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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR...

The academic year of 2021-22 has been an exciting year for the Food and Resource Economics Department at the University of Florida. We spent much of the year interviewing faculty and staff in response to investments from IFAS to replace faculty who retired, moved to other institutions, and grow into being able to serve students and industry more. While this kept us busy, we also had many great accomplishments— later in the newsletter, you can read about a few of these special items.

Our undergraduate program continues to excel, with many classes taught by new faculty bringing new and updated perspectives to topics like agricultural policy, humanitarian assistance, and agricultural sales. Drs. Jaclyn Kropp and Misti Sharp, along with FRE Advisor Danielle Shu are busy recruiting students for our Multicultural Scholars Program which funds student scholarships from a USDA grant to increase diversity in the agricultural workforce.

Beyond the scholarship program, activities under this grant include the development of a peer mentoring program for all FRE students interested. Academically strong students are being recognized beyond the department, like Maddie Dvorak, who was recognized by CALS as an E.T. York Junior Medal Finalist. Maddie will enter her senior year in FRE in the fall semester. Our graduate students are also finding the success in the job market. Dr. Yingkai Fang is an Assistant Professor at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and MS graduate Carter Cosgray joined the Office of Economic and Demographic Research with the State of Florida.

In addition to our teaching programs, our research and Extension faculty are staying busy with exciting projects. Dr. Bachir Kassas, along with graduate student Glory Okpiafo (who was recently recognized with the CALS Council Graduate Leadership Award), are partnering with Yale University on a USDA funded grant to conduct research investigating both the potential for CRISPR gene editing methods to help put an end to citrus greening, as well as understand how best to communicate with consumers to maintain a high willingness to pay if this technology is used. Dr. Pilar Useche spent much of the year in Columbia developing partnerships for both research and education. Her research focuses on advancing the wellbeing of rural households, women and youth. In this newsletter, you’ll see updates from other faculty who are working on important and exciting topics related to Florida’s agricultural and natural resource sectors.

Our next newsletter will feature more details, but for now, a sneak peek from our hiring activities — joining FRE in 2022 are:

Suzanne Thornsbury
Professor, Extension/ Research appointment
to focus on Specialty crops marketing and policy; Nathan Palardy, Assistant Professor, Extension/Research appointment to focus on State and Local Government policy; Weizhe Weng, Assistant Professor, Extension/Research appointment to focus on Water policy; Jared Gars, Assistant Professor, Research/Teaching appointment to focus on Policy (both US and in developing countries); James Ji, Assistant Professor, Teaching/Research appointment to focus on Environmental economics and policy; Di Fang, Associate Professor, Teaching/Research appointment to focus on health economics and consumer behavior; Patrick Ward, Associate Professor, Teaching/Research appointment to focus on development and environmental economics; Angelia Chen, Assistant Professor, Teaching/Research appointment to focus on food marketing and supply chains (specifically alternative markets like direct to consumer); and Xumin Zhang, Lecturer, to teach classes in economics and for the university’s Quest series of courses for general education.

We are planning some alumni events for 2022, so please make sure we have updated information so we can let you know of plans and celebrate everyone’s accomplishments!

Dr. Lisa House

Dr. Lisa House
UF/IFAS Food and Resource Economics Professor & Department Chair
Events
Faculty and staff represented the University of Florida at several major conferences this semester, including SRSA and SAEA.

Southern Regional Science Association (SRSA)

Christa Court, Caleb Stair, Bijeta Saha, Mengming Li, Kelsey McDaid, Roberto Koeneke and Eyrika Orlando of our Economic Impact Analysis Program traveled to Austin, Texas, in April for the Southern Regional Science Association meeting.

Dr. Bijeta Saha presented about impacts of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on the commercial fishing supply chain in Gulf states and Mengming Li presented some methodological work about national accounting in the United States.

“At the SRSA Annual Meeting, our students and postdoctoral researchers are exposed to the problem-driven, interdisciplinary, policy relevant research that faculty as well as researchers at government agencies and private research organizations are working on from around the United States and beyond,” said Dr. Court, director of the Economic Impact Analysis Program. “It is also a great opportunity for networking as the atmosphere is collegial, inclusive, and very welcoming of young scholars!”

