

AgLink

Fall 2002

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Making sense (and cents) of sawfly scents

For some lucky people who take walks on warm summer evenings, the clean scent of a nearby wheat field is not just sweet, but also regarded as one of life's free luxuries. Some of the earth's tiniest creatures have an even more discriminating sense of smell.

For insects that prey on wheat, like the wheat stem sawfly, the aroma of wheat is made up of a mosaic of individual scents, some of which attract, while others repel. Montana State University researchers are trying to decipher this language of smells. When they succeed, the benefits hopefully will include economically and ecologically sound pest control for the grain we use to make our daily bread.

MSU entomologists David Weaver and Wendell Morrill are working with a group of campus colleagues, visiting scientists, and students on a wide-ranging sawfly management project. Much of their work has been to collect and identify wheat and sawfly odors.

Some wheat odors already are drawing sawflies to test traps.

MSU graduate student Gavin Peck of **Darby** is working with Weaver and Morrill this summer to see whether wheat produces a different odor when it is infested with sawfly, which may signal other sawfly either to "come hither" or stay away.

Weaver began the research a few years ago by collecting the sawfly's pheromones, a major component in its reproduction.



Sawfly (upper right) flying toward baited trap at left. Photo by Robert Peterson, Montana State University.

But the team's research is broader and includes a search for wheat stem sawfly diseases, parasites and predators, learning how to raise the beneficial insects, how to

cont. on p. 10

Student Gavin Peck of Darby collecting wheat odor samples for wheat stem sawfly research.



From the Dean

As a new academic year starts in Bozeman, we welcome students back to campus and look forward to a fun, productive and rewarding year. The College has disbursed the most scholarship money in its history (\$425,000) to assist students with their financial obligations. Our

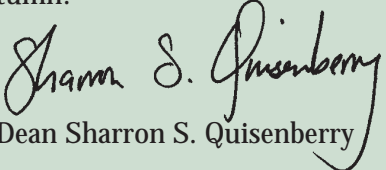


new recruitment and retention coordinator, Heidi Hart (AgEd '89), is striving to increase our enrollment. The dedicated faculty and staff in the College of Agriculture continue to provide excellent research and instructional programs.

The university system, College of Agriculture and Agricultural Experiment Station face many challenges in the coming year, especially with the state's budget deficits. We are committed to working with the 2003 Legislature to find innovative

and equitable solutions to these difficult issues.

I encourage you to join us on campus for Ag Appreciation Weekend Nov. 15-16, and I hope you will choose to nominate someone you know for our Outstanding Agricultural Leader award (see p. 3). Have a wonderful autumn!


—Dean Sharron S. Quisenberry

Come to MSU for Ag Appreciation Weekend

The fourth annual MSU Ag Appreciation Weekend will be held Nov. 15-16. Please join us to celebrate Montana's number-one industry and support student activities in the College of Agriculture.

Dr. Joseph W. Glauber, USDA deputy chief economist, will present the M.L. Wilson Lecture on Friday, Nov. 15. Also on Friday, Steer-a-Year judging takes place at the Miller Pavilion at 2pm, the Bobcat Fire-up is at 5pm, and the MSU volleyball team takes on the rival Grizzlies at 7pm. High school students are on campus for Ag Days competitions on Thursday and Friday, and the Ag Appreciation Art Show is on display throughout the weekend.

Saturday is full of fun activities for the whole family from the tailgate, kiss-a-critter contest and football game against Portland State, to the silent auction and Boots and Bow Ties Banquet. For more information, contact Lynn Speakman at (406) 994-5744 or lynns@montana.edu. We hope to see you there!

College of Agriculture now offers four-year equine science degree

Montana State University now offers a four-year degree in equine science.

The degree was created in response to numerous requests from students and horse industry representatives, and will begin this fall, said Mike Tess, head of MSU's Animal and Range Sciences Department. As the number of horses in Montana increases every year, so does interest in equine education and careers, he added.

In addition to riding skills, students will learn the science of horses: physiology, nutrition, genetics, and reproduction, as well as practical skills like horseshoeing, horse packing and colt training. Students can also learn to teach horsemanship skills to others.

Montana has an estimated 150,000 horses, said Sandy Gagnon, MSU associate professor. That number has grown steadily since a 1992 survey estimated just over 56,000 horses in the state. That means more students are inquiring about equine career opportunities, whether related to animal health and nutrition, horse training or business management within the horse industry.

