



Renk Agribusiness Institute
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2018 Annual Report

The Renk Agribusiness Institute, in the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, serves as a focal point for agribusiness education, outreach and research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The goals of the Renk Agribusiness Institute center around two themes: Increasing the visibility and reputation of agribusiness on the UW-Madison campus, and building connections between the UW-Madison campus and Wisconsin agribusinesses through education, outreach and research. This Annual Report highlights some of the major activities in 2018 under the leadership of the Director, Paul Mitchell, professor of Agricultural and Applied Economics and extension state specialist in cropping systems and environmental management, and Associate Director, Jeremy Beach, faculty associate and instructor in the Farm and Industry Short Course.

Events

Wisconsin Agricultural Outlook Forum – 1/25

The 2018 Wisconsin Agricultural Outlook Forum continued using the new format introduced during the 2017 forum. The morning of the 2018 forum included an agricultural situation and outlook, while the afternoon addressed a specific topic, focusing on the state's rural-urban divide. In the agricultural situation and outlook session, Paul Mitchell covered farm income and costs, Mark Stephenson (UW Center for Dairy Profitability) covered dairy, and Brenda Boetel (UW-River Falls) covered grains and livestock. Paul Mitchell also presented on the state's specialty crops followed by Steve Deller's presentation on the Wisconsin economy. Presentations are available on the Renk Agribusiness Institute web page: <https://renk.aae.wisc.edu/documents/2018-agricultural-outlook-forum-presentations/> and the content is summarized in the 2018 Status of Wisconsin Agriculture (<https://renk.aae.wisc.edu/status-of-wisconsin-agriculture/>). After lunch, Dean Kate VandenBosch spoke briefly about new building projects in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, including the Meat Science Laboratory, the Wisconsin Crop Innovation Center, and the Center for Dairy Research in Babcock Hall.

The forum's afternoon session explored how Wisconsin agribusinesses affect – and are affected by – the rural-urban divide. This session started with a keynote presentation by UW-Madison political scientist Katherine Cramer, author of the book *The Politics of Resentment*. Next, Tessa Conroy covered the myths and realities of the rural-urban divide before the Wisconsin Agribusiness Panel shared their experiences how the rural-urban divide has affected their businesses in the past, how they address it now, and their expectations and wishes for the future. Panelists included Larry Alsum (Alsum Farms and Produce), Mark Crave (Crave Brothers Farmstead Cheese), and Mark O'Connell (Wisconsin Counties Association). Materials for these presentations are also available online: <https://renk.aae.wisc.edu/documents/2018-agricultural-outlook-forum-presentations/>

Overall, the 2018 Forum was very successful, with 205 attendees including walkup registrations. For the first time the forum was also live-streamed on the UW-Madison Integrated Pest Management (IPM) YouTube channel. This option was very well received with over 30 attendees live-streaming the forum at once. The new format, as well as the live-stream option, both worked very well and were planned to be used again for the 2019 forum.

Commodity Markets & Trading Alumni Panel – 3/14

The Renk Agribusiness Institute co-sponsored the Commodity Markets and Trading Alumni Panel, which included presentations by Dan Basse (President and Founder of AgResource Co.) and Katie Burgess (Senior Commodity & Risk Analyst with Blimling and Associates). Presentations were followed by audience Q&A and a reception.

Renk Seed Co Tour – 3/16

Twenty-three students, including thirteen Renk Scholars, visited Renk Seed Company for a tour hosted by Jeff Renk followed by dinner in Sun Prairie. In addition to Renk Scholars, student members of the Agricultural Business Management Club (ABMC) and the Farm & Industry Short Course (FISC) also attended. This event continues to receive very positive feedback and has become an annual event for the Institute.

AAE Career Options Alumni Panel – 4/19

The Renk Agribusiness Institute co-sponsored the AAE Career Options Alumni Panel, which included presentations by Luke Drachenberg (Portfolio Manager with Ceres Partners LLC) and Sydney Endres (American Jersey Cattle Association). Presentations were followed by audience Q&A and a reception.

ABM & AAE Internship Panel – 9/25

The Renk Agribusiness Institute co-sponsored the ABM & AAE Internship Panel, which included presentations by four students on their summer internship experiences at Monsanto, PepsiCo, Land O'Lakes, and Masters Gallery Foods. Presentations were followed by audience Q&A and a reception.

