



News of the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics

August 2005

Dear Friends:

It may have been a long time since many of you heard directly from us. I would like to bring you up-to-date on some of the most important happenings in the Department's recent history.

Retirements

I am sure that all of you are aware of the budgetary hard times in which higher education found itself during recent years. Those problems had a severe impact in the Department. The number of our faculty shrank from 25 to 17 with a corresponding decline in our support staff. The retirements of Don Lacy, Paul Hoepner, Charlie Coale, David Kenyon, Leonard Shabman, Mike Chandler, Lester Myers, Waldon Kerns, David Kohl, and George McDowell were a part of this reduction. The presence of Wayne Purcell will be missed in the Department when he retires August 31.

New Faculty

While I don't expect our Department ever to regain the strength in positions that we had earlier, I believe we are now in a rebuilding phase. Denise Mainville joined us in January after completing her Ph.D. at Michigan State University. Her appointment is teaching and extension in the marketing area. We also hired Alex White who received his Ph.D. from this Department in 1995 to work in teaching and extension in the agribusiness management and agricultural finance programs. We are getting ready to interview for a new position in the economics of consumer behavior in nutrition and health. This new initiative in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences is a cluster hire among the Departments of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise; Food Science and Technology; and our Department. We expect that the initial research focus will be on the problems associated with obesity. We are also looking forward to filling in the near future the positions left vacant by the resignations of Anya McGuirk and Tia Hilmer.

Our Department was also fortunate to benefit from the expansion of the Virginia Bioinformatics Institute in that we could provide an academic home for one of its staff members, Dr. Achla Marathe. I should also mention that we have gotten reconnected with Dr. Dan

Kauffman, who is now working at the Virginia Seafood Research and Extension Center in Hampton, Virginia, but is responsible programmatically to our Department. One-fourth of Marjorie Norton's time belongs to us to support her cooperation on research with Everett Peterson and David Orden. Extension recently contracted with Mike Roberts so that he can continue some of Wayne's work as Commodity Marketing Extension Agent. Last but not least, we were able to extend an adjunct professorship to Dr. Joachim Schleich of the Fraunhofer Institute in Germany. "Joe" is one of our Ph.D. graduates who visits us periodically and collaborates with our faculty on research.

Mike Ellerbrock and Jim Pease were promoted to full professor in 2004 and 2005 respectively.

New Department Head

The most important good news for the Department is our hiring a new Department Head. Dr. Kevin Boyle, former Chair of the Agricultural Economics Department at the University of Maine and an accomplished researcher and teacher, will assume his duties as our Department Head on October 1, 2005. His coming is also good news for me personally, as it will allow me to return to full-time retirement. As some of you may know, I assumed the duties as Interim Department Head on a part-time basis on April 1, 2004. I was happy to help the Department get through this period of transition.

Staff Changes

We lost Karen O'Connor when her husband took a job in South Carolina. Dot Wnorowski retired. Ann Rogers, fiscal technician, and Mark Crawford, programmer/analyst, took jobs elsewhere on campus. We were fortunate to be able to replace both Ann and Mark. Sharon Cox is the new fiscal coordinator. Randy Flinchum, the new programmer/analyst, helps keep our computers running smoothly. Jill Albert, Patty Angus, Shirley Baber, Lisa Blankenship, Marilyn Echols, and Karen Mundy continue in their traditional, but expanded roles in the Department.

Merger Status

Some of you may be aware that there was a proposal to merge our Department with the Department of

Economics. This merger idea was most acute just after the effects of the staff reductions in the department became fully felt and caused additional anxiety and the need for special planning. Eventually the merger idea as abandoned. This helped to refocus the department's efforts on traditional tasks as well as new initiatives.

Center for Farm and Agribusiness Management

One of the productive outcomes during this transition period has been the realization of an idea that Gordon Groover has had for some time. We are establishing in the Department the Center for Farm and Agribusiness Management. This Center is to serve our traditional audiences, on campus, in the Commonwealth, and through our research program in management, marketing, and the economic and legal issues of rural land use.

An important part of this Center idea is our plan to honor Dr. David M. Kohl by establishing an endowed chair in his name. The incumbent of the David M. Kohl Chair will also be the Director of the Center for Farm and Agribusiness Management. We have established an advisory committee to help us in the fund-raising and also to help give direction to the Center's work in the future. Undoubtedly, you will be hearing more about this effort in the near future.

Undergraduate and Graduate Programs

Many other good things have happened or are underway in the Department. Our undergraduate program is doing well with Dixie Reaves playing the leadership role as Coordinator of our Undergraduate program. We currently have about 110 undergraduate majors, and our NAMA/AgEcon Club is doing well in national competitions. Leon Geyer most recently took a group of undergraduates to Australia.

Our graduate program continues to be directed by Dan Taylor. We have between 35 and 40 graduate students, with about one-half of them pursuing the PhD.

We are expected to increase our student enrollment. I believe that we can achieve those goals given the modest rebuilding of our faculty numbers.

Research and Extension

Through the Department's cooperation with the Office of International Research, Education and Development our Department has built a very significant program on

rural development and environmental issues both internationally and domestically. George Norton, Jeff Alwang, Brad Mills, and Dan Taylor deserve special credit for our work in this area.

Kurt Stephenson, currently on Special Research Assignment with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, is pushing our resource economics program, as well as making a major contribution to our undergraduate program. Most of Darrell Bosch's work is in the natural resource/environmental economics area as well. Dave Orden, currently on leave with the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, D.C., and Everett Peterson are devoting most of their efforts to issues of agricultural and trade policies.

Our extension program was the hardest hit by the staff reductions during the budget crunch. Nevertheless, we continue to have a solid program which is mainly carried by Jim Pease, Gordon Groover, Mike Ellerbrock, and Pam Gibson.

A Bright Future

I hope that the above paragraphs have helped to bring you up-to-date on some of the major happenings in the Department. Virginia Tech, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics are all trying to adjust to rapidly changing economic and social environments and are, therefore, undergoing major changes themselves. None of us can predict the outcome of all of these changes with any degree of certainty. I am confident, however, that we have in this department a competent faculty and staff, that we are governed, and govern ourselves, by rules that reward productivity, and that we are sensitive to the needs of those who support us. Because of this dedication by faculty and staff, AAEC at Virginia Tech will have a bright future.

Sincerely,



Herbert H. Stoevener
Professor Emeritus and Interim Head