Davenport emphasizes the value of mentorship: "Mentoring undergraduate students is one of the most rewarding parts of my job. Watching their curiosity for science grow into new discoveries and confidence is very fulfilling, and we get to ask some pretty fascinating scientific questions along the way!"

Investigating Heritage Livestock Genetics

The moorit color is highly valued in heritage fiber markets. For decades, it was believed lost in Wensleydale sheep until it reappeared in an Idaho flock. Following this rediscovery, as breeders selected for moorit, the wool of some Wensleydale sheep began to show a darker, blue-gray cast called muddy moorit. This observation suggests that multiple genetic changes may be involved. According to one student, muddy moorit is "not like a true moorit, but it's showing some variation of it," with a "bluish, gray, brownish phenotype."

The research team is focusing on *TYRP1* (tyrosinase-related protein 1), a gene that influences coat color in sheep. Mutations in the gene responsible for black pigment result in the brown (moorit) phenotype. Their primary objective was to sequence the entire *TYRP1* gene to confirm the known mutation associated with moorit and to identify additional variants that may explain the muddy moorit phenotype. This process required extensive laboratory work, including DNA extraction, multiple polymerase chain reactions (PCRs), and gel electrophoresis. Subsequently, the team sequenced the DNA using an in-house Oxford Nanopore MinION, a portable DNA sequencer. The resulting DNA reads were then mapped to the sheep reference genome to identify genetic variants.

Student Growth and Scientific Curiosity

While the scientific objectives are clear, the project is equally about building students' research confidence. "Mostly how to properly work in the lab," said Chad Knox, who was familiar with the terminology but not the concepts. Learning procedures such as PCR and gel electrophoresis helped clarify these ideas. "That was really helpful for me to actually understand what was happening."

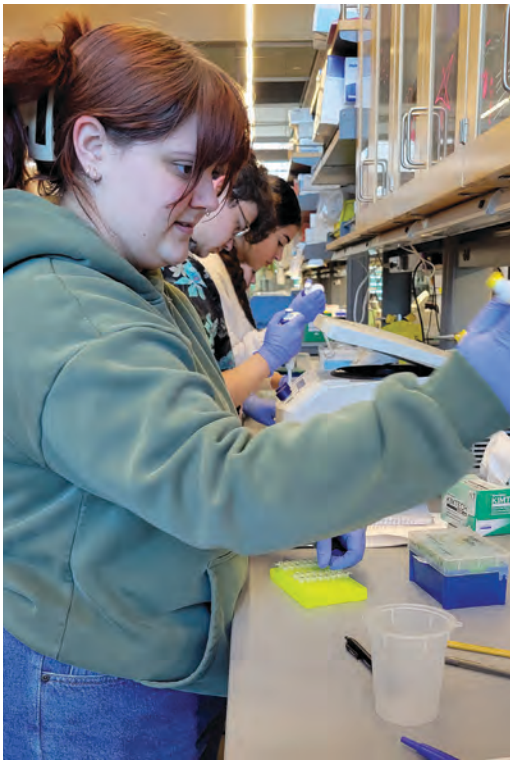
Support and inspiration have been essential to the students' progress. All of the students joined Davenport's lab through the CAHNRS Ignite program and stayed because of the combination of mentorship and intellectual curiosity. Anais Atilano, who wants to go to veterinary school, expressed a desire to understand "what goes on in a lab." She noted that, "Kim's positive and supportive attitude was really inviting." Avery Lyons, who will start vet school in August, initially felt uncertain about research, but after a tour, she felt "very welcome" and "liked the energy" in the lab. Ultimately, she

Undergraduate students (L to R) Jocelyn Brown, Chad Knox, Anais Atilano, and Avery Lyons program a thermocycler for a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) in Dr. Kim Davenport's lab. They are investigating the genetics behind the muddy moorit coat color phenotype in Wensleydale sheep. Not pictured: Kimberly Zapata and Elisa Macbean

discovered that research was “something that I really like.”

Collaborative Discoveries and Achievements

Beyond laboratory research, this work may help breeders and breed registries make informed decisions. By supporting genetic diversity, these efforts help conserve at-risk heritage sheep. Jocelyn Brown noted that the muddy moorit phenotype in Wensleydale sheep "hasn't been seen in a long



time." She added, its reappearance is "really kind of monumental." As a result, this research may improve the chances of breeding and preserving the trait.

The experience is also broadening students' perspectives on their roles in science. After attending the Plant and Animal Genome conference in January, Brown described observing researchers sharing ideas and building on each other's work: “It was really cool and inspiring,” she said. “I was like, yeah... grad school's for me,” as she decided between veterinary school and graduate school. Lyons agreed that stepping outside the daily routine was valuable: “It was nice to kind of get out of our little... bubble of the lab and realize... there's so much genetics research going on.”

Their analyses are almost complete, and the students are excited to share what causes the muddy moorit coat color. As the next step, Brown and Lyons will present the group's findings at the American Society of Animal Science Annual Meeting in Madison, Wisconsin, in July.

Cultivating Tomorrow's Industry Leaders

Active Learning in Beef Production

Dr. Katie Shira, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Idaho, joined WSU this spring as a lecturer for the Beef Cattle Production and Beef Feedlot Systems courses. She brings practical knowledge from her family's cow-calf operation, research experience as a feedlot intern, and her animal science education, all of which shape the teaching she provides to students.

Shira began her educational journey studying animal science at Treasure Valley Community College in Eastern Oregon, about 50 miles northwest of Boise, Idaho, before she transferred to Oregon State University and completed a BS degree in agricultural science with a minor in animal science at the Eastern Oregon University campus in La Grande, Oregon, in 2019. Building on this foundation, she then moved to Moscow, Idaho, and completed her PhD in animal science – beef physiology in 2024, where she studied bone and skeletal muscle growth and development before beginning her postdoc. Currently, she splits her time equally between the UI and WSU, working on livestock genetics research and teaching, respectively.

Her upbringing working with her parents on the ranch, combined with seeing how much her mom enjoyed teaching elementary school, led Shira to discover a passion for educating the next generation about beef cattle production. Building on these influences, she now emphasizes active learning and plans for students to visit operations, observe management styles, and ask questions in the courses she teaches. Because early job shadowing and internship experiences strongly shaped her own career, she wants her students to have similar exposure.

“I want to give students a real-world picture of beef production and feedlot management,” she said, as she described her teaching philosophy. “I want students to get some hands-on experience and get involved with industry members, and I want them to learn about all the opportunities there are in the industry.”