Careers in Agriculture: Networking Panel and Social – 11/15

The Renk Agribusiness Institute co-sponsored the Careers in Agriculture: Networking Panel and Social, which included an employer panel consisting of representatives from VitaPlus, InsightFS – Growmark, Filament Marketing, Blimling and Associates, Michael Best and Associates, Compeer Financial, BMO Harris Bank, and Hartung Brothers Farm. A moderator asked questions of panelists followed by audience Q&A and a reception.

Recruitment Activities

Renk Scholarships – 2/23

The following 18 undergraduates majoring in Agricultural Business Management (ABM), Agricultural and Applied Economics (AAE), or pursuing the certificate in Business Management for Agricultural & Life Sciences, received a 2018-2019 Renk Scholarship, receiving a total of \$44,000 in financial support. See <https://renk.aae.wisc.edu/meet-our-scholars/> for short bios of each scholar.

Addison Arndt	Bailey Fritsch	Jacob Mann	Darlene Shafer	Jessica Wendt
Ciera Ballmer	Carmen Haack	Michael Moede	Vanessa Soendjaja	Deanna Zernicke
Allie Breunig	Molly Hendrickson	Leah Rothstein	Taylor Stanek	
Amber Dammen	Megan Lehr	Mena Schmitt	Tucker Wedig	

Building Connections: CALS Employer/Student Networking Lunch – 9/21

The Renk Agribusiness Institute co-sponsored this event with CALS Career Services in order to provide an informal environment for students and employers to follow-up after initial connections made during the Fall Career Fair in September. About 20 students attended and met with 15 company representatives. Given the timing of this event that centers around the Fall Career Fair, and the sense that students and employers both have a full schedule during these few days, this event will likely be held at a different date in the future.

Farmer Cooperative Conference Scholarship – 11/7

The Renk Agribusiness Institute and the UW Center for Cooperatives co-sponsored the Farmer Cooperative Conference Scholarship, which offered funding for undergraduate and graduate students to attend the Farmer Cooperatives Conference in St. Paul MN. Recipients of the four scholarships include graduate students Kristin McAdow and Dervis Gursoy, and undergraduate students Jessica Mehre and Leah Rothstein. Feedback from recipients and other conference attendees was very positive and this scholarship will likely continue annually in the future.

MWFPA Student Recruitment Career Fair – 11/28

The Renk Agribusiness Institute co-sponsored this event with the Midwest Food Products Association (MWFPA) in order to proactively match students with the types of employers that were looking to recruit them for internships and entry-level job openings. This was the first year holding this event during the 2018 MWFPA Annual Convention in November to capitalize on the aggregation of employer representatives at a single location. Overall feedback was positive despite low numbers of students (5) in attendance. Employers in attendance included Bonduelle, Bush Brothers, Chippewa Valley Bean, Del Monte, Lakeside Foods, McCain Foods, Pinnacle Foods, and Seneca Foods. Despite low student attendance, at least one internship was filled due to connections made at this event.

WABA Agribusiness Connections Program – 1/16/19

The Renk Agribusiness Institute co-sponsored this event with the Wisconsin Agri-Business Association (WABA) in order to proactively match students with the types of employers that were looking to recruit them for internships and entry-level job openings. This was the second year holding this event during the 2019 Wisconsin Agribusiness Classic in January to capitalize on the aggregation of employer representatives at a single location. Student and employer attendance were both up this year compared to previous year. Overall feedback was very positive, and employers mentioned the students were of higher quality than the previous year. About 20 students attended with employers including AG Systems, Inc., AgSource Laboratories, Allied Cooperative, Black's Valley Ag, Countryside Cooperative, Dairyland Laboratories, The DeLong Company, Helena Agri-Enterprises, Insight-FS Growmark, Landmark Services Cooperative, Northside Elevator, Pearl City Elevator, and United Cooperative. Anecdotally, one internship was offered and accepted on the spot, and several future interviews were scheduled.

