

Spring 2020  
Newsletter

# UPDATE

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Department of Economics



# Department of Economics

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## Department of Economics Update

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## Message from the Chair



Joshua L. Rosenbloom, professor and department chair

**G**reetings from my home office (aka the spare bedroom). As is true for many of you receiving this newsletter, the last seven weeks have been marked by a radical transformation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to reduce transmission of the disease. One consequence is that we are all working from home.

Several weeks before Spring Break, the university chose to cancel all Spring Break study abroad courses, and on March 11, President Wintersteen wrote to the university community to inform faculty and students that all courses would be moved online for the two weeks immediately after Spring Break. On March 17, the university made the decision to close the campus to all but essential personnel and adopt a maximum “Working From Home strategy.” And, by the following day it was announced that online instruction would continue through the end of the semester.

The Iowa State University campus is as beautiful as ever this spring: the flowers are still coming up on campus, flowering trees are in bloom and everything is turning green, but with buildings closed and students gone, the usual buzz of activity and excitement at this time of year has been replaced with an eerie silence. This week students are taking final exams online, and at the end of the week graduates will be honored virtually. We’re as proud as ever of our graduating students, but this year we will not have the opportunity to express that pride in person.

Moving instruction online was an enormous logistical challenge. Across the university as whole more than 6000 courses were shifted from in-person to online delivery. Meanwhile, a host of other policies and procedures required adjustment for the new reality. I’m profoundly appreciative of our staff, faculty and students for their ingenuity and spirit of cooperation in adapting to a situation none of us had contemplated ever occurring. If there is a silver lining in all of this, it has been a stark reminder of the ways in which teaching and learning benefit from the many small personal interactions that take place on campus each day. Despite all of the seeming efficiencies of online teaching, we can see how much would be lost by abandoning the model of residential college education.

COVID-19 has not been the only dramatic change on campus in the last year. On July 1 Iowa State University adopted a new Improved Service Delivery (ISD) model in which many key HR and financial functions were shifted from departments to centralized service units. At the same time, the university switched to a new software package (Workday) to replace a variety of aging systems for managing financial and HR transactions. ISD, Workday, and the resulting shifts in personnel that they caused have reshaped the department. Since last spring many of the key staff in the department office have left for other positions in the university or retired.

To replace their experience and expertise in our daily operations, we have been fortunate in recruiting a very talented group of staff to fill the vacancies they left. **Rafael Pluta** and **Karen Kovarik** have taken on management of the day-to-day operations of the department, **Lydia Richards** is providing excellent support in our undergraduate office, and **Marty Watt** has stepped in to manage the financial aspects of our operations.

As you look through the rest of this newsletter you will see stories about the continued accomplishments of our faculty, students and alumni during the last year. There is a great deal to celebrate this year, as there is every year. We appreciate your continued interest in the Department of Economics and Iowa State University. Please stay in touch during the coming year.



Photo: Joseph L. Murphy/Iowa Soybean Association

ISA President Tim Bardole; Reed Burres ('17 ag business); Robert Haus, Corteva (left to right)

### Burres Wins New Leader Award

Reed Burres ('17 ag business) of Humboldt received the Iowa Soybean Association's (ISA) New Leader Award presented by Corteva at the ISA's annual awards banquet held January 27 in Des Moines.

Burres has exponentially grown his involvement with ISA over the last two years. After joining as a District Advisory Council member, he completed the 2018 ISA Experience program that engages soybean farmers who want to learn more about the association and consider future leadership opportunities.

Impacting policy issues affecting soybean farmers is also a priority for Burres. He is an ISA Policy Advisory Council participant and served as ISA's representative in the 2018-19 American Soybean Association/Corteva Young Leader Program.

"Through my involvement with the Iowa Soybean Association I have been able to interact with some of the best farmers in the country," says Burres. "Through these interactions I have become a better agriculturalist as I have newfound perspective on growing practices and management techniques."

### Brugman Works Despite COVID-19

In January, B.J. Brugman ('12 ag business) and his wife arrived in Lyon, France, where she is on assignment with Bayer. The plan was for B.J. to split his time between Ames, where his startup agtech business, Sentinel is headquartered, and Lyon.

Brugman said, "We were really only out and about for a month and a half before things got locked down. We could get to the U.S. if we really needed to, as there are some flights going back and forth but it sounds like quite the process—it isn't easy."

March 25 was scheduled as a guest-day for ECON 334/Entrepreneurship in Agriculture, part of a regular dose of guest agricultural entrepreneurs that speak to students over the course of the semester in the classroom in Kildee Hall.

What to do when the class moves to virtual and the guest is in France? Adapt! Brugman shared the story of Sentinel, with 55 students in ECON 334.

"We're working from our 600 square foot apartment," he explained. We're restricted to one hour per day outside for exercise and grocery shopping and can't travel more than one kilometer from home under the current restrictions."

Brugman shared the story of conceiving the idea of Sentinel, a business that connects swine producers to critical barn-level information by enabling precision livestock farming and remove management of livestock facilities.

"Livestock wasn't a passion when I graduated from ISU and started a position with Elanco," Brugman explained. "But as you work deeply in an industry like swine, you develop great relationships and an eye for solving problems."

Students asked questions about working remotely, Sentinel technology development, business model, pricing, his past VEISHA leadership experience, career advice, and the decision to start an agricultural technology business.

Of the 56 students enrolled in the course, there are three international students (China, Bolivia, Ecuador), ten students from other states (Illinois, Wisconsin, Texas, Minnesota, Indiana and Florida) and the remaining 43 from across Iowa. For fifty minutes, all were together virtually for a discussion with Brugman and instructors Kevin Kimle and Dave Krog.