Students are encouraged to bring their own horses to Bozeman, where boarding is available at numerous private facilities. Previous experience and horse ownership are not required. Gagnon said students will be able to choose from a number of practical internship opportunities.

MSU's College of Agriculture facilities include a university-owned herd of 50 horses, indoor heated arena and 400-acre research farm.

For more information, contact Heidi Hart at agstudents@montana.edu or (406) 994-1662; or Denise Thompson in Animal and Range Sciences at (406) 994-5582, deniset@montana.edu. Information will also be on-line at http://animalrange.montana.edu/Docs/horse_science.htm



Students in the new Equine Science program can prepare for a variety of careers, including Montana's growing horse industry and the general livestock industry.

USDA-ARS Northern Plains Agricultural Research Laboratory



The USDA laboratory in Sidney is a partner with MSU's research programs.

With a new 21,800 square foot facility and several new staff members, the USDA-ARS Northern Plains Agricultural Research Laboratory is poised to make a difference, says Bob Evans, NPARL research leader for agricultural systems programs.

"We have two research units here at Sidney, agricultural systems research and pest management research, and we have outstanding scientists in both areas. We are going to make a difference," says Evans.

Even as the pest management unit begins summarizing the work of TEAM Leafy Spurge, a 5-year multi-agency program to control leafy spurge, the unit is planning its next offensives, says Tom Shanower, research leader of the pest management group. Specifically, his unit will expand work to control salt cedar and field bindweed, and continue looking at the interactions of insects and pathogens for those purposes. The addition of a DNA sequencer in 1999 has added to NPARL's biocontrol efforts, because

it lets scientists more precisely identify potentially useful microorganisms.

For the agricultural systems research unit, soil and water management research remain critical missions. Evans says his unit is putting heightened emphasis on work with high-value irrigated crops. The work includes such areas as movement of agricultural chemicals in irrigated systems, alternative cropping systems on both dry and irrigated land, and the effects on soil quality by management decisions.

Both units cooperate closely with MSU on regional agricultural research. They have been using a 1965 facility that had become very cramped, so the dedication Aug. 10 of six new labs and 19 new offices in a \$7.5 million building is welcome. Shanower and Evans say that another appropriation will be needed to add a biocontainment and additional greenhouse space, which would greatly expand their capabilities for studying new biocontrol agents for pests.

Chickpea promise

Not many U.S. farmers grow chickpeas, but Canadians are growing the crop in the same soil and climate conditions as exist in Montana, said Perry Miller, an MSU agronomist. Miller, along with MSU agricultural economist Dave Buschena and a scientist in North Dakota are looking into whether chickpeas would be a good alternative crop for Montana producers. Miller is studying pest management and cropping systems; Buschena is evaluating the economic risks and benefits.

Seedling protector

Canola growers know that, as a seedling, the crop is vulnerable to flea beetles and fungi, said Bill Grey of MSU Plant Sciences. But once past that stage, the plants with bright yellow flowers are pretty tough. Grey is studying treatments that will protect the crop at its earliest stages from diseases like brown girdling root rot. Canola, grown and processed for its oil, is a good rotational crop in Montana because it can break the disease cycles found in small grain fields.

Wheat from on high

Farmers who wonder if their wheat lacks nitrogen might walk through the fields and mark areas that aren't as green as others. They could also study aerial photographs, says Mal Westcott of the Western Agricultural Research Center in Corvallis. Scientists have found correlation between greenness and nitrogen content. Westcott is now part of a multistate project that might allow farmers to gather that information from satellite images. Funded by the USDA-CRSEES Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems, the project could give farmers an inexpensive tool to detect nitrogen deficiencies. They could then apply fertilizer only where needed.

Nominate an ag leader by Sept. 15

The deadline is approaching to nominate Montana's outstanding agricultural leaders, who are honored during Ag Appreciation Weekend Nov. 15-16, 2002. Applications must be submitted by Sept. 15.

Each year, the MSU College of Agriculture honors producers or industry representatives who have exhibited outstanding leadership in the agricultural community. Contact Sandra Germann at (406) 994-7671 or www.montana.edu/agriculture/College/Development/award.htm

Hiding from Momma is the only way to grow

In the nine months of pregnancy, mothers-to-be watch for every sign of life. Oddly enough, to avoid miscarriage, her fetus must hide from her immune system.

That is the essence of the article by Montana State University researcher Ed Schmidt that was featured on the July 12 cover of "Cell," a leading cell biology journal.

