2025 Florida Ruminant Nutrition Symposium

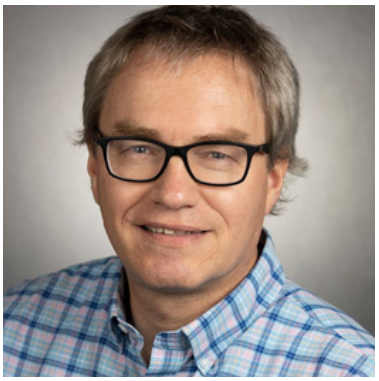
Speaker Biographies

Dr. Tara L. Felix

Dr. Tara L. Felix is an Associate Professor in the Department of Animal Science at the Pennsylvania State University. She is a member of the Penn State Extension Livestock Team and the Beef Specialist for the state. A native of Northwestern Pennsylvania, she graduated from Penn State with an Animal Bioscience major, she received her M.S. at the University of Florida, studying trace minerals. She earned her Ph.D. from the Ohio State University in ruminant nutrition, with a focus on growth performance and ruminal metabolism of feedlot cattle. Dr. Felix is a member of the executive board for the PA Beef Producers Working Group, an organization of beef producers and stakeholders working together to monitor industry needs in the region to create and provide opportunities that meet the needs of beef producers in PA. Dr. Felix also advises graduate and undergraduate students in the Department of Animal Science and lectures on nutrition and cattle management topics. For the last 9 years, Dr. Felix has been researching ways to add value to dairy progeny used throughout the beef supply chain. Dr. Felix values the fact that her career allows her to participate in all 3 aspects of the Land Grant Mission: teaching, research, and extension. She resides in Centre County PA with her husband and 3 beautiful daughters.

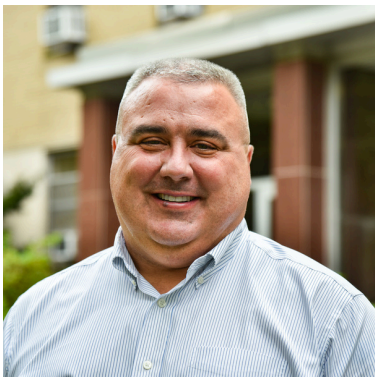
Dr. Bradley J. Johnson

Dr. Bradley J. Johnson is the Gordon W. Davis Regent's Chair in Meat Science and Muscle Biology and a Professor in the Davis College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources' Department of Animal and Food Sciences at Texas Tech University. Johnson has been in this position since June 1, 2008. Johnson, a native of Milbank, SD, and he earned a bachelor's degree in Animal Science from South Dakota State University. His M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Animal Science are from the University of Minnesota. Johnson's laboratory focuses on research that increases our understanding of factors regulating growth and development of skeletal muscle in meat animals such as beef cattle. His group uses exogenous growth promotants such as steroidal implants and beta adrenergic agonists as models to study the mechanism of postnatal muscle growth in meat animals. Separately, the research team is involved in developing novel means to enhance marbling in beef. This research focuses on novel receptors present on intramuscular adipocytes that appear to have positive effects on lipid accumulation.



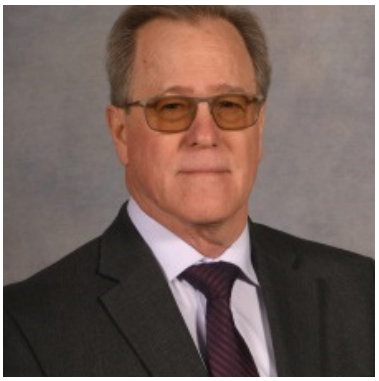
Dr. Albert De Vries

Dr. Albert De Vries is a professor in the Department of Animal Sciences at the University of Florida. He teaches undergraduate courses in Dairy Science, works with dairy farmers and the allied dairy industry in his Extension role, and conducts research related to dairy systems management. Dr. De Vries' interests are in culling and replacement strategies, economics of reproduction and genetics, and precision dairy farming. He grew up on a mixed dairy, poultry, and pig farm in the Netherlands. Dr. De Vries graduated from Wageningen University with an M.S. degree in Animal Science and a minor in Agricultural Economics. He received a Ph.D. degree in Animal Sciences from the University of Minnesota in St. Paul. He lives in Newberry, Florida, with wife Kim and five cats.