B.J. Brugman ('12 ag business) is currently running his startup business, Sentinel, from Lyon, France.



Elizabeth Burns-Thompson ('11 ag business)

**Elizabeth Burns-Thompson Named to the 15 People to Watch in 2020**

As she meets with legislators and local leaders across the country, Elizabeth Burns-Thompson doesn't forget her days growing up on a family farm. That includes the sweltering summer days she would spend putting up hay bales.

"If there's one thing that makes you appreciate an office job in July in Iowa," she said, "it's having to remember what it was like to put up small square bales when it's 120 degrees outside."

As manager of corporate affairs for Renewable Energy Group, the largest producer of biodiesel in North America, the 29-year-old Burns-Thompson has turned her farming background into a successful career in agriculture policy and politics. Her responsibilities range from meeting with state officials to guiding 2020 presidential candidates on tours of the company's Iowa refineries. She is one of the *Des Moines Register's* "15 People to Watch in 2020."

A major accomplishment of her first 10 months in the position came December 3, when Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds signed an executive order requiring all new state-owned diesel-powered vehicles to be able to use at least 20% biodiesel.

Burns-Thompson was among those with Renewable Energy Group working with the governor's office on the new policy, which was applauded by those in the renewable fuels industry.

Aside from her day job, Burns-Thompson is heavily involved in

community organizations within the city of Altoona, where she has lived for six years. In November, she was elected to her first term on Altoona's City Council.

"She is a roll-up-her-sleeves and do the hard, dirty work kind of person," said USDA Iowa Farm Service Agency state executive director Amanda De Jong, who worked with Burns-Thompson during her time at the Iowa Corn Growers Association. "What I think is most notable is she has often done it completely under the radar. To me, that type of approach is the spirit of service we should all try to strive to attain."

Burns-Thompson grew up on a family farm outside Alburnett, a town of about 700 people north of Cedar Rapids. Her parents worked in town on weekdays and would spend their nights and weekends growing corn and soybeans and raising cattle.

Her world opened up when she began attending Iowa State University in fall 2008. Through conversations with economics professor Ron Deiter, she settled on a double-major in agricultural business and international ag, with a minor in agronomy. She graduated in 2011.



Florin Citu ('01 PhD econ)

**Citu Appointed Romania's Prime Minister-Designate**

Romania's president Klaus Iohannis appointed acting finance minister Florin Citu ('01 PhD economics), a member of the National Liberal Party (PNL), as prime minister-designate to form a new government, after consultations with the parliamentary parties on February 26.

Born in 1972, Florin Citu holds a bachelor's degree in economics from Grinnell College, a master's degree in economics and a doctoral degree in macroeconomics and international economics from Iowa State University.



Matt Carstens ('96 ag business)

**Carstens Named Landus CEO**

Following a nationwide search, the Landus Cooperative board of directors introduced Matt Carstens ('96 ag business) as Chief Executive Officer for the farmer-owned cooperative.

The Board unanimously selected Carstens, who has nearly 25 years of experience in the industry spanning every step in the supply chain from agronomy retail to end-user grain customers, food manufacturers, grocery stores and consumers.

Carstens most recently served as Senior Vice President of Truterra, a division of Land O'Lakes. There, he provided leadership for farmer-driven sustainability collaborations with food manufacturers and consumers by focusing on technology, data, and precision offerings. Previously, he served at United Suppliers, where he was responsible for the crop nutrient business, including sales, marketing, supply chain logistics, financial performance, and commodity procurement. He has also held various sales, marketing, and management positions at several other agronomy businesses.



Tedd Kruse ('93 ag business)

### **Kruse Named ADM President**

Tedd Kruse ('93 ag business) was named president of the global milling business Archer Daniels Midland Co. Kruse has been chief executive officer of Stratas Foods, a 50/50 joint venture between ADM and ACH Food Companies, since 2011.

The Stratas Foods joint venture was established in 2008, and supplies fats and oils to the food service, food ingredient and retail private label markets.



Corby Fichter III ('78 ag business)

### **Fichter Outstanding Alumni Awardee**

Corby Fichter III ('78 ag business) of Farm Credit Services of America, one of the largest agricultural lenders in Iowa, was awarded the Outstanding Alumni Award by the Iowa State University Agricultural Business Club.

Fichter is regional vice president of FCS America in Southwest Iowa. He also serves as president of the Shenandoah Iowa Education Foundation.



Kent Berns ('92 ag business)

### **Berns Receives the Professional and Scientific Excellence Award**

Kent Berns ('92 ag business), superintendent for Iowa State research and demonstration farms, received the Professional and Scientific Excellence Award.

Berns has managed the ISU Central Iowa Research Farms since 1999. The

2,000-acre research area is home to more than 77 Iowa State research field projects with 44 project leaders.

Berns also works on conservation projects on the farms, such as prairie restoration, wetland conservation and buffer strip implementation to improve water quality.

## **Class Notes**

**Jenna Lansing** ('16 ag business) has accepted a position as a project manager with Aimpoint Research.

**Holden Asmus** ('14 ag business) has accepted a position as a key account specialist with AgriGold.

**Ben Zelle** ('14 ag business) has been promoted to aftermarket business analyst at John Deere.

**Dustin Brucker** ('07 ag business, '16 MS seed technology and business), has accepted a position as a field manager in western Iowa for the Soil Health Partnership.

