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# Alumni Spotlight



Jim Stocker

Jim Stocker is all business – agricultural business, that is. A 1959 UT graduate with a major in agricultural business, Stocker reached the highest levels of management in one of the most successful agribusiness firms in recent history, Murphy Farms. Murphy was a major player in the phenomenal growth of the swine industry in North Carolina during the 1980s and 1990s. His tenure with Murphy lasted

28 years, during which he was promoted to vice president, executive vice president and general manager, president and vice president of the board of directors.

Stocker was born in 1937 of Swiss and German immigrant ancestry in rural Sequatchie County, Tennessee. In the early days of grammar school, he and his brother stayed with their maternal grandparents in order to attend school at Collins in Grundy County. They went home twice a week to get a bath and a change of clothes. The home had no indoor plumbing and no electricity. Water was piped by gravity from a spring "up on the mountain." Appliances consisted of a gas-powered washing machine and propane refrigerator, range and water heater. Homework was done by kerosene light. Electricity was extended to the area in 1962. School buses were first available at about the time Stocker was in the fourth or fifth grade.

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## From the Head of the Department

### **DEPARTMENT COMPLETES ACADEMIC REVIEW**



Every 10 years, each department is asked to conduct an academic program review with a team of faculty members from outside the department. Our department completed

its most recent review last fall. The review team, composed of Dr. Wallace Tyner, Purdue University; Dr. Lynne Robbins, University of Kentucky; Dr. Don Hodges, UT; and Dr. Neal Eash, UT; spent three days in the department collecting data and interviewing faculty, staff and students. The team was generally very complimentary of the department. The following represents highlights of some of the review team's recommendations and the department's responses.

### 1) Focus greater attention on student recruiting, particularly minorities.

The department is committed to increasing undergraduate enrollment. Our strategic plan sets a goal of 100 to 120 students by 2012. Our new undergraduate programs should be more attractive to minority students. The departmental Web site was redone in 2008 and provides a much improved link to our academic programs. The departmental undergraduate committee will develop and implement a recruitment plan update by August 2009.

2) Future faculty should have appointments split between teaching, research and Extension.

There is a trend in land-grant systems to assign faculty joint academic appointments. Joint appointments are common for research/teaching, and research/Extension joint appointments are becoming more common. While there is good reason for some appointments to contain both Extension and research elements, there is also good reason for some appointments to be entirely research, Extension or teaching. The department will maintain flexibility to design appointments to meet needs of research, Extension and teaching programs.

### 3) Increase the number of undergraduates participating in study abroad programs.

The department will continue to encourage undergraduates to participate in study abroad programs. Departmental faculty members have ties with many foreign countries. With additional funding, more opportunities or support for these programs can be advanced.

### 4) Collect better information on job placement of our graduates and on alumni contacts.

Conducting exit interviews with graduating students is one method of finding out where our students are finding jobs. As important, however, is keeping up with them after a few years. Keeping our departmental newsletter mailing list current will help to keep us in contact with graduates.

### 5) Pursue collaboration with the Department of Economics in establishing a PhD program.

That suggestion is included in the department's new strategic plan. If the Department of Economics is willing to establish a joint program, there is a possibility that a PhD program can be reinstituted. Funding issues would also have to be addressed in order to attract the quality and quantity of PhD students desired. The departmental graduate committee will approach the Department of Economics by summer 2009 to investigate the possibility of a joint program.

### 6) Enhance collaboration with other units within and beyond the institute.

The recent joint effort by research and Extension, on the institute level, in developing and writing grant proposals to the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative was well supported by the department. We will continue to look for ways of collaborating with other units to enhance our research and outreach accomplishments.

### 6) Create an external advisory group.

In 2009, a faculty committee will be formed to develop guidelines for establishing an advisory/advocacy group. Some groundwork was laid in 2008 with an alumni survey. Data from that survey along with input from faculty and supporters will be used to develop this group.

