

The Hoot

FALL 2025



Greetings everyone! As fall settles in here in Moscow — with colorful leaves and crisp mornings — it's a perfect time to reflect on the accomplishments of our students, staff and faculty.

Beginning last spring, our faculty dedicated many hours to reviewing our degree programs and courses to identify the best opportunities for our students. The goal was to ensure both degree plans equip graduates with the knowledge and skills needed for success in their future careers. While this was a significant undertaking, the updated courses and degree plans are now well underway — adapting to the needs of future professionals and aligning closely with evolving career paths.

I'm especially excited about our future teachers who will begin their internships this spring. They are working diligently — both in and out of class — to learn, practice and demonstrate high levels of proficiency in both formal and informal teaching.

With application of these attained attributes next semester (at many schools across the state), they should be ideal candidates for employment in the upcoming school year.

Our other degree plan, in agricultural science, communications and leadership, continues to thrive. Garrett Brogan is leading extensive efforts to develop and coordinate courses — collaborating with other university departments to ensure they meet our students' needs.

We're excited about the

LETTER FROM THE *Department Head*

opportunities awaiting these students after graduation, as well as the impressive skills and projects they are developing through their coursework and university experiences. Stay tuned to learn more about what AELC students are attaining and their impact in agriculture!

On behalf of everyone in AELC, I can confidently say that we deeply value our students and our role in serving Idaho's agricultural community. Our focus remains on providing the best possible education, opportunities and experiences for our students.

We continue to engage in activities across the state and to build strong partnerships with other institutions — all to better serve the people of Idaho.

Go Vandals!

-Don W. Edgar, Ph.D.

By the Numbers: Fall 2025

Compiled by AELC Staff

43

ASCL Undergraduates

55

AGED Undergraduates

10

Graduate Students

5

States our students
are from

643

Experiential learning
hours logged by AELC
students

3,273+

Interactions on
social media
posts

Cultivating Leaders

AELC Department Staff



Don Edgar

Department Head and Professor



Garrett Brogan

Assistant Professor



Keith Frost

Assistant Professor



**Amanda
Moore-Kriwox**

Program Specialist and Academic
Coordinator



Melissa Sherman

Idaho FFA Executive Director



Kasee Smith

Associate Professor



Sarah Swenson

Administrative Coordinator



Kattlyn Wolf

Professor

All Roads Lead Home

by Jewelia Hawker



Dean Leslie Edgar finds her way back to Idaho as the new Dean of CALS.

Even while living in states like Georgia

and New Mexico, Leslie Edgar's home state has always held a special place in her heart. Now, she is back in the state and serving as the J.R. Simplot Endowed Dean for the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Idaho. Edgar is stepping into this new position with her best foot forward and a goal to communicate the good work that the university does to the people it serves.

Edgar's journey in agriculture started in her hometown of Kuna. There she grew up on a small family farm and built meaningful connections with her high school agricultural teacher, who she remains in contact with today.

"We often text and joke with each other that no one would have pictured us being where we are today," Edgar says.

She also carries this outlook when speaking about her other life experiences.

Edgar started her college education at Ricks College, which is now Brigham Young University -Idaho, and then transferred to Utah State University where she graduated with a degree in animal science and a minor in business. Her original goal was to open and operate her own veterinary clinic, but that plan changed with the birth of her twins.

She didn't let a change in

direction put a stop to her desire to further her education as she went on to get her master's degree in agricultural systems, technology and education again from Utah State University. A few years later, Edgar attended Texas A&M University to get her doctoral degree in agricultural leadership, education and communications.

She says, "What I would tell students today is embrace every single experience you have and let it really create the path of where you're going to be in the future."

In similar fashion to her education, her work experience has taken her life in different directions than she planned. That's why Edgar says it's important to be ready for whatever may come your way.

"I think it's the same - just embrace every single opportunity you have in your professional career and use it," she explains.

Out of all the job titles she has held, the one position Edgar says she misses the most is being a teacher. She enjoyed sharing information with younger generations and seeing the impact it would have on their lives and world perspective. When she served as the director of international programs at the University of Arkansas, she had the opportunity to see this impact firsthand.

As she says, "Regardless of what we were doing in that country, every time I brought a student back to the United

States, they had a deep appreciation for this country."

