

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

# in the MARGINS

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL AND APPLIED ECONOMICS

## Faculty Profile: Mariah Ehmke

By Mariah Ehmke, Assistant Professor

I often wake up and am thankful to work at the University of Wyoming. The colleagues I work with are some of the nicest in the profession. We also have a beautiful setting and nice-sized program. During the semester, students offer stimulating comments either in my office or in class. I only hope I make this a better research and learning environment for those around me.

Right now, I am teaching a class to a small group of students on agribusiness strategy and ethics. This class is a recent addition to the course list and responds to a need in management – strategic thinking tempered with responsible action. This is only the second time I've taught the class, but we are having lots of fun. Each week, we discuss a new business case which calls on the students to apply principles of strategy to critical decisions the businesses face. Through this semester, they've argued for Bunge to pursue biofuels, Friona Industries (a major feedlot) to vertically coordinate with meat processors and food retailers to improve beef quality, and Nestle to improve its sustainable agriculture practices. Next we will look at employee ownership in King Arthur Flour and the future of Academia Barilla, a major pasta producer. We will end the semester with a series of class discussions on the role of ethics in decision-making in agribusiness. Along the way, I am supplementing our class discussion with a series of podcasts on timely strategy topics, which has been very well received by the class. The students are also working on strategic business plans for businesses or organizations of their choice. I am enjoying this semester as we have students from both our program and economics enrolled in the class.



Currently, my research focuses on the use of experiments to investigate applied economic problems. The main project I am leading relates to one of country's biggest health epidemics: obesity. Due to the food-related dimensions of this problem, it is an important time for agricultural economists to be involved

in its prevention. The name of our project is the Family Food, Health, and Interaction Study. In the last year, 50 mother-child pairs have come to the Experimental Economics Laboratory to have their time preference, risk and bargaining behavior measured. I am now working with colleagues in Family and Consumer Science to understand how these measures may be related to other family household behaviors contributing to obesity and measures of health including mother's and children's Body Mass Index, waist circumference, and cholesterol levels.

I am also working with colleagues within the department to understand changes in agricultural policy provision on land-owner and tenant's welfare, the role of group risk decision-making in farm management decisions, and how increased researcher diversity may lead to increased agricultural research and development productivity. As the projects are developed, you may see some of the research occurring at an extension office or research station near you.

My passion is to bring insight, creativity and best practices to the classroom and to my research efforts. My goal is to continue to strive for excellence in my work in order to build a stronger program for both my students and colleagues. There are so many opportunities and important activities that I am pleased and honored to be a member of this faculty and community – it is an excellent time to be at the University of Wyoming. Our faculty is rejuvenated through a number of recent hires and there are opportunities to be involved in research with local as well as national prominence. I look forward to a long productive career contributing to the future of this College, UW and the State of Wyoming. ■

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## Position Searches in Progress

The Department is currently conducting searches to fill two positions. Both will fill important niches within the Department, as well as the University. Should you know of a person who would fit the requirements, please contact the search chair. Official position announcements are available on the Department website, [agecon.uwyo.edu](http://agecon.uwyo.edu).

**Endowed Chair in Community Development** This position was created with money associated with the Hathaway program and is designed to be filled by a senior person in the areas of community economic development and natural resource policy with capabilities in the research, teaching and extension areas. The review of applications will begin March 1. Inquiries should go to Search Chair David "Tex" Taylor — [ttaylor@uwyo.edu](mailto:ttaylor@uwyo.edu).

**Assistant Professor in Water Economics** This position is for a tenure-track person to conduct research, extension and teaching in the area of water resource economics as it relates to agriculture, community development, energy and/or the environment. A PhD in agricultural economics (or equivalent) with specialization in water resource economics is a must. The review of applications will begin January 12. Inquiries should go to Search Chair Dale Menkhous — [menkhous@uwyo.edu](mailto:menkhous@uwyo.edu). ■

The end of the year is coming up – if you would like to donate to the Department's priority projects or support the College of Agriculture's mission, contact Department Head Roger Coupal at [coupal@uwyo.edu](mailto:coupal@uwyo.edu) or (307) 766-5539, or contact Anne Leonard ((307) 766-3372).

## McLeod Edits *Forum*

The new editor for the *Western Economic Forum* is our own Don McLeod. Taking over the position in June, he has plans for expansion. "I am looking forward to getting two volumes out in the next nine months and then to possibly expand from two issues per year to three or four while including color diagrams, graphs and figures," McLeod says. "I am hoping to also have volume themes pertaining to specific issues important to the West."