Given that students in her classes come from a wide variety of backgrounds, including many with pre-vet interests, Shira focuses on meeting the class where it is. To bridge different experience levels, she first covers some fundamentals before delving into more advanced information. Additionally, she encourages students to complete Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certification to ensure they understand and can discuss the science-based production principles that assure cattle well-being, beef quality, and safety.

In addition to the current courses, she would like to help bring back the Cougar Cattle Feeders program, which has been inactive for several years. Her goal is to revive this program so that students can once again participate in the student-run cooperative, custom-feed steers and heifers, and gain valuable hands-on experience in feeding, care, and management. The revived program would also reconnect students with industry leaders and help prepare them for careers.

Shira provides a learning experience that connects classroom learning with the realities of beef cattle production and feedlot management, giving students the knowledge and the confidence to step into a wide range of careers in the beef industry. Shira's goal is simple: to help students see what's possible, then give them the experiences to get there.

Introducing Dr. Addison Carroll

Dairy Specialist with a Producer-First Approach

We are excited to introduce Dr. Addison Carroll, a new assistant professor and dairy cattle specialist, who joined us in August 2025. She brings a producer-first mindset to her research and outreach programs.

Background and Early Interests

Carroll was raised on a cow-calf operation in Missouri and developed an interest in dairy cattle as a teenager raising Holstein steers. As an undergraduate at Northwest Missouri State University, she became interested in nutrition after learning how ruminal microbes convert fiber and carbohydrates into volatile fatty acids, a key energy source for the animal. She later milked for three years on a family-owned Jersey dairy farm, further developing her practical skillset while enhancing her passion for nutrition and dairy production. These early experiences gave her a basic understanding of the links between biological mechanisms and animal performance, subsequently leading her to focus her education on ruminant nutrition.

Carroll earned a BS in animal science with a spanish minor from Northwest Missouri State University in 2019. She completed her MS in 2021 and PhD in 2024 in ruminant nutrition at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln under Dr. Paul Kononoff. Her graduate work focused on feed pelleting strategies to enhance palatability, energy metabolism, nitrogen utilization, and methane mitigation in dairy cattle.

Research Focus and Academic Roles

Carroll's role at WSU blends research (65%), Extension (30%), and service (5%). Her primary goal is to help dairy producers maximize nutrient value by improving utilization and reducing nutrient excretion, especially carbon and nitrogen.

She emphasized, "I want to ensure more carbon and nitrogen are available for productive purposes, instead of being lost through manure or greenhouse gas emissions." This utimately leads her program to evaluate how nutritional and manure management strategies influence the total GHG and nutrient excretion of dairy cattle from head to tail.

Student Engagement and Mentorship

Students play a key role in her program. Her team consists of six undergraduate students who are gaining important practical experience with dairy cows, data collection, and daily research problem-solving. Carroll notes that, "Watching student's confidence grow from working with cattle in a key source of joy. No two days are the same when working with animals. Honestly, their teamwork is outstanding and it is my hope they take lessons learned into the future career endeavors."

She is also actively seeking graduate students to advance her program.

Supporting Producers and Extension Initiatives

In her Extension role, Carroll's primary objective is to build trust and strong relationships with producers. She aims to provide practical, research-based guidance on nutrient management and sustainability to help producers address regulatory requirements and improve profitability. She also plans to assess and communicate how environmental metrics apply to local dairies, serving as a resource and advocate when models or assumptions do not reflect on-farm realities.

"It is essential that we focus on economic sustainability first, and evaluate how new technologies support both economic and environmental sustainability," Carroll stated, noting the distinct challenges faced by Washington dairy producers.

Carroll looks forward to meeting and talking directly with producers and students, whether that is talking through on-farm challenges, identifying research questions that matter, or helping students explore careers in dairy science. She also shared that new regional Extension educational programs are in development, with workshops tentatively planned for the fall.

Personal Interests

To unwind, Carroll enjoys gardening, especially tending her cut-flower garden. She is also looking forward to harvesting apples from her front yard this fall.

Looking Ahead

As she settles into her role at WSU, Carroll aims to create a program that delivers practical, science-based solutions for Washington dairies. She is dedicated to interacting directly with producers and educating students, thereby positioning the Department of Animal Sciences as a trusted partner in addressing the state's most pressing dairy challenges.

Welcoming Dr. Zachary Seekford
Advancing Livestock Reproduction at WSU

We are pleased to announce that Dr. Zachary Seekford joined our department as an assistant professor of livestock reproduction in January 2026. Raised on a dairy farm in western Virginia, he developed an early passion for animal agriculture and science.

Background and Education

Seekford earned his BS in dairy science from Virginia Tech in 2018 and his MS in animal science in 2020, during which he learned applied reproductive technologies such as ultrasonography, embryo transfer, and IVF, as well as more basic science procedures, including cell culture and molecular biology. To stoke his passion for science and understanding biological mechanisms, he completed a PhD in animal science with a minor in reproductive biotechnology at the University of Florida in 2024, further developing his knowledge in cell and molecular biology. Deciding to remain in academia, Seekford pursued postdoctoral training at Texas A&M University, where he focused on grant writing, mentoring, and new research opportunities. He saw the job opening at WSU as a great opportunity to grow as a scientist, and he is extremely pleased to join the department.

"I am thrilled to join the WSU team. The existing early-career faculty and anticipated new hires open doors for collaboration," he stated, and added, "Guidance from senior faculty members coupled with the department's available resources will further enhance these opportunities."

Innovations in Reproductive Biology

His research program aims to understand how the maternal immune system affects reproductive success, using cattle as his primary model, with plans to expand into the biomedical space. Seekford aims to define baseline immune activity at the maternal-embryo interface and to identify the immune and inflammatory pathways underlying pregnancy loss and uterine disease. He also wants to use the results to create decision-making tools and disease-prevention strategies for commercial dairy farms and other species, including humans. In the long run, he hopes to develop ways to predict which cows are more or less likely to conceive and which animals are at higher risk of pregnancy loss. His work connects practical farm applications with detailed cellular and molecular research.

Teaching and Department Involvement

Seekford's role is mainly focused on research, with about 70% of his time devoted to research, 20% to teaching, and 10% to service and Extension. He started contributing to the department right away and now teaches Introduction to Animal Sciences and Dairy Management Laboratory, two important courses in the animal science program. One of his short-term goals, which he is particularly passionate about, is to revitalize the Dairy Club.

Training the Next Generation

Seekford is dedicated to creating an inclusive, curiosity-driven training environment and is especially excited to involve undergraduate students in his research. He is setting up his lab, has already recruited one master's student, and plans to add another this summer.