She later moved on to the University of Georgia as a department head before serving as the associate dean and experiment station director for New Mexico State University. Her last role was at Washington State University where she served as the associate dean of research.

When the dean position opened, Edgar saw an opportunity for her to come back home. She was looking forward to working with colleagues and friends she had met to help move agriculture forward in Idaho.

Now she gets to be involved in Idaho agriculture through 10 research and extension centers and 42 UI extension county offices that serve all 44 counties in the state. She hopes to be intentional with the research the college is doing and hopes to meet the specific needs of producers in her home state.

Dean Edgar set out to help the agricultural community by having a veterinary service practice but spent most of her career teaching the next generation of agricultural leaders. Although the path was uncertain at times, she has never stopped moving forward in her education and career. She has been across the country advocating for the agricultural industry, and now she can do the same here in Idaho. Edgar's story is a testament to the old saying - all roads lead home.

From Blue Jackets to Silver and Gold

by Gracie Swope

For years, former Idaho FFA officers have continued their path as leaders in agriculture at the University of Idaho.

Idaho doesn't just grow crops, it grows leaders. Since 1889, the University of Idaho has played a significant role in developing those leaders. For many years, Idaho FFA state officers have retired their blue corduroy jackets for U of I silver and gold.

The College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) has been a place for many past officers to further their leadership skills and knowledge

of agriculture. The blue jacket teaches members how to serve, and at U of I, students learn how to turn that service into a lifelong career. The tie between FFA and U of I has helped shape Idaho agriculture into what it is today, through research collaborations, Extension efforts and scholarships.

The Agricultural Education, Leadership and Communications department is proud to house

archives of old photos dating back to the beginning of Idaho FFA. Each image holds a rich history showcasing generations of leaders and detailing the tradition of agriculture throughout the state of Idaho.

Below are two former students found in those archives, and a small part of the story sharing how both Idaho FFA and CALS led them into their futures.

Charlie Vogel, Idaho FFA State Reporter 1996-1997



Vogel began his academic career at U of I and studied agricultural education. He then went on to earn his master's degree in business administration at Colorado State University.

Vogel was an educator and FFA advisor in Colorado for seven years. He then went on to do many agricultural-based careers, including welding, agronomy and serving as the executive director for a wheat research council.

Jose Gabiola, Idaho FFA State Treasurer 1989-1990



Gabiola received his bachelor's in animal and veterinary science at U of I. During his time at the university, he was a member of the livestock and meat judging team. Gabiola then went on to work for the USDA as a consumer safety officer. He has worked there for 32 years.

As Idaho agriculture evolves, the bond between FFA and U of I remains strong. Both entities share a deep-rooted passion for cultivating agricultural leaders. This

connection makes silver and gold a likely place for FFA members, from Idaho and other states to find themselves as they continue on their journey after they retire their blue jackets.

We are pleased to house this history and grateful to every former FFA member who chose to become a Vandal as they continued their leadership and personal journey.

When Plans Change, Purpose Remains:

by Brynn Kelley

A high-impact experience in resilience and global food security.

In spring 2025, students were given the chance at a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: the Global Orientation to Agriculture Learning (GOALs) program. Designed to help future educators understand global food security, the program brought together students from the University of Idaho, Pennsylvania State University, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Tuskegee University and Alcorn State University.

At the time of application, the plan seemed perfectly mapped: a yearlong experience with fall and spring coursework, immersion at the Norman Borlaug International Dialogue in Des Moines, a spring teaching immersion and a summer study experience in Belize. Five U of I students — Addilee Carter, Sage Cochrane, Braydon Drake, Delainee Ellsworth and Brynn Kelley — were selected to represent Idaho in this national cohort. Everything was set for the fifth year of the program to be a success.

Then, everything changed.



In August 2025, faculty learned that federal funding through the USDA Higher Education Challenge grant had been unexpectedly terminated. In that moment, the program's future — and the students' long-awaited opportunity — was at risk.

Instead of letting the setback end the experience, faculty partners across the five universities, including Kasee Smith at U of I, went to work pooling institutional support and reshaping the experience so students could still engage in meaningful learning. The redesigned program preserved its core purpose: preparing adaptable, globally minded agricultural educators who understand the complexities of food security and the interconnected nature of agriculture worldwide.

