

# WKU Agriculture Alumni

Newsletter • Fall 2024



Dear Alumni,

It has been a privilege to serve as the Agriculture & Food Science Chair this past year. As you might expect, there has been a learning curve for both Dr. Strunk and me in our new positions. However, I believe our students can attest that the

transition has been smooth. I encourage you to browse this newsletter to learn about some of the successes and achievements from this past year. We continue to make strides in improving our academic programs, laboratories, and outreach to enhance our students' experiences. Our faculty and staff have committed tremendous effort this past year to fulfill our mission of Growing Minds & Cultivating Leaders.

As an alum, I hope you have noticed some changes this past year. We have made some conscious efforts to improve the visibility of our program in hopes of improving recruitment. These efforts are starting to yield results! The compliments and encouragement I have received from the alumni have been heartwarming. One of the most often asked questions or statements I hear from alumni is, "If there

is anything I can do to help, please let me know." Well... I'm letting you know. Each year, it is becoming more difficult to look for efficiencies to help offset a reduction in resources. Providing field trips for current students, having red towels and t-shirts to give prospective students, and providing awards for contest winners are a few of the examples of how your donations assist current students or help with recruiting the next generation of Hilltoppers. Simply go to our homepage at [www.wku.edu/agriculture](http://www.wku.edu/agriculture), click on the "Donate to WKU Agriculture" button, and follow the prompts. If you are in a position to give a more substantial gift, simply reach out to us via email or by phone.

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## Department of Agriculture and Food Science

The Department of Agriculture and Food Science at Western Kentucky University prepares students for careers in agriculture and food science industries and strives to fill the needs of both the student who requires general technical knowledge for production agriculture and the student who needs more specialized training to pursue one of many careers. We use the University Farm and the Agricultural Exposition Center as integral parts of our laboratory and classroom instructional programming to provide practical experiences.



1906 College Heights Blvd. #41066  
Bowling Green, KY 42101-1066  
(270) 745-3151



Prospective students can use this link to register for one of our scheduled tours.

Alumni use this link to donate directly to the Department.

Alumni and individuals that would like for us to reach out to specific potential students please use this link.



## IN THIS ISSUE

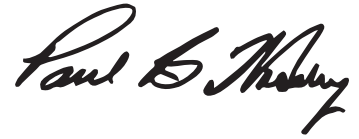
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There are other ways alumni can be involved outside of a monetary gift. If you know of a potential student, simply go to our homepage and click on the "Refer a Student" button and fill out the requested information. Also, potential students can schedule a tour by clicking on the "Schedule a Farm Tour" button. Alumni can also volunteer to speak to current and potential students. If you are still struggling with how you can help, simply ask.

Finally, I have one big announcement to share: We will NOT be having our Homecoming brunch this year. Due to the early start of the Homecoming football game and the conflict with the North American Livestock Show in Louisville, we feel its best to not have a brunch and give alumni attending Homecoming the opportunity to tailgate prior to the game. However, we

will have a similar event called "Coming Home" which will take place on February 22nd in conjunction with the WKU Men's basketball game vs. LA Tech. If you are attending Homecoming, we will be tailgating with the Ogden College tent on South Lawn, so please stop by and say hello. Please stay in touch with your email and our social media pages for more information with our basketball alumni event.

Thank you again for all of your support, and enjoy the newsletter! Go Tops!



Paul B. Woosley, Ph.D.  
WKU Agriculture & Food Science Chair

## 2023-2024 Outstanding Students



MEGAN MUDD



EMILY KELLEY



MAKAYLA BIZZELL



GRACE MIKA



DAVID KEARNS



ALLIE BLAIR



JOE TAYLOR



CAROLINE DAVENPORT



MARANDA RECORD



TRISTAN EAKES



ABIGAIL KRENT

- Megan Mudd (Outstanding Graduate Student) Clarkson, KY
- Emily Kelley (Outstanding Agribusiness Senior) Morgantown, KY
- Makayla Bizzell (Outstanding Agricultural Education Student) Mount Juliet, TN
- Grace Mika (Outstanding Agronomy - Plant Science Student) Frankfort, KY
- Allie Blair (Outstanding Animal Science Student) Rineyville, KY
- David Kearns (Outstanding Agronomy - Soil Science Student) Elizabethtown, KY
- Joe Taylor (Outstanding Floriculture Student) Scottsville, KY
- Caroline Davenport (Outstanding Horticulture Student) Russellville, KY
- Maranda Record (Outstanding Horse Science Student) Shelbyville, TN
- Tristan Eakes (Outstanding Turfgrass Management Student) Ridgetop, TN
- Abigail Krent (Outstanding Senior) Noblesville, IN

# Homecoming



Although our department is celebrating Homecoming in 2025, we hope you can join us at the Ogden College of Science & Engineering tent on South Lawn for a Roaring Red Homecoming Celebration on November 16th! Make sure to check in and let us know where you'll be celebrating to score your FREE Homecoming 2024 tech sticker and a chance to win exciting prizes!