Southern Agricultural Economics Association (SAEA)

In February, our department was heavily represented by both faculty and students at the SAEA annual convention in New Orleans, Louisiana this February.

Faith Aiya was awarded third-place in the Three Minute Thesis (3MT) Award for her research “Analysis of Florida citrus fruit crop actual production history crop insurance policy.”

In addition to the many papers and posters presented, undergraduate students from the University of Florida also competed at the Quiz Bowl. They also competed at the Applied Economics Agriculture Association (AAEA) conference in Anaheim, CA, in July.
Gator National Agri-Marketing Association (NAMA)

This April, Gator NAMA traveled to Kansas City, Missouri, for the annual NAMA conference.

The team consisted of eight undergraduate students: Amanda Heinzmann, Sara Beth Lee, Madeline Ricketts, Claire Smith, Emmie Victor, Robbie Sistrunk, and Joshua Brooks.

Led by FRE assistant professor and Gator NAMA advisor Dr. John Lai, students had spent the previous year working with faculty and industry members to develop a strategic marketing plan for finger limes.

“Our team wanted to solve a problem facing Florida agriculture, so we decided to create a marketing plan around citrus greening resistant finger limes as an alternative for Florida citrus growers,” said Amanda Heinzmann.

The team came up with the concept of a company called “Lux Produce” that would sell the tiny citrus fruit to high-end restaurants and bars as “Poppers and Toppers.” Included in the marketing plan were a market analysis and strategies for promotion.

Students from the Gator NAMA team also attended Southern Exposure, a tradeshow and conference for the Southeast Produce Council. They assisted University of Florida researchers in collecting feedback on the perception of finger limes as a product.

While they did not place, Dr. Lai said they performed well and were provided very positive feedback from judges on the exciting and unique product they developed.

“They worked very hard together as a cohesive team to prepare their executive summary and an engaging presentation,” Lai said. “It takes a lot of critical thinking, and even greater effort to create a high-quality presentation and this team exceeded my expectations.”

In addition to gaining practical experience, students established new network connections and learned about exciting careers in agricultural marketing.

“Through this experience, I was able to apply classroom knowledge in solving a real-world problem, work as a team toward something bigger than ourselves, and network with industry professionals,” Heinzmann said.

COOK Alliance Partnership and Student Competition

During the Fall 2021 semester, UF FRED partnered with the Home Cooking alliance to conduct peer-reviewed research and data collection on the home cooking movement, composed of food-based businesses run by entrepreneurs out of their own homes. As a part of the project, students in the “Agribusiness & Food Marketing Management” seminar during Fall 2021 worked with Drs. Lisa House and Angelia Chen to apply their studies towards case studies on the home cooking movement.

The papers were then judged, with three winners being chosen as follows:
First Place: William Fasking
Second Place: Jonathan Ritacco
Third Place: Carlie Flanagan & Josephine Hoffner
This was the seventh year the department has hosted the day long speaker series designed to address the most pressing issues expected to impact Florida agriculture currently and in the upcoming year.

Speakers from FRE and other experts covered a variety of topics, including disaster assistance, food-supply chain issues in the COVID-19 pandemic, and the expected agricultural budget for Florida’s legislature in the upcoming year.

The outlook was also provided for specific crops including horticulture, citrus, vegetables, berries, peanuts and row crops.

Finally, in-person attendees had the opportunity to tour the Consumer Behavior Lab located at MREC where FRE associate professor Dr. Hayk Khachatryan and FRE research assistant Xuan Wei conduct research using cutting-edge eye tracking technology, studying how individuals make decisions.