**Dana Schweitzer** ('05 ag business, '14 MBA), won a 2019 CYtation Award from the ISU Professional and Scientific Council.

**Erik Heggen** ('00 ag business) has been named chief executive officer of Stratas Foods.

**Adam Obrecht** ('98 ag business), owner of AO Wealth Advisory, has been elected to the Urbandale, Iowa city council.

**Brent Tripp** ('93 ag business, international ag), a farmer near Eldora, were honored as a 2019 Master Pork Producers.

**Daniel Koster** ('93 MS econ), was named vice president, FBL Financial Group Inc.

**Brian Bormann** ('87 ag business) has accepted a position as the site lead in Leland, Iowa for Gro Alliance.

**Ed Chabal** ('82 ag business), was elected vice president of the Association of School Business Officials International.

**James Borel** ('78 ag business), former executive vice president at DuPont Pioneer, received the 2019 Carl F. Hertz Distinguished Service Award.

**Rex Wilcox** ('72 ag business), retired president of Stalcup Ag Service, received the 2019 D. Howard Doane Award for outstanding contributions in the field of agriculture with emphasis on farm management and rural appraisal.

# Finding Her Niche in the Numbers

Becky Heller ('05 economics, mathematics) has spent her life immersed in numbers. Whether she was successfully solving story problems in elementary school, calculating derivatives in college or producing valuable data for the U.S. Census Bureau—Heller has always been drawn to the simplistic beauty of numbers and how they concisely convey facts and information.

“Math is something that I’ve always had an affinity for,” Heller said. “I took high school math classes in seventh grade and I always enjoyed logic puzzles and word problems. You focus on where your strengths lie and that’s what I’ve done throughout my career.”

Heller’s current focus is providing U.S. Congress members with valuable budget and economic projections and analysis. An economist for the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), Heller helps elected representatives, including Iowans like U.S. Sen. Charles Grassley and U.S. Rep. Cindy Axne, understand the cost and real-world impacts of their proposed legislation.

When legislators put forth new plans—like changes to the tax code, hikes in the federal minimum wage or a government-run healthcare program, CBO economists like Heller provide revealing forecasts. Their numbers tease out the consequences of those policies as well as the price tag.

“What will this add to the federal budget?” is an important question and one that we need to answer,” Heller said.

Prior to joining the CBO, Heller spent nine years at the U.S. Census Bureau, doing what she describes as, “some interesting and important work that feeds into the current work I do at the CBO.”

## The U.S. Census Bureau: Data Producers

Most people associate the U.S. Census Bureau with the decennial census, a widely publicized national event which aims to count each person living in the United States. Although the 10-year census is the Bureau’s most well-known project, it represents a mere fraction of the agency’s ongoing work.

“It’s a big agency that employs around 4,300 people at its headquarters,” Heller said. “The U.S. Census Bureau conducts more than 130 surveys each year, and the data from those surveys are made available to the public and used by many people in so many ways.”

For example, economic development experts and entrepreneurs use population data to determine optimal locations for new businesses. Solid census data is foundational to research that is conducted by public and private sector scientists—from sociologists and computer scientists to epidemiologists. Print and broadcast journalists routinely include census data in their articles and television news pieces. City planners and government officials depend on data to plan improvements and expansions to hospitals, school lunch programs, emergency services, road construction and a host of local services.

*“Iowa State provided my first foray into doing research and working with data. That planted all of the seeds that have flourished today.”*

Quality data are the cornerstone of many jobs that are carried out in a wide variety of professions.

From 2010-2019, Heller worked in the Labor Force Branch and rose to branch chief with nine analysts under her. Her previous work at the Bureau provides a window into the lesser-known surveys and data that are ongoing at the Bureau.

## The SIPP: A Tall Drink of Data

“As an analyst at Census, I worked on the Survey of Income and Program Participation, or SIPP, which is a longitudinal survey that follows the same people for about four years,” she said. “The survey is very rich in information about U.S. household incomes, net worth and sources of income, including government benefits, such as SNAP”

The SIPP galvanizes a wealth of data from nearly 35,000 households. The resulting trove of information is



Becky Heller ('05 economics, mathematics) worked at the U.S. Census Bureau for nine years. She is currently an economist with the Congressional Budget Office.

our nation’s most comprehensive source of longitudinal, monthly data on U.S. households. Information about health insurance, food security, childcare, income, education levels and so much more, is gathered by the SIPP.

“Policymakers use SIPP data to adjust government-benefit programs, analyze the solvency of Social Security and write new laws which impact the federal budget, tax policies and countless government programs,” Heller said.

Heller’s work on the SIPP involved: designing and developing the labor-related and wealth sections of the survey, meticulously crafting questions in those sections and ensuring that completed survey data was consistent and logical.

“We end up with an incredibly detailed snapshot of U.S. households as well as the demographic changes and paths that our citizens are experiencing in their lives,” she said.

Heller’s work at the Bureau was typically focused on national perspectives and macro trends. In a micro-level twist involving Ames, Heller assisted colleagues at the Bureau of Labor Statistics to acquire additional data. Their work revealed that Ames had the lowest unemployment rate of any U.S. city. For several months

in 2019, Ames made headlines for this novel data point that was unearthed using multiple sources, including the American Community Survey.

“That was a big deal for me, to be a small part of those statistics and to know the people who created them. I was at the gym listening to Planet Money and they were talking about Hickory Park and how difficult it was to hire servers due to the drastically low unemployment rates,” Heller said. “It was nice when my work circled back to my hometown of Ames, where I grew up and attended Iowa State.”