## Coming Home



David Givens, Alum Speaker

**JOIN US**  
**Saturday, February 22nd at 4pm (CST)**  
for our  
**Ag Coming Home**  
event at  
**L.D. Brown Agriculture Exposition Center!**

We will have hors d'oeuvres and a silent auction. Group basketball tickets will also be available for LA Tech vs. WKU! Register for the event here.

# New Faculty/Staff



Dr. Debbie Shoulders grew up on a beef cattle farm in Warren County and decided to follow in her grandfather's footsteps and become a veterinarian. She attended WKU before graduating from Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine. After graduation, Dr. Shoulders worked in a mixed animal practice in Morgantown, KY for 13 years before starting a house-call practice. She and her husband, Mark, raised three children on their family farm and are now happily enjoying two (almost three) grandchildren. She is very active in her state veterinary association, and she serves as a representative for Kentucky in our national veterinary organization. She has had so many wonderful mentors that have gotten her where she is today, and she looks forward to mentoring a new generation of veterinarian and agriculture students. We are excited for Dr. Shoulders to join the WKU Agriculture family!

## Crop News

- We have ten industry partners.
- There are two breeder plots.
- 116.5 acres of corn and 163.5 acres of beans
- We are conducting an inter-crop study with Enlist corn and beans. It's demonstrating a one-pass cropping system, which, in the past, you could spray 2,4d on corn, but it would make it brittle. This corn doesn't get brittle when Enlist is sprayed on it.
- We have held ten industry field days with one more to go.
- Spring started out rough with all the rain, but once it dried enough to plant, we were dry for about a month. We then received timely rains up until the past few weeks. The crops are looking good.
- In 2023, we won the high yield contest again for the second year in a row.



# Horticulture News



## Rebuild of the High Tunnels

This past year, AREC's horticulture unit has undergone a transitional phase as the farm rebuilds previously damaged structures with the help of WKU students, faculty, and staff. During Spring 2024, students from multiple agriculture classes teamed up to help demolish the remnants of three high tunnels that were destroyed during the previous year's windstorms.



## Farm-to-Campus

This spring has also shown great success with AREC's Farm-to-Campus program with over 1200 lbs. of student-grown vegetables being delivered to campus's eateries since April.



## Ornamental Production



Along with growing a variety of edibles, AREC facilities also grow thousands of annual flowers for the Hill.

# Agronomy News



Students from the AGRI 493/493G (Sustainable Agriculture) class visited local producer Mr. Willie Huston's field in Rockfield, KY in Spring 2024. Students learned about innovated strategies for diversifying farm enterprises and advancing sustainable agriculture. Students who attended the trip (from left to right): Brady Morphew, Logan Green, Nate Henderson, Jackson Glass, Jailyn Campbell, Shi Jie Liu, Tristan Eakes, Willie Huston (producer), and Rony Bourdeau.

Agronomy Club students toured the Ethanol Plant in Hopkinsville, KY this spring. On the tour, we learned of various uses for corn grain ethanol and the byproducts created. Students who attended the trip were Grace Mika, Zan Soyars, and Eli Dotson.



Pictured here is the 2023 WKU Soil Judging Team: Kylie Davis, Jackie Lambert, Zane Soyars, Emily Sturgill, Bryan Reaka (graduate student), Makayla Baize, David Kearns, and Nate Woodall.

Congratulations to Nate Woodall who placed 10th individual! Overall, the team placed 8th in the Southern Regional contest held in Morgantown, WV. We graduated several students: Makayla Baize, David Kearns, Zane Soyars, and Emily Sturgill.





## Research

Along with assistance from Drs. Singh and Willian, Dr. Gilfillen is continuing the research on carbon storage in a crop rotational system using animal manure and inorganic fertilizers. This research is in its 19th year.

# Agricultural Education

## North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture Judging Conference 2024



Five of our Agricultural Education students traveled to Twin Falls, Idaho to compete in the NACTA Agricultural Education teaching contest. The students had to answer a 100-question exam and teach a lesson in agriculture. The exam covered educational philosophy, theory, current issues, and organizational content. The students then taught one lesson after drawing a topic from a list of six areas. Each student had 60 minutes to prepare a lesson and teach in front of a panel of judges. Results for the content were:

- Team Event: 2nd in the Nation (National Runner-Up)
- Tori Langman: 1st Place Individual (National Champion)
- Emma Betz: 4th Place Individual
- Summer Riley: 7th Place Individual
- Abby Thompson: 13th Place Individual

The students would like to thank all the donors and the Department of Agriculture and Food Science for sponsoring the team for this educational opportunity.