Projects

2017 Wisconsin Custom Rates Survey

The Renk Agribusiness Institute provided financial assistance and facilitated the creation of the 2017 Wisconsin Custom Rates Survey and resulting Custom Rate Guide found here: https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Wisconsin/Publications/WI-CRate17.pdf. This survey and corresponding guide was a joint effort between the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Wisconsin Field Office in cooperation with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP), UW Extension, Biological Systems Engineering (BSE), the Renk Agribusiness Institute, the Center for Dairy Profitability, and the UW Soybean program (Coolbean). The results of this survey were released just in time for the 2018 cropping season, providing valuable information on the costs of common farming operations and benefiting both those providing custom services and those seeking their services. Current data on these operations was necessary since survey data hadn't been collected since 2013.

2018 State of Rural Wisconsin

The Renk Agribusiness Institute provided the *Future of Wisconsin Agriculture – Outlook 2018* chapter within the 2018 State of Rural Wisconsin: Status and Trends of our Rural Communities report published by UW-Extension and Wisconsin Rural Partners. This publication is widely dispersed around the state of Wisconsin and can be found here:

<https://www.wiruralpartners.org/state-of-rural-wisconsin>

Educational Activities

Classroom Teaching

- FISC 051: Business Principles of Agricultural Management (Spring) – Beach
- FISC 115: Agribusiness Feasibility Planning (Fall) – Beach
- AAE 399: Coordinated Internship – Beach and Gould
- AAE 320: Farming Systems Management (Fall) – Mitchell
- AAE 375 Spread sheet fundamentals (Fall): Gould

Student Mentoring

- The following graduate students were (co-) supervised by Paul Mitchell: Yuji Saikai (PhD in AAE) who is working on machine learning and precision ag in crop production, I-Chun Chen (PhD in AAE) who is working on crop insurance economics and marketing of Wisconsin potatoes, Robert Smail (PhD in the Nelson Institute) who is working on agricultural water issues in Wisconsin, and Nicholas Gallagher (M.S. in AgroEcology) who is working on cover crops in forage production.
- The Commodity Marketing Group, advised by Sheldon Du in AAE, received funding for undergraduate travel to competitions and conferences, for student-hourly help with clerical duties and data entry, and for bringing industry speakers to campus, including an AAE Alumni Panel presentation on Commodity Markets & Trading.
- The National Agri-Marketing Association (NAMA), advised by Sarah Botham in Life Sciences Communication, received funding for a significant portion of travel expenses to attend the national competition in Kansas City, MO where they placed 1st nationally.

Research and Outreach Activities

Paul Mitchell, the director of the Renk Agribusiness Institute, has an active research and outreach program focusing on issues of importance to Wisconsin agriculture and agribusiness. His program entails a variety of activities that generate multiple outputs, and help build the reputation of the Institute and agriculture on campus, around the state, as well as nationally and internationally. His research and outreach program broadly focuses on the economics of crop production, both commodity and specialty crops, agricultural policy, including commodity support and crop insurance, insect, weed and disease management, and practical agricultural sustainability metrics and programs. These activities and outputs include journal articles, research reports, magazine articles and extension publications, as well as academic and extension presentations. In addition, he is regularly interviewed by various media and has become a voice for agriculture and agribusiness in non-agricultural contexts.

Brian Gould, the first Renk Professor of Agribusiness beginning in July 2017, retired in January 2019. Throughout his career, Brian has had an active outreach program focused on dairy markets and support programs. These activities include a national reputation on web-based software for farmers to understand and use federal support programs such as Livestock Gross Margin insurance for dairy (LGM-Dairy) and the dairy Margin Protection Program (MPP), and to maintain the Understanding Dairy Markets web page that has about 15,000 visits each month.