Life Beyond the Lab

In his free time, Seekford enjoys hiking, skiing, and other outdoor activities. He and his fiancée like to play with their dog, Hank, and he also enjoys grilling a tasty steak!

Strengthening Industry Ties and Tomorrow's Success

Dr. Seekford's research and commitment to student training will drive innovation in cattle reproductive efficiency and build strong industry partnerships. We look forward to the significant and lasting contributions he will bring to research, education, and collaboration with producers.

Bridging the Gap

Cyrus Gibbons Earns USRSB Scholarship for Sustainable Beef Leadership

Image credit: Hannah Muhlbeier

Cyrus Gibbons is one of just five students nationwide to earn a United States Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (USRSB) scholarship. He will head to Tampa, Florida, in late April 2026 to attend their General Assembly Meeting. There, he'll meet beef industry leaders and take part in discussions on sustainable beef production. The scholarship will cover his full registration and give him a $1,500 stipend for travel and lodging.

About the USRSB

Bringing together diverse stakeholders, USRSB promotes and advances sustainability throughout the U.S. beef value chain. The group defines sustainable beef production as practices that are socially responsible, environmentally sound, and economically practical. Their emphasis on the planet, people, animals, and progress drives programs that encourage continuous improvement.

Gibbon's alignment with USRSB's mission drew him to the scholarship. "After Dr. Johnson told me about the scholarship, I looked into the USRSB. Their values resonated with me," he said. "Sustainable beef production is necessary if the industry is to remain viable in the future."

Gibbons views the upcoming roundtable as an opportunity to learn how to help enhance sustainability in the beef industry and bridge the gap between producers and the public. He is especially interested in practical strategies that connect the beef industry with consumers, particularly as animal agriculture faces increasing attention.

Reflecting on this goal, he adds, "Having sustainability practices for producers can create a clearer understanding of the reality of beef production and help realign values within the general public, bridging the gap between producers and non-agriculturists."

During his time in Florida, building on his aims for the roundtable, Gibbons will meet people from all segments of the beef supply chain, including producers, packers, and educators. He will also participate in exclusive tours that showcase Florida's beef industry, from ranches to research and resource management. These visits will allow him to compare beef production in Florida and Washington.

Gibbons' Agricultural Journey

Growing up in the Columbia Basin, Gibbons was surrounded by agriculture from a young age, and his passion for the cattle industry started about a mile from home at the Burkholder and Unruh ranch in Warden, Washington. For years, he showed their

cattle statewide and worked on their Angus cattle ranch, where he learned the basics of running a successful beef cattle operation, including nutrition, animal care, herd health, and farm equipment maintenance. He continues to assist with the Angus and show cattle management aspects at the ranch, crediting the Unruh and Burkholder families for shaping both his skills and his commitment to the industry. "I've always had positive and educational experiences with the Unruh family," Gibbons said. "All three generations—Jonathan Burkholder, Dr. Unruh, and John—have been willing to share knowledge to help me advance in the cattle industry."

Mentorship and Support from Industry Leaders

He said that support has remained "invaluable" as he began raising his own cattle. "I can confidently say that I would not be involved in the beef industry without the guidance of the Unruh and Burkholder families," Gibbons said.

Dr. John Unruh, who earned his BS and MS in animal sciences at WSU, retains an interest in the ranch, which is owned and operated by his father, John Unruh, his brother-in-law, Glenn Burkholder, and his nephew, Jonathan Burkholder.

Gibbons has been active in youth livestock programs, including 4-H and FFA. He has successfully raised and shown cattle across the Pacific Northwest for years. He hopes to encourage the show-cattle community to consider more than just phenotype when judging animals. Although phenotypes are important in the show ring, he wants them to find ways to look at key performance traits, such as feed efficiency, average daily gain, profitability, and carcass value, when determining what makes a quality calf.

A Vision for the Future of Beef Production

Looking ahead, Gibbons remains dedicated to the beef industry and wants to build a career in academia. After finishing his undergraduate degree, he plans to earn a PhD in animal science. He wants to focus on beef production research and teaching what he calls the whole truth about the industry. He hopes to educate the next generation about science-based beef production. In the future, Gibbons hopes to raise show cattle that will provide opportunities for youth in agriculture.

The Department of Animal Sciences is excited to see what Gibbons learns from these experiences and believes his insights will spark new conversations in classes, labs, and student programs.

Healing with Tradition

Jennifer Kim's Focus on TCVM

Jennifer Kim's path to animal sciences at WSU has been shaped by diverse cultures, an eagerness to explore biology, and a drive to improve animal health. Although born in South Korea, Kim grew up mostly in Canada until a family emergency brought her back to Korea. As she grew older, her affection for animals turned into a commitment to help those without homes. She volunteered at shelters and rescue groups, caring for abandoned and neglected pets. These experiences showed her how kindness and service can impact animals' lives, igniting her passion for veterinary medicine.

Kim took a brief two-year break to study film making before returning to her passion for veterinary medicine. She applied to U.S. programs that met vet school requirements and, in 2023, accepted an offer from WSU to begin studying animal sciences. As she advanced in her coursework, Kim's interest in animal sciences—especially nutrition—grew. Her instructor, Dr. Nancy Irlbeck, made key concepts clear and engaging by using practical examples, turning early morning lectures into enjoyable learning experiences.

"I used to dread 9 a.m. classes, but Dr. Irlbeck's class was different," Kim said. "I looked forward to her stories."

Kim's journey took a significant turn when she discovered a summer program in traditional Chinese veterinary medicine (TCVM) at Nanjing Agricultural University. Her prior exposure to traditional Chinese medicine while living in Korea, combined with her passion for integrative medicine, inspired her to apply. With strong support from Dr. Zhihua Jiang's letter of recommendation, Kim earned a full scholarship to attend the 2025 summer program.

During the two-and-a-half-week program, Kim studied the principles of TCVM, a system used in China for thousands of years to treat animals. TCVM practitioners believe that diseases arise when the body is out of balance, and they diagnose health issues by identifying patterns of disharmony. Treatments aim to restore balance through acupuncture, herbal medicine, food therapy, and Tui-na massage, focusing on acupoints and meridians to enhance energy flow (https://chiu.edu/about/what-is-tcvm).

Kim appreciated engaging with veterinary students from Europe and other regions throughout the program. Together, they studied canine acupoints and explored how acupuncture could benefit horses and various farm animals.

"We could only observe acupuncture practices used to treat dogs," Kim explained. "But we got to try it on ourselves and each other."

The TCVM program strengthened Kim's interest in integrative medicine and renewed her belief that traditional and Western approaches can complement each other, especially in chronic care, prevention, and nutrition. This pivotal experience reinforced her motivation and clarified her vision for her future career.