What a great year to be a Hilltopper in Agricultural Education! The AE program continues to make strides in developing some of the best agricultural teachers to meet the needs of today's modern schools.

Makayla Bizzell has accepted a Graduate Assistantship position this fall and will be working with Dr. Kingrey on her Master's program. She will be teaching some undergraduate courses and working on her thesis.

The Kentucky FFA will be hosting its Vision/Mission Conference this fall on the campus of WKU. This will allow students to attend FFA leadership workshops instructed by National FFA officers.



# Equine News

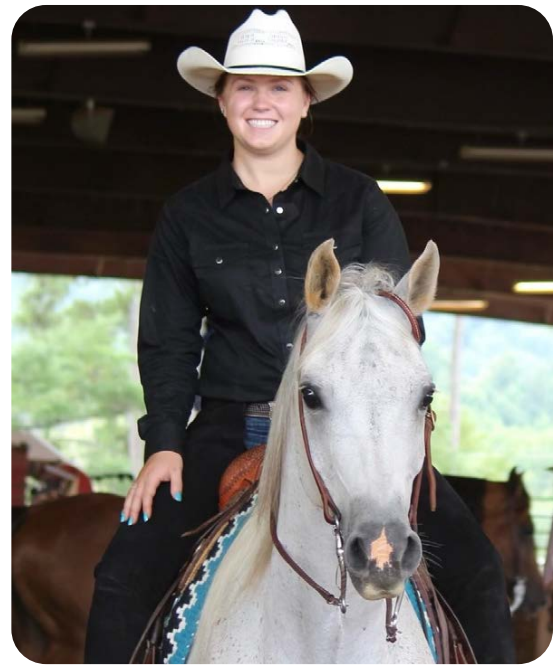


Elsa Humphrey shows WKU horse, Patty, at our IHSA home show.



Katie LaDuc performs a sliding stop abroad WKU horse, Doogie, at an ASHA stock show.

- The WKU IHSA Equestrian Team finished out the 2023-2024 academic year with two regional qualifiers: Ryan Cobb and Morgan Wach with several others on slate to qualify early this coming show season.
- WKU was able to supply horses to be used at the IHSA semi-finals hosted at MTSU. Trigger, owned by WKU, won the Team Reining at semi-finals.
- The WKU Stock Horse Team has continued to grow with eight horse-and-rider combinations who compete in Cow Horse, Reining, Trail, and Pleasure.
- The WKU Stock Horse Team started the season out strong in the spring, taking home two Collegiate Novice High Point All-Around Championships at our first two shows of the year.
- We received a grant through the WKU Sisterhood for \$3970. This allowed us to help students cover some entry fees and start our Show Outfit Closet to outfit students.
- WKU hosted our second regular season IHSA show in September, providing our riding facilities and twenty university horses while also competing against regional colleges.
- Equine Reproduction class was able to use acquired skills to palpate and successfully breed on of our WKU horses who is expected to foal out in Spring 2025.
- One of our students, Paige Burckhard, competed a summer internship with one of the top NRHA reining trainers, Crystal McNutt, In Arizona. Paige was able to acquire additional skills to help further her training and horsemanship skills.
- The acquisition of 20 new Bob's Western Saddles will help with all of our riding classes and teams. This was a very exciting addition to the horse barn this past year.
- Thank you to our local and regional equine professionals and friends for your continued support of our program. You provide us with horses, dentals, volunteerism at our events, and guest lecturers to further enrich our program.



Senior Morgan Wach astride WKU horse, Hustler, at an ASHA stock horse show.





Paige Burckhard executes a sliding stop aboard WKU horse, Trigger, during a reining pattern at an ASHA stock show.



Mary Niblett works the gate during a trail pattern aboard Hustler.



The WKU Stock Horse Team poses at a Tennessee Stock Horse Association show.

Kennedy Roberts is awarded a grant to benefit the WKU Equestrian Team from the WKU Sisterhood.



# Farm-to-Table

In an effort to increase the amount of locally sourced food utilized by dining services at WKU, the Office of Sustainability, WKU Restaurant Group, and the WKU Agriculture Research and Education Center (WKU Farm) will partner to establish garden spaces on campus.