### **Delving Into Numbers at Iowa State**

It was Heller’s passion for mathematics that drove her to study economics at Iowa State University.

Although she didn’t take economics courses during her time at Ames High School, Heller entered Iowa State as an economics major, ready to dive into the science of demand curves, discount rates and deflation.

*“Becky made it a real pleasure to be a professor. Her classmates, especially the ones who collaborated with her on group projects, were star struck by her. It was evident that she had a very bright future.”*

“I liked that there was a great deal of math in economics and that’s why I chose to study it. The field ended up really clicking with me,” Heller said. “I loved the idea of putting structure around the way people behave. I was never interested in policy debates though. I preferred to focus on facts and numbers.”

Heller enrolled in numerous math classes, purely because she enjoyed tinkering with numbers and the challenges of calculus, derivatives and statistics. Her passion for numbers unintentionally left her just a few credits shy of a mathematics degree.

“So of course, I decided to add the mathematics major,” Heller said. “The majors complemented each other well.”

Working on double degrees in mathematics and economics, Heller enrolled in Advanced Money and Banking during her sophomore year. The class

was led by Associate Professor Maureen Kilkenny, who is now a senior fellow with the National Center for Food and Agriculture Policy, a virtual think tank. The class transformed the trajectory of her career and carved her initial path toward graduate school.

Heller grew comfortable with a decision to earn a Ph.D. in economics as she worked on her undergraduate degree.

“Money and Banking was an amazing class that got me excited about working in the public sector,” Heller said. “Professor Kilkenny taught me how to use the material I learned in class and help people with it. I was immediately drawn to being involved in policy after she brought in a guest speaker from the U.S. Federal Reserve to speak with students.”

Although Heller graduated from Iowa State more than 15 years ago, Kilkenny has vivid memories of her along with high praise for Heller’s creativity and intelligence. Kilkenny noted Heller’s “mature-beyond-her-years work ethic” which left an indelible impression.

“Becky was the youngest student in my money and banking class and she earned the highest grade in the class, as well as a perfect score on two of the three exams, which was extremely rare,” Kilkenny said. “She distinguished herself by helping her classmates and organizing

study groups. Some of the students she helped became so excited about economics that they became economics majors.”

Kilkenny recalled Heller as a founding member of the ISU Economics Club and serving on the board every year.

“Becky made it a real pleasure to be a professor,” Kilkenny said. “Her classmates, especially the ones who collaborated with her on group projects, were star struck by her. It was evident that she had a very bright future and that she would be very successful in graduate school.”

Heller earned her Ph.D. in economics from the University of Texas at Austin in 2010. After teaching economics at Austin Community College and several years at the Census Bureau—all roads led to her current job at the Congressional Budget Office.

### **Working the Numbers for Lawmakers**

“I’ve been working as an economist for the Congressional Budget Office for one year, and already it’s been extremely rewarding,” Heller said.

Heller works in the Microeconomic Studies Division. Instead of producing census data, she’s now a consumer of that same census data.

“There’s a great bridge between my work at Census and my current work at the CBO,” Heller said.

**Heller, continued on p. 9**



Becky Heller (second from right) with her colleagues during a training session at the Congressional Budget Office.



John Winters, associate professor

## John Winters: Economic realities

So far in his academic career, Associate Professor John Winters has penned more than 50 scholarly papers with topics including regional and labor economics, economic development, entrepreneurship, technological change and more. Through it all, Winters relies on census data to examine trends and outcomes that will influence future policymaking. His go-to data tool is the American Community Survey (ACS), administered by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Each year, the census bureau sends the ACS to approximately 3.5 million households in the U.S. to gather vital information on social, economic, housing and demographic characteristics. This data helps community leaders allocate resources appropriately and provides researchers, like Winters, with information that advances his mission to formulate better economic policies.

“For me, it’s the single most important data product I use, and I’m always pushing other researchers and grad students to use it,” Winters said. “It’s a wealth of knowledge.”

Without access to census data, like the ACS and other surveys, Winters fears his career path would take a sharp turn in another direction.

“My research career has been built on this data, so I probably wouldn’t be here at Iowa State because I would be doing something very different somewhere else.”

## Enthusiasm For Economics Research

When Thu Tran (’21 economics) visited Iowa State University as a high school senior, he heard something on his campus tour that convinced him he just had to be a Cyclone.

“The student tour guide pointed out that Iowa State is classified as an R1 research institution and that less than 150 schools in the country have that designation,” Tran recalled. “There was a heavy emphasis on undergraduate research, which was something I wanted to do.”

Today, Tran is a recipient of the LAS Dean’s High Impact Award for Undergraduate Research, and like many social science researchers, he uses census data to explore important questions about our communities. Tran’s research examines how federal statistics, released to inform opinion, are also used by nonprofits to influence opinion.

### Making Sense of the World

Tran’s introduction to research began through Iowa State’s first-year Honors Program. He was paired with faculty mentor **Peter Orazem**, a University Professor, professor of economics and amateur stand-up comedian.

“I was so nervous. Then I walked into his office, and Dr. Orazem started cracking jokes,” Tran said. “I thought, ‘This guy is pretty funny.’ I thought all economists were stoic and straight-faced.”

*“I’m fascinated by how we can do all these models to predict a certain outcome. It makes the world make a little more sense.”*

Orazem initially connected Tran to research through a bank case study competition. Tran worked on the project with peers during Orazem’s Saturday Breakfast Club, a weekly meeting-of-the-minds for student researchers.