Schmidt believes that this surprising insight into how the immune system works in pregnancy could eventually lead not just to fewer miscarriages but also to solutions for other problems, such as the rejection of donated organs. His work is funded by the March of Dimes, which works to prevent birth defects and infant mortality.

The broad significance of his work comes partially from the pervasiveness of the gene he worked with in mice. It is so basic to life that he describes it as "required by all cells, in almost all living things, at all times."

"We found that in addition to the gene's requirement for basic functions, there is an additional bit needed to maintain pregnancy. This bit allows the fetus to hide. Without it, mothers' immune systems see the fetuses as foreign tissue, as if it were



Ed Schmidt

an invading virus, so mutant fetuses were aborted." Later, Schmidt eliminated the mothers' immune systems, and they gave birth to healthy mice that otherwise couldn't have hidden as fetuses.

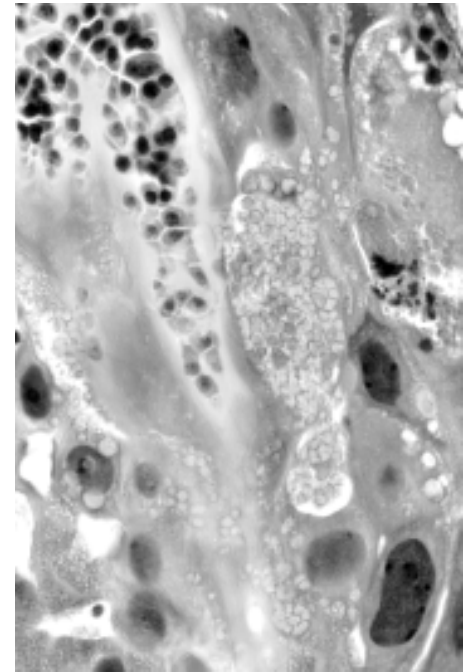
The immune systems of mice and humans are virtually identical, so

"these mice should be useful to investigators interested in improving the outcomes of pregnancies for humans," says Schmidt.

His team included MSU graduate student Nicole Hobbs and MSU Research Specialist Alla Bondareva, as well as cooperating researcher Mario Capecchi and his assistant Sheila Barnett at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in Salt Lake City.

March of Dimes Vice President for Research Michael Katz says the application of Schmidt's work "is likely to be important to diagnosing and treating many human disorders that are currently not treatable."

Miscarriages occur in 15 percent of recognized pregnancies, according to the March of Dimes. However, many miscarriages occur before a woman even knows she is pregnant. That means that up to 50 percent of all pregnancies may end in miscar-



Mouse placental cells at the interaction zone with the mother's uterus, as seen through a high-powered microscope. This pregnancy is in the process of being rejected.

riage. With each miscarriage, the odds of additional miscarriages increase.

"The only reason pregnancy works at all is the same reason five-year-old children get away with so much. They know how to hide. In this case, the placenta hides the fetus. When it fails to hide the pregnancy from the mother's immune system, a miscarriage often occurs," says Schmidt.

Livestock judging team busy this fall

MSU's livestock judging team continues to rack up experience, traveling this fall to the World Beef Expo in Milwaukee in September, to a competition in Louisville in October, and to the San Francisco Cow Palace. The team, coached by Marc King, is still in need of sponsorships for team members. For more information, contact King in Big Timber at (406) 932-5146 or Sandra Germann at (406) 994-7671.

Support MSU students: Donate a steer!

Through the Steer-a-Year program, you can donate a steer or its monetary equivalent to

- **College of Agriculture** (supporting the livestock and meats judging teams)
- **Athletic Scholarship Association** (supporting student athletes)
- **Rodeo Team** (supporting rodeo team members)

For more information, contact Lisa Duffey at (406) 994-4323 or lduffey@montana.edu

Honor Roll of Donors

Thank you to all those alumni and friends who generously donated to the MSU College of Agriculture during this fiscal year (July 1, 2001-June 30, 2002). Donors listed in italics contributed \$500 or more to the college, including matching gifts. Your very generous support plays a major part in what we are able to provide for student, research and industry needs. Look for an Honor Roll of Donors to be published by the College of Agriculture each fall. Thank you for all you do!

*Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this list. Should you feel an error has been made, please contact Sandra Germann in the Development Office: (406) 994-7671. An asterisk * designates donors who are deceased*

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Thank you, donors, for everything you do to support agriculture and education in Montana!

Range scholarship honors early professors

A scholarship fund for range science students has been established in the names of Dr. Gene Payne, Dr. Don Ryerson and Dr. Jack (John E.) Taylor. Dr. Payne began the MSU (then Montana State College) range curriculum in 1945 and taught alone for five years. Together, the three professors contributed 86 years of teaching in range science to MSU.