Visit https://fred.ifas.ufl.edu/Extension/florida-agricultural-policy-outlook-conference/2021/ to learn more about the full scope of topics covered.
Alumni Spotlight: Roger Cryan

Roger Cryan

Attendees at this year’s Agricultural Economics & Policy Outlook Conference may have recognized speaker Dr. Roger Cryan, Chief Economist for the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Hailing originally from rural New York, Cryan came to the University of Florida after receiving his B.A. in International Studies from John Hopkins University. While at UF, Cryan earned both his M.S. and Ph.D. from the Food & Resource Economics Department.

Before joining the American Farm Bureau Federation in October 2021, Cryan served as Director of the Economics Division for the Dairy program at USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service for nine years and as Vice President for Milk Marketing and Economics at the National Milk Producers Federation for 12 years before that.

Throughout his career, Cryan has served as a dedicated advocate for farmers. “When advocating for farmers, the sounder the analysis, the better the outcome, for producers and consumers,” he says.

His successful efforts to support producers through robust economic analysis can be seen recently in USDA’s response to the coronavirus pandemic.

As schools and restaurants found themselves shutting down indefinitely in the spring of 2020 to prevent the spread of COVID-19, dairy farmers and many other agricultural producers found themselves struggling due to a lack of demand for products.

For his work developing the dairy payment calculations in the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), Cryan shared the Agricultural & Applied Economics Association’s prestigious Bruce Gardner Memorial Prize for Applied Policy Analysis in 2020. Cryan had previously received the President’s Gears of Government Award in 2019, the USDA Secretary’s Award in 2018, three Agricultural Marketing Service Administrator’s Awards, and an Under Secretary’s Award (in the Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs mission area) for his work in the negotiation and implementation of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

Now, as chief economist for the AFBF, Cryan manages Farm Bureau’s economics team and leads their economic policy analysis. The team applies its analysis and experience to support and advise the members on market issues and as part of the AFBF grassroots policy development process.

“Check out www.fb.org/market-intel,” said Cryan. “Our Market Intel reports are a reflection of the diversity of work our economists do to support our farmers and their policy objectives.”
Seafood Sustainability

Understanding the Global Exportation and Re-Exportation Seafood Market

A multidisciplinary team of researchers from the University of Florida, American University, Duke, the University of Stavanger, BI Norwegian Business School, and the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future and Department of Environmental Health and Engineering recently used data from the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations to analyze the import and export markets of seafood in China. Members of the group included Asche, Anderson and recent FRE Ph.D. graduate Dr. Bixuan Yang.

Their research showed that nearly 75% of the seafood imported by China was being re-exported, suggesting that China has two seafood systems as most of the seafood consumed in China was being produced domestically. Over the past few decades, China has become the largest importer of seafood globally. Understanding this has implications for seafood labeling, supply chain efficiency, and the seafood market’s global sustainability.

“While it has been known for some time that the re-exports of seafood from China was increasing, the scale was still surprising,” said Asche, lead author of the paper. “It makes seafood supply chains significantly more complex, which is a challenge when there are a number of unsustainable and even illegal fishing practices out there, particularly in international waters. China does not need to be involved in these, but the more complex supply chain makes it easier to hide the origin of a fish.”

Fishery Management Systems

Conducted in partnership with academic colleagues across multiple disciplines, countries, institutions, and industry, FRE faculty member Dr. James Anderson and FRE affiliate faculty member Dr. Frank Asche were part of an interdisciplinary research team that looked at the application to fisheries management of the three pillars of sustainability: economic performance, social well-being and environmental sustainability.

121 fishery systems worldwide were analyzed using the data collected using the Fishery Performance Indicator approach. This is the first paper to have a global fisheries system database with comparable observations for economic, social, and environmental outcomes. The database includes many fish species, developing and developed nations, and a broad range of fishery governance approaches.

The key conclusion is that good infrastructure, fisheries management, strong access, and harvest rights and effective community leadership are necessary to achieve improved triple bottom line outcomes for the environment, economics, and community. Another conclusion was that if the national governance is weak and ineffective, it will undermine performance of fisheries management systems.