The *Forum* is intended to provide a forum for professional agricultural economists with a Masters degree, PhD or equivalent understanding of the field who are working on agricultural and resource economic, business or policy issues in the West. Manuscripts are currently being accepted for the December 2008 and May 2009 editions. The *Forum* is hosted on Department servers by John Hewlett. Visit it at <http://waeonline.org/>. McLeod can be reached at [dmcleod@uwyo.edu](mailto:dmcleod@uwyo.edu). ■

## Thompson Runs for HD46 Seat

Jim Thompson, lecturer in the Department, is running for Wyoming's House District 46 seat. Thompson says he is running "primarily to get a larger stream of permanent revenue for Laramie and Albany County." Other issues he mentions are economic development and the COLA issue (cost of living allow-



ance). "Our retired alumni are very concerned about this." House District 46 includes the town of

Laramie east of 15<sup>th</sup> St. and south of Grand Avenue and the south half of Albany County, including Sherman Hills to the east and Centennial west.

Thompson was raised in Casper and has degrees in economics and sociology. He and his wife Nancy Stanton moved here in 1972, and their children Garth and Meg were born here. Living on a small ranch in south Albany County, he worked in the Department and had a consulting business in Laramie for 12 years. His current work in the Department involves teaching our Community and Economic Development class (AGEC 4660/5660). ■

## Karl Rich Visits UW

Dr. Karl Rich of American University in Cairo and the International Livestock Research Institute visited the UW campus and presented two seminars and explore collaborative research opportunities with AgEcon and Econ Department faculty. The first seminar, October 1<sup>st</sup>, was *New methods for integrated models of animal disease*. On October 2<sup>nd</sup> was *Poverty impacts of animal disease in developing countries*.

Dr. Rich has worked on the economics of livestock disease throughout the developing world, including South America, Africa and southeast Asia, focusing largely on the consequences of livestock disease for the afflicted country's access to international markets, and implications for the efficiency of disease control policies. Dannele Peck organized the events following a conference session at which Dr. Rich was a panelist. ■

## Peck Organizes Session

Dannele Peck organized a conference session titled "Wildlife/Livestock Disease: state of the knowledge, research priorities, and potential partnerships to inform policy," at the conference *Pathways to Success: Integrating Human Dimensions into Fish and Wildlife Management*, September 28 to October 2 in Estes Park, Colorado. The event brought together researchers in veterinary sciences and epidemiology, wildlife biology, and economics to identify multidisciplinary research needs in the area of wildlife/livestock disease, particularly for rangeland/pastoral systems. ■



We want your news! Alumni, faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students are welcome to submit news and photos. Send them to Cole Ehmke at [cehmke@uwyo.edu](mailto:cehmke@uwyo.edu).



August 13 found the Department hiking Medicine Bow Peak in an outing organized by Tom Foulke. The snow on the ground didn't deter the 11 who hiked, nor the 20 or so who enjoyed beef hamburgers, gourmet hotdogs and lamb from the grill. Above are Savannah Billings, Brian Strauch, Yoshiyuki (Zen) Igarashi and Graham McGaffin. At right are Emily and Graham McGaffin, Milt Geiger and Zen Igarashi.

## Publications

- Ehmke, C.** Strategies for Competitive Advantage. In *Niche Markets: Assessment and Strategy Development for Agriculture*. Western Extension Marketing Committee. University of Nevada, Reno, Technical Report UCED2007/08-13. July 2008.
- Hewlett, J.P.** "Family Business Landmines and Tips for Avoiding Them." *Enterprising Rural Families* online newsletter, IV:8. August 2008.
- Hewlett, J.P.** "Succeeding in Business with Family Members Takes Special Sills." *Enterprising Rural Families* online newsletter, IV:5. May 2008.
- Hoag, D., E. Fathelrahman, D. Griffith, **J. Hewlett**, C. Keske, J. Parsons & J. Pritchett. *Risk Navigator SRM: A ten-step strategic risk management program for agricultural practitioners*. June 2008.
- Nagler, A. M., C. T. Bastian, B. D. Lubben & D. J. Menkhaus.** "Out with the Old, In with the New: Are Western Commodity Producers Ready for Buyouts?" *Western Economics Forum*. 7, 2 (2008): 14-21.
- Nagler, A., C. T. Bastian & D. J. Menkhaus.** "Experimental economics lab puts Adam Smith's invisible hand under the microscope," *Reflections*. June 2008: 9-12. (Awarded Second Place Article in this issue).
- Sedman, J. & **J.P. Hewlett.** "Comparing AGR-Lite with other crop insurance programs." *Barnyards & Backyards* series in the *Wyoming Livestock Roundup*. July 2008.
- Sedman, J. & **J.P. Hewlett.** "Protecting against changes in price: Options for producers." *Barnyards & Backyards* series in the *Wyoming Livestock Roundup*. September 2008.
- Taylor, D., B. Rashford, R. Coupal & T. Foulke.** 2008. *An Economic Analysis of Predator Management in Wyoming: First Year Results*. Report to Wyoming Animal Damage Manage-