When the program structure changed, students also adapted. They adjusted to a different immersion structure, reframed their expectations and continued to show up with determination and curiosity.

Rather than viewing the changes as setbacks, they embraced them as part of the learning process — an authentic lesson in the realities of life. Their ability to remain flexible, stay engaged and find purpose in uncertainty became one of the defining strengths of the 2025 cohort. Through each challenge, they demonstrated the very qualities — grit, reflection and creative problem-solving — that can help



solve complex challenges like those within global food security.

After returning from the World Food Prize in October, U of I students reflected on how the experience expanded their perspectives and deepened their commitment to teaching about global agriculture.

In Des Moines, they met with world leaders, innovators and advocates tackling the most pressing challenges in food security. Those conversations helped them see the profession of agricultural education as part of a much larger global network — one where knowledge and empathy cross borders and teachers are the conduit for change.

They came home with new ideas, professional connections and a renewed sense of purpose. Although the program looked different from its original plan, students agreed that the opportunity to engage directly with international leaders and forward-thinking educators gave them a lasting advantage.

This year, perhaps even more than the previous four cohorts, they learned that adaptability is more than a skill — it's a mindset that will serve both them and their future students.

We've got something big...

COMING THIS SPRING!

**AELC
students are
creating a
magazine!**

Excitement is growing in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences as Agricultural Education, Leadership, and Communications (AELC) students prepare to launch a college magazine this spring. Created and written entirely by students, the publication will highlight the people, programs and innovations that make CALS a leader in agricultural excellence. Watch for the first issue this spring!

Interested in supporting the magazine? Advertising space is available to help support our production costs and promote your organization within the CALS community. For more details, contact Garrett Brogan at gbrogan@uidaho.edu.

For the Future

by Jenna Whitaker

Alumnus Buddy Carter endows scholarships to support and inspire the next generation.

Decades after sitting in his first agricultural education class at the University of Idaho, Buddy Carter is still finding ways to help students succeed.

Carter came to U of I as a student in 1967. After serving in the U.S. Army and Idaho National Guard for a few years, he returned and completed his degree in 1973. His career led him to classrooms across northern Idaho and eastern Washington, helping build strong agricultural education programs in places like Deary, Colville and Garfield-Palouse.

After retiring, Carter and his wife, Sheryl, decided they

wanted to support the next generation of students from their alma maters, the University of Idaho and Idaho State University.

"I have always had the urge to help and support agricultural education programs and students," Carter shares.

The Carters made provisions in their estates for scholarships to be endowed, meaning the original donation is invested, and the interest from the funds is used to create scholarships.

It's thanks to people like Carter the Department of Agricultural Education, Leadership and Communications is able to continue providing support and

opportunities for its students.

From all of us in the department, thank you for choosing to invest and believe in the future of agriculture.



'Hoo' Knows Best?

Compiled by Madi Knapp

Faculty share advice for success and life with students.

The University of Idaho Agricultural Education and Leadership (AELC) Department has some wonderful faculty. Often, students will come to their professors with questions ranging from what class to take to where to go on their next road trip. Somehow they have all the answers. To share this wealth of knowledge with the world, these wise owls are starting an advice column.



What's something you wish you knew as a young adult/student?

I wish I knew that everything did not have to be perfect. Sometimes there is not enough time in the day or week to have everything perfect. There were/are many times when we should have finished that project to move to the next item on our list of to-dos.

— Don Edgar



How do you gain more confidence in your agricultural knowledge?

I am a huge fan of agricultural tours. National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) state and regional meetings often offer great ones. I always love learning about new and innovative agricultural technologies in person. If you can't always see things in person, there are a lot of "Ag Influencers" these days. Bales Hay Sales & Feed Store is one of my favorites. I would encourage anyone in the industry to keep learning.

— Kattlyn Wolf



How do I balance my social life with academics and other extracurriculars?

Your college experience is definitely more than going to class, but the primary purpose of being here is to learn things that will be beneficial to your future career. Balance can be tough but is a constant in life. Make sure you prioritize school work, plan for deadlines and ensure you schedule time for extracurriculars. Get a good calendar and holding yourself accountable to study when you've planned to study can minimize distractions like doom scrolling or streaming an entire Netflix series and maximize the balance.

