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NU Vice President and Harlan Vice Chancellor, IANR

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An agreement of cooperation between UNL and Sri Venkateswara Veterinary University in Tirupati, India, is signed by UNL Chancellor Harvey Perlman and SVVU Vice Chancellor D.V.G. Krishna Mohan.

Graduate student Yuli Meneses of Ecuador plans to learn more about dairy farming and processing on an international scale when she travels to India this summer. Meneses will be one of two University of Nebraska–Lincoln food science students to travel to India. She and Alex Nelson, a food science and technology senior from Omaha, will go to Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (TANUVAS) in Chennai for one month.

As part of the program, they will visit Sri Venkateswara Veterinary University (SVVU) in Tirupati, learning the manufacturing processes for indigenous Indian dairy products. They also will visit commercial dairy processing companies in India.

In return, SVVU plans to send faculty and students to UNL to conduct research and learn more about American dairy processing and products.

The exchanges were agreed to in an agreement signed May 1 by D.V.G. Krishna Mohan, the vice chancellor of SVVU. The agreement pledges cooperation between SVVU and UNL, said Harshavardhan Thippareddi, associate professor of food science and technology at UNL.

“They are very excited about the opportunity and want to establish student exchanges very soon,” Thippareddi said. “They see an ideal partner in us.”

After Meneses and Nelson return to UNL, they will make ethnic Indian dairy products at The Food Processing Center dairy plant to evaluate their potential in the U.S. market, Thippareddi said.

Mohan said the exchanges will benefit all because the dairy industry in the two countries is so different. Indian farms have relatively few dairy cattle, and milk is kept for home drinking and shared through a cooperative agency. The tropical climate in southern India lends itself to further differences, he said.

Mohan hopes the exchanges will result in collaborative research and help Indian students broaden their knowledge. “We want to expose them to a U.S. learning environment,” Mohan said. Students who attend SVVU take classes for five years. Two to three students a year likely would come to UNL during their tenth semester and stay for a month or two, Mohan said.

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Nebraska vet students win first-place honors

Three Nebraska students in the Professional Program in Veterinary Medicine offered by Iowa State University and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln won first-place honors during the 2009 Intercollegiate Veterinary Dairy Challenge at ISU.

Jennifer Glaesemann of Fairbury, Melissa Herberer of Haskins, and Melissa Thompson of Page took first place during the April event. Participating students spent three hours observing at a dairy and recording their perceptions, then developed a plan of action for the dairy.

Established in 2007, the competition encourages hands-on practice for future dairy veterinarians.

Agreement results...

The visits by UNL students and faculty to the Indian university will provide them with valuable educational experiences outside the United States, Thippareddi said.

In April, four members of SVVU’s Board of Management visited UNL to look at opportunities for collaboration between the two schools, Thippareddi said. They visited the departments of animal science, veterinary and biomedical sciences, and food science and technology as well as the Food Processing Center.

In February, IANR and UNL administrators and faculty visited India to seek expanded opportunities in the food processing industry in Nebraska and India. — Lori McGinnis

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NU Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources
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Erdman transforms ag education into career in public service

Working in public service wasn’t what Philip Erdman had planned on while growing up on a farm near Bayard or when he first started studying in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources.

By the time Erdman reached his senior year, however, he was campaigning to run for the Nebraska Legislature and when he graduated, he was just months away from being elected.

“My family has placed a high value on service,” Erdman said. “I thought it was the right calling at the time.”

Erdman, a 2000 graduate in agricultural education, unseated an incumbent and served eight years in the Legislature before he had to leave due to term limits. He now is state agricultural director for former Nebraska governor and now U.S. Sen. Mike Johanns, and works in Johanns’ Lincoln office.

Erdman grew up on a farm that produced corn, dry edible beans, alfalfa, and sugar beets, and raised some livestock. He was state FFA president while a senior at Bayard High School into his freshman year at UNL.

While at UNL he spent two summers working for regional cooperatives. He hadn’t planned on going back to the family farm but hadn’t ruled it out either.

“Going to the university I was open to opportunities in agriculture, possibly something in ag business,” he said.

His time at UNL kept him busy. Besides his class load, he was president of Burr Hall, involved in FFA alumni activities, served on the CASNR Advisory Board and Curriculum Committee, and was in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

During his junior year he extended his activities beyond UNL and began campaigning for the Legislature by knocking on doors in his western Nebraska district. Just months after his graduation at age 23, he won the election and became one of the youngest state senators in the history of the Unicameral.

He believes he won because “I ran an energetic and active campaign and was willing to stand up for the values and issues of the district.”

After graduation the new state senator returned to the family farm and rented his own farmland until 2005. He then appraised real estate for Valley Bank & Trust in Gering until Johanns’ transition team called him in December to ask if he would be interested in working on the senator’s staff. Three interviews later he was hired.

Erdman moved his wife and two children to Lincoln. He travels the state to represent Johanns at events where agricultural policy issues are to be discussed. Erdman, who began the new post in January, also anticipates some travel to Washington, D.C.

Erdman believes the faculty and students at CASNR helped prepare him for public service.

“The faculty was very accessible and I personally feel that the way they approach their jobs prepared me well for whatever I wanted to do,” he said.

— Lori McGinnis

Graduating CASNR seniors saluted during ‘Salute to Graduates’

The College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and its alumni association set records in May for its Salute to Graduates.

The May 8 event at the Nebraska East Union had 130 students participating, the most ever, said Paul Horton, CASNR alumni development officer. Because students’ families attend the event, it also had a record number of family members.