“This is an important and insightful paper. For me, it was motivated by seemingly endless, and sometimes contentious, debate during my time at the World Bank and elsewhere about how we should make investments in fisheries management systems,” Anderson said. “Some argued for more infrastructure; others say there must be improved fisheries conservation – more fisheries data and enforcement; others argue for stronger fishing rights, and still others champion more investment in local leaders and community training. This research shows that if the goal is to achieve the triple bottom line, there should be investment in all of these factors.”
Florida Bees

Economic Impact Analysis Program studies Apiculture Industries’ Contributions to Florida Economy.

The EIAP recently received funding from the Florida State Beekeepers Association to conduct research documenting the economic contributions of the apiculture industry in Florida. In collaboration with the UF/IFAS Honeybee Research & Extension Laboratory, the EIAP designed an internet survey that was distributed in late 2021 to 4,671 beekeepers identified through the Florida Department of Agriculture- Apary Inspection Service’s registration.

Results suggest that Florida beekeeping operations received an estimated $93.36 million in revenue in 2020, supporting 2,437 workers during peak season and 1,544 workers during non-peak season. The project also examined reported threats to the beekeeping industry which included pests and diseases (78% of respondents), pesticide exposure and honey contamination (65%), resistance to pesticides for mite control (55%), and adulteration of honey with other sweeteners (52%). 44% reported as unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was sponsored and supported by the Florida State Beekeepers Association (FSBA) and the Commercial Beekeepers Committee, and the full report will soon be released on the FRED website.

Single Use Plastics

A new article by FRE students and staffs examines how warning labels can impact consumer packaging preference.

Researchers presented study participants with images of different egg cartons, one clear plastic, one foam, and one pulp-based. Respondents looked at a picture of the different options alongside a price and then responded either yes or no as to if they would buy the eggs at that price point. Researchers then compared that price point to see how it changed after being shown the warning label.

Customer preference for the clear plastic packaging was clear when they were given no other information or warning labels. However, some consumers preferred the foam, believing it was more protective of the eggs. Egg purchases did not prefer foam to pulp packaging, suggesting that egg sellers currently using foam packaging could switch to pulp-based packaging without significantly reducing demand.

Participants also read one of three randomly assigned warning labels. One label focused on the health impacts of plastics, one on the environmental impacts, and one on safety which mentioned both. Results clearly showed that the information in the warning labels was effective at shifting customer preference toward sustainable packaging, with an apparent decrease in willingness to purchase both plastic and foam egg cartons. However, it differed by messaging used, with the most drastic decrease in willingness to purchase when participants read a health-focused product label.

“Our results indicate that warning labels may be considered as a part of a broader policy toolkit to reduce plastic use in the U.S.,” van Asselt said. “For example, the FDA could require plastic packaging to carry plastic warning labels. They can educate consumers of the potential harm of plastic consumption, nudge consumers away from purchasing single-use plastic, and in turn incentivize lower plastic production and use across the agro-food supply chain. We hope to conduct more research in this area to confirm our findings and to help propose a strategy to reduce plastic waste in the U.S.”
Awards & Honors
Alumni Spotlight

FRE Alumnus Natalie Miaoulis named to Explorer Clubs “ECO 50”

The Explorer’s Club honored Natalie Miaoulis-Maillis for her work in fishery economics and sustainability, naming her one of the “Explorers Club 50: Fifty People Changing the World that the World Needs to Know About.”

Miaoulis-Maillis graduated with her Master of Science in Food and Resource Economics (FRE) from the University of Florida in 2020 and currently serves as a fisheries specialist for the Nature Conservancy’s northern Caribbean program.

Seafood production is a significant part of the Bahamian economy. Her work focuses on working with local producers to study different production of different seafood species and put into place best practices and regulations for increased sustainability.

While in the Master of Science with Thesis program at UF, Miaoulis-Maillis worked with many FRE faculty.

“Dr. Sherry Larkin helped launch me into the world of fisheries and has been an inspiration to what women can achieve in the field personally and professionally,” Miaoulis-Maillis said. “I will never forget my first class with her and how intrigued I was and the constant support from her throughout my thesis. Also, Dr. Gilly Evans encouraged me to pursue my passions for a career that impacted my region, the Caribbean.”