— Kasee Smith



What is the best way to combat being homesick?

Stay busy. Involve yourself in activities on campus whether they're formal activities or simply get-togethers in the dorm. But, it's OK to call/text/FaceTime mom and dad. They are always happy to hear from you and give you a little advice. It's normal to feel homesick at times while you're away, so don't feel bad if you are. Check in with family and then find something happening on campus that you can participate in.

— Sarah Swenson



What is the best outdoor/recreational activity in the area?

We are situated near so many beautiful lakes near Coeur d'Alene and even south to Dworshak Reservoir. So many great places to go paddleboarding and enjoy the water. There are also so many great hiking trails nearby.

— Garrett Brogan

ROOTED *in tradition,* GROWING *toward tomorrow*

The history and future of AELC Leadership
by Madi Rudner

Every generation leaves its mark on agriculture. At the University of Idaho, the Department of Agricultural Education, Leadership and Communications (AELC) is focused on shaping the next generation. Under the guidance of professors Don Edgar, Kasee Smith, Keith Frost, Kattlyn Wolf and Garrett Brogan, the department is growing its program, modernizing classrooms and preparing students to lead in the growing agricultural world. It's a new chapter for AELC, one that is grounded in deep roots and reaching towards a bold, bright future.

Long before today's technological tools and precision agricultural systems, there was a vision: to train teachers, leaders and communicators who would bring agricultural knowledge into Idaho's classrooms and communities. That's where Susie Whittington, Ph.D., comes in.

Her name now resonates in national agricultural education circles, but Whittington's early career is tied to building the educational foundations that departments like AELC stand on today.

Though Whittington is more widely recognized in her work at The Ohio State University,

where she taught for 25 years, she has roots that connect back to the early days of the U of I agricultural education program, serving as one of the first professors in agriculture teacher preparation. Her efforts to shape curriculum, mentor students and build bridges between theory and practice have shaped the DNA of AELC today.

Whittington's long career has included teaching Methods of Teaching Agriculture for over 25 years, creating courses like Toward Cultural Proficiency, and authoring key textbooks in agricultural pedagogy. She has also been recognized for her excellence in teaching, receiving national awards from USDA and the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture (NACTA).

In many ways, Whittington's legacy is a bridge linking the older traditions of agricultural education to the evolving demands

of modern teaching. Her focus on strong critical thinking, philosophy, teacher preparation and student engagement laid a foundation that leaders like Edgar and Smith are building upon.

For Edgar, agriculture has always been more than a profession; it's a way of life. Growing up on a ranch in



Dr. Whittington & University of Idaho agricultural education senior at U of I homecoming 2025

southwest Texas, Edgar spent 14 years teaching high school agriculture down south before joining U of I, where he now leads the AELC department.

“Understanding the value of agriculture has always been in my life,” he explains. “Seeing firsthand its impact on young people instilled in me that what we do vv education, leadership and communications is so important to so many people in Idaho and the nation.”

As the department head, Edgar sees his role as creating an opportunity for both him and the faculty in AELC to grow.

“Our responsibility is to find ways to positively impact students at the University of Idaho,” he notes. “We have the best faculty and staff who strive to provide valuable educational experiences.”

For faculty and staff in the AELC department, connections are the key. From supporting transfer students through partnerships with the College of Southern Idaho, College of Western Idaho and other community colleges, to recruiting students from out of state, they are expanding graduate offerings and building industry connections.

“Being able to attract future faculty, staff and students by showing our passion for what we do is essential to a successful program,” Edgar says.

The department is also making efforts to expand its reach. One example is the 2+2 degree option. This option allows students to complete their first two years at a community college and then transfer to U of I for their final two years to earn a bachelor’s degree. This option allows AELC to bring its offerings to students in rural areas, community colleges and places far from

Moscow.

Smith and Edgar both stress the importance of “meeting students where they are.”

Greater access means more voices in agricultural leadership — voices from places and communities that too often go unheard.

Smith is an associate professor in AELC and believes innovation isn’t about replacing tradition but about strengthening it. Her work in agricultural education and communication blends storytelling, leadership and technology to help students prepare for what’s next in the field.