Payne taught until 1979, Ryerson until 1980 and Taylor until 1991. Anyone wishing to donate to the scholarship endowment may contact Sandra Germann at (406) 994-7671 or sgermann@montana.edu or Carol Ann Sparks at (406) 778-2320.

Sawfly scents, cont. from p. 1

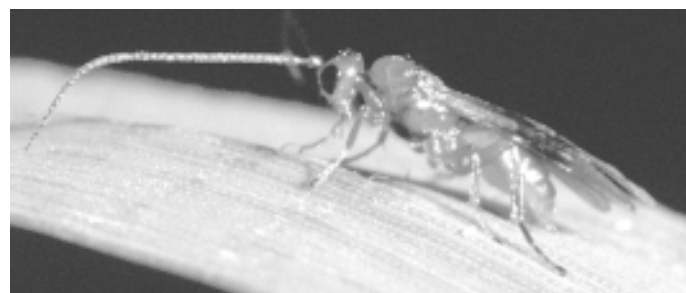
build a better sawfly trap and learning how cultural control methods, such as no-till farming, help reduce sawfly damage.

"You can't go at these problems with just one approach," says Weaver.

Cooperators include Jerry Philipps southwest of **Conrad**, on whose land Morrill found braconid wasps, a potential biocontrol for sawfly, and Don Fast of **Glasgow**, who has had braconids released on his land. Undergraduate students on the team include Courtney Shannon of **Portland, Ore.**; B.G. FitzGerald of **Jordan**; Deidre FitzGerald of **Noxon**; Megan Johnson from **Centerville**; and Ying Liu of **China**. The team's lab manager is Justin Runyon.

Other researchers working with Weaver and Morrill include Bill Grey, Robert Peterson, visiting scientists Anna Wenda-Piesik and Dariusz Piesik of **Poland**, Xinzhi Ni, a research assistant professor from **China** working with MSU College of Agriculture's Dean Sharron Quisenberry, Research Associate Petrea Hofer and graduate student Scott Meers of Strathmore, Alberta Canada.

Montana is the center of North American sawfly infestations, which can cost Montana wheat producers \$20-30 million in a bad year through wheat yield reductions and increased harvest costs.



A braconid wasp. Photo by Robert Peterson, Montana State University.

An opportunity for Animal and Range Sciences alumni and friends...

If you would like to memorialize a family name, family ranch or business, or simply support Animal and Range Sciences in Montana, please consider the new Animal BioSciences Facility, which will be located on campus at MSU in Bozeman. Classrooms, laboratories and meeting rooms will all be named for donors.

MSU's Animal and Range Sciences department remains years overdue for a new facility. This need has been established as a University-wide priority. The price of the new facility is \$15 million. The proposed Endowed Chair for the Center for Beef Excellence, which will be housed within the new facility, brings the total to \$19 million.

The state-of-the-art facility will not only benefit students and researchers, but will support the state's economy through livestock production as well as biobased products and food safety.

The planning phase is currently underway. An architectural drawing including site selection on campus will be ready by Jan. 1, 2003. Naming opportunities are available for classrooms, laboratories and meeting rooms.

For more information on being a part of Animal and Range history in Montana, contact the Development Office for the College of Agriculture at 406-994-7671.

New Sheep Institute a natural step toward weed control

Montana State University recently received a \$400,000 USDA grant to fund a statewide Sheep Institute. The Montana Sheep Institute is a cooperative program of MSU, the Montana Wool Growers Association and the Montana sheep industry. The project will help increase the competitiveness of Montana's sheep industry by using sheep in large-scale weed management systems, reducing lamb mortality and improving income through new wool and lamb marketing strategies.

Rodney Kott, MSU Extension sheep specialist and Sheep Institute principal investigator, said that the grant grew from requests by Montana sheep producers and land managers for help in developing weed grazing programs and other efforts to help Montana's sheep producers survive economically. Rapid changes in world wool and lamb markets over the last 10 years have caused reduced profits to producers, marking a drop in Montana sheep numbers from 500,000 in 1990 to 250,000 in 2002.

"Land managers were a surprise partner," said Kott. The Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and Montana Weed Control Association are looking to sheep as a tool in battling noxious weeds like leafy spurge. Weed grazing opera-



Using sheep to control leafy spurge costs a fraction of the price of chemical spraying. The sheep prefer the weeds, which provide them with more nutrition than grasses.

tions have proved successful, said Kott, but the practice has never been adopted on a large and organized scale. The Montana Sheep Institute will develop a system that brings sheep producers and land managers together.