Miaoulis-Maillis describes the FRE program as instrumental to her career development and cites her time as a member and officer of the Agricultural Economics Club and Gator National AgriMarketing Association as providing her with real-life skills to enable success in the workforce.

“I would not trade my degree from this department for any other for the practical, implementable skills learned,” Miaoulis-Maillis said.

Growing up on the island of Abaco in the Bahamas, Miaoulis-Maillis has loved the ocean for as long as she can remember. Working directly with fishers in the field in the U.S. Virgin islands fueled her passion and motivation to continue working with fisheries in the region.

“My passion for looking for strategies to include local communities and resource users in the policymaking process fuels me. The connection between community and viable achievable sustainable fisheries and ocean policy is critical,” Miaoulis-Maillis said. “When communities are involved, it’s more likely to be successful implementation and sustainable outcomes, and this is what I strive to accomplish in my work.”

Her current project with the Bahamas queen conch fishery includes working with fishers to conduct conch maturity sampling, weighing and measuring, studying reproductive tissue, and recording data.

“There are many people out there working very hard for ocean and fisheries sustainability,” Miaoulis-Maillis said. “I am one, one might say, of many fish in the sea that’s working towards this, but it is an honor for the work to be recognized, most importantly to give a stage and platform for the great work that is happening within the Caribbean region. The Caribbean is more than palm trees, sand, and sea but also a beautiful diaspora of peoples that are dependent on the ocean resources for a living and cultural way of life, and I am honored to represent them.”

Miaoulis-Maillis of The Nature Conservancy freedives next to an artificial reef art sculpture off New Providence, Bahamas. Photo: Shane Gross, The Nature Conservancy
Student Spotlight
Meet the graduating master’s and Ph.D. students of FRED’s Spring 2022 graduating class.

Audrey Risk, M.S.
Audrey is graduating with her M.S. in Food and Resource Economics.

She worked on her thesis, studying best management practices for insecticide use to prevent citrus greening, with Dr. Ariel Singerman, FRED.

Audrey said she was drawn to the Food & Resources Economics program because of its applied nature.

She hopes her thesis research can be used to create more effective regulatory practices in Florida.

Audrey spent the summer in Miami for an internship before returning to Gainesville to finish her law degree at the University of Florida Levin College of Law.

Joanna van Asselt, Ph.D.
Joanna van Asselt also defended her dissertation this semester to earn her Ph.D.

Her dissertation looks at the nutrition, sustainability, and productivity of smallholder farmers in Latin America and Africa.

She said the most valuable skills she learned while in the UF Food & Resource Economics program come from working with her chair, Dr. Pilar Useche, and include developing theoretical models, creating a story for her writing, and organizing research papers.

After graduation, Joanna began working for the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington D.C. within the Development Strategy and Governance Division.

Junhong Chen, Ph.D.
Junhong Chen successfully defended her dissertation last semester, and is graduating officially in the spring with Clear Prior.

Her dissertation, entitled “Three Essays on Consumer Behavior in the Food Value Chain: Analysis of Factors Affecting Grocery Store Selection and Food Choice,” looked at ways that grocery stores could improve profit by understanding consumer purchasing preferences, Junhong’s committee was chaired by Dr. Zhifeng Gao.

Currently, Junhong is working full time as a data scientist for a commercial insurance company based in Sarasota, FL.
FRED Awards & Honorees

Several Food & Resource Economics students and faculty members were recognized at this year’s UF College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Annual Banquet for their accomplishments.

**Dr. Zhifeng Gao: Graduate Teacher/Advisor of the Year**

The College of Agricultural and Life Science recognized nine faculty for outstanding achievements at their annual banquet this year, including Dr. Zhifeng Gao.

Gao, who was recognized as the Graduate Teacher/Advisor of the Year, first joined the University of Florida as a research scientist in October 2007 and was awarded full professorship in 2020. He was also honored with the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture Educator Award at their 2022 conference in June.