This initiative will provide numerous benefits by growing food that is sustainable and locally-sourced. In addition, the use of these crops will be used as a way to educate the WKU community on the ways in which food can be grown sustainably. Alumni connections and involvement in this project will be a priority in order to foster continued community with WKU students of the past and present.

This project will also provide an opportunity to educate students and the local community alike on the benefits of sustainable farming and locally-sourced food, while also creating profiles on local farmers from whom the university could buy crops in order to further supplement items for dining services.



Dr. Martin Stone's Farm-to-Table course processed Fresno peppers to ferment them into value-added hot sauce. They learned about the science of transforming raw ingredients into food via fermentation. The process takes weeks to complete.

## The Hilltopper Creamery

Special thanks to Nikki Roof for her years of service to the Hilltopper Creamery. Nikke recently accepted a position to work with the Milk Safety Branch of the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. In her time on the Hill, Nikki built upon the foundation of Gary Beau, expanding on the variety of cheeses offered, developing and marketing the farm market, and rebranding Hilltopper Creamery. While she will no longer be working for the University, Nikki will be inspecting our Creamery and provide expertise.

The Hilltopper Creamery submitted cheese to the Kentucky State Fair and received:

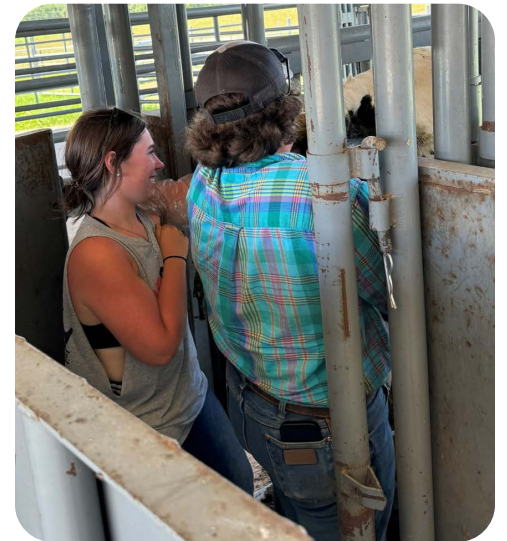
- Gold Medal for Jalapeno Pepperjack (Flavored High Moisture category)
- First place for Jalapeno Pepperjack (Flavored Open category)
- First place for Colby (Natural Farmstead Open Cheese category)
- Second place for Mild Cheddar (Natural Cheddar category)
- Second place for Smoked Gouda in the (Flavored [Smoked] category)
- Second place for Mild Cheddar (Mild Cheddar category)
- Second place for Vintage Reserve Cheddar (Aged Cheddar category)



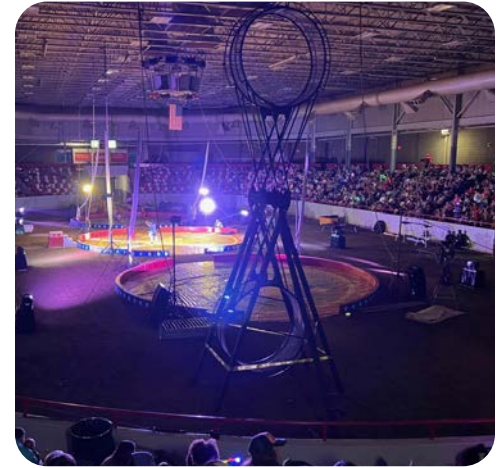
# WKU SmartHolstein Lab



- Average cows milked for the year: 45
- Milk rolling herd average up 2,026 lbs. from last year to 27,330 lbs.
- Milk fat averaging 4.1% and protein averaging 3.3%
- Per cow average of 88 lbs. of milk per day
- 19 Holstein heifers born in 2024 so far
- Top genomic animal (1195) WKU Thorson 747 (1156 NMS, 3119 TPI, 1469 PTAM, 136 PTAF). 1195 is a granddaughter of (7643) Welcome Biggelo Tarmak, who is in her third lactation and has produced 71,860 lifetime pounds. There are four descendants of 7643 in the herd.
- Provided employment and experience to six students over the past year.
- Visited local Chik-Fil-A restaurant as part of their Summer of Cows initiative.