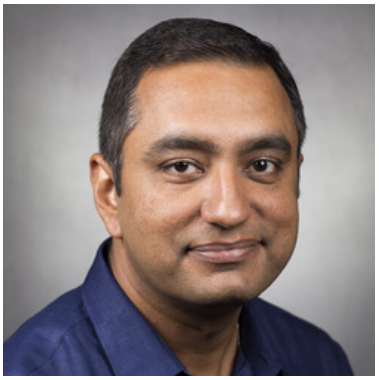
Dr. Thomas R. Overton

Dr. Thomas R. Overton is Professor of Dairy Management and Chair of the Department of Animal Science at Cornell University. Tom is recognized widely for his research and extension efforts relating to nutritional physiology of the transition dairy cow. He serves as Director of the statewide PRO-DAIRY extension program at Cornell. He teaches the dairy cattle nutrition course for undergraduates and co-teaches a similar course for veterinary students. Tom assumed the role of interim chair of the Department of Animal Science in July 2019 and was appointed chair in November 2020.Tom has a B.S. degree from Cornell University (1991) and M.S. (1994) and Ph.D. (1998) degrees from the University of Illinois. He has authored or co-authored nearly 120 peer-reviewed scientific publications and numerous conference proceedings, extension publications, and popular press articles. He was awarded the Cargill Animal Nutrition Young Scientist Award by the American Dairy Science Association in 2006, the ADSA Foundation Scholar Award in 2007, and the ADSA Nutrition Professionals Applied Dairy Research Award in 2024.



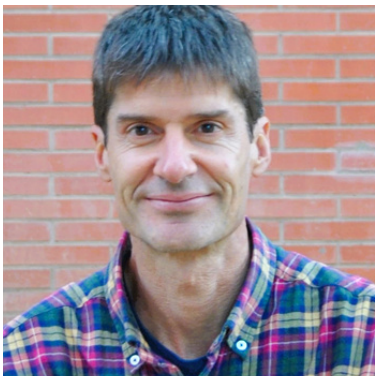
Jeff Firkins

Dr. Jeffrey Firkins is a Distinguished Professor in the Department of Animal Sciences at the Ohio State University. He completed his Ph.D. and a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Illinois in 1987. Jeff joined the OSU in 1987 and was promoted to Professor in 2000. He has advised and served on committees of about 100 graduate students, including 7 Ph.D's from other countries. He served multiple terms on competitive grant panels (manager twice) and numerous planning committees for international conferences. He served six terms as a section editor for three journals. He was a member of the update committee for NASEM's Nutrient Requirements of Dairy Cattle. Out of about 600 publications and presentations, he has over 175 journal articles and reviews and over 200 invited presentations in more than 20 countries. He has numerous awards, including Fellow of ADSA (2020) and Distinguished Professor of OSU's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (2023). He was director or associate director of OSU's interdepartmental nutrition doctoral program for 19 years and provided service to OSU and societies in numerous capacities.



Dr. Diwakar Vyas

Dr. Diwakar Vyas is an Associate Professor of Ruminant Nutrition in the Department of Animal Sciences at the University of Florida. He earned his PhD from the University of Maryland in Dairy Cattle Nutrition. His PhD work focused on lipid metabolism in the mammary gland of dairy cows. Dr. Vyas completed postdoctoral studies at Lethbridge Research and Education Center of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada working on environmental sustainability and rumen physiology of beef production systems. Upon joining the University of Florida, Dr. Vyas teaches and conducts research on methods to improve forage quality, nitrogen utilization by ruminants, and use of feed additives to improve nutrient utilization by dairy and beef cattle. His work expands to areas involving economic and environmental sustainability of ruminant production systems with focus on feeding and forage management.

