Chair’s Message

by Carol Bagnell, Ph.D., Department Chair

On March 15, 2013, our department celebrated the completion of “Phase 1” of the Bartlett Hall 3rd-floor renovations with an open house featuring light refreshments, tours, and a slide show. The space formerly occupied by the Ralston and Wohlt labs was reconfigured into the Roepke lab space, a graduate student office, two restrooms, and a pantry/kitchen area. All new windows were installed, and our electrical supply was upgraded to provide much-needed emergency power outlets for labs on all floors of Bartlett Hall. This is a huge investment in the building and department by the Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (SEBS) administration. The slide show of before, during, and after construction photos (thanks to Lisa Estler, SEBS Associate Dean of Planning and Budgets) documented the transformation of the 3rd-floor space. “Phase 2” of this project will be the renovation of space occupied by the John-Alder lab and former grad student office. These building improvements have been on our ‘wish list’ for years so this is terrific news about improving the building’s infrastructure for all of us.

Great news! Sarah Ralston has been promoted to Professor I, effective July 2013. She was awarded a 2013-2014 Fulbright US Scholar Grant to travel to Brazil in Spring 2014 to offer an equine nutrition course and conduct research in Minas Gerais.

It has been a busy year for Animal Sciences. Our undergraduate enrollment (over 450 majors) is still the highest at SEBS, and we’re developing new courses to challenge them. Both graduate and undergraduate students are involved in the cutting-edge research being conducted in our laboratories. Our Extension faculty’s outreach activities include educating citizens interested in improving the sustainability of animal agriculture and the equine industry, addressing farm environmental issues as well as issues for equine business owners. At the request of our new Rutgers president, Bob Barchi, our faculty and staff participated in the strategic planning process by identifying aspirations, opportunities, current strengths, areas for improvement, hurdles, and concerns. I forwarded our recommendations to SEBS Executive Dean Bob Goodman to pass along to President Barchi.

Please plan to join us by the Round House for Ag Field Day on Rutgers Day: Saturday, April 27, 2013. Our students will be participating in the animal shows, petting zoo, Equine Science Center demonstrations, and other activities. As usual, I’ll be selling bagels and burgers at the Society of Animal Science BBQ. Hope to see you there!

Rutgers Hosted the NESA 2013 Competition

On February 23, 2013, Rutgers hosted the American Society of Animal Science/American Dairy Science Association Northeast Student Affiliate (NESA) competition. Almost 200 undergraduate students from nine land-grant universities from Maine to Delaware participated.

Months of careful planning by Society of Animal Science seniors Jess Martin, Emily Natoli, Amber Byleckie, and Shruti Iyer (all pictured on page 3 top) laid the groundwork together with advisors Carey Williams, Barry Jesse, Nick Bello, Troy Roepke, Daniela Sharma, Carol Bagnell, and Danielle Smarsh. The full day of activities began with livestock judging at Cedar Lane Farm in Oldwick, NJ. On-campus activities in Hickman Hall included a quiz bowl and presentations (see page 4 photos). Alumni, faculty, and current graduate students were recruited for judging the day’s events. Department staff, farm crew, and club members were on hand to help make the day’s events go smoothly. An awards banquet was held at the Radisson Hotel in Piscataway for all participants, including judges and other volunteers. “It took a village” but we’re still receiving emails from NESA advisors complimenting us on a job well done!
Undergraduate News
by Daniela Sharma, Ph.D., Undergraduate Program Director

As you know, the Animal Science curriculum provides students with the science, skills, and experience to be competitive for entrance into graduate or professional (veterinary, medical) schools or employment in animal science related fields. A central element of our outstanding teaching program is the involvement of undergraduates in our research laboratories. In June 2012, Carey Williams and I traveled to the University of Wisconsin–Madison to represent Rutgers and share our stories at “Teaching and Learning in the Animal Sciences: A National Conference to Challenge Old Assumptions and Break New Ground for the 21st Century.” This conference was part of a project funded by a USDA/National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Higher Education Challenge Grant meant to strengthen pedagogical content knowledge in the animal sciences as well explore new teaching strategies for future generations of animal science students. We presented a poster entitled “Using research to enhance the undergraduate animal science curriculum,” which was coauthored by Carol Bagnell and Sarah Ralston. Everyone was interested in how our students were able to gain practical research experience as part of their curriculum plan.