### 7) Place more value on international activities.

With increased funding, more international activities can be made available to faculty and students. During 2008, several faculty members participated in international research/educational events. These international opportunities should fall within the job expectations of the institute, department and individual faculty member.

### 8) Do a better job of promoting the department's successes.

During 2008, the departmental awards committee, along with individual faculty members, developed several award packets. Faculty awards included two institute research awards and one teaching award. An Extension associate and an area specialist each won statewide awardof-excellence competitions. The department will continue to nominate faculty and staff for awards.

From this review process, it is evident that the department is on solid footing in its research, teaching and Extension programs. The review provided several areas where the department can modify its programming efforts. With current faculty and staff, we will no doubt meet and exceed the expectations of the review team's recommendations.

# Delton C. Serloff

# Dual MS/MBA Program Launches Fall 2009

A new program allowing students to earn two master's degrees – one in agricultural economics and the other in business administration - will be initiated in the fall. The dual MS/MBA program requires only one additional semester of course work beyond earning the MBA alone, and 20 credit hours fewer than earning both degrees separately.

The new program gives our students a chance to enroll in businessrelated courses that until now have been reserved for MBA students only. Graduates will have a unique set of agribusiness skills developed through training in business fundamentals and combined with the analytical, technical, management and economic decision-making skills necessary to operate within in a rapidly changing agribusiness sector in a competitive global market. They will be prepared to take leading management roles in agribusiness firms within the agricultural consulting, bio-energy, food processing, input supply, marketing and logistics industries, among others.

The idea of the dual program came about in late 2007 when one of our M.S. students asked the director of the UT's MBA program for permission to enroll in an MBA course. Representatives from our department and the MBA program soon met to discuss the potential for a dual program. After a long journey through the review process, program approval from the UT Knoxville Faculty Senate in February was good news indeed and none too soon. Our first dual program student finishes the MBA portion of the program in spring semester 2009, and will be taking courses in our department starting fall semester.

### New General Education Course

We also expect

this course to

attract students

from outside

our college.

The department has received approvand intercultural perspectives. While 

of the Global Food and Fiber System" (Agricultural Economics 201). This course can be used by students to satisfy the social science requirement within

the university-wide general education program. The course will also contribute to UT's Ready for the World initiative, which seeks to enhance students' exposure to international

economic principles (both micro and macro), the context for illustrations and applications will be the food and fiber system. In addition, substantial attention will be given to the globalization of this system and the critical role of international

trade in food and fiber commodities and products.

The department plans to replace Economics 201 in our curriculum

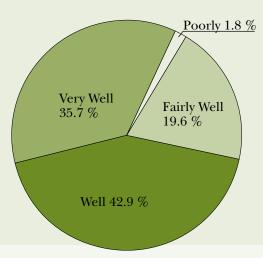
requirements with this new course, and we believe it likely that other departments within the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources will follow suit. We also expect this course to attract students from outside our college. Over time, we are confident that offering this course will help in achieving our goal of 100 to 125 majors. Our tentative timetable is to offer Agricultural Economics 201 every semester beginning in the spring of 2010.

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# Alumni Survey Reflects Grads' Opinions

Our faculty and staff members place strong emphasis on teaching and other interactions with undergraduate and graduate students. Last fall, the department conducted an online survey of graduates to help identify program areas where we are doing well and where we might improve our overall performance. Below are some questions and results of the survey that may be of interest to you.

If you have an advanced degree, how well did your B.S. degree experience prepare you for success in your advanced degree program?



How well did your experience in our B.S. program equip you with regard to the following skills?

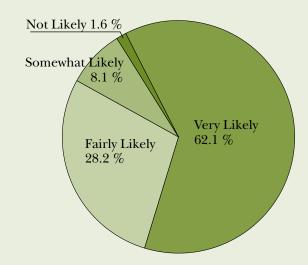
	Average
	Rating
$Analytical/Problem\ Solving\dots.$	3.37
Business Management	3.38
Financial Decision-Making	3.32
Quantitative	3.14
Computer	2.30
Writing	2.80
Public Speaking	2.88
Leadership	3.09
Teamwork	3.22
Overall Preparation for Career	3.33

(1 = Poorly, 2 = Fairly Well, 3 = Well, 4 = Very Well)

How would you rate your experience in our B.S. program with regard to the following?

