



UF

Have You HERD?

UF/IFAS DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL SCIENCES
NEWSLETTER VOL.1 | FALL 2020

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



Dear alumni, friends and supporters,

This year has been anything but ordinary here in the Department of Animal Sciences and at the University of Florida. We have shifted our traditional learning environments to a virtual format, important events have been cancelled and safety measures have been put in place. While we have certainly faced many challenges with these changes, I cannot help but express how resilient and successful our faculty, staff and students have been throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since March 2020, I have watched our faculty, staff and students modify and adapt to any change that came their way. Faculty have found innovative ways to deliver course content for extremely hands on classes online, still providing a great experience for our students. Our faculty and staff successfully transitioned from their offices to a work from home environment, never missing a beat along the way. Our dedicated unit managers and farm staff carried on with their responsibilities, making sure farms and animals were taken care of and product was moved, even with new and unique challenges. Our students have shown true resiliency, as many of them graduated in Spring, Summer and now Fall without a traditional ceremony, and without an opportunity to experience many of the senior year “memories” that are made here on campus. None-the-less, our students adapted and ultimately succeeded through all of these changes. We couldn’t be more proud of them!

I would be remiss not to specifically mention two events, which were some of the most challenging to adjust to an online format- the annual Sale in the Swamp and the Inaugural Brahman Bull Sale. With the dedication and hard work of faculty, staff and students, both of these sales were moved online in a short period of time, and turned out to be extremely successful.

When I joined the Department of Animal Sciences as Chair in April 2019, one of my goals was to increase communication with our alumni and stakeholders. We hope you will enjoy this inaugural issue of “Have you Herd?”, a newsletter that will be produced three times per year, featuring the wonderful things that are happening in our department – from student life to research findings and everything in between. We hope that you will reach out if you have ideas or feature stories that you would like to see in the future.

Lastly, we could not do what we do here in the Department without our alumni, friends and stakeholders who generously support our efforts in so many ways. Whether you are giving through financial support, giving your time to speak to our students or providing jobs and internships, we cannot say thank you enough. If you are interested in giving, please visit <https://give.ifas.ufl.edu/animal-sciences-giving/> to learn about various giving opportunities.

Sincerely,

John Arthington

Professor and Chair

FACULTY/STAFF AWARDS

Dr. Todd Thrift, associate professor and extension beef specialist, was recently awarded a Superior Accomplishment Award from the University of Florida in the academic personnel category. This program recognizes faculty and staff members who contribute outstanding service, efficiency, or to the quality of life provided to students and employees.

Thrift has a 70% teaching appointment and a 30% extension appointment, but his colleagues agree that he goes above and beyond in each. His peers and students alike commend his unique teaching style, and his commitment to each student he teaches, whether they be a traditional college student or a Florida cattleman that he is working with through extension.

"The beef production courses that Thrift has been teaching for many years exceeded my expectations tenfold," said animal sciences undergraduate, Will Kempfer. "Not only does he teach the practical side of the industry, he gives so many students that have never had the opportunity, a chance to get their hands dirty and get some real-world experience."

Two of the Extension programs Thrift worked on last year, Beef 706 and Fed-Beef Challenge, were brand new programs requiring novel efforts to develop, advertise, and implement.

"In the span of six weeks Todd delivered four large Extension programs, all while teaching his full teaching load of 10 credits in the spring," said Dr. Matt Hersom, professor and director of the Piedmont Research and Education Center at Clemson University and previous associate professor at the University of Florida. "Three of the Extension programs were three-day events that required the coordination of facilities, staff, animals, faculty, participants, and other logistical necessities."

Thrift has been with the University of Florida since 2001. Prior to coming to the University of Florida, Thrift worked for Texas A&M University as a beef cattle specialist for five years.

In addition to Thrift, several animal sciences faculty and staff were nominated and received IFAS Superior Accomplishment Awards.

IFAS Superior Accomplishment Award Recipients:

Clerical/Office Support: **Melony Gay Hale**, Research Administrator

Scientific Technical: **Liz Jannaman**, Chemist II

Community Service: **Adegbola Adesogan**, Professor and Director, Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Livestock Systems



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: TRAVIS ARP

Senior Director of Market Access and Export Services for the U.S. Meat Export Federation, Travis Arp (MS '10), was one of seven College of Agricultural and Life Sciences alumni selected as a UF 2020 40 Gators under 40 honoree.

As an undergraduate student at the University of Missouri, Arp participated on both the meat and livestock judging teams. This led him to UF where he earned a master's degree in animal sciences (meat science). In 2012, Arp earned his Ph.D. in meat science from Colorado State University.