Today, Kim feels deeply appreciative of the Department of Animal Sciences, where she found both supportive faculty and a wide range of opportunities. She broadened her learning outside of regular coursework by delving into research areas like reproduction, nutrition, and genetics, which helped her clarify her interests. Kim reflected, "Animal science goes beyond loving animals—it's about understanding the science behind them."

Motivated by curiosity, empathy, and faith, Kim views animal sciences and veterinary medicine as disciplines that blend scientific exploration, keen observation, and compassionate care. Despite cultural adjustments, academic doubts, and personal obstacles, Kim now feels confident that she belongs in this field and eagerly anticipates supporting both animals and their owners in the future.

What's on the Menu? Evidence-
Insights from Animal Nutritionis

The Halver Comparative Nutrition Lecture brought together students, faculty, and guests to address a significant question: how do we determine appropriate diets for animals in managed care settings, such as zoos, aquariums, sanctuaries, and rehabilitation centers? Supported by the Halver family, the series highlights the science and applied problem-solving involved in comparative nutrition across diverse species. This lecture series honors the late Dr. John Halver, a pioneer in fish nutrition whose work significantly influenced modern diet formulation. It is dedicated to exposing students to the field of comparative nutrition.

MEET THE SPEAKER

This year's featured talk, "What's on the Menu? Evidence-based Feeding of Exotic Species," was presented by Dr. Kimberly Ange-van Heugten, a professor in animal science at North Carolina State University. She teaches animal nutrition classes to about 450 students annually and has taken students on study abroad programs to Thailand, Costa Rica, and South Africa. In addition, she runs an active research program in comparative animal nutrition and serves as a consulting nutritionist for exotic species in zoos and sanctuaries worldwide.

Dr. Ange-van Heugten grew up working on her parents' swine farm and planned to become a veterinarian, inspired by her older

Dr. Kimberly Ange-van Heugten presents her invited talk at the 2026 Halver Lecture in Todd Hall on March 24.

brother. She finished her undergraduate degree at NC State and entered an MS program in animal science, expecting to attend vet school afterward. During her MS degree, she met a fellow student who worked at the Duke Lemur Center, which studies this endangered primate, and this gave her a first look at comparative animal nutrition. Fascinated, she saw exciting new opportunities. After her MS, she began a two-year nutrition residency at the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago, where she learned about many animals and their dietary needs and made key contacts. She later earned a PhD in animal science from Wageningen University in the Netherlands, focusing on primate nutrition, especially the Woolly monkey.

A Woolly Monkey in Brazil. © SunnyRandhawa / Adobe Stock Images

THE SCIENCE BEHIND BUILDING BETTER DIETS

Throughout her lecture, Ange-van Heugten discussed her experiences with formulating diets for exotic species. She first relies on data from well-known livestock and companion animals. She collaborates with veterinarians, conservationists, and zookeepers who care for these animals. Together, they design species-specific diets to support health and well-being.

CASE STUDY: ROCK HYRAX DIET DESIGN

For example, rock hyraxes are small mammals that are most closely related to elephants. Rock hyraxes are hindgut fermen-

A Rock Hyrax © Duncan Noakes / Adobe Stock Images

based Feeding of Exotic Species
t Dr. Kimberly Ange-van Heugten

ters, meaning they digest feed by fermenting it in their complex large intestines. Their diets are formulated to contain high levels of fiber and are based on what we know about horse nutrient requirements, as horses have similar digestive systems. A typical diet fed to rock hyraxes in managed care generally consists of equal amounts of high-quality hay and a nutritionally complete pelleted feed that is high in fiber and low in starch, sugar, and iron.

DIET FORMULATION BEYOND INGREDIENTS

She emphasized that the process of diet formulation is more than just choosing suitable foods; it requires creating diets that reflect the animal's estimated nutrient requirements and food preferences, which are influenced by its environment. In addition, diets must use ingredients that can be sourced locally, stored, prepared, and fed safely and consistently.

CASE STUDY: FEEDING AARDWOLVES

Continuing with practical examples, another specific challenge Ange-van Heugten discussed was the feeding of aardwolves. Although these animals resemble typical canids, they are actually insectivores and do not thrive on meat-based diets commonly fed to wolves and other canid species. They require diets that reflect the nutrient composition of termites, their main food source. Termites contain a significant amount of chitin, which is an insoluble

An Aardwolf © Cathy Withers-Clarke / Adobe Stock Images

but digestible fiber. According to information on the Cincinnati Zoo's website (https://cincinnatizoo.org/animals-archive/aardwolf/), a single aardwolf can consume 200,000 termites a night. Therefore, providing enough termites to sustain aardwolves in managed care is impractical. The main challenge in creating a suitable diet for them is identifying a safe, practical substitute that supports long-term health. She did this using a combination of roach-based diets and nutritionally complete pelleted diets.

WHEN FEEDING BECOMES WELFARE

In addition to diet composition, Dr. Ange-van Heugten noted that the method of food delivery is another essential aspect of nutrition. Proper feeding setups can reduce stress and boredom. They also minimize competition and promote natural behaviors. These actions reinforce the connection between nutrition and animal welfare.

STUDENT Q&A: MEASURING SUCCESS & BUILDING A CAREER

During the Q&A, students shifted the discussion toward diet effectiveness by asking whether successful reproduction indicates an effective diet. Ange-van Heugten responded that breeding success is an important indicator of health, but not the only one.

Dr. Kimberly Ange-van Heugten fields questions from the audience after the Halver Lecture on March 24

Another question focused on how to begin a career in comparative animal nutrition. To this, she advised, "Get your hands dirty with as many animals as possible. Don't just look at zoos for jobs or internships. There are many more opportunities with regular livestock and companion animals, and you can learn a lot about handling animals, welfare, and nutrition." She continued, "Be persistent and keep asking. You might get 20 negative responses, but 21 might be a Yes."

In summary, Dr. Ange-van Heugten's lecture tied together effective nutrition for exotic species with the broader theme of drawing on knowledge of domestic species. This approach reflects the central challenge and value of comparative animal nutrition. For students desiring a career where science has a real-world impact, pursuing a career in animal nutrition offers diverse and meaningful opportunities.

Outstanding Undergraduate Students

CAHNRS Cashup Davis Nominee

Sam Snekvik will graduate in May 2026. Raised near WSU in Palouse, Washington, she enjoys running, dancing, camping, and working with her horse. Sam now holds a full-time position in Molecular Diagnostics at the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory in Pullman, where she will continue working after graduation.