ment Board, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, July 2008.

- Taylor, D., R. Coupal, T. Foulke, B. Rashford & D. Olson.** 2008. *An Economic Profile of the Bridger-Teton National Forest*. Phase II report to the U.S. Forest Service in support of the Bridger-Teton National Forest Plan Revision Process, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, February, 2008.
- Taylor, D., R. Coupal & T. Foulke.** *An Economic Profile of the Shoshone National Forest*. Report to the U.S. Forest Service in support of the Shoshone National Forest Plan Revision Process, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, May, 2008.
- Tranel, J., **Hewlett, J.**, Weigel, R., Rahman, T., Teegerstrom, T. & **Ehmke, C.** "Who Are Today's Farmers and What are their Educational Needs?" *Western Economics Forum*. VII:1. Spring 2008.
- Tranel, J.E., **J.P. Hewlett**, R. Weigel, T. Rahman, T. Teegerstrom, & **C. Ehmke.** "Preliminary Results: A New Look at the Agricultural Community as Extension Clientele in the West." University of Wyoming, Cooperative Extension Service. B-1190. June 2008.

## Pasture Cam Updated

After eight years, it was time to replace the old PastureCam that has



served us so well. Tom Foulke has installed a new camera with twice the resolution of the old one. On the PastureCam page, be sure to follow the link to the "Downtown Wyoming" page, which has photos from around the state. It's available at [agecon.uwyo.edu/EconDev/PastureCam.htm](http://agecon.uwyo.edu/EconDev/PastureCam.htm)

# *In the Margins*

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## New Faculty: John Ritten

John Ritten is a new assistant professor in production economics/systems analysis, a position housed at the new Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension Center (SAREC) near Lingle, WY. Having an economist at SAREC will help integrate research work. "I can be involved in research at its inception and answer pertinent questions for the local area as opposed to being in a university building where everyone has great research projects, but not many others know about them," he said. "This gets me out there with people who can utilize our findings."



Ritten's position also has a significant extension appointment and may also involve work with students.

Ritten is native of Rapid City, S.D. who received his PhD at CSU while teaching courses for UW. His dissertation looked at interactions between cattle and rangeland in Wyoming under different management strategies during periods of drought. He received his bachelor's degree in marketing from Arizona State University and his master's of business administration from New Mexico State University. ■

## New Work on Optimal Calving

Graduate student Brian Strauch recently presented this thesis to the department. In it he addressed the possibility that shifting the calving period may be advantageous in the semi-arid, high-elevation mountain valley ranches of Wyoming. Calving traditionally occurs in the spring on most cow-calf operations in Wyoming.

Strauch's work, under the direction of Drs. Larry Held and Dannele Peck, considered whether fall-calving may offer cost-savings and output-price premiums that could help increase ranch profitability. In it he compared five different ranching enterprises to estimate the most profitable: spring cow-calf, fall cow-calf, spring cow-short yearling, fall cow-short yearling and spring cow-long yearling.

The results showed that a fall cow-calf enterprise was more profitable than spring cow-calf, even though it involved fewer cows. The fall cow-short yearling enterprise was more profitable than both the spring cow-short yearling and spring cow-long yearling enterprises, primarily because of cheaper gains on summer grass versus winter hay. The spring cow-calf and fall cow-short yearling enterprises were the most profitable for their respective calving seasons. In sum, fall calving is a viable alternative to spring calving in Wyoming. Strauch may be contacted at [bstrauch@uwyo.edu](mailto:bstrauch@uwyo.edu). ■