"This program is very important to Montana as we work to address the problem of noxious weeds that are crowding out grass in our range lands," said Bob Gilbert, secretary/treasurer of the Montana Wool Growers Association. "Not only do we (Montana's agricultural economy) win, but also wildlife that

depend on rangeland for survival."

Jim Moore, former Extension agent for Judith Basin County, was hired as full-time Sheep Institute project coordinator to develop and implement educational programs for grower activities focusing on weed grazing and profitability. The coordinator will also help sheep producers with value-added marketing efforts throughout the state, such as the wool-pool marketing programs in south-central and northeastern Montana, and lamb marketing efforts in western and south-central Montana.

New site brings top companies and jobs to ag alumni

A new Internet site, www.jobhog.net, now offers job-seeking alumni convenience and opportunities in the agriculture, food, natural and life sciences sectors.

According to Eric Spell, jobhog.net president, the site's focus is to link qualified candidates and agribusiness employers.

"I invite alumni to search jobhog.net for jobs in more than 20 categories, ranging from agribusiness to genetics to engineering," says Spell, an agriculture college alumnus and former ag industry recruiter from North Carolina.

Organizations using jobhog.net to find professionals include Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Tractor Supply Company, JR Simplot, Tyson Foods, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cargill and Seaboard Farms Inc., among others.

"As many alumni have discovered, the ag industry as a whole is small, so very specific resources are necessary when job searching. Jobhog.net brings top companies and jobs to alumni who are looking to change careers," Spell says.

Congratulations!

Michael Tess is now department head for the Department of **Animal and Range Sciences** after a successful nationwide search. He had been interim department head since Oct. 2001.



Mike Tess

As of June 1, **Connie Shelhamer** is the budget and fiscal director for the College of Agriculture and Agricultural Experiment Station.

Martin Frick, associate professor **AgEd**, and **Darren Crawford**, Glacier County **Extension** agent, won the honorable mention journal award from NACTA, the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture, for an article in the NACTA professional journal. NACTA also honored **horticulture** professor **Robert Gough** for his six-year term as editor of the NACTA Journal. In addition, Gough was recently elected Fellow by the American Society for Horticultural Science.

John Antle and **Susan Capalbo**, both professors in **Agricultural Economics and Economics**, were honored by the American Agricultural Economics Association: Antle as Fellow and Capalbo as member of the Executive Board for 2001-2004.

A journal article co-authored by **Norm Weeden**, department head of **Plant Sciences and Plant Pathology**, was selected as the Outstanding Fruit Publication for 2001 by the American Society of Horticultural Science.

Heidi Hart (**AgEd '89**) began July 1 as the recruitment and retention coordinator for the College of Agriculture.



Heidi Hart

Chengci Chen is a new research scientist at the **Central Agricultural Research Center** near Moccasin. Chen will research alternative crops for rotations with wheat and barley.

Agriculture Dean and Director **Sharron Quisenberry** was appointed by President George Bush to the Board for International Food and Agriculture Development. She was also recently elected Fellow of the Entomological Society of America.

MSU grad **Lee Van Wychen** (**LRES**) is the 2003 Congressional Science Fellow for the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America and Soil Science Society of America. Van Wychen will assist House and Senate members in

Washington, D.C. on agriculture and natural resource issues.

John M. Marsh, **Ag Economics** professor, received the Outstanding Instructor Award for the 2001-02 school year from the **Ag Student Council**.

Blair Stringam is a new asst. professor in **Agricultural Operations Technology**. He will teach Agricultural Machinery Management; Agricultural Structures and Environment; Water Management; Surveying Application; and Critical Thinking for the Food and Fiber Systems. He also advises the AOT club.

David Weaver, **Entomology**, is now an Insect Chemical Ecologist researching wheat stem sawfly ecology and biological control.

David Brown is a new asst. professor of landscape analysis and management in **LRES**. He will teach Soil Classification and Pedology and Soil-Landscape Dynamics.

Bryan McGlynn is also a new asst. professor in **LRES**, focusing on Watershed Hydrology.

Dominic P. Parker won the American Agricultural Economics Association's and the Western Agricultural Economics Association's Outstanding Master's Thesis Award for "The Effects of Contracting Costs, Bureaucratic Costs, and Constituencies on State Wildlife Agency Budgets."

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