Outstanding Senior

Jadey Ong is originally from Lynnwood, Washington, and will be graduating in May with a BS in animal sciences and a minor in business administration. She is excited to be joining Washington State University's College of Veterinary Medicine this fall as part of the Class of 2030.

Outstanding Junior

Gavin Jaeger is from Deer Park, Washington, and is currently a junior. In addition to his studies, he is a contracted member of Army ROTC and plans to become an Army veterinarian after earning his undergraduate degree in animal sciences and, ideally, attending veterinary school.

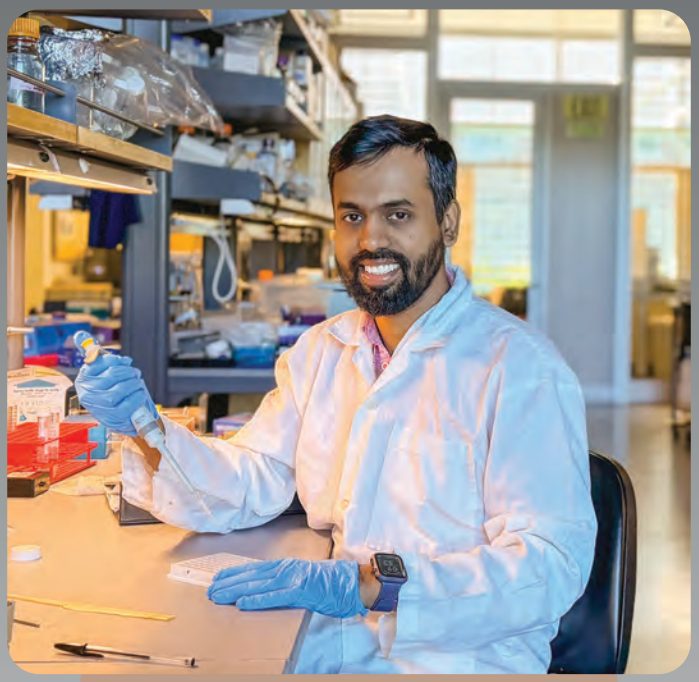
Outstanding Sophomore

Lucille Mortimer is a second-year pre-vet animal sciences student from Enumclaw, Washington. She grew up on a small farm, where her family raises various animals. At WSU, Lucille has deepened her passion for animal science through research and animal management activities.

Outstanding Graduate Students

Morgan Wagle is a master's student in Animal Sciences in Dr. Kimberly Davenport's lab. She researches sire and dam influences on the developing bovine placental epigenome. Originally from rural Missouri, she earned undergraduate degrees in animal science and writing from Northwest Missouri State University. Her goal is to improve animal production and welfare in livestock through her research. Morgan will defend her MS thesis in April 2026.

Outstanding MS Student



Md Nazmul (Naz) Hossain grew up in southwestern Bangladesh and earned a DVM in 2013 and an MS in animal science in 2016 from Sylhet Agricultural University, Bangladesh. In 2022, Naz began a PhD in the Department of Animal Sciences at WSU to further his understanding of muscle growth and improve beef production and quality. His current research focuses on the developmental mechanisms that regulate myogenesis and adipogenesis during embryogenesis. Naz's long-term goal is a research career focused on improving production efficiency and animal and meat quality by applying insights from developmental biology.

Outstanding PhD Student

New Scholarship Sustains the Purposeful Legacy of Animal Science Educator P.L. Senger

By Seth Truscott
Senior Communications Coordinator
CAHNRS Marketing & Communications

An inspiring and dynamic teacher, Phillip Senger trained and tested animal science students at WSU for over 20 years. Above, Senger is pictured with a copy of his landmark textbook, "Pathways to Pregnancy and Parturition," in the 1990s.

During his lifetime, Professor Phillip Senger's contagious enthusiasm and lively approach to teaching inspired generations of aspiring animal scientists and veterinarians at Washington State University.

Following his passing earlier this year, Senger's legacy lives on through a new scholarship established by his three daughters, Amy Heggem, Molly Wolniewicz, and Sally Senger.

"Being an educator was a huge part of our dad's life," Wolniewicz said. "He'd be over the moon to know he was making a continued impact."

The Dr. P.L. Senger Memorial Scholarship will support students pursuing a degree in animal sciences at WSU.

Senger taught and studied animal reproduction in WSU's Department of Animal Sciences for over 20 years and was a respected collaborator with colleagues in the College of Veterinary Medicine. He died at age 80 in June 2025.

His textbook, "Pathways to Pregnancy and Parturition," became the standard resource in animal reproduction classrooms at hundreds of universities and colleges around the world. Teaching, family and fellow scientists agree, was his greatest gift.

"Phil was one of the most dynamic and engaging teachers that I've ever experienced," said Jon Oatley, WSU Regents Professor in the College of Veterinary Medicine. "He dedicated himself to the art of instruction and was brilliant at it."

Born in 1944 in Nappanee, Indiana, Senger grew up in a dairy family. Seeing a calf being born on his grandparents' Iowa dairy farm as a child may have sparked his interest in animal health and reproduction.

Senger earned his undergraduate degree in zoology at North Carolina State University, then received advanced degrees in reproductive physiology at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, where his major professor, Dick Saacke, had a profound influence.

Senger, left, photographed as a graduate student at Virginia Tech with his major professor, Dick Saacke. Deeply influenced in his teaching approach by his mentor, Senger remained close friends with Saacke until the latter's passing in 2023, and dedicated his textbook to Saacke and his wife Ann.

Senger joined the WSU faculty in 1974 and then left a few years later to serve as a dairy physiology professor at Pennsylvania State University. In 1984 he returned to WSU, where he taught for over two decades before retiring to found an educational business, Current Conceptions.

Regents Professor Oatley worked as a teacher's assistant to Senger during his graduate education. He never forgot how his mentor transformed lectures and exams into engaging conversations and skill-building encounters.

"He was ahead of his time in coming up with ways to test and apply fundamental knowledge to real-life situations," Oatley said. "He explained how biological processes actually work, and his examples showed why that knowledge matters."

"Phil was always trying to improve the learning of students," said Jerry Reeves, professor emeritus in the Department of Animal Sciences. "He thought final exams should be a teaching tool, not just an evaluation of the student's knowledge of the subject."

Reeves co-taught courses with Senger during his 37-year career and recalled how his teaching partner implemented one-hour oral final exams in which four undergraduate or graduate students had to solve real-world problems in front of two instructors. To succeed, students had to come prepared.

Senger's very high expectations weren't always popular, and rumors about the challenge of his classes and exams terrified some students. But his daughters have kept a stack of correspondence from those who experienced Senger's courses on animal reproduction, which mingled practical challenges with humor and relevance.

