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USDA Announces National Teaching Awards for Food and Agricultural Sciences

Washington, D.C. – The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) today honored four public university faculty with national teaching awards recognizing excellence in agricultural sciences teaching and student engagement. Elizabeth Flaherty of Purdue University and Gretchen Mafi of Oklahoma State University were named national recipients of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Excellence in College and University Teaching Awards for Food and Agricultural Sciences. Wyatt Hoback of Oklahoma State University and Nicholas Uilk of South Dakota State University were named recipients in the national Teaching and Student Engagement category. The awards, which celebrate university faculty for their use of innovative teaching methods and service to students, will be presented as part of the 133rd APLU Annual Meeting.

Six regional and three early-career awardees were also named recipients of the 2020 Excellence in College and University Teaching Awards for Food and Agricultural Sciences. In recognition of their scholarship, exemplary pedagogy, and dedication to instruction, the annual awards include stipends of \$5,000 for the national winners and \$2,000 for regional and early-career honorees to be used for improving teaching at their respective universities.

The six regional awards were presented to: Matthew Mars of the University of Arizona; Robert McCleery of the University of Florida; Gulnihal Ozbay of Delaware State University; Aleksan Shanoyan of Kansas State University; Julianne Treme of North Carolina State University; and Brian Whitaker of University of Findlay.

Joy Morgan of North Carolina State University; Suzanne Gray of The Ohio State University; and Tyson Sorensen of Utah State University each received best early-career teacher honors.

“We applaud this year’s winners of the Excellence in College and University Teaching Awards for Food and Agricultural Sciences,” said Doug Steele, Vice President of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources at APLU. “The high bar they’ve set stands as a powerful example not only to their students, but to other faculty striving to better serve their students.”

Details on the 2020 recipients of the Excellence in College and University Teaching Awards for Food and Agricultural Sciences:

Elizabeth Flaherty, Purdue University

Dr. Liz Flaherty focuses on the development of students' critical thinking and professional skills as well as mastery of course content as she trains future natural resource and agriculture professionals. In her courses, students engage in activities similar to those expected of natural resource professionals, like developing habitat management plans for Purdue-owned properties as a semester-long project in her Wildlife Habitat Management course, which also provides students with opportunities to evaluate career options and pathways.

During her seven years at Purdue University, she has revised and taught three required courses in the wildlife major, developed and taught a teaching seminar to support her department's graduate students that serve as teaching assistants for undergraduate courses, and developed and led two study abroad courses to Cuba and the Galápagos Islands that focus on the environment, biodiversity, and land management.

Gretchen Mafi, Oklahoma State University

Dr. Gretchen Mafi centers her teaching approach on five core values – attitude, commitment to excellence, hard work, leadership, and passion. Dr. Mafi is the Ralph & Leila Boulware Endowed Chair Professor and undergraduate advising coordinator for the Oklahoma State University Department of Animal and Food Sciences, which is home to more than 1,000 students.

During her 14 years at Oklahoma State University, Dr. Mafi has educated and mentored over 5,000 students through traditional and online learning. With a teaching and research focus in meat science and evaluation, Dr. Mafi is passionate about providing students with hands-on experiences to help them better understand the global importance of the meat industry. Dr. Mafi has received 19 teaching and coaching awards.

Details on the 2020 recipients of the National Teaching and Student Engagement awards:

W. Wyatt Hoback, Oklahoma State University

Dr. Hoback has taught 24 different courses in biology, ecology, graduate studies, and entomology during his 21-year career. He teaches more than 600 undergraduate about the interactions of insects and human society. In addition to teaching, Dr. Hoback formally advises 30 Entomology majors each year. He has mentored over 40 master's and Ph.D. graduate students and has mentored almost 100 undergraduate research projects.

He also serves as the Southwestern Branch of the Entomological Society's president and is chair of the society's National Education and Outreach Committee. Dr. Hoback's research focusses on insect communities and explores the beneficial roles of insect biodiversity in maintaining ecosystem health. He has published over 130 peer-reviewed research articles and 12 peer-reviewed teaching articles, most co-authored with undergraduate and graduate students. He has been lead-PI on four education grants from the USDA and has generated more than \$4 million in external funding for teaching and research.

Nicholas Ulk, South Dakota State University

Nic Uilk teaches a range of classes within many programs including agricultural systems technology, agricultural education, and precision agriculture. Nic stresses hands-on experiences for his students and strives to provide these experiences to support lecture material throughout all his courses. One example of hands-on teaching was adding a mobile lab experience, allowing his students to get multiple hours of direct exposure to the technology being used on modern farm equipment today.

Early in his teaching career, Nic saw an industry demand for graduates with a background in precision agriculture and worked to fill that void by creating a program that taught students the value precision practices can bring to production agriculture. He has engaged in professional development experiences to improve his teaching and has collaborated with other faculty to assist them as well. He has been a recipient of the Walt McCarty Advisor of the Year and the Gamma Sigma Delta Excellence in Teaching Award.

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APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. With a membership of 246 public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations, APLU's agenda is built on the three pillars of increasing degree completion and academic success, advancing scientific research, and expanding engagement. Annually, member campuses enroll 5.0 million undergraduates and 1.3 million graduate students, award 1.3 million degrees, employ 1.3 million faculty and staff, and conduct \$49.3 billion in university-based research.