	Average Rating
Academic Advising	3.42
Career Guidance from Advisor	3.13
UT Career Services Office	2.51
Quality of Teaching in Ag Econ Classes	3.52
Quality of Teaching in Classes in Other Departments	3.05
Availability of Computers and Technology	2.56
Classroom Facilities	3.06
Interaction with Faculty in the Department	3.53
Interaction with People from Different Cultures	2.55
Opportunity to Participate in a Departmental Club	3.15
Helpfulness of Support Staff in the Department	3.49
Space for Studying/Group Work/ Socializing	
Overall Education Received	3.49
(1 = Poor, 2 = Fair, 3 = Good, 4 = E	xcellent)

If given the opportunity, how likely are you to recommend our department's B.S. program to someone planning to go to college?



# Department Revises the Existing Major and Initiates a New One

As a direct result of the strategic planning process completed in 2007, the department took some time to analyze its undergraduate program and identify ways to increase its appeal and usefulness to students. After studying peer departments at other land-grant universities across the United States, we found that many programs have moved beyond a focus on traditional agriculture. These peer programs offer majors that emphasize the food industry in its larger context, natural resources and environmental issues. The impacts on enrollments in departments where the programs had been broadened were positive.

### **Food and Agricultural Business**

Our faculty reasoned that taking a

more inclusive view of the agri-food system would allow us to maintain our roots in production agriculture while recognizing that the food industry is, in fact, much larger and that many of our graduates find employment with firms in food processing, distribution and retailing. This more inclusive view also recognizes that many of today's students may not identify with agriculture even though they have a strong interest in a food industry career.

Based on that reasoning, we revised the existing major in agricultural economics and business to include more emphasis on the food industry. We added some courses in food science and nutrition to the requirements and modified other existing required Ag Econ courses to include more attention to the food business beyond the commodity level. In fall 2008, we also changed the name of

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the major to Food and Agricultural Business. To use the marketing lexicon, this revision in our major better aligns our product with our target market, which includes our traditional market plus a broader demographic of students.

### Natural Resource and Environmental Economics

The agricultural economics profession and our peer departments around the country have a long tradition of attention to the economics of land and water. Over the last 50 years, allocation decisions about land and water have become environmental policy issues as well as production decisions. The demand from students to learn more about these issues and the demand from society for graduates with knowledge in this area continues to grow. The faculty decided to

appeal to this growing demand by developing a new major titled Natural Resource and Environmental Economics. The new major combines courses in Ag Econ (especially Ag Econ 470 – Natural Resource Economics and 471 – Policy Analysis for Environmental and Natural Resource

Management) with courses in Forestry,
Wildlife and Fisheries;
Environmental and
Soil Sciences; Economics; and Biosystems
Engineering Technology along with a strong general education component. The result is a broad-based major that provides a background in the physical and biologi-

cal aspects of natural resources and the environment while giving graduates analytical and decision-making skills associated with economics. This program is currently awaiting final approval by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

In the case of both of these majors, our intention is to adjust our curricular options to meet the demands of modern society and modern students and, in doing so, better position ourselves to be central to the future.

### Mark Your Calendars!

We are now finalizing the details of the department's 90th anniversary celebration, and we hope you can join in the fun. The festivities will include dinner on Friday, September 25 followed by Ag Day and the UT football game on September 26. Look for more details in the coming months. Hope to see you there!



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#### [Continued from cover]

Agriculture interested Stocker from an early age and he says he followed his father "every step he took." So, by the time he entered high school, Stocker claims to have known how to do everything his father could do. His dad trusted him to operate the red-bellied Ford tractor by himself from the time he was 7 or 8. He milked the family cow every day and was rewarded with her calves.