"His students told us it ended up being the best class they ever took," Wolniewicz said. "Dad was a purposeful disruptor. He

wanted to change how lectures and labs were delivered."

Sally Senger agreed, recalling how her father made students believe they were capable of more than they knew.

"That's what made him unforgettable, not just the facts he taught, but the confidence he sparked," she said.

Through his book and his teaching, Senger influenced nearly every student who entered the WSU veterinary program during his time in Pullman, said Ahmed Tibary, professor emeritus in the WSU College of Veterinary Medicine. Many chose veterinary medicine because of him.

"His desire to communicate what he knew, build on it, and encourage students to learn and apply their knowledge definitely influenced my own career," Tibary said. "Because of Phil, I stayed at WSU. He encouraged me and mentored me."

A portrait photo of P.L. Senger, taken at WSU in 1974.

Fellow Emeritus Professor Mike Griswold remembers Senger as a witty, funny storyteller and good friend. Like Tibary, Griswold benefited from Senger's efforts to draw colleagues with similar interests together.

"Dad was the ultimate connector," Wolniewicz said. "It was a rare weekend or holiday without a graduate student at our dinner table. In his university career, and in later years in his senior community, he always brought people together."

"He had a curiosity for learning that was passed to us as well as his students," Heggem added. "Dad never saw any limits to what we could do."

Establishing the memorial scholarship was the easiest decision Senger's daughters made during the hard days following his passing. His colleagues also see it as especially appropriate.

"A scholarship in Phil's name is brilliant," Oatley said. "Any student who gets this scholarship should embrace his legacy and what it means to the educational mission of this university."

To support the Dr. P.L. Senger Memorial Scholarship, make a gift at the WSU Foundation website (foundation.wsu.edu/give/).

Udderly Inspired

Alika Robinson Steps up at KDC

Alika Robinson has been promoted to Manager of the Knott Dairy Center (KDC) in recognition of her commitment to dairy production, dedication to animal care, demonstrated leadership, and continuous pursuit of professional development while supporting her colleagues.

Growing up on a small farm in Newport, Washington, Robinson set her sights on a career working with animals, initially considering veterinary medicine. To accomplish this goal, she began studying animal science at WSU in 2021. In 2022, she joined the Cooperative University Dairy Students (CUDS), where she learned the basics of dairy production through hands-on experiences. As her enthusiasm for the industry grew, she sought a part-time role at the KDC to continue learning and worked there until graduation.

After earning a BS in animal sciences in May 2025, Robinson stepped into the role of the dairy's assistant manager in August and advanced to manager in January. She embraces the significant responsibility and eagerly mentors students, showing them that the dairy is more than just a workplace. To Robinson, the KDC is a place to learn about herd management, teamwork, and decision-making through real experience.

She oversees daily operations, supports research, and delivers high-quality care to about 140 lactating cows, as well as dry cows, replacement heifers, and calves. She helps set new standards for efficiency and animal welfare. Knowing that her proficiency in artificial insemination (AI) needs improvement, she currently breeds animals under the expert guidance of Dr. Martin Maquivar and plans to complete an AI certification course this summer.

Looking ahead, Robinson plans to boost the dairy's operational efficiency by hiring two additional full-time staff, including an assistant manager, and improving facility organization and cleanliness, as well as data and inventory management. She aims to improve conditions for cows, students, and staff, making the dairy a model of efficiency and teamwork.

A career in cattle care and industry leadership: Dr. Alika Conley

Honoring a progressive voice for producers and a champion for sustainable practices

The Department of Animal Sciences is proud to announce that **Dr. Alika Conley, DVM,** has been selected as the 2026 Outstanding Alumnus for his progressive ideas and impactful advocacy for Washington's beef cattle industry.

Conley has always been connected to cattle. He grew up on a large cow-calf ranch on Hawaii's Big Island near Waimea. Motivated to provide care for livestock, he attended WSU and earned both a BS in animal sciences and a DVM in 2010 through the Combined Program in Animal Sciences. After several years as a large-animal veterinarian in a mixed-animal practice, he joined Simplot Feeders in 2013 as a heifer-raising manager. Since then, he has advanced within the organization and currently serves as manager and veterinarian of their feedyard in Pasco, Washington. There, he and his team oversee the health, comfort, and nutrition of up to 75,000 cattle per turn.

Conley emphasizes the broader contribution of beef production to Washington's economy. USDA statistics show Washington's beef cattle industry was valued at $1.33 billion in 2023, second only to apples. Despite this fact, Conley notes that beef producers face growing scrutiny from lawmakers and state agencies, many of whom may not fully understand industry practices. He notes that Washington beef producers are committed to reducing their environmental impact. As President of the Washington Cattle Feeders Association, he aims to educate the public about the sustainable practices used by producers. Additionally, he highlights the important role cattle play in food security at the state, national, and global levels by upcycling agricultural waste and inedible byproducts into high-quality protein.

The department sincerely thanks Dr. Conley for his outstanding leadership, professionalism, and service, which continue to inspire excellence, drive positive change, and enhance sustainable beef cattle production in Washington and beyond.

Guided by Mentors, Driven by Excellence

Robin White honored as 2026 Distinguished Graduate in Science, Education, and Technology

Dr. Robin White is recognized as the 2026 Distinguished Graduate: Science, Education, and Technology for her rigorous scholarship and significant practical contributions. She earned a PhD (2014) and BS (2010) in animal sciences from WSU and currently serves as Professor of Livestock Systems Management at Virginia Tech. Her research at the livestock–environment interface advances sustainable animal production systems in both academic and applied settings.

Over her career, Dr. White has mentored 18 graduate students (8 PhD, 10 MS) and 3 postdoctoral scholars, and has supported 17 undergraduate advisees and 32 undergraduate researchers. As an educator, she has developed and taught a wide range of undergraduate and graduate courses, including ruminant nutrition, equine studies, precision animal agriculture, and research-based learning. In addition to her teaching and mentoring, Dr. White has established collaborative research programs and secured $102.8 million in external funding ($6.26 million as principal investigator, $96.3 million as co-principal investigator). She has contributed 228 peer-reviewed articles, conference proceedings, abstracts, and book chapters to the field. Her editorial responsibilities and commitment to peer review demonstrate her professional leadership and underscore her dedication to training future animal scientists.

"I have a lot of gratitude for everyone who shaped my time at WSU," White reflected. In particular, she noted, "Without a doubt, Kris Johnson is at the top of that list for her remarkable ability to teach in ways that stay with you. I still revisit her lessons and understand them more deeply years later. Her commitment to rigor, integrity, and clarity set a standard I aim to follow. I'm grateful she held me to a high bar and pushed for better thinking, clearer communication, and stronger science. That influence continues to shape how I work independently. If I were half as effective as a mentor, my job would be a lot easier."