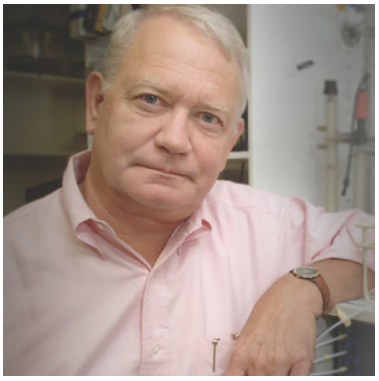


Alex Bach

Dr. Alex Bach is a Research Professor at the University of Lleida in Spain. Alex conducts research to understand the physiology and metabolism of cattle and to improve nutrition and management of dairy herds to make them more sustainable. He has received several awards in recognition to his research activities, has spoken at more than 150 international congresses, is author or co-author of more than 170 peer-reviewed publications, more than 100 extension articles, and more than 20 books (or book chapters). He has served as a scientific expert in several committees of the European Food Safety Authority and has also served in the European Research Council. He is a section editor and sits on the editorial board of several scientific journals, and is a member of various scientific committees. In his spare time, Alex enjoys running, biking, and windsurfing.

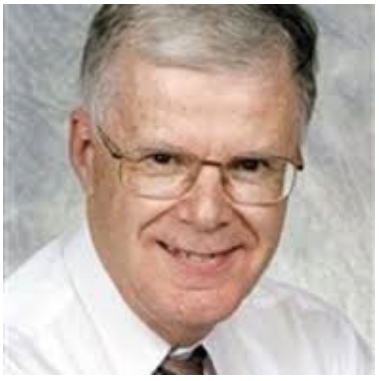
Dr. Lance Baumgard

Dr. Lance Baumgard is a Distinguished Professor and the Normal Jacobson Professor of Nutritional Physiology in the Department of Animal Science at Iowa State University. Lance is a native of southwest Minnesota who grew up on a swine and row-crop farm. He has a B.S. and M.S. degrees from the University of Minnesota and a Ph.D. from Cornell University. He joined the University of Arizona faculty as an Assistant Professor in the Fall of 2001 and joined Iowa State University in 2009. Lance and his wife Dr. Aileen Keating live in Ames with their two children.



Dr. Robert J. Cousins

Dr. Robert J. Cousins is the Boston Family Professor of Nutrition, Director of the Center for Nutritional Sciences at the University of Florida. His research on the physiology of zinc metabolism now focuses on how this micronutrient acts, through cellular transporters, to influence cellular function, host defense mechanisms and diseases including inflammatory disorders. Dr. Cousins' education includes a Ph.D. in Nutritional Biochemistry from the University of Connecticut focusing on ruminant vitamin A metabolism and an NIH Postdoctoral Fellowship in Biochemistry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison focusing on vitamin D regulation. His academic career started at Rutgers University, first in Animal Sciences and then Nutritional Sciences advancing to Distinguished Professor. In 1982, he moved to the University of Florida for an Eminent Scholar Chair of Nutrition. His laboratory has produced over 35 PhDs and 35 Postdoctorals. On the national level, Dr. Cousins was elected President and Board Chair of the Federation of American Societies of Experimental Biology. Dr. Cousins is an elected member of the National Academy of Sciences, Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and he has received numerous awards including the Danone Institute Mentorship Award by the American Society for Nutrition; the Bristol-Myers Squibb/Mead Johnson Award for Distinguished Achievement in Biomedical Research; the American College of Nutrition Research Award; Gamma Sigma Delta Senior Research Award, University of Florida; MERIT Award from the NIDDK; the Osborne and Mendel Award and Mead Johnson Award by the American Society for Nutrition, the Future Leader Grant Award by the Nutrition Foundation; the USDA Secretary's Honor Award for Superior Service in Research; and the W.O. Atwater Lectureship by the Agricultural Research Service with the USDA.