As a student at Sequatchie County High, Stocker participated in Vo-ag and went to Knoxville for judging contests. He specifically remembers a trip to the dairy farm. His "senior trip" in high school was to an amusement park in North Georgia where he got sick on one of the park rides. Stocker says, "The nice girl who came to my rescue, I later married."

Even with strong encouragement from his Vo-ag teacher, Stocker did not plan to go to college. He and a friend wrote UT to inquire and were told to arrive a week early to take an entrance exam. He did and was admitted fall quarter 1955. He lived in South Stadium Hall, but was so homesick that he thumbed or caught a ride home every weekend of his first quarter even though he had Saturday morning class. He remembers the Quarterback on the Cumberland Avenue Strip, the Cameron Restaurant, and some other establishments where he got some valuable education. He did not participate in many extracurricular activities at UT because he "always felt backward." He adjusted to college work and made five As and a B his last quarter, which pushed his GPA up close to 3.0.

He graduated in December 1959, and married Betty Jean Scott, that nice girl from Sequatchie County who came to his rescue at the amusement park. He took a temporary job in the order credit department at Central Soya in Chattanooga at \$2.10 per hour. He was with Central Sova

for more than 13 years because "they took a The deal that liking to me and my expanded the attitude and my work.' company into Iowa He was promoted to was closed on the plant credit manager 72nd floor of the at the Central Soya Sears Tower, "big-Plant in Orangeburg, time for North South Carolina in Carolina hog 1962. Stocker rememfarmers." bers making the move

1960 VW – without air. He helped improve plant management at Orangeburg and the plant began to make money.

to Orangeburg in a

One of his customers was a startup swine feeding operation named Murphy Farms. Stocker maintained a close relationship through supplying feed credit to Murphy even though promotions moved him to positions in Chattanooga, Tennessee and Charlotte, North Carolina. By 1973, Murphy had grown substantially and needed additional management help, so they hired Stocker away from Central Soya and he moved to Duplin County, North Carolina.

During his 28 years with Murphy Farms, Stocker helped engineer and manage the development of the company through many costreducing technological production changes, including development of all-indoor, three-site production systems. The company also moved to producing their own sows and pigs. Production expanded into South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois and South Dakota. The deal that expanded the company

into Iowa was closed on the 72nd floor of the Sears Tower, "big-time for North Carolina hog farmers." By the time the company merged with Smithfield Foods in 2000, it was producing more than 6 million hogs

> per year and had 1,500 employees and contracted growers representing more than 1,000 families.

Stocker retired from Murphy in 2001. However, he didn't quit working. He and his son operate two contract sow farms

and a 220-cow beef operation that feeds out its steers and heifers and develops bred heifers. He is considering plans for expansion even though he has been battling colon cancer since March 2008.

Stocker made and is still making many contributions to his industry, community and UT. He served on the board of directors of the National Pork Producers Council, the board of trustees of James Sprunt Community College, the Board of Directors of Harrells Christian Academy, and is the chair of the political action committee of the North Carolina Pork Producers organization. In addition, he has supported UT by serving on the Ag Alumni Council and the Ag Development Board, which he chaired for two years. He is also a very significant financial supporter of the Department of Agricultural Economics. His support enables the department to provide a stronger educational experience for many bright young men and women who, hopefully, will enjoy careers like Stocker's.

# MANAGE Program Continues To Be Successful

Tennessee's MANAGE Program helps farm families evaluate their individual financial situation, plan their farm business, and improve their quality of life. The program was initiated in 1986 when state agricultural and legislative leaders identified a strong need for providing assistance to the state's farm families in the area of financial analysis and planning. Funding was provided to Extension to employ 12 area farm management specialists. Since the beginning, Dr. Clark Garland has served as coordinator of MANAGE. Currently, 10 area farm management specialists work with farmers in all 95 counties.

#### **MANAGE Successes**

- More than 18,000 Tennessee farm families have participated in the comprehensive financial management and marketing educational program. Most of these sessions are held around their kitchen table.
- Within the past year, computer financial planning software has been used to individually plan with approximately 600 Tennessee farm families. Area specialists also worked with more than 6,000 additional farmers on record keeping, partial budgeting, and marketing decisions.