Distinguished Service and a Lasting Legacy

Celebrating Michael Para

Michael Para has supported the Department of Animal Sciences and Washington's beef industry for many years. He has encouraged education and innovation by hosting class tours and research projects at his feedyard and has served as an advocate with various industry organizations. The department recognizes Para's outstanding efforts and dedication by honoring him with the 2026 Distinguished Service Award.

Para's connection to Washington's beef community spans generations. After his family emigrated from Italy and settled near Othello in 1913, his father, John, established the original feedlot. Building on this legacy, Para assumed leadership of the ranch and feedlot in 1980 at age 22. He expanded the operation from a 1,500-head grow yard to a 7,000-head finishing yard feeding both his own and client-owned cattle. He focused on sustainability by sourcing local products. Because his feedlot was smaller than most, he could add a personal touch to cattle care, and that same hands-on approach shaped how he worked with both customers and employees.

This hands-on, people-first mindset is also what Para points to when he talks about his proudest accomplishment: lasting relationships. He has served customers across the Pacific Northwest for over two decades, including some he has never met in person. At Para Livestock, this loyalty extends to employees, many of whom spend their entire careers with the company. One key team member has been with Para for 30 years.

"My employees are family," Para said, noting that he has enjoyed watching their children grow up over the years.

Now, Para and his wife, Liz, have decided to retire by closing their cattle-feeding business and selling the feedlot, ending a chapter that saw even their children involved before they pursued other careers. As they seek the right buyer for the feedlot, a bittersweet step tied to recognition for their longstanding efforts, their commitment to the cattle industry continues at the family's original 8,000-acre ranch, where they run 800 cows and raise and sell cutting horses.

Honoring a Legacy

Dr. Nancy Irlbeck Named ASAS Teaching Fellow

Dr. Nancy Irlbeck has been named an ASAS Teaching Fellow, one of the highest honors from the American Society of Animal Science (ASAS). This award recognizes educators for exceptional contributions to the animal industry and/or the Society, requiring at least 25 years of continuous membership, and honors superior teaching, mentorship, and dedication to animal science education.

Dr. Irlbeck was nominated by Dr. Margaret Benson, WSU professor emeritus and former department chair, who highlighted her lifelong dedication to student learning and mentorship. Dr. Benson shared, "Nancy's long career, focused on student learning, made her an excellent candidate for the competitive and prestigious National Teaching Fellow Award through ASAS. Her teaching career at Colorado State University and, most recently at WSU has been impactful and valued by thousands of students. Dr. Irlbeck bases her teaching on her experience and expertise with diverse species, as well as her commitment to hands-on learning for students. She has a unique, highly valuable network of comparative nutrition experts worldwide. Her passion for livestock and all animals is obvious when you first meet her. Dr. Irlbeck's willingness to mentor students through experiential learning is a characteristic many of them will remember forever. As an accomplished and complete academician, she has distinguished herself as an exceptional teacher and mentor, committed to student learning and the preparation of career-ready graduates proficient in problem-solving. Dr. Irlbeck is highly deserving of this award, and it was a pleasure to nominate her."

Reflecting on the award, Dr. Irlbeck expressed her gratitude, saying, "VERY HUMBLING!!! I really did not think that I would be successful. There are SO MANY good teachers. I am SO very humbled and honored. I teach, have taught, because of my passion for students and learning. To watch the changes in a student's face when they 'GET IT' is what is magical!!!"

This distinguished honor coincides with Dr. Irlbeck's January 2026 retirement from WSU, highlighting the culmination of an exemplary academic career devoted to teaching and mentoring students. ASAS's recognition honors her decades of service and influence in animal science education and stands as a testament to her enduring legacy.

News and Kudos

Kris Johnson's Retirement Marked by Prestigious Industry Honor

Dr. Kristen Johnson was honored with the 2025 Friends of the Feeders award by the Washington Cattle Feeders Association (WFCA), recognizing her decades of dedication and invaluable contributions to the state's beef cattle industry. As Alika Conley, President of the WCFA, shared, "Kris has always been a great friend to the Washington Cattle Feeders. She has helped formulate research projects that directly impact our industry, and she has a great common sense approach to getting information that we need to help steer our members in the right direction—both from a financial standpoint and a sustainability/environmental standpoint."

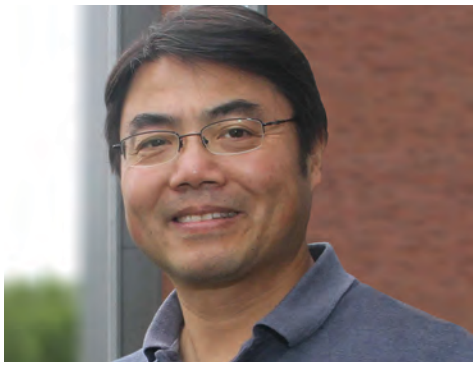
Jack Field, WFCA Executive Director, also praised Kris, stating, "Kris has been the go-to for all environmental issues for cattle feeders and has been committed to helping feeders as long as she has been with WSU. Her level of service is the highest! WSU needs to find the next Kris Johnson for the future of animal agriculture in Washington state. She is quite possibly the best that WSU has to help cattle feeders."

Kris Johnson is a true 'friend of the feeders.' As she retires after more than 37 years of service, we celebrate her legacy of research excellence, leadership, innovation, commitment to educating the next generation of animal scientists, and unwavering support for Washington's cattle feeders.

Award-Winning Research

Addison Manter (L) and **Sienna Tatos** (R) earned a Novice Award at the Showcase for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities (SURCA) in March for their poster summarizing research in the Organismal, Population, Ecological, and Evolutionary Biology Category. Their project, "Potential genetic biomarkers of infertility in the repeat breeder cow syndrome in mature lactating Holstein cows," was highlighted at the event.

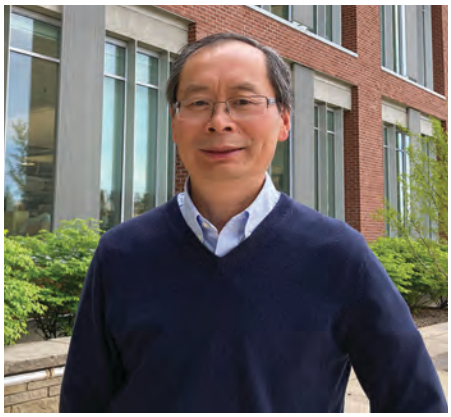
Min Du Named Baxter Endowed Chair



On October 1, Regents Professor Min Du was named the Thelma and Max Baxter Endowed Chair in Beef Research and Education. This endowed chair was established in 1998 by a generous gift from Thelma and Max Baxter, passionate advocates for animal sciences at WSU. The Baxter Chair supports ongoing innovation and progress in the beef industry. Funding from this endowment will allow Professor Du, a leading expert in the study of nutrients, genetics, growth, and health, to pursue new research and provide opportunities for students.