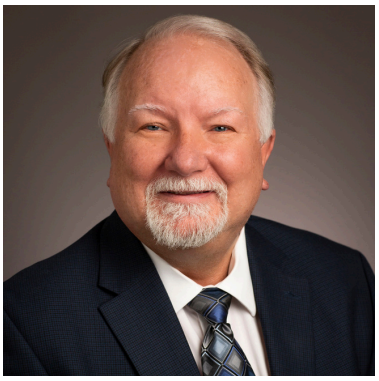


David Fraser

Dr. David Fraser is an Emeritus Professor in the School of Veterinary Science at the University of Sydney, Australia. He received his degree in Veterinary Science from the University of Sydney in 1962. He was a Teaching Fellow in the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Sydney before becoming a postgraduate student in Clare College at the University of Cambridge in the UK. He undertook research in the University of Cambridge Dunn Nutritional Laboratory on vitamin D metabolism and graduated with a Ph.D. in 1967. From 1967 to 1986 he was a member of the Scientific Staff of the Medical Research Council at the Dunn Nutritional Laboratory, with continuing research on the metabolism and function of vitamin D. In 1986, he returned to the University of Sydney as Professor of Animal Science. He was Head of the Department of Animal Science (1992-1994) and Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science (1994-1998). He continues with research and teaching on the nutrition of domestic animals at the University of Sydney, with particular interest in vitamin D status and function.

Dr. Jerry W. Spears

Dr. Jerry W. Spears received his B.S. and M.S. degrees in Animal Science from the University of Kentucky, and his Ph.D. degree in Animal Nutrition from the University of Illinois. Dr. Spears was a faculty member in the Department of Animal Science at North Carolina State University for 32 years. He retired from the University in 2012 and is currently Professor Emeritus. Dr. Spears is recognized nationally and internationally as a leading authority in the area of mineral nutrition of domestic animals. He has given over 150 invited presentations in 27 countries and has published over 400 publications, including over 195 referred journal articles and 15 book chapters. He was awarded the Young Animal Scientist Award from the Southern Section ASAS in 1989, the Ruminant Nutrition Award in 1985, and the Cromwell Award for Mineral Research in 2012 from the American Society of Animal Science, and the FASS, AFIA New Frontiers in Animal Nutrition Award in 2019.He was named a Fellow of the American Society of Animal Science in 2012. Dr Spears has served on the National Research Council-Committee on Animal Nutrition and the National Research Council-Subcommittees on Beef Cattle Nutrition, and Minerals and Toxic Substances in Diets and Water for Animals.

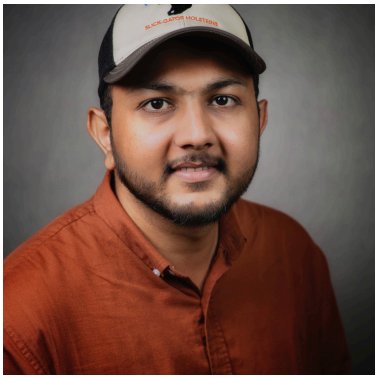


Jim Drakley

Dr. Jim Drackley is Professor Emeritus of Animal Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA. Dr. Drackley joined the faculty of the University of Illinois in 1989 after receiving his Ph.D. in Nutritional Physiology from Iowa State University. Drackley's research program centered on 1) nutrition, metabolism, and management of dairy cows during the dry period and transition to lactation, 2) metabolism in the liver and other tissues of ruminant animals, 3) dairy calf nutrition and management, and 4) lipid utilization and metabolism in ruminants. Drackley has published extensively, trained 45 graduate students, and was consistently on the “List of Excellent Teachers” as voted by the students at the University of Illinois. Dr. Drackley has received numerous awards for his research and teaching. Dr. Drackley also has worked extensively with dairy and feed industry groups around the world. He was a member of the National Research Council committee to produce the 8th edition of the NASEM publication “Nutrient Requirements of Dairy Cattle”.