“The one-word description of Thu is ‘enthusiastic,’” Orazem said. “He was willing to show up on Saturday mornings to discuss how to set up the analysis and how to test hypotheses using available



Thu Tran (’21 economics), right, takes in the scene of ESPN College Game Day at Jack Trice Stadium in September 2019.

census data. He worked on the problem all summer, thanks to an LAS undergraduate research grant, and he had a paper ready to submit by that September.”

“I’m fascinated by how we can do all these models to predict a certain outcome,” Tran said of economics research. “Diving into the data is super cool. It makes the world make a little more sense. It’s complex and not every model is going to capture the full scope of what’s happening. Every model has its limitations, but I like that economists are able to predict. It’s like looking into the future based on the past.”

### Informing vs. Influencing

Looking into the future based on the past is something the census can help us do, in everything from congressional representation to budget allocation.

Tran’s research looks at how publicly produced data, such as federal poverty statistics and the American Community Survey, both administered by the U.S. Census Bureau, are shared by nonprofits and policy organizations to influence public opinion. He focused on specific case studies in the areas of household income, day care expenditures, living wage and food insecurity.

For example, do low local household incomes necessarily imply low local family incomes? In land grant counties like Story County, where there are larger populations of single young adults ages 18 to 24, household incomes can be misleading, Tran points out.

“Counties with larger shares of young, single adults will seem poorer than they are,” Tran explained in his research. “Because this bias is known, it is simple to remove the bias by comparing cities on family income or by focusing on households aged over 25 years.”

This type of flaw is widely known to academic researchers through peer review, but it’s a bias that nonprofits or other organizations may neglect to account for when working to build a case for their cause.

“While nonprofits mean well, they are driven by specific motives,” Tran said. “Our research tries to show the bias in that and point out their shortcomings.”

Tran’s research stresses the importance of using accurate information to allocate resources so community needs can be met in the most effective ways.

### Prepared and Published

Tran’s paper, titled “When numbers lie: Using data to influence rather than inform opinions and resource allocation,” has been accepted by the *Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy*.

“I never thought I would get to be a first author on a paper this early in my undergraduate career,” Tran said. “I want to become a lawyer so this experience has really helped my writing in many areas, and I’ve learned how to think critically.”

Tran’s paper was also accepted at three undergraduate research conferences. Those conferences were canceled due to the spread of the novel coronavirus, but Tran will still have a chance to present his research next year.

“I had heard college professors didn’t care so much if you succeeded or not, but I’ve found the opposite to be true,” he said. “They genuinely care about providing opportunities to you. Dr. Orazem has taught me so much through our research paper. I’ve been more prepared as a researcher and it has made my classes a lot easier.”

Stacey Maifield. LINK

### Heller, continued from p. 7

“Knowing how that data is produced and how ‘the sausage is made’ is really helpful to my current work at the CBO.”

Heller was excited to play a small role in helping to inform lawmakers who were considering pivotal legislation that made national headlines last spring. She worked on reviewing the final stages of a report that laid out the costs and impacts of a federal minimum wage law.

“We looked at the broader economic impacts and what would happen if the federal minimum wage was raised to \$10, \$12 or \$15,” Heller said.

Last July, the House of Representatives, by a vote of 231 to 199, voted to increase the federal minimum wage to \$15 by 2025. This was the first time in 10 years that the House voted to increase the federal minimum wage.

“It was terrific to be a part of that process and to play a small role in helping to inform lawmakers when they were considering that historic legislation,” Heller said. She is quick to note that her work never involves partisan politics or opinions. Instead, she’s laser focused on imparting numbers and data.

“We don’t tell legislators what to do and we don’t offer suggestions,” she said. “We provide the data to illustrate the short- and long-range effects of their specific policies. They make the decisions about what those numbers mean and the directions in which they want to go.”

Heller moves forward at the CBO, grateful for her Iowa State education. She fondly recalls the undergraduate opportunities, experiences and achievements that shaped her career, solidified her interest in economics and propelled her to serve in the public sector.

“I had terrific mentors at Iowa State, and the economics and math departments were fabulous,” Heller said. “I had incredible personal attention from professors with whom I had meaningful connections.”

As an undergraduate, Heller conducted research on the long-term impacts of gap years on college graduates’ income. The project was part of an Honors seminar which ignited her interest in research. “Iowa State provided my first foray into doing research and working with data,” Heller said. “That planted all of the seeds that have flourished today.”

### Connecting Back to Iowa State

Heller’s love for Iowa State and a desire to give back, compelled her to forge a connection with ISU student Sara Ronnkvist (’20 statistics). After reading about her passion for the census, Heller reached out.

“I read that Sara said working for the census was her dream job,” Heller said. She shared information about U.S. Census Bureau internships and insight on graduate school. She also provided guidance about research opportunities and careers in government.

“Becky definitely helped me to solidify my goals by providing terrific information that helped me plan out my graduate career,” Ronnkvist said. I’m planning my graduate career around the terrific information that she provided.”

### Bright Future

Heller is excited about her future with the CBO and she is committed to the important work that she is doing. April marked her first-year anniversary there.

“I learned so much working for Census, and I’m now able to use all of the information I know about producing data and apply that to my work at the CBO,” Heller said. “I still have connections at the Census and I try to facilitate conversations so the CBO has access to the best census data.”

Whether she’s helping a senator understand the cost of a consumption tax or demonstrating how a new veteran’s program will affect communities—she’s just getting started at the CBO.

No doubt this seasoned economist—who discovered her love of numbers at a young age—will continue making impacts in Congress. Her behind-the-scenes analysis, data and reports could shape policies that impact our communities, lives and futures.