Today, he is the senior director for export services and market access for the U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF). USMEF is a non-profit organization that works on behalf of its members to promote and expand access for U.S. beef, pork and lamb in overseas markets.

In his role at USMEF, Arp is an ambassador for the beef, pork and lamb industries to help them grow and be profitable. He works to understand how value is created across the supply chain through exports. Arp shares, "I want to continue to do my best to represent the industry and work to make producers as successful as possible. Doing so will help family-owned operations like the one my family runs continue to be successful for another 100+ years."

Arp covers the Asian and Middle Eastern regions for USMEF, overseeing market and trade access issues while also working with USMEF members, foreign offices and the U.S. government to improve market access for U.S. companies exporting red meat.

During his career, Travis has supported trade negotiations to open or expand market access for red meat products in markets such as China, Saudi Arabia, Japan and Singapore. His work in Japan, in particular, was recognized by the USDA Foreign Agriculture Services with the FAS Honor Award for Excellence in Achieving Strategic Objectives.

Read more about Travis Arp in the [CALS Q&A blog post](#) by Agricultural Communication Ph.D. student, Christine Krebs.

UF ANIMAL SCIENCES BRAHMAN PROJECT



Before the State was attractive to tourists, millions of residents and thousands of businesses, beef cattle were calling Florida home. For almost 500 years, the beef cattle industry has been a huge part of Florida's economy and environment. In 1521, beef cattle were introduced to North America, in Florida, by Ponce de Leon – now over 900,000 head of beef cattle share the state with a population of ~21 million people.

While ranchers in Florida have both *Bos taurus* and *Bos indicus* breeds of cattle, *Bos taurus* breeds, such as Angus, are most comfortable at cooler temperatures ranging between 40-75 degrees F. Florida's subtropical climate, with both high heat and humidity, are brutal for these cattle, yet producers often favor the breed for its early maturation and high marbling. *Bos indicus* breeds of cattle, notably the Brahman, are better adapted to these subtropical climates. The Brahman's short, slick hair, ability to sweat freely and greater dissipation through surface area blood flow make it an optimally adapted breed for Florida's climate.

Cow/calf production systems are the predominate production practice in Florida's beef industry. These operations rely on cattle genetics that are adapted to our unique environmental challenges. As a result, the influence of Brahman genetics on the productivity of the commercial cow/calf industry in Florida is vital. Because of this, the UF/IFAS Department of Animal Sciences is committed to positively impacting the Florida and gulf-coast commercial cattle industry through the three mission areas of our land

grant university: research, teaching, and extension. We believe that further investigation of the Brahman breed will bring important insight for commercial beef producers in subtropical climates.

The mission of the **UF Brahman Project** is to optimize the performance traits of Brahman cattle to improve their contribution to the commercial beef industry in warm environments. The Project strives to develop the Brahman breed in Florida as an important commercial beef animal, investigate the genomics of the breed that relate to issues such as meat quality and reproductive performance, and educate students and producers about the benefits of Brahman influence.

The project objectives are to:

- **Research-** Establish a selection and mating program that focuses on improving 3 target traits: marbling, tenderness, and age at puberty, using traditional selection and genomic tools.
- **Teaching-** Educate students on the unique biology of the Brahman breed and their contribution to the commercial beef industry.
- **Extension-** Inform and educate stakeholders on existing and emerging tools that improve the genomic selection and management of Brahman cattle to improve the profitability of commercial beef production.

The remarkable hybrid vigor of Brahman x *Bos taurus* cattle, combined with their favorable adaptability to Florida, make these cattle well suited to Florida and much of the Southeast. Still,

purebred Brahman and many crosses are discounted for their inconsistent tenderness and lower marbling scores. Additionally, Brahman are known for reaching maturity at later ages. These issues were the inspiration for the development of the UF Brahman Project. This interdisciplinary project brought together researchers from the University of Florida and cattle producers through the Florida Cattlemen's Association and the Florida Beef Enhancement Board, to develop a Project focused on improving important production traits of Brahman cattle. The central aim of the Project is to improve the influence of Brahman cattle on the productivity and profitability of the commercial beef cow/calf industry.

Over the last decade, the UF Brahman Project has worked to grow the former USDA Subtropical/Tropical Agricultural Research Station (Brooksville, FL) Brahman herd at UF with a goal of 250 mature animals. This herd size was set to provide researchers enough samples to adequately identify and influence herd characteristics. This past spring, our herd size goal was met, and the department was able to conduct our inaugural Brahman Bull Sale.