According to a mail survey of participants:

- Ninety-eight percent of the families said the program is useful.
- Ninety-six percent improved their financial management skills.
- Farm families averaged making 3.8 major changes following their participation in the program.
- Ninety-six percent of the participants stated they would use the program again.
- Ninety-seven percent of the families stated that resources for Extension financial management educational

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programs should be increased or maintained.

- Ninety-eight percent of the families agreed that Extension financial management educational programs are valuable during non-crisis times.
- Overall, the program increases farm profits approximately \$12 million annually.

### **How MANAGE operates**

MANAGE provides assistance necessary for Tennessee farm families to:

- Accurately assess their current financial status.
- Determine farm and family goals and opportunities for achieving them.
- Identify and evaluate alternatives available to the family.
- Develop appropriate strategies to improve their financial future.

All financial and personal information remains confidential.

#### What Farmers Say About MANAGE

- "The program helped me THINK!"
- Bedford County farmer

"I give the program credit for me farming today." - Fayette County

"MANAGE personnel showed a frank and sincere interest in me as a person as well as in my success in farming." – Blount County farmer

"Using the joint effort of the area farm management specialist along with the experience and knowledge of our local Extension agent creates a powerful tool that can fit the individual needs of our operation."

- Monroe County farmer

"Management in non-crisis times helps keep us out of a crisis." - Grundy County farmer

MANAGE is an integral part of the Extension program in agricultural economics. It contributes to achieving UT's and the Department's outreach mission. The program reaches new audiences and enhances their appreciation for programs conducted by the UT Institute of Agriculture.



Area Farm Management Specialist Alice Rhea (right) works with a farm family in the MANAGE program.

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### Chinese Connection

Four members of the Department of Agricultural Economics recently participated in a trip to China to share information with Chinese researchers. The trip was hosted by Professors Ouyang Zhu and Li Yunsheng of the **Institute of Geographical Sciences** and Natural Resources Research (IG-SNRR) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS). The UT researchers included Dr. Daryll Ray, Dr. Dayton Lambert, Dr. Lixia He, and Research Associate Harwood Schaffer of Ag Econ and Dr. Don Tyler, Biosystems Engineering and Soil Science. The trip was a follow-up to a previous collaboration that Tyler had established between UT AgResearch and CAS.

The UT group spent the first week meeting with researchers at the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, visiting some of the cultural sites in Beijing, and observing the work of researchers at the CAS Yucheng Comprehensive Experiment Station located four hours south of Beijing.

Research at Yucheng focuses on no-till agriculture, soil remediation and improvement of agricultural production. In the local area, most of the farms are aggregated into large units in which farmers cooperate in planting and harvesting, but take responsibility for cultivation of their own parcels. People were in the fields everywhere as hand labor is popular; the UT researchers only occasionally saw animal power and mechanical equipment in the fields. Clearly, the land is highly productive with high levels of agricultural output per unit of area. Closer to major cities, more land is dedicated to vegetable production in both fields and greenhouses. In some vegetables and cotton, farmers used plastic mulch to reduce

During the second week, Ray and Schaffer traveled to Harbin in Heilongjiang Province in the north of China to observe soybean production and research, while Tyler, Lambert and He went south to Wuhan.

During the trip, all five UT researchers made presentations to various groups of Chinese researchers and, in turn, heard presentations by their Chinese counterparts. The UT group made plans for future collaboration between Chinese researchers affiliated with IGSNRR.



Professor Ouyang Zhu (left) and Professor Li Yusheng (back to camera) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, describe one of their experiments at the Yucheng Comprehensive Experiment Station to UT researchers Dr. Dayton Lambert, Dr. Daryll Ray, and Dr. Don Tyler. The field behind is in winter wheat inter-planted with poplar trees. When the wheat is harvested, corn will be double-cropped into the field using no-till methods.