“We’re at a point where what students learn in the classroom has to match what the industry demands,” Smith says. “Integrating new tools, whether digital platforms, data systems or communication technologies, is going to define who leads agriculture over the next few decades.”

That mindset is shaping how AELC approaches teaching and learning. The department is experimenting with new technologies, including AI-driven tools, to give students hands-on experiences that mirror real-world challenges.

“We have an AI robot in the classroom this semester,” Edgar said. “What it can offer students now and, in the future, should be amazing.”

Smith believes innovation must also come with connection. Through community partnerships, outreach and experiential learning, AELC students are gaining real-world experience and learning how to use their voices to advocate for agriculture.

“When a student takes what they’ve learned here back home,” she says, “they

start conversations, influence practices and strengthen their communities.”

As the department continues to evolve, its mission remains deeply rooted in the values that started it all: education, leadership and service.

The department’s commitment to honoring tradition while embracing innovation ensures that every student who walks through its doors is equipped to make a difference in agriculture and beyond.

With passionate faculty, growing programs and a focus on connection and opportunity, AELC isn’t just preparing students for the future — it’s helping shape the future of agriculture itself. Rooted in tradition, and growing toward tomorrow, the department stands as a testament to the power of learning, leadership and legacy.



Herbert Lattig, first department head

We feel incredibly fortunate for the strong leaders who provided leadership to our department over the last 99 years. Our department heads have included:

- H.E. Lattig
- Herbert Winner
- Douglas Kindschy
- Lou Riesenber
- Douglas Pals
- James (Jim) Connors
- Don Edgar

Breaking Ground

by Kaylee Moody

All-female cohort redefines agricultural education at the University of Idaho.

This year marks a milestone for the University of Idaho's agricultural education program. In 2025, for the second time in the program's history, the cohort of students is made up entirely of women — the largest female only cohort ever in the Department of Agricultural Education, Leadership and Communications.

These eight students are reshaping the landscape of agricultural education and redefining what leadership looks like in the industry. Their presence marks a turning point not just for the university, but for the broader agricultural community as more women step into teaching and leadership roles across the country.

Kasee Smith, a professor of agricultural education at U of I, says the milestone is exciting and significant for the future of the program.

"Our students get more classroom experience than almost any other ag-ed program in the country," Smith says. "They're not just learning theory, they're out there teaching."

Smith says the cohort is preparing for student teaching placements this spring and is among the strongest groups the department has seen in recent years.

"As these eight women prepare for student teaching, they're paving the way for future cohorts," she says. "They're proving that passion and skill matter more than gender in

shaping the future of agriculture. We're proud of them. They represent the best of what agricultural education can be."

Smith says that while agriculture in the U.S. can be viewed as a male-dominated industry, women have always played essential agricultural roles.

"Globally, women have always played a crucial role from food production to livestock care," she says. "In the United States, we've seen that same shift happening over time."



Women were first allowed to join FFA in 1969, and since then the number of female students in agricultural education has steadily grown. Smith said that in the last decade, the field has seen a dramatic increase in female educators and leaders.

"In the last decade, we've actually seen the field become dominated by women," she says. "Here at the University of Idaho, our last all-female cohort was in 2015, when there were only two students. This year, we have eight."

While the increase in female

representation is a positive sign of progress, Smith said the trend has also come with new challenges, particularly in recruiting male students into the teaching field. More women are finding their voices and passions in agricultural education, which is something to celebrate. But it's also a priority to make sure men continue to pursue teaching agriculture. Diversity in experiences, perspectives and teaching styles only strengthens our classrooms.

The milestone is not only about celebrating the accomplishments of this year's all-female cohort but also about reflecting on the importance of balance and inclusion within the profession. The field of agricultural education thrives when it welcomes and uplifts everyone.

Agriculture, after all, has always depended on individuals of all backgrounds to bring their unique perspectives to the table. That same spirit of collaboration and shared purpose continues to shape the future of agricultural education.

As the 2025 cohort prepares to enter classrooms across Idaho and beyond, they carry with them both the weight and the promise of this historic moment. Their success marks change for women in agriculture, but is also a reminder of the field's ongoing commitment to inclusivity and a reminder that anyone can shape the next generation of students.