Good luck to this year’s George H. Cook Scholars as they prepare their honors presentations: Monica Boulos (Bagnell), Alexandra Locke (Uzumcu), Devan Murphy (Buckendahl, Center of Alcohol Studies), Nora Jean Nealon (Bello), Merrill Simpson (Ralston), Monica Smetts (Sarkar), and Brianna Stafford (Williams). In addition, we salute our 2012 George H. Cook Scholars: Susan Eastman (Williams), Dale Levitt (Sarkar), Meg Radford and Cynthia Xue (Katz & Becker), and Divya Ramnath and Clair Park (Ralston).

Nora Jean Nealon, Monica Smetts, and Devan Murphy have been selected as the winners of the 2013 Departmental Endowed Scholarship Awards in recognition of their excellence in academics, research, and/or service. Jessica Martin (pictured on page 3 top) is the recipient of the Rex Gilbreath Memorial Award for her involvement in NESA and promoting animal science as the president of the Society of Animal Science club.

Last year’s Departmental Endowed Scholarship Awards were given to Dale Levitt, Susan Eastman, Divya Ramnath, and Amanda Cloke. Leon Schermerhorn received the 2012 Rex Gilbreath Memorial Award in recognition of his involvement in undergraduate teaching, leadership, and dedication to the field of animal sciences.

Dairy Cattle AI over Spring Break

Twenty undergraduates spent several days in Lancaster County during Spring Break participating in the Precision Diagnostics “Dairy Cattle Artificial Insemination” course sponsored by Rutgers. This course included morning lectures at Lancaster DHIA and afternoon hands-on sessions at Kreider’s Dairy Farm where the students practiced AI techniques and semen handling. The course coordinator was Mike Westendorf (pictured page 3 as the Ag Field Day dairy judge). Alumni may fondly remember taking the course with Jim Wohlt, who ran this course for many years before his retirement in June 2010.

Students agreed that it was time well spent! Alexandra Goldin wrote: “As I want to be a large animal veterinarian, this program not only furthered my education but also gave me an edge in comparison to other students that are in the process of applying to vet schools.” Josh Gilens noted that “the kind of camaraderie that can only be developed through three full days of cattle AI made this class a lot of fun.” Rutgers Research Farm Manager Clint Burgher encourages students to hone their skills by assisting the farm crew to inseminate the heifers on campus before they’re returned to the Univ. of Delaware for calving.

Remembering Dairy Farming in NJ

In March 2013, SEBS Assistant Dean and alum Penny Carlson emailed the photo shown below to the “Cook Personals” listserv with the following note: “I thought people might be interested in seeing this picture of an abandoned farm I passed yesterday….I grew up in Sussex County and when I was a kid, there were more cows than people. Sadly most of those dairy farms are now gone. At least this farm seems to be on preserved land.” Her photo and note jogged the memory of many readers, and here are some of their reminiscences:

“It makes me think back to Ed Oleskie, Frank Wright, Ralph Mitchell, etc., days when Rutgers had a dairy farm in Sussex County.” – Greg DiLalo

“Like Gregory I think fondly of the first class dairy folks we had here back in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s....and had milk cows here on Cook campus.” – Mark Robson

“Times change, at one time New Jersey had nearly 6,000 dairy farms, now less than 75. In 1945, the US had 2.4 million dairy farms, today less than 50,000. At the same time, herd size has gone from less than 15 cows per farm to nearly 200. And production has increased from less than 5,000 pounds per cow per year to over 20,000 pounds. This trend has shown no sign of leveling off....Anyway, thanks for sharing that picture, it is beautiful.” – Mike Westendorf

An abandoned dairy farm in Sussex County (photographed by Penny Carlson)
Graduate Program Highlights
by Wendie Cohick, Ph.D., Graduate Program Director

Our interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Endocrinology and Animal Biosciences (EAB) continues to grow with the addition of new faculty members with interests in endocrinology and integrated physiology. Last year we welcomed Tracy Anthony from the Dept. of Nutritional Sciences and Bill Belden from the Dept. of Biochemistry and Microbiology. Tracey’s lab explores signaling and gene expression pathways activated by amino acid deprivation. Bill’s research focuses on the molecular aspects of chromatin remodeling and circadian rhythms as well as noncoding RNA.

Our weekly graduate seminars continue to enrich the professional development of our students and faculty. Troy Roepke is the 2012-2013 seminar series coordinator. We’ve enjoyed hearing about cutting-edge research conducted in labs throughout the world. Our students and postdocs have the opportunity to meet over lunch with seminar speakers who come from outside of Rutgers. It’s a great opportunity to network with established scientists and to get different perspectives on career paths.