The UF Brahman herd also serves as a teaching tool. Students in the Livestock Judging class use the Brahman herd for workouts, the Beef Background & Feedlot Management class evaluates gain of animals in the Brahman herd, and the Beef Cow-Calf Management class uses the herd for their lessons on bull selection and fertility. Block and Bridle club members handled, and halter broke the first

crop of Brahman bulls as a way to provide students with limited cattle exposure an opportunity to gain hands on experience. The Seedstock Management and Marketing students were responsible for collecting the yearling and performance data of the bulls, making advertising decisions and facilitating the sale.

"Florida has never been a large purebred state, but the Brahman breed has always been of predominant importance to the Florida beef industry," said **Dr. Todd Thrift**, associate professor of Beef Cattle Management. "So utilization of our Brahman herd to teach the logistics of seedstock production just makes natural sense for students that have some interest in the purebred/seedstock portion of our industry."

Researchers in genomics, reproduction and meat science are working to collect samples and identify potential relationships between genetic markers and important commercial factors such as tenderness and age at maturity. As these characteristics are identified, selective breeding in the UF Brahman herd will further improve our understanding of how superior Brahman traits can be utilized by commercial beef operations.

"Continued evaluation and selection of superior animals will lead to a genetically improved Florida Brahman population over the coming years," said **Dr. Raluca Mateescu**, professor of quantitative genetics and genomics. "The goal is to genetically improve the purebred Brahman population in Florida

so when these animals are used in crossbreeding programs, they produce superior offspring."

The UF Brahman Project's efforts are to examine areas of opportunity for the Brahman breed in Florida commercial beef cattle operations. This cannot be achieved without continuing our tradition of collaboration with the Florida beef industry. In the coming years, the animal sciences department aims to host annual Brahman field days to ensure that producers have available any tools or significant insight the project reveals. The Brahman Project provides a unique opportunity for our department to continue to interact and hear from producers to better understand their needs, to ensure that we deliver industry driven research and results.



This spring, the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences recognized their top 10 seniors. In March, CALS recognized two animal science majors, **Vada Hammons** and **Case Emerson** as top 10 seniors in 2020.

Hammons, from Sarasota, Fla., came to animal sciences to help her reach her goal of becoming a veterinarian. At UF, Vada worked as an emergency surgical technician at UF's Small Animal Hospital, and conducted research in the Brooks' Equine Genetics Laboratory. This research experience provided Vada with the opportunity to present her findings at both the Equine Science Society Symposium and

International Plant and Animal Genome Conference. Vada completed an honors thesis on a gene that affects Chestnut coat color shade variations in horses.

As a senior, she served as the president of UF Sigma Alpha Professional Agricultural Sorority and was a CALS Ambassador. Hammons is currently attending Colorado State University and pursuing a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine.

An animal sciences major from Lake Butler, Fla., Emerson was a member of the CALS Ambassadors, Collegiate Farm Bureau and Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity. He participated in Cohort 9 of the CALS Leadership Institute, where he completed a service project and traveled to Morocco.

Through his fraternity, Case volunteered with the Winn Dixie Hope Lodge, and during high school football season you can catch him on the Union County Radio - WUCR 107.9 LP FM as an on-air sports

broadcaster. Case participated in the UF Intercollegiate Meats and Live Animal Evaluation team representing UF animal sciences at various competitions across the country.

Emerson is currently pursuing a master's degree in Agricultural Education and Communication at UF.



2020 OUTSTANDING SENIORS

ANS STUDENT BALANCING CLASSES AND CAREER



Photograph by Ryan Thompson

Animal sciences major, **Andie Biancone**, grew up living and breathing horses. As the daughter of recognized trainer, Patrick Biancone, Andie spent her childhood immersed in the Thoroughbred racing industry. At age seven she started riding, and by eleven she was spending all of her free time at the track and working off her riding lessons. For the last three years, Andie has worked full time for her father's business, all the while working to complete her degree.

Andie transferred to UF to study animal sciences with an equine specialization after completing an associate's degree at Palm Beach State College.

"Since I was a little kid, I've always known that I wanted to be a trainer," Andie said. "I have flip-flopped a couple of times in my head between horse trainer or vet, but organic chemistry kicked my butt and I was like, 'Nope, it's horse training.'"

At UF, Andie is focusing on a degree that will prepare her to be a better horse owner and trainer with classes covering aspects of equine growth, health, management, and psychology.

"I like my equine nutrition class a lot, it's something that really interests me because it's really applicable to my job and what I'm doing," Andie said. "I've learned so many technical things about horses, like understanding how a horse's digestion works."

It hasn't been easy for Andie to juggle her education and her responsibilities in the family business. Her work with horses often takes her out of state for weeks at a time for events, making it difficult to stay caught up in her classes. Last year, when Andie's father was diagnosed with cancer, she took time off from school to run the barn and keep their horses on track for the season.