Advancing Livestock Science Zhihua Jiang's Fulbright Journey

Dr. Zhihua Jiang, an expert in animal genetics and phenomics, recently received his second Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program grant. In December, he traveled to Egypt to work with local researchers on improving livestock efficiency through advanced technologies such as AI, with a focus on Egypt's native breeds. Due to increased tensions from the war in Iran, he returned to the U.S. in March, earlier than planned. During his 23 years at WSU, Jiang has earned multiple patents, mentored leading students, and made significant contributions to global animal science.



In Memoriam

James Cronrath died peacefully at his home in Cashmere, Washington, on June 18, 2025, at the age of 76. Jim earned both a BS and an MS in animal sciences at WSU. He was a laboratory technician in the department for 30 years, retiring in 2003.

Loyd Falen passed away on June 16, 2024. He was 83. Loyd earned an MS in animal nutrition from the University of Idaho and spent his career as a laboratory technician in the Department of Animal Sciences at WSU.

Orvil Sears died on May 3, 2024, surrounded by his family at home. He was 84. Orvil was hired by the department in 1966 and held several positions throughout his career, including herds manager of the horse barn and the cattle feeding lab. He retired in 2002.

Student Swine Cooperative (SSC)

The SSC has been busy this year. They sold pork from the pigs they finished in December and will sell pork from pigs finished during the spring semester. Cooperative members in front row (L to R) include Kaleb Leath, Aeries Erickson, Belicia Guzmán, and Melaney Flores. Members in back row (L to R) are Luke Perko, Keliann Stephens, Darlena Schmitt, Bethzy Quirarte, Sapphyre Chanthabouly-Perry, Jailyn Johnson, Raquel Rodriguez, Emily Rodriguez, and Seniah Flesher. Not pictured: Danielle Peterson and Taylor Miller

Building Skills, Giving Back

Lauren Adolph, originally from Gig Harbor, Washington, is a sophomore majoring in animal sciences. With a strong academic record and clear goals, she only applied to WSU. "I knew that this was where I wanted to go," she said.

Adolph's commitment to veterinary medicine began early. Since childhood, she aspired to become a veterinarian, even attempting to spell "veterinarian" in a grade-school scrapbook. In ninth grade, she aligned with mentors and began seeking internships and other programs to help her prepare for veterinary school. After seeing a beloved pet suffer from heart disease, she developed a strong interest in cardiology.

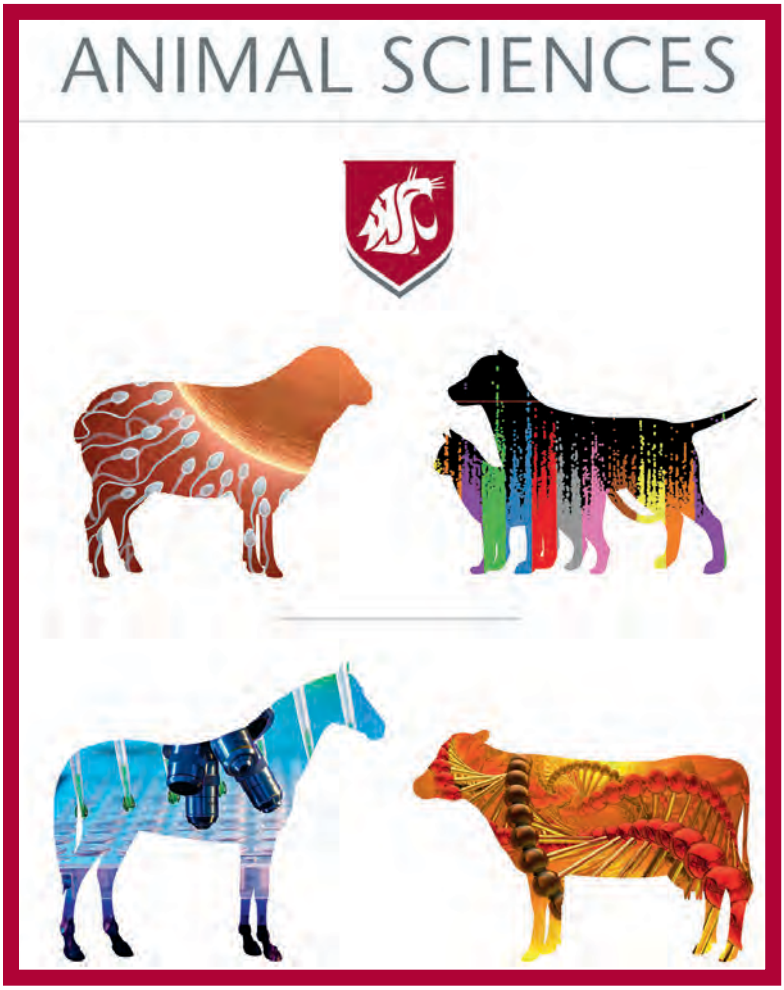
She is actively pursuing her goals through hands-on internships. Last summer, she completed a cardiology internship at a veterinary clinic in the Tacoma area, focusing on cardiac ultrasound. She shadowed a veterinary cardiologist and saw firsthand how a specialty clinic operates every day. In addition to technical skills, she improved her client communication skills and learned effective practice management. She continues to build on these experiences by shadowing veterinary cardiologists at the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital.

Outside of class, Adolph remains engaged with the interests that inspired her to pursue animal sciences. She participates in Prendergast Pups at WSU, raising and training a service dog through Canine Companions. Over the next year, she aims to teach the dog basic obedience and socialization before the dog transitions to a professional trainer for advanced skills, such as diabetic alert training.

"This program is a great opportunity to get involved on campus," she said. "I've been training dogs for years, and this is something that makes me feel more at home. It is also a good way to give back to the community while also building some volunteer hours."

Looking ahead, Adolph has a busy summer planned. She hopes to work at an emergency clinic in her hometown, take summer classes, and study abroad in Costa Rica. With each new experience, whether she is learning in a specialty practice, training a service dog, or exploring veterinary work in a new place, she is building skills and perspective to bring back to WSU as she prepares for veterinary school.

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Animal Sciences



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