The Master Plan

by Kenzie Barta

A look into the life of an AELC master's student.

When undergraduate students enter their first day of the fall semester as freshmen, the countdown for the next four years starts ticking. But the opportunities to expand knowledge and experiences do not end there.

For students interested in continuing their educational journey, the Department of Agricultural Education, Leadership and Communications (AELC) offers the opportunity to earn a master's degree in agricultural education. There are currently 10 graduate students in the department who are enhancing their skills before jumping into teaching the next generation of agricultural advocates.

Ellie Tesnohldek, a current graduate student, will graduate in May 2026. Originally from Fruitland, Tesnohldek received a bachelor's degree from U of I in 2024 in animal and veterinary science before deciding to pursue agricultural education.

"I was not entirely sure what I wanted to do after graduation ... I knew in the long run I always wanted to be an ag teacher," she says.

Tesnohldek decided to follow many of her family members' footsteps by preparing for the classroom at U of I. She will complete her graduate degree with her teaching internship in Middleton during spring 2026.

The life of a master's student is flexible, says Tesnohldek. The degree's academic plans are

altered to fit the needs of the students to accommodate full-time or part-time students. It can also be completed at a distance while working full-time.

Tesnohldek works on both research and teaching tasks as a graduate assistant. She is involved in two research studies while being a full-time student on campus and also works as a teaching assistant.

One research project included examining various definitions of consensus in previously conducted research studies. This work was presented at a research conference in Texas, and she plans to continue this project in the future. She also completed a study exploring noncognitive skills of FFA members at competitions.

When not in class or working on research, Tesnohldek helps grade, teach and schedule materials for classes. This includes her current assignment, AGED 4060: Exploring International Agriculture. She assists both in and out of the classroom.

Tesnohldek says she has learned how to be a professional teacher and that there are multiple ways to go about instructing students through hands-on educational experiences.

"I got to see different types of teachers, professors and lecturers in multiple subjects," she says. "There is a huge difference between teachers in the classroom and industry

professionals."

The varied experiences helped her plan how she wants to pursue teaching in the future.

"My favorite part of being a graduate student is being an individual that undergraduate students can come to confide in ... it helps prepare me for being a teacher," Tesnohldek says. "My goal has always been to advocate for agriculture. This degree path will allow me to advocate at a younger age."

She advises those interested in graduate programs to look into being involved in undergraduate research before entering graduate studies. She believes the master's program is a great opportunity to take the next step in any degree path for guidance and to learn more about career opportunities.

Master's students in the department all have different plans designed to fit their career goals. The 10 students include Savannah Carpenter, Hannah Doumit, Mindy Raymond, Elizabeth Smith, Hannah Stolfus, Blaze Swan, Ellie Tesnohldek, Cade Wallace, SheilAnne Smith and Elise Wilkins.

The AELC department is proud to provide the chance for both educators and communicators to enhance their skills. If you are interested in a master's program or want to learn more about what the opportunity has to offer, contact one of the professors in the AELC department.

Always Innovating

by Ainsley Goughnour

AELC students and faculty are engaged in a variety of research projects.

The University of Idaho Department of Agricultural Education, Leadership and Communications (AELC) is no stranger to innovative research.

Faculty, graduate students and undergraduates are regularly involved in research projects, and this year is no exception. These research projects are commonly used to better our community. Current research projects taking place within the department include studying gender roles in FFA and agriculture education, handicap accessibility of agriculture classroom shops and credibility using AI imaging.

There are five students currently involved in a research class with faculty in the AELC department, Caylie Browne, Madi Rudner, Rachel Wandell, Kenzie Barta, Emma Laugle and Elise Wilkins.

Wilkins is currently a part of the research team looking into gender roles in agriculture education alongside department head Don Edgar. They are primarily looking at gender perception in agricultural mechanics from student and teacher perspectives. Although the research is in the early stages, they have developed a written paper survey to learn how students perceive agricultural mechanics. Another survey was created and given to student teacher candidates with the hopes of being able to gauge their confidence level when it comes to

teaching these courses. These surveys will be taken two more times this semester as part of their research study.

Wilkins says she's looking forward to using the data to better prepare student teachers.