"It's honestly been kind of a roller coaster, just because I've had to start and stop my education so many times,"

Andie said. "With COVID, the only good thing that really came out of it was that most of my classes were online, so I was able to restart school, so that's really exciting."

This year, in the midst of a global pandemic, Andie achieved a horse racing milestone many trainers work their entire career to achieve: her horse Sole Volante qualified to run in the 2020 Kentucky Derby.

Three years ago, when the Biancones moved to Florida, their training operation only had a few horses. Patrick Biancone, with Andie's help, has rebuilt their business and they now have around 30 horses, a couple of which have the capacity to be successful, according to Andie



Photo by Christina Bossinakis

Sole Volante was a birthday present from her father, and the first horse Andie owned herself. The pair purchased Sole Volante from the Ocala Breeders Sale 2-year-old auction for \$20,000, far less than the average for Derby contenders. At the time, Andie believed him to be a project horse who would maybe go to a few stakes races, but never expected that he would make it to the Derby. Andie and her father worked together to develop jockey silks and Sole Volantes training plan.

"It's so special to be part of a horse like [Sole Volante] and to say I own him and to see my silks in a race. It's just such a wonderful thing to share with my family."

Though she said the whole experience was both incredibly exciting and stressful, the most memorable part about going to the Derby was getting to work him in the mornings on the track.

"There was a special time in the mornings the derby horses got to train, and it was my first time riding at Churchill," Andie said. "Sole Volante is so sweet, standing under the lights I was just waiting there and petting him, soaking it all in. It was surreal."

Taking part in the 2020 Derby is just the beginning, as Andie hopes to one day take over her father's business training racehorses. Though her dreams don't involve being a "super trainer," she says she loves getting up every day at 4:30 in the morning to work with her horses, and it's the only thing she can really see herself making into a career. Her favorite part of the job is seeing the progression of the horses and how they change through training.

"Sole Volante the day we got him, versus who he is today is completely different," Andie said. "I've watched him grow into a horse that has so much confidence in himself and physically has developed so much. That is my favorite thing, just seeing babies transition into little racehorse and helping them achieve greatness."

Andie credits several of the animal sciences faculty members with making her education a great experience thus far and providing a program that will help her in her future endeavors.

"The faculty are really amazing, it's great to be able to connect with people like **Mr. McQuagge** and **Dr. TenBroeck**," Andie said. "I really have the faculty to thank, they have been so supportive of my goals and helping me make sure I can keep working and still finish my degree."

Q&A WITH DR. BRAD DAIGNEAULT



Dr. Bradford Daigneault joined the ANS faculty in February as an Assistant Professor of Reproductive Biology. Brad earned his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois and most recently worked as a Postdoctoral Fellow at Michigan State University. Get to know more about Brad in our Q&A!

What inspired you to pursue an academic career in animal sciences?

Like many other people, I first became interested in animal sciences because I was exposed to livestock at a young age. Most of my summer employment as a kid involved many aspects of

ranch work. Without knowing exactly what I wanted to do when I finished high school, it seemed logical that I should start with animal sciences.

Where did you attend college?

Texas A&M University, Colorado State University and the University of Illinois

What drew you to the University of Florida?

I was very keen to join a diverse group of animal scientists where opportunities for research and collaborations were not limiting factors. My research interests in reproductive biology span multiple species including bovine, porcine and equine. It is rare to find a University like UF that maintains large research capabilities with multiple faculty involvement for these species among others. After learning more about UF, it was clear to me that the Department of Animal Sciences at the University of Florida was certainly among the best in the world in terms of research, animal facilities and students. Most importantly, the people and environment were welcoming and dynamic.

Favorite activity you and your family have done since moving to Florida?

Searching for armadillos

What is your favorite class you have ever taught?

I have always enjoyed teaching undergraduate reproductive physiology courses. I like to interact with students in classroom, laboratory, and animal settings.

Favorite hobby outside of work?

Mowing

Favorite animal?

Bulgarian Weasel Hound

Who's been your most influential mentor to date and why?

I have had too many influential mentors to identify a single person including many outstanding graduate and postdoctoral advisors. However, I can say that two people who were initially influential for sparking my interest to continue in the field of reproductive biology were Dr. George Seidel and Dr. Paul Harms. Other influences include Alfred the Great and Tom Brady.... both outstanding professionals.

SHARE YOUR STORY WITH US

We enjoy hearing updates from our alumni!

- Do you have internship or job opportunities for animal sciences students?
- Are you interested in speaking in an undergrad class about your career?
- Would you like to be featured in a **Have you HERD** Alumni Spotlight?

Visit our [website](#) to learn how to be involved with the UF Department of Animal Sciences!

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