“I think that’s what everybody hopes, that their work is going to make an impact in some way,” Heller said. “And even if it’s small, hopefully it is important to somebody.”

Angie Hagerty. LINK



John Crespi, professor and CARD director

## Crespi Named New Director of CARD

John Crespi has been named director of the Center for Agricultural and Rural Development at Iowa State University. Crespi, a professor of economics, joined the faculty of Iowa State in 2015 and has served as the interim director of CARD since September 2018.

“I see this as an opportunity to be surrounded by research that I’m interested in,” he said. “CARD is a fantastic research center with some of the smartest people working in food, agricultural, and environmental policy, combined with a really gifted staff. I can see why the work people do here has always had an impact on policy.”

Crespi’s past research focused on food marketing and business competitiveness. Some of his recent work at CARD examines the long-run impacts of the 2003 bovine spongiform encephalopathy outbreak in the United States and the vertical coordination of

livestock markets. He is also one of the authors of “The Impact of the 2018 Trade Disruptions on the Iowa Economy,” an award-winning research paper that was the first to quantify the effects of the US-China trade war on Iowa’s economy.

“CARD has a mission to conduct innovative research on local, regional, and global agricultural issues. That won’t change. Five years ago we weren’t expecting a trade war, but it happened, and CARD responded with some excellent research. Climate change is bringing challenges to agriculture; water policy will continue to need good, independent research; and knowing how farm policies translate into things like crop insurance, land values and SNAP benefits are issues that CARD has always examined, and we will continue to do that. You never know what issues you will get called about tomorrow.”

Crespi has bachelor’s degrees in English

and economics from California State University, Sacramento; a master’s degree in economics from Colorado State University; and a doctorate in agricultural and resource economics from the University of California, Davis. Prior to joining Iowa State, he was a professor of agricultural economics at Kansas State University.

For over 60 years, the Center for Agricultural and Rural Development at Iowa State University has conducted innovative public policy and economic research on local, regional, and global agricultural issues, combining academic excellence with engagement and anticipatory thinking to inform and benefit society.

## Moschini Named Distinguished Professor

GianCarlo Moschini, professor and Pioneer Chair in Science and Technology Policy, has been named Charles F. Curtiss Distinguished Professor in Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University.

The designation of Distinguished Professor is a significant achievement and will be part of his university title throughout his tenure at Iowa State University, as well as his emeritus title upon retirement from the university. The designation comes with a raise in salary.

Moschini will be formally recognized at the University Awards Ceremony.

In addition, Moschini, along with coauthors Federico Ciliberto and Edward Perry, is the recipient of the 2020 Quality of Research Discovery Award from the Agricultural & Applied Economics Association (AAEA) for their paper, “Valuing Product Innovation: Genetically Engineered Varieties in US Corn and Soybeans.”



GianCarlo Moschini, distinguished professor and Pioneer Chair in Science and Technology Policy



Chad Hart, professor



Alejandro Plastina, associate professor



Ebby Luvaga, teaching professor



Peter Orazem, university professor

### Hart Promoted

Iowa State University has promoted **Chad Hart** from associate to full professor.

After receiving his Ph.D. from Iowa State University in 1999, Hart served in several positions with the university, starting with postdoctoral research associate, associate scientist, and scientist with CARD, under director Bruce Babcock; then assistant professor and associate professor with the department/extension and outreach, serving as crop markets specialist for the department.

### Plastina Promoted

**Alejandro Plastina** has been awarded tenure and promotion to associate professor. Plastina earned his Ph.D. in agricultural economics from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2007. He has been a member of the Department of Economics as assistant professor since 2014.

### Luvaga New International Ag Coordinator

**Ebby Luvaga**, associate teaching professor, has been advanced to teaching professor, and has also assumed the role of coordinator for the International Agriculture Secondary Major for all CALS majors. In addition to her current position in the economics department, her new responsibilities are to advise all International Ag majors and to sign off on all International Ag paperwork.

In addition, Luvaga was inducted into the Gamma Sigma Delta honor society in recognition of her excellence in agricultural pursuits and to encourage high standards of scholarship in agricultural science and education.

### Orazem on New Committee to Address Sustainability

**Peter Orazem**, university professor, is part of a new university committee

established by President Wendy Wintersteen to improve sustainability at Iowa State.

The University Sustainability Committee is charged with developing a set of actionable recommendations that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase energy efficiency, energy conservation and use of renewable energy with the goal of moving Iowa State toward carbon neutrality.

### CALS Experts Reach +1.7 Billion

The ISU Office of Strategic Relations and Communications shared that recent media coverage featuring CALS experts is “massive” compared to past reports. The top three faculty, all in the Department of Economics, cited in recent publications and their media reach (based on circulation calculated over the last 14 days) are: **Dermot Hayes** – reach of 871.3 million, **Chad Hart** – reach of 655.75 million, **Lee Schulz** – reach of 211 million. The following two stories grabbed the majority of the attention:

Virus Closes Some Meat Plants, Raising Fears of Shortages (Associated Press) featuring Dermot and Chad ran in over 200 different publications (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *U.S. News and World Report*, etc.).

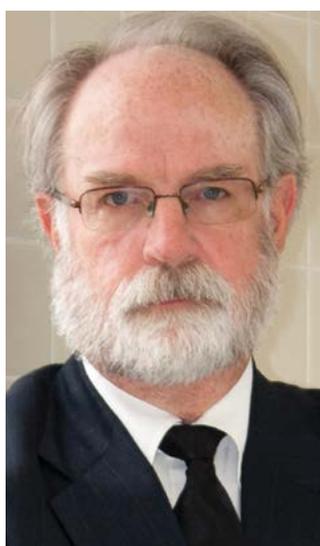


Dermot Hayes, distinguished professor

From caviar to apple juice, coronavirus is changing the way the world feeds itself (*Los Angeles Times*) featuring Lee is one of multiple examples of supply chain coverage.