"There are a lot of perceptions and biases when it comes to female ag teachers and that is what we're looking to mitigate," Wilkins explains. "As a female myself in the field of ag-education who is mostly confident in the mechanics area, it's super important to me that we start to rid the fear and lack of confidence that is often present in young female teachers when instructing about mechanical processes."

Rudner is actively researching the accessibility of welding shops in the classroom and ADA compliance through a project being led by faculty member Keith Frost. Shop classes in

agriculture education play a pivotal role in providing hands-on experiences for all students. Rudner has a history of working with students with special needs, which has heavily impacted her life. She wants to help invest in making agricultural education classrooms and shops more accessible for all students.

"The end goal is for kids to feel welcome in the shop," Rudner says. "Hopefully this is a step in the right direction of helping them feel like they are welcome and can do anything that they put their mind to."

The research is also looking into what roadblocks limit schools from creating more ADA accessible shops.

Research for all projects is in the early phases with a lot on the horizon, as the department continues to blaze a path towards innovating and improving the agricultural community.

The AELC department is continually contributing to the legacy of the University of Idaho being an accredited R1 research university. With two thirds of U of I's undergraduate population being involved in research, the AELC department is providing exceptional opportunities for their students to be involved in the ground breaking research taking place across campus.



Course Connection: AGED 2580

by Amber Lemrick

Agricultural education students learn by doing.

There's no better classroom than the real world. For students majoring in agricultural education, AGED 2580 gives future educators the tools to help their students learn by doing.

AGED 2580, Experiential Learning and Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) Programs, is a class that allows students to contemplate how experiential learning concepts work in an agricultural education program.

Students in this class begin with an understanding of how experiential learning and hands-on knowledge are formed, and each student completes an

assignment to evaluate how they learn best through experience.

As the course progresses, students complete a foundational project focused on developing personal skills and an immersion activity which allows them to gain skills in a specific area of agriculture. Over the course of the semester, each student logs 80 hours of experiential learning into the Agricultural Experience Tracker (AET), a system many will use as teachers.

The class models the SAE for ALL program which is embedded in high school agricultural education programs. SAE programs at the high school level

allow students to gain hands-on experiences in the agriculture industry and earn rewards for developing skills.

KaraAnn Akers, a sophomore studying agricultural education, appreciates the experiential components the course offers.

"There's a lot of hands-on activities that directly tie to what's important," Akers says.

As students in AGED 2580 dig into their own foundational and immersion SAEs, they're learning how to teach using experiential learning concepts to plant the seeds for the next generation of agricultural leaders — one project at a time.

Cultivating Community Through Clubs

by Danika Kuck

Highlighting a few of the many clubs AELC students are using to build their skills outside of the classroom.

Polo Club

This club brings together students who share a passion for horsemanship, teamwork and competition. These members represent the Vandals in collegiate matches across the Northwest.

AELC student Braydon Drake benefits from this club as a varsity player who strives to be a leader that guides his teammates to success.

U of I Rodeo Team

The team competes across the Northwest in a variety of events ranging from roughstock riding and roping to barrel racing.

Layla Knight, this year's team president, says, "The sport of rodeo is something that has always been number one in my life. Getting the opportunity to continue my sport into college has been amazing."

Women in Agriculture Club

This group empowers students as leaders, advocates and professionals in agriculture. Through networking and hands-on learning, members promote the role of women in agriculture.

"It gives me the opportunity to network with other women that are passionate for agriculture," says Addilee Carter, a sophomore

in the club. "It's given me a community of women that support each other and lift each other up."

Collegiate FFA

This group gives students opportunities to lead and serve. Through community outreach and professional development, members take pride in furthering the blue and gold.

Madi Knapp says, "I love how interactive the club is, there is always something new. I love how it is a club based on service and giving back to our community."

From Classroom to Capitol

by Allison Kinzer

Shawn Dygert's journey to lifelong advocacy in agriculture education.

Shawn Dygert is a proud Vandal and lifelong advocate for agricultural education. Raised in the ranching community of Pingree, his passion for agriculture led him to pursue a bachelor's degree at Utah State University and a master's degree at the University of Idaho.

Dygert shaped generations of students through hands-on learning, leadership development and career readiness over 35 years as an agricultural educator teacher and FFA advisor—33 of those in the Kuna program.