“This was the eighth and by far the largest Salute to Graduates ceremony since the program began in December of 2005,” Horton said. “Nearly 750 people, including participants, were in the East Union to attend.”

The event, held twice a year before UNL graduation, is a very personalized ceremony, Horton said.

“We get comments from graduates and their families that they appreciate that type of ceremony,” he said.

During the ceremony, each graduate was called individually to a stage with John Owens, NU vice president and LANR Harlan vice chancellor, CASNR Dean Steve Waller, the student's department head and the CASNR Alumni Association president.

Brief comments previously written by the graduates were read, stating their greatest achievement in college, and what they plan to do after graduation. Photographs taken were posted to the CASNR Web site and made available to the graduates’ hometown newspaper. Each graduate received gifts from the college.

CASNR graduates are not required to participate, but most do, Horton said. The May turnout had more than 60 percent of graduates participating.

This year’s graduating class was larger than most — 190 seniors, Horton said. Also invited were the first 24 students who have completed the UNL portion of the Professional Program in Veterinary Medicine offered by Iowa State University and UNL, Horton said. The ceremony was open to August graduates as well.

Prior to the Salute to Graduates, CASNR departments had their own receptions for the graduates where their parents could meet faculty and staff. Before the actual graduation ceremony on May 9, CASNR sponsored the Senior Sendoff reception for its graduates at the Devaney Sports Center.

Salute to Graduates has been held every May and December graduation since December 2005, Horton said. The program was conceived by Owens and developed by Waller.

“They felt it was very appropriate to provide this kind of recognition,” Horton said.

Quilt museum gets award for green design

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) has presented a silver rating to the International Quilt Study Center and Museum.

The building underwent a study by the USGBC’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program. The program awards points based on green features in building design and construction.

The silver rating was announced during the center’s first anniversary celebration in April.
Baenziger named to International Rice Research Institute board

An international agricultural center that conducts research into one of the world’s most important food crops has selected an Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources faculty member to serve on its board of trustees.

P. Stephen Baenziger, Eugene W. Price Distinguished Professor in the University of Nebraska—Lincoln Department of Agronomy and Horticulture and small grains and genetics researcher, will begin a three-year term on the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) board beginning in 2010. Currently, only one person from the United States sits on the 15-member board.

“It’s a huge opportunity,” Baenziger said. “This appointment is a dream come true for me.”

IRRI, established in 1960 and headquartered in the Philippines, is the largest nonprofit agricultural research center in Asia. Its mission is to reduce world hunger, improve the health of rice farmers and consumers, and work for environmentally sustainable rice production.

IRRI is one of two international agricultural centers focused on researching the world’s three most important food crops. IRRI focuses solely on rice while the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center focuses on wheat and corn.

“These centers have had an impact on billions of people who are alive today because of the research the centers have done,” Baenziger said.

Research in rice is important because it is the predominant food for much of the world, particularly in south Asia, Baenziger said. While Baenziger’s research at UNL focuses on wheat, barley and triticale, he believes IRRI contacted him for his expertise in plant breeding and genetics, which he honed at IANR.

“I got into agriculture because I was interested in feeding people, and I have an interest in international agriculture,” he said, adding his hope as a board member is to help people who survive on a rice-based diet.

Not only is the appointment an honor for Baenziger, it is a feather in UNL’s cap, he said.

“If someone asks about the quality of faculty that the University of Nebraska has, you could say that when the board of trustees of the largest international rice research group in the world was looking for another member, it came to Nebraska.”

Erickson receives animal science honors

The Midwestern section of the American Society of Animal Science and the Midwest branch of the American Dairy Science Association have given Galen Erickson their Young Outstanding Research Award.

Erickson, IANR ruminant nutritionist, received the award during the organizations’ annual meeting in March in Des Moines, Iowa.

The organizations honored Erickson for being a young animal science leader. Erickson has been in the Department of Animal Science since 2001.

Calkins named educator of the year

Chris Calkins has been named educator of the year by the North American Meat Processors (NAMP) Association.

Calkins, Nebraska Beef Industry Professor of Animal Science, was honored for accomplishments that included developing new cutting procedures for veal and beef chuck. His muscle profiling research benefits the beef industry and consumers with cuts that previously were under-valued.

The award was presented in March at the NAMP conference in Chicago. Calkins, an IANR faculty member since 1981, conducts research on muscle characterization, objective grading technology, meat quality, and the effects of feeding wet distillers grains on beef quality.

Lou receives two major honors

Marjorie Lou, professor in the Department of Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences, has received two prestigious honors.

Lou has been invited to be a member of the organizing committee of the Abraham Spector Lecture, sponsored by the Columbia University Department of Opthamology and held biennially.

Lou will help select the award recipient and schedule events. The next lecture is anticipated for spring 2010.

In addition, Lou, a lens biochemistry researcher, was named to the inaugural class of the Association for Research in Vision and Opthamology Fellows. The title of ARVO Fellow is a new honor recognizing current ARVO members for their individual accomplishments, leadership, and contributions to the association.

Barcenas wins national EFNEP award

Omega Barcenas, nutrition adviser with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) in Hall County, has received a national award.

Barcenas was one of two to receive the paraprofessional award in the North Central Region, given in conjunction with EFNEP’s 40th anniversary in Washington, D.C. Two recipients were selected from each region in the United States.

EFNEP annually teaches 2,000 limited-resource Nebraska families to make food choices that improve meal nutritional quality.