Neil Harl, emeritus distinguished professor



Mark Edelman, professor



Amani Elobeid, adjunct associate professor



Amy Brandau, academic adviser

### Harl Receives Meritorious Service Award

Family farm agriculture endures as the backbone of a safe and secure national food system because of the tireless advocacy and hard work of men and women across the industry. National Farmers Union (NFU) today presented its highest honor, the Meritorious Service Award, to two of these individuals at the organization's 118th Anniversary Convention.

NFU presented **Dr. Neil E. Harl** of Iowa and Dennis Sjodin of Minnesota with the Meritorious Service Award to Farmers Union and to American Agriculture.

"Both Dr. Harl and Dennis Sjodin spent their careers and lives bettering life for American farm and ranch families and their communities," said NFU President Roger Johnson. "It is important to celebrate champions for family farmers and rural communities and to honor these men in particular for their service. I am proud to recognize their contributions with our organization's highest honor, the Meritorious Service Award."

Harl and Sjodin join past recipients of the Meritorious Service Award, including former Members of Congress and a former United States President, who have made particularly noteworthy contributions to family agriculture, humanity, and Farmers Union at the state and national levels.

### Edelman Given Extension Award

Mark Edelman, professor, is this year's recipient of the North Central Region's Excellence in Extension Award. The award is presented to individuals who have strived throughout their careers through their local, state, regional, or national responsibilities to achieve the benchmarks reflective of excellence in Extension educational programming.

The North Central Cooperative Extension Association said of Edelman: "Your programming and the leadership you provide to enhancing rural economic vitality in Iowa is outstanding and serves as a great example of excellence."

### Elobeid Excellence in Teaching Awardee

**Amani Elobeid**, adjunct assistant professor, received the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' Excellence in Teaching by Lecturers and Adjunct Faculty Award.

Elobeid teaches large lecture format classes in introductory macroeconomics, introductory microeconomics and introduction to agricultural markets.

Elobeid constantly adapts her teaching methods to incorporate new technologies, identify student needs and encourage students. She developed a new online introductory economics class based on the latest learning concepts and designed and led study abroad classes to the United Arab Emirates. Her teaching

methods consistently get positive reviews and evaluations from her students.

In addition, the Iowa State University Provost's Office has announced the approval of advancement for Amani Elobeid from adjunct assistant professor to adjunct associate professor, effective July 1, 2020.

### Brandau Receives Learning Community Coordinator Award

**Amy Brandau**, an agricultural business academic adviser, received the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' Learning Community Coordinator Award. She was previously recognized as part of the CALS staff for her learning communities service at the Learning Communities Institute in May 2019.

Brandau advises transfer students and coordinates the agricultural business learning community. She works with prospective students, peer mentors, transfer students and club officers to help students feel welcome and on track for graduation.

Brandau also works with the transfer learning community. Her goal is to inspire, engage and challenge students to become successful graduates. To do that she creates a community experience that's safe, professional and supportive. She also works to foster learning by helping students learn about themselves, gain professional skills and work with teams.



### Kimle Advanced

The Iowa State University Provost's Office has announced the approval of advancements for **Kevin Kimle**. He has been advanced to teaching professor (from associate teaching professor), effective July 1, 2020.

### Department Adds New MSAE Program in Fall 2020

The new Master of Science in Agricultural Economics is a one-year, professional-track program designed to yield job-ready graduates with advanced training in applied economics. Students graduating from the program will be well-positioned for careers in agribusiness finance, farm management, agribusiness extension, risk analysis, commodity market analysis, agricultural policy, and other similar fields.



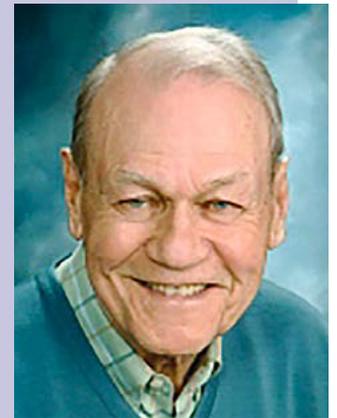
### Travel Fund Honors Artz

The Executive Board of the Agricultural & Applied Economics Association (AAEA) recently approved a proposal for an endowed graduate student travel fund in honor of Economics Department Associate Professor **Georganne Artz**, who passed away April 25, 2019.

### Luckett Passes

**Dudley Luckett**, Emeritus Distinguished Professor in Liberal Arts and Sciences, passed away January 24, 2020.

Luckett began his career as a member of the faculty in the department in 1958. During his career, he authored or co-authored eighteen journal articles on monetary economics as well as a textbook, *Money and Banking*, which went through three editions between 1976 and 1984.



## staff updates



**Katherine (Katie) Harris-Lagoudakis** started as assistant professor in Aug. 2019.



**Donghyuk Kim** joined the faculty as assistant professor in fall 2019.



**Jian Li** came to Iowa State Department of Economics as assistant professor in fall 2019.



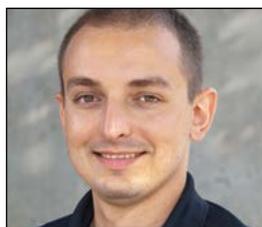
**Bertan Turhan** joined the department as assistant professor beginning fall 2019.