His journey into education began with a simple opportunity: standing in front of a classroom. A simple moment that sparked a passion that would define his career.

Dygert says student teaching played a pivotal role in shaping his philosophy: *education should be immersive, practical and student-centered*. Leading content-related classes helped him realize the deep impact a teacher could have on a student's life.

Throughout his career, Dygert prioritized real-world experiences. He organized summer conferences that

connected students directly with industry professionals. These weren't just lectures — they were interactive, career-focused events.

"We'd bring in folks from across the ag industry; ranchers, soil scientists, irrigation specialists and let students rotate through hands-on stations," Dygert says. These conferences became a hallmark of his teaching approach, giving students not only knowledge but confidence, connections and sometimes even internship offers.

"I wanted students to see what ag careers really looked like. Not just read about them," he explains.

Dygert's commitment to education extended beyond the classroom. The confidence he gained during student teaching propelled him into leadership roles, including over 20 years of legislative advocacy. He served as the legislative liaison for the Idaho Agriculture Teachers Association (IATA), working on bills that supported education about livestock, educational funding and career readiness programs.

"I've worked on multiple pieces of legislation, including funding for technical education and bills that support ag programs and career technical education overall," he says.

In 2014, Dygert was honored as a part of the Kuna agricultural education program which was named

the Idaho Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Program of the Year award.

For Dygert though, the most meaningful recognition comes from former students — letters and thank you notes expressing how he has influenced their lives. One of those former students now happens to be the new dean of College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at U of I, Leslie Edgar.

He often reminded students that education is a journey, and the beginning is often the hardest part. Drawing from his own challenges in higher education, he encouraged perseverance and resilience.

Now retired from teaching, Dygert continues his advocacy from the halls of the Idaho State Capitol. In 2024, he was elected to represent District 23B in the Idaho House of Representatives. His legislative work focuses on strengthening career and technical education, supporting Idaho's agricultural industries and ensuring rural communities have access to vital resources.

"Advocating for agriculture in Idaho is not just a commitment to the state's economic well-being but a celebration of its heritage and identity," Dygert notes. "We preserve a way of life and contribution to a thriving, interconnected community that values the land and its people."



Smile!

Compiled by Brynn Kelley

The winners of the inaugural AELC photo contest.

This year, the AELC department put on its very first virtual photography contest, open to all students at the University of Idaho and all current alumni. This year's theme was broad

to attract students and alumni from different disciplines to submit photos. Submitted photos included livestock, sports, nature, campus events and even moose. This was a successful

contest that we hope will be a continued tradition. The top three submissions are featured here, but all were excellent images. Thank you to all of the students and alumni who participated!



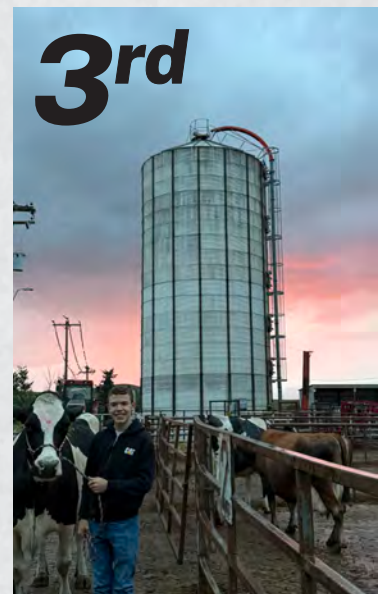
“Terrible Call, Ref”

photo by James Taurman-Aldrich



“The Next Generation”

photo by Rachel Becker



“Dairy Club Fun”

photo by KaraAnn Akers



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Note from the Editors

This newsletter is a labor of student learning; 16 pages entirely written, edited and designed by students. As members of the Communications and Media Team, we are responsible for producing all outreach and social media communications for the department, including this newsletter. Thank you, to each and every reader, for supporting us as we strive to become better storytellers for the agricultural industry.



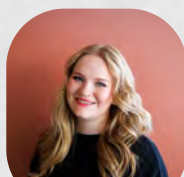
Kenzie Barta



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Danika Kuck



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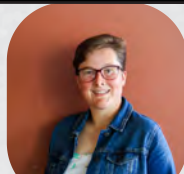
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