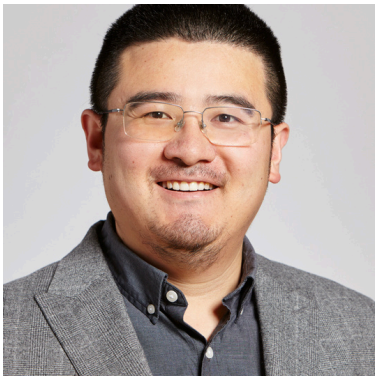
Dr. Javier Martín-Tereso

Dr. Javier Martín-Tereso leads the Ruminant Research Centre of Trouw Nutrition, a team dedicated to dairy, beef, and calf nutrition innovation. Dr. Martín-Tereso studied Agricultural Engineering in Madrid, Spain, where he specialized in Animal Science. In 2010, he obtained a PhD degree from Wageningen University, Netherlands working in the area of dairy cattle nutrition. During his Ph.D. program, he spent time in the Ohio State University and in Ancona, Italy. His professional career started in education, teaching science in Madrid and Spanish in Minnesota during college. In 2000, he moved to the Netherlands to join Nutreco Research & Development. His research focuses on ruminal health and efficiency in beef and dairy animals, and on mineral nutrition across farm animal species, including modelling supply and requirements, trace element homeostasis, and milk fever prevention in dairy cattle. Beyond research, he held technical manager positions for feed additives, and also provided nutritional consulting for feed companies in Europe, Asia and the Americas. Since 2012, he leads the Ruminant Research Centre of Trouw Nutrition.



Masroor Sagheer

Masroor Sagheer is a PhD candidate in the Department of Animal Sciences at the University of Florida under the mentorship of Dr. Peter Hansen. Masroor obtained his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine and the Master of Science degree in Theriogenology from the University of Veterinary & Animal Sciences Lahore, Pakistan. During his MSc program, he worked on the development of ovum pickup and IVF techniques in the native buffaloes of Pakistan. After completing his MSc, Masroor served as a junior faculty member at his alma mater. Masroor joined Dr Hansen's laboratory in August of 2021 as a PhD student, where he is currently studying the role of methyl donors as potential modulators of early embryonic development and postnatal phenotype during the periconceptional period.

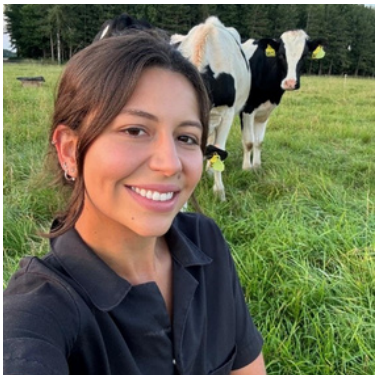


Dr. Mutian Niu

Dr. Mutian Niu is an Assistant Professor of Animal Nutrition at the Institute of Agricultural Sciences, at the Department of Environmental Systems Science, at ETH Zurich, Switzerland. Mutian received his M.S. degree in Animal Science from the Penn State University working under Dr. Kevin Harvatine. He then moved to the University of California Davis where he received the M.S. degree in Statistics and the Ph.D. degree in Animal Biology under Dr. Ermias Kebreab. Prior to his current position, he was a data scientist at Farmer's Business Network Inc., and an Assistant Professsor of Animal Nutrition at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. Mutian's research program is dedicated to advancing sustainable animal agriculture, with a focus on ruminant nutrition, mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and nitrogen excretions, improvement of nutrient utilization efficiency, statistical modeling and data science applications leveraging weable sensors and computer vision, and development of technologies and scientific approaches to improve animal welfare.

Dr. John P. Goeser

Dr. John P. Goeser received his B.S. degree (2004) in Dairy Science and Agronomy, the M.S. degree (2006) in Plant Breeding and Genetics and Dairy Science, and the Ph.D. degree (2008) in Dairy Science all from the University of Wisconsin Madison. John joined the Rock River Laboratory in 2008 and is the Animal Nutrition Director. In addition to his role at the Rock River Laboratory, John is an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Animal and Dairy Sciences at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Goeser's work is on improving our understanding of ruminant nutrition, seed genetics and forage management, and feed hygiene in relation to feed conversion efficiency, sustainability, and agribusiness profitability. He works across disciplines, gathering agronomists, animal nutritionists, veterinarians, and farmers to work together at one table.



Lais Lima

Lais Lima earned a Bachelor's degree in Animal Sciences from São Paulo State University (UNESP), Jaboticabal Campus, Brazil. She completed the M.S. degree in the same institution specializing in ruminant nutrition and grazing management. Currently, Lais is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Florida under the supervision of Dr. Diwakar Vyas. Her research focuses on sustainable ruminant production in grazing systems.