**Darin Wohlgenuth** became the director of undergraduate studies in Jan. 2020.



**Karen Kovarik** moved to the administrative assistant position in Feb. 2020.



**Rafael Pluta** started as the new department administrative specialist Sept. 2019.



**Lydia Richards** joined the department as student services specialist July 2019.



**Lisa Stephany** joined the pre-award support team for economics and CARD Oct. 2019.



**Marty Watt** started at Iowa State as the new cost center manager in Nov. 2019.



Christopher Pudenz



Jose Borunda



Brady Read



Cody Tjossem



Macy Janssen



Wendiam Sawadgo

**Pudenz Wins Galm scholarship**

**Christopher Pudenz**, second year Ph.D. student, was chosen to receive the 2019 Tim Galm Graduate Scholarship in Agricultural Economics. The \$5,000 scholarship rewards promising Department of

Economics graduate students with a focus on Agricultural Economics.

Pudenz has been working as a research assistant with **Lee Schulz**. His research has been related to livestock economics, with an emphasis on animal health economics and the economics of biosecurity adoption. He also has an interest in livestock marketing, with a paper co-authored with Dr. Schulz pertaining to price discovery in the cattle market currently under review.

The Galm scholarship was established by Molly G. Mulqueen, in memory of her husband, Tim Galm ('74 MS ag econ). Galm's first job after Iowa State was farm management specialist for the Iowa State University Extension Service in northwest Iowa.

**New Position for Sawadgo**

An econ department Ph.D. candidate **Wendiam Sawadgo** will join the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology at the University of Auburn (Alabama) as Assistant Professor/Extension Economist next August. His focal areas will be Agricultural Production, Risk Management, and Agricultural Policy.

**Undergrad Students Win National Tech Award**

Four College of Agricultural Life Sciences students were recognized with the prestigious Low-Code Innovation's "Highest Return on Investment" award for an employee-facing smartphone app design. **Kate Collins**,

ag business senior from Adel, was part of the Landus Cooperative app project team recognized with a global award. Category winners hailed from Brazil, Philippines, and Australia.

**Ag Business Students Compete in Innovation Pitch**

On Feb. 18 three agricultural business students competed and qualified from CALS in the College-by-College Pitch Off at the new Student Innovation Center.

**Zach Ritland** and **Jared Fisher** won in the new idea category with their job recruitment tool for connecting talent between farmers and community colleges. **Natalie Eick** won in the existing business category for her company Hightail Ice Cream.



Laura Mincks, ag life science education; Josh Carlson, ag studies; Josh Halbur, ag systems technology; Kate Collins, ag business (left to right)



Ag business juniors Zach Ritland and Natalie Eick; Jared Fisher, ag business senior (left to right)



Zach Leist



Tyler Meyer

## CALS Students Inducted into Cardinal Key Honor Society

Cardinal Key Honor Society is Iowa State University's highest honor society. Each year it selects new student members who embody four virtues: scholarship, leadership, service and character.

This year three agricultural business students were inducted into Cardinal Key. 2020 Cardinal Key inductees:

**Jose Borunda**, senior  
**Brady Read**, senior  
**Cody Tjossem**, senior

## The Iowa Chapter of Gamma Sigma Delta Honor Society Awardees

Gamma Sigma Delta, the Honor Society of Agriculture, has announced the winners of annual awards presented to Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences faculty, students and alumni.

Gamma Sigma Delta is a faculty-governed agriculture honor society. Its purpose is to encourage excellence in agricultural pursuits and to encourage high standards of scholarship in agricultural science and education. Because the awards ceremony was canceled due to COVID-19, each winner will receive a certificate from Gamma Sigma Delta in recognition.

The new agricultural business inductees include:

**Dawson Fischer**, junior  
**Macy Janssen**, junior  
**Zackery Leist**, senior  
**Tyler Meyer**, senior  
**Cody Tjossem**, senior

## Thanks For Your Support!

The Department of Economics deeply appreciates the generosity of all the wonderful friends and alumni who help fund the needs of the department. Your help plays an important role in making possible cutting-edge research by our faculty, new equipment, funds for student groups to travel to conferences, and many community outreach activities.

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|--|--|--|
| Ag Processing Inc.                       | Drs. Steve and Diane Halbrook          | Dr. Stahis and Mrs. Joyce Panagides    |
| Mr. Jim and Mrs. Cathryn Ahrenholz       | Mr. Daniel Harrell                     | Dr. Coleen Pantalone                   |
| Mr. John Allender                        | Dr. Dermot and Ms. Caroline Hayes      | Mr. Gary Parker                        |
| Archer Daniels Midland Company           | Drs. Claudia and Robert Heath          | Mr. Kyle Phillips                      |
| Mr. Thomas and Mrs. Georgene Arthur      | Helena Agri-Enterprises LLC            | Mr. Joel Phipps                        |
| Mr. Edwin Bartine                        | Mr. Chad and Ms. Heidi Hertz           | Mrs. Teri and Mr. Matthew Prochaska    |
| Mr. Gregg Behrens                        | Mr. Tom Hertz                          | Dr. Allan Rahn                         |
| Ms. Beverly Bowers                       | Mrs. Mina Hertz Jacobs                 | Mrs. Patricia Reed                     |
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| Corteva Agriscience                      | Dr. George Judge                       | Mr. Harold and Ms. Brenda See          |
| Prof. John Crespi                        | Mr. Ed and Mrs. Gayle Juhl             | Mr. Roger and Mrs. Sharon Selley       |
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