In Fall 2012 our program welcomed a new MS student from India and a part-time MS student who works in industry. We now have 12 PhD and 3 MS students in our graduate program, including 2 PhD students from Iraq on government fellowship. A fifth-year Ph.D. candidate in Carol Bagnell’s lab is being supported during this academic year by the graduate student scholarship so generously funded by Michael Graziano (with matching funds from Bristol-Myers Squibb). A sixth-year student in the Sarkar lab is being supported by the Philip and Ann Aines Endowed Fellowship. We’re very grateful to these alumni donors and all others who support us.

Need Dessert? Dog Treats? Stop by the GSO Booth

On Ag Field Day (after buying a burger at the Society of Animal Science BBQ), visit the adjacent booth to purchase baked goods and dog treats. It is the main fundraising activity of the EAB Graduate Student Organization (GSO). See photo at right.

A new travel award program has been established to enable active members to attend scientific conferences related to their graduate research. Proposed by EAB students, it is funded jointly by the graduate program, department, and GSO.

Since 2008, our students have collaborated with the Nutritional Sciences GSO to host the annual Nutrition, Endocrinology & Animal Biosciences (NEAB) Graduate Student Conference featuring keynote talks by well-known scientists, student oral presentations, and a poster session. Riva Touger-Decker and Barry Levin (UMDNJ) gave the 2012 keynote talks; Harvey Grill (U Penn) is the 2013 NEAB Conference keynote speaker. AlcheraBio has donated $250 in prizes for the best posters.

Photo credits: Penny Carlson (p 2); Brooke Domino Photography (p 4, top-left photo); K. Manger (all other photos)

Please Make a Donation!

☐ Yes, I wish to support the continued excellence of the Department of Animal Sciences and Graduate Program in Endocrinology and Animal Biosciences with a gift of:
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The Department of Animal Sciences

Newsletter 2012-2013

More on NESA...

The photos on this page provide a glimpse of the Animal Sciences community that worked together for NESA 2013. We’ll post additional photos on our department homepage.

Last year’s NESA competition was held at the Univ. of Maine. Forty-seven teams from ten universities participated. Rutgers Team D (Rebecca Aguilar, Samantha Buteux, Dale Levitt, and Sara Omar) earned Third Place in Quiz Bowl, and Dale Levitt won First Place in Original Research Presentations. Thanks to the efforts of all Rutgers participants and advisors, our 2012 NESA Team brought home a Fourth Place ribbon. It’s proudly displayed in the Bartlett Hall foyer along with our Second Place ribbon from 2010 and Fifth Place ribbon from 2011.

Although we didn’t compete in 2013 (because we hosted), we have established ourselves as a top-tier finisher at NESA.

Faculty and Students Win Awards

Want to hear a good story about the students, faculty, staff, and alumni of our department, School, and NJAES? On the SEBS-NJAES Newsroom (sebsnjaesnews.rutgers.edu) you’ll see stories and photos of events of the past year: Ag Field Day animal shows, our reception for graduating seniors, the GSO end-of-the-year picnic at the Log Cabin, Karyn Malinowski’s Equine Science Award from the American Society of Animal Science, George Eager’s retirement party last July, and our September “Pioneers in Endocrinology” workshop.

A Newsroom story highlighted the selection of a journal article by Dipak Sarkar and coauthors Dmitry Govorko, Rola Bekdash, and Changqing Zhang (EAB) as one of the top 15 articles in the field of biological psychiatry in 2012. Stories are also posted describing Sarah Ralston’s selection as a Fulbright Scholar, Julie Fagan’s award-winning “Ethics in Science” class project, research by Carol Bagnell’s lab on the role of nursing and “first milk” in reproductive tract development, the selection of Jessica Verpeut (Ph.D. student, Nick Bello’s lab) as the U.S. 3rd place graduate winner in the Alltech Young Scientist competition, and the new Equine Business Planning course coordinated by Carey Williams and Laura Gladney.

Please visit the Newsroom often to search for animal, equine, endocrinology, Endocrine Program, etc. You’re cordially invited to send us your own stories (animalsci@sebs.rutgers.edu).

Farm Sales Program

The NJAES Animal Care Program, in conjunction with several Animal Science undergraduate classes, has been developing direct-marketing programs of Cook Campus Farm products. For information about purchasing RU pork, goat meat, beef, lamb, and composted manure, go to the Farm Sales website, njaes.rutgers.edu/animalcare/farm-sales.