“The Dr. Gao is a valued member of the Food and Resource Economics Department who is recognized by students and faculty in the department as a top advisor and mentor for graduate students,” said Dr. Lisa House, department chair.

Gao fills a variety of roles in the department including advisor, teacher, and graduate program coordinator.

“The opportunity came up that they asked me whether I’m willing to serve as the graduate coordinator,” Gao said. “I said, of course, because I know it’s time-consuming, but I feel like I know the program pretty well, and I think I can help make some changes through those programs to serve our students better.”

Some classes taught by Gao include elements of econometrics, microeconomic theory two, and applied valuation methods.

Dr. Gao advises many master’s and Ph.D. Students in the Food & Resource Economics Department. His unique lab-based approach prepares them for successful careers in the industry or in academia, and is tailored towards each student’s goals.

Younger faculty members and students alike look to Gao as a mentor figure.

“For me, what I learned from Dr. Gao is his diligence and growth mindset,” said Junhong Chen, Spring 2022 graduate from FRE’s Ph.D. program. “Dr. Gao is very diligent, and he always keeps track of the current topics in our field and what are those newest methods we can apply to the research. I enjoyed every conversation and discussion with him, which sparks new research ideas and motivates me to do the research.”

Dr. Gao chaired Chen’s dissertation committee.

According to Gao, this sentiment goes both ways as he feels he learns much from his students as well.

“I think what I enjoy the most actually is I feel like sometimes I can learn many things from students,” Gao said. “They kind of encouraged me to think more and learn more about myself.”

**FRE Student Honorees**

**Robbie Sistrunk**
Top 10 Senior

**Glory Okpiaifo**
CALS Council Graduate Leadership Award

**Maddie Dvorak**
E.T. York Junior Medal Finalist
Promotions

Three of our faculty members have earned well-deserved promotions during the 2021-2022 academic year. Pilar Useche was promoted to full professor, Conner Mullally to associate professor, and Misti Sharp to senior lecturer.

Work Anniversaries

In July, Dr. Jaclyn Kropp celebrated her 10 year anniversary working with FRED.
FRED 2022
Spring Graduates

Ph.D in Food and Resource Economics
Junhong Chen
Joanna van Asselt

Master of Science with Thesis
Audrey Rizk

B.S. in Food & Resource Economics
Cason Sim Adams
Manuel Alfonso Alvarez iii
Ivan Alan Badillo
Courtney Ellasyn Ball
Hansun Cao
James V. Crown
Coleman Crozier
Landry Banks Driver
Liam Isaac Frank
Hunter Skylar Gaskin
Manuel Girona Gomez
Joseph Alan Gonzalez
Paul David Hawkins
Amanda Beth Heinzmann
Josephine Caroline Hoffner
Hunter Hudson
Mathew Ryan Hudson
John Hunt
Sarah Elizabeth Lee

Nick R. Lomas
Cade Christian Macri
Veronica Megna
Antonio Menacho
Keala Reine Moncur
Hunter Moss
Carlos Kandai Nishizono
Jose Carlos Nogales Gutierrez
Laura Partee
Jared Lee Phares
Christian Alfredo Raposo
Andrew John Reimer
Madelaine Lorna Rennardson
Johnathan Josepah Ritacco
Gabriel Rivas
Evan Hunter Teal
Mason R. Watson
Rober Russell Woodall
Robert A. Sistrunk
FRED 2022
Summer Graduates

Ph.D in Food and Resource Economics
Ariel Soto Caro (Guan)
Edgar Marcillo Yepez

Master of Science with Thesis
Ruojin Zhao

Master of Science in Agribusiness
Austyn Sanchez

Master of Agribusiness
Ruojin Zhao

B.S. in Food & Resource Economics
Zipporah Broughton
William J. Fasking
Anthony Albert Moreno
Gabriel Rivas
Michael Justin Pedersen
Kenneth Summers
Juan Pachon

M.Ed. in Student Personnel in Higher Education
Our FRE undergraduate advisor Danielle Shu also completed her master's program with the UF College of Education.