# L.D. Brown Ag. Exposition Center



- Hosted numerous events including Lonestar Rodeo, Carden Circus, and Flat Shod Horse Sale.
- Held seven new events including Kentucky Junior Cattleman Association Fall Classic and the Kentucky Miniature Horse Breeder Cup
- Events at the Expo brought over 25,000 people to the Farm
- Provided employment and exposure to our agriculture facility and management to eight students from the Department of Agriculture and Food Science and beyond

## Agribusiness News

The WKU Agribusiness program is doing well. This past year, our students competed in the Southern Agricultural Economics Association (SAEA) Annual Collegiate Quiz Bowl Competition, held in Atlanta, GA. The competition was part of a larger academic conference. Two of our students (Sarahi Salinas and Clarissa Mackey) gave research presentations during the conference. While in Atlanta, students were able to enjoy some of the local attractions such as the World of Coca-Cola. We thank all those who may have sponsored our students to take part in such activities. Dr. Gumirakiza and Dr. King are proud of our many students and graduates. This past summer, Hunter Groves completed his Master's of Science in Agriculture, his thesis research being on the economic impact of cervid (deer) farming in Kentucky. For the 2024-2025 academic year, Dr. King is working with WKU students and the Kentucky Farm Bureau to develop a WKU Collegiate Farm Bureau chapter. We believe that this will be a great addition toward improving the WKU Agriculture and Food Science experience. If anyone would like to be involved with the WKU Agribusiness program, please contact Dr. King ([stephen.king2@wku.edu](mailto:stephen.king2@wku.edu)) or Dr. Gumirakiza ([dominique.gumirakiza@wku.edu](mailto:dominique.gumirakiza@wku.edu)). We are happy to have alumni as guest speakers, provide opportunities for field trips, and to sponsor students to participate in future SAEA Quiz Bowl competitions.



# Agriculture Appreciation Day

In September, we were honored to host the second annual Raising Hope Farmer Appreciation event. This initiative was created in 2020 by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, and state universities. The initiative's goals are to provide farmers with information about mental health resources, destigmatize mental health issues, promote the safety of farmers, and enhance the quality of life for farmers and their families.



Professor Emerita, Dr. Susan Jones from the WKU School of Nursing has been instrumental in getting this initiative off the ground. KY Ag Commissioner Jonathan Shell and WKU President Dr. Tim Caboni spoke at the event. Farmers and FFA students were able to participate in safety demonstrations and health screenings. Event sponsors also provided food, ice cream, and t-shirts. Not only was this a great event to celebrate Kentucky farmers, it also allowed the department to raise its visibility both at the university and state levels.

# Alumni Scholarship Recipient

## Meet Emily Tabor

I am Emily Tabor, and I'm proud to call Breckinridge County, Kentucky my home. Currently, I am a junior at WKU pursuing a degree in Agribusiness. I'd like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the WKU Department of Agriculture and Food Science alumni for their generous scholarship. It's an honor to be



selected from among the many outstanding students in the department. By choosing me to receive an alumni scholarship, you can be assured that you have made an investment in my success here at WKU and the future of agriculture. Although I am pursuing a degree in Agribusiness, my true passion is the beef industry. I am actively involved in several cattle associations as well as being a fourth-generation cattle rancher on the family farm. Currently, I have the privilege of serving as the President of the Kentucky Junior Cattlemen's Association and the Public Relations Chair for the American Junior Black Hereford Association. Exhibiting beef cattle locally and nationally also fuels my passion for the beef industry. In the spring, I plan to add a minor in Animal Science to help me pursue my career goal of becoming an Animal Pharmaceutical Sales Representative. This will allow me to blend my passion for agriculture with my desire to support and serve the livestock industry.

# Agriculture Alumni Award Winners



Terry Burks received the 2023 WKU Agriculture & Food Science Friend of the Year award along with Warren Beeler (not pictured). Both Terry and Warren helped with live animal evaluation classes at WKU. Additionally, both are always instrumental in securing livestock for various livestock judging events that take place at the Ag Expo Center. Thank you, Terry and Warren!



Sheldon McKinney received the 2023 WKU Agriculture & Food Science Alumni of the Year award. Sheldon is a 2008 alumna and a Flemming County native. Upon completion of her agriculture education degree, Sheldon taught high school agriculture. However, in recent years, she has served as the Executive Director for Kentucky's FFA Foundation. Through her efforts and leadership, the KY FFA has been able to impact more lives of future agriculturists than at any one point in history. She is responsible for one of the premier fundraising events in the state, the FFA Blue and Gold Gala. Sheldon is relentless when it comes to advocating for agriculture, especially students. Congrats, Sheldon!



Laura Smith received the 2023 WKU Agriculture & Food Science Spirit award. Laura is a 1990 graduate of the department and serves as Associate Director of WKU Philanthropy & Alumni Engagement. Laura was instrumental in helping resurrect the Ag Alumni Chapter. She works tirelessly to engage agriculture alumni and help keep them connected to the department. She is one of our biggest fans. Congratulations and well deserved, Laura!