Highlights from 2018

- Forthcoming journal paper on the benefits of white mold control in soybeans for 10 different fungicides with several plant pathologists from around the Midwest and two book chapters, one on corn productivity (with J.P. Chavas) and the economic benefits of 2,4-D herbicide in the US (with F. Dong).
- Working with Plant Pathology and NPM collaborators, released Sporebuster, a smartphone app that calculates net returns and break even probabilities for fungicide-based management of white mold in soybeans based on user-entered data. Available in the Google Play and iPhone stores: <http://ipcm.wisc.edu/apps/sporebuster/>.
- Sporebuster video developed by NPM staff posted on UW Integrated Pest and Crop Management YouTube Channel. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09xFyjrQvZo>.
- Two supported graduate students presented at the AAEE annual meetings in Washington, DC: Yuji Saikai and I-Chun Chen: “Multi-Armed Bandit for Experimental Plot Selection” and “Policy Implications of Joint versus Separate Estimation of Crop Insurance Demand.” Both did well, enhancing the reputation AAEE in the profession.
- Presented “Economic Logic of Risk-Based IPM” at the IPM for Early Season Pests Workshop at Iowa State University in Ames, IA during June 19-21, 2018.
- Two articles for the *Badger Common Tater*: “What is a Viable Future for Wisconsin Specialty Crops?” with Jed Colquhoun as lead author and “Ensure Wisconsin’s Potato Workforce into the Future”.
- Co-leading an informal specialty crop task force with Jed Colquhoun to examine ways for Wisconsin to remain competitive in specialty crop production and processing, as several trends indicate a decline. Anticipate a white paper report summarizing findings in 2019.
- Approximately 15,000 visitors per month using the Understanding Dairy Markets web page: <http://future.aae.wisc.edu>, including the LGM-Dairy simulator (Gould).
- Part of teams awarded two research grants: USDA-SCRI: “Integrated Technologies to Improve Sweet Corn Production” and USDA-AFRI: “Applications of Reinforcement Learning Algorithms to Improve Crop Input Use.”
- Extension presentations at the MWFPA Processing Crops Conference, the WABA Agribusiness Classic, the WPVGA Grower Education Conference, and the Corn-Soy Expo, and farm situation and outlook talks at the Wisconsin Ag Outlook Forum, Wisconsin Rural Summit and Midwestern Mint Growers meetings.

Media

Paul Mitchell conducted interviews on agricultural/agribusiness topics with multiple media outlets, including:

WI Agricultural Outlook Forum

- <https://fyi.uwex.edu/news/2018/01/12/navigating-the-rural-urban-divide/>
- <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein/media/weekly-columns/looking-ahead-for-agriculture/>
- <https://www.wisfarmer.com/story/opinion/columnists/2018/02/01/thoughts-2018-ag-outlook-forum/1081339001/>

Farm Bankruptcies

- <https://www.wpr.org/western-wisconsin-led-nation-farm-bankruptcies-2017>
- <https://www.channel3000.com/news/farmers-hotline-offers-help-during-tough-farming-economy/693370537>
- <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/wisconsin/articles/2018-01-28/western-wisconsin-had-most-farm-bankruptcies-in-the-us>
- <https://www.wpr.org/wisconsin-experts-expect-increase-farm-bankruptcies-continue-2019>

Crop Production

- <https://www.morningagclips.com/farmers-concerned-mold-could-hurt-profits/>
- <https://www.wpr.org/wisconsin-farmers-finish-harvest-mold-could-impact-corn-soybean-profits>
- <https://newfoodeconomy.org/cranberry-glut-destroy-crop-volume-regulation-usda-ocean-spray/>
- <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2018/11/09/wisconsin-cranberry-growers-dump-25-percent-their-crop/1941849002/>

Farm Income & Policy

- <https://www.wpr.org/wisconsin-farm-incomes-expected-decline-again-2018>
- https://cornsoyexpo.org/library/uploads/PaulMitchell_CornSoyPolicyUpdate2018.pdf

Flooding & Markets

- <https://www.channel3000.com/news/flooding-ruins-crops-and-wipes-out-community-gardens-amid-already-tight-market/793203778>

Energy

- <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-products-distillates-supply/u-s-midwest-distillate-stocks-reach-record-high-ahead-of-harvest-idUSKCN1LZ2NW>

Renk Agribusiness Institute in 2018

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YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiagfZwekHZBdHWAW4XGrtA/featured>

Advisory Board

Tom Bressner: Executive Director, Wisconsin Agribusiness Association, Madison, WI

Nick George: President, Midwest Food Products Association, Madison, WI

Jeff Renk: President and Sales Manager, Renk Seed Company, Sun Prairie, WI

John Umhoefer: Executive Director, Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, Madison, WI

AAE Department Chair: (ex officio) Jeremy Foltz: Professor, Ag & Applied Economics, UW-Madison