Welcome to the rejuvenated Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics monthly newsletter, The Plant Pages. I am looking forward to sharing the great news and events from the department with you through this newsletter. We hope to connect with our current faculty, staff and students and engage with our alumni, supporters and donors in a more meaningful way.

I want to welcome Dr. Jacob Jungers to the Department as our newest Assistant Professor. Dr. Jungers joined the department on April 30 as our new Cropping Systems Agronomist focusing on the development of diversification strategies that increase overall productivity, profitability, and resilience of Midwest cropping systems. In addition, Dr. Jungers will be actively involved with education and will be teaching introductory and advanced agronomy and cropping-systems courses for our students. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to our donors, alumni, friends, and faculty for your generous support of our students.

Spring semester is a favorite time of the year for me as I am given the opportunity to award many scholarships to our undergraduates and fellowships to our graduate students due to the generosity of the many supporters of the department. These scholarship and fellowship funds help ease the financial burden faced by our students and reward them for academic excellence, leadership roles, and extracurricular activities. Your financial contributions help establish and support academic scholarships and
fellowships, and your many other contributions help provide a better experience for our students to make a positive impact on the world — thank you!

Nancy Jo Ehlke

News: Research | Teaching | Extension

Wild Wheat Research

Research: Wild wheat relatives, dating 10,000 years, have helped to improve today’s varieties

Read more

Palmer Amaranth

In September 2016, Palmer amaranth (Amaranthus palmeri) was initially discovered and confirmed in Minnesota. Efforts to eradicate this weed are critical to Minnesota’s commodity crop producers.

Read more

New Hire: Jacob Jungers

Jacob’s interests are focused on agroecology, multifunctional agriculture, perennial crops, climate change, nutrient cycling. He is an assistant professor in the department and received his Ph.D. form the University of Minnesota.

Read more
Undergraduate Student Spotlight

Tannis Anderson is currently a senior at the University of Minnesota’s College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, pursuing a bachelor’s degree in Plant Science. Before moving to Minneapolis for school, Tannis was originally from Fargo, North Dakota. Her interests in plant science and agronomy include plant breeding and genetics, mainly breeding for disease resistance, climate tolerance, and nutrient deficiencies. Outside of plant science, Tannis enjoys working with ceramics and spending time with family and friends. During her time at college, Tannis has taken classes in plant breeding, with Eric Watkins, and works in Aaron Lorenz’s soybean lab and breeding program. Another professor that has been influential in her schooling is her faculty advisor, James Anderson. After graduating in spring 2020, Tannis plans to attend the University of Minnesota or North Dakota State University to obtain a master’s degree in Plant Science, specifically plant breeding.

Graduate Student Spotlight

Jeff Neyhart is a recent Ph.D. graduate in Applied Plant Sciences (APS) in the Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics. A native of New Jersey, he was raised in a family of horticulture educators, an environment he credits for his decision to pursue a career in agricultural. Jeff received his B.S. in Plant Science from Cornell University in 2014 and started his graduate studies that same year. His thesis research, under the guidance of Professor Kevin Smith, focused on genomics-enabled breeding and quantitative genetics in a new two-row barley breeding program. In addition to research, Jeff’s time in graduate school has been marked by service roles at the program, department, and college level, including those as President of the APS Graduate Club and Co-chair of the Plant
Sciences Symposium Planning Committee. In his spare time, Jeff enjoys biking in the Twin Cities, is an avid freshwater and saltwater angler, and occasionally performs stand-up in local pun slam competitions. Jeff's future plans include postdoctoral research work on the way to an academic career.

Researcher Spotlight

Mitch Hunter is an agronomist and agroecologist focused on improving cropping system productivity, sustainability, and resilience in the face of climate change. He came to the Department last summer after completing my PhD in Agronomy at Penn State with a minor in Ecology, working with Dr. David Mortensen. His dissertation used field experimentation and modeling to assess the potential for cover crops and soil improvement to mitigate drought stress in maize. He also led an analysis showing that food demand is not likely to double by 2050, and that urgent action is needed to meet environmental targets for agriculture. Until last December, he was the graduate student representative to both the Board of Directors and the Science Policy Committee of the American Society of Agronomy.

He is currently working with Drs. Jacob Jungers and Craig Sheaffer to improve agronomic management of Kernza® intermediate wheatgrass. Mitch’s research focuses on managing intermediate wheatgrass as a dual-purpose forage and grain crop, which has the potential to both improve Kernza yields and provide an additional income source for farmers. He manages grazing trials in Morris and on private farms around the state (see picture). Mitch hopes to use novel phenotyping methods to help determine why Kernza yield declines as stands age in the future.

Alumni Spotlight

Whitney Place serves as Assistant Commissioner at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA). She has been at the MDA since 2012 in the roles of Director of Legislative Affairs, Assistant to the Commissioner, and Project Coordinator for the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program. As Assistant Commissioner, Place oversees the Ag Marketing and Development Division and the Plant Protection Division.

Whitney also served as the 2018-2019 CFANS Alumni Society President, focusing on involvement in the CFANS Mentor Program, Policy Engagement Program and various other programs directed by the Alumni Society Board. Whitney earned a B.S. in Applied Plant Science and a M.S. in Science, Technology and Environmental Policy from the University of Minnesota. She grew up in Okabena, Minnesota where she learned about agriculture in the high school FFA program and on her family’s farms.
Announcements: Agronomy and Plant Genetics

Workshops!!

You are invited to join students, faculty, staff, and community members who identify as agroecologists to participate in a series of workshops. We’d like you to share your experiences, values, and goals as we work to develop an interdisciplinary agroecology education model to better train graduate students for effecting real-world change.

**When:** June 25, July 16, August 15, 9:00 AM- 1:00 PM

**Where:** 144 McNeal Hall (Saint Paul Campus, UMN)

**RSVP:** z.umn.edu/AgroecologyWorkshops

Please contact one of the organizers for more information: Vivian Wauters vwauters@umn.edu | Jennifer Nicklay nick0135@umn.edu | Sharon Perrone perro043@umn.edu

Read more

2019 Field School for Ag Professionals

The 2019 Field School for Ag Professionals will be held on **July 30 - 31** at the University of Minnesota Agriculture Experiment Station in St. Paul.

Field School for Ag Professional is the summer training opportunity that combines hands-on training and real-world field scenarios. The two-day program focuses on core principles in agronomy, entomology, weed and soil sciences on the first day to build a foundation for participants; and builds on this foundation with timely, cutting-edge topics on the second day.

Read more
Job Opening:

The department is seeking a talented individual to serve as an Integrated Cropping Systems Extension Weed Scientist. For further information, please contact Dr. Roger Becker, Search Committee Chair, at 612-625-5753 or becke003@umn.edu. For assistance in uploading application materials, please contact Ms. Lori Loberg at 612-624-8439 or theis022@umn.edu.

Eric Ristau Farewell Coffee

Eric Ristau worked in the Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics for more than 39 years, establishing and conducting field and lab research and mentoring graduate students, undergrad students, and other technicians. Over the years he worked on various research projects with numerous faculty including Gordon Marten, Craig Sheaffer, Nancy Ehlke, Bruce Maxwell, Orvin Burnside, Bill Lueschen, Rex Bernardo, Paul Porter, Jeff Coulter, and Scott Wells. During retirement, Eric looks forward to spending time with family, planting wildlife food plots, sugaring in the maple woods, being more of a hunter-gatherer, and keeping active in the outdoors.

When: Monday, June 10
Time: 9:30am-10:30am
Where: 306 Borlaug Hall