



MIDDLE TENNESSEE
STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE



Highlights for the 2025–26 Academic Year

By Dr. Jessica Carter, Interim Director

MTSU School of Agriculture faculty, staff & students had a busy year and we are happy to include many highlights from the 2025-26 academic year in this newsletter. I stepped back into the director/department chair role in August 2025 and Dr. Chaney Mosley is serving as the associate chair for the department. We hired 2 new faculty members and 5 new staff members. Two new endowments were established to support research and scholarships. Several faculty members are working on externally funded research projects that bring new equipment to campus, collaborations among other agricultural

institutions, and opportunities for our students to become engaged in research. Our student organizations and teams continue to impress me with their activities and achievements. We hosted many events including the Ag Award Banquet, a Career Fair, Club Day, K.J.'s Cookout, several 4-H and FFA events, livestock and horse shows, Winter Village, and Ag Ed Spring Fling. Additionally, our Farm Laboratory and Small Farming Unit participated in the Murfreesboro Saturday Market. We hope that you will enjoy this newsletter. Please also follow us on Facebook or Instagram for news and events throughout the year.

How we get our chocolate milk from the cow to the consumer

<https://mtsuneews.com/2026/04/10/april2026-out-of-the-blue/>

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. — Middle Tennessee State University's **School of Agriculture** is in the spotlight in a special edition of "Out of the Blue," tracing the journey of its popular and delicious chocolate milk while highlighting the hands-on experiences that prepare students for careers in the industry.

The 30-minute episode, hosted by Andrew Oppmann, vice president for the Division of Marketing and Communications, follows the process from the Experiential Learning and Research Center, part of the MTSU Farm Laboratories, in Lascassas to the MTSU Creamery and ultimately to the Rutherford Farmers Co-Op in Murfreesboro. Along the way, viewers see how students are involved at every stage, from dairy production to processing and distribution.

Recorded at multiple locations, the special showcases the university's commitment to experiential learning within the College of Basic and Applied Sciences.

The episode features:

A look inside the university's dairy operation, where students gain hands-on experience in herd management, milking and farm operations.

Student perspectives on how working at the farm has shaped their academic paths and career goals.

An inside look at the MTSU Creamery on campus, where milk is tested, processed and bottled.

The final stop at the Rutherford Farmers Co-Op, where the product reaches the community, supports the local economy and is one of several businesses in the area that sell this signature MTSU product.

The episode also underscores the broader impact of agriculture in Tennessee and MTSU's role in preparing students to meet the needs of a growing industry.

Tennessee commissioner of agriculture and deputy commissioner of agriculture visit MTSU School of Agriculture

A great day at the MTSU School of Agriculture!

We welcomed Tennessee Commissioner of Agriculture Andy Holt and MTSU alum Ryan King, Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture, to campus. They

toured the Center for Historic Preservation, School of Agriculture, the MTSU Dairy, and the MTSU Small Farm and spent time learning more about our programs and students.



Left to right: Dean Greg Van Patten, Jessica Carter, Commissioner Andy Holt, Mary Hoffschwelle, and James Flatt holding MTSU chocolate milk



Commissioner Andy Holt and Deputy Commissioner Ryan King touring the MTSU Dairy farm

2026 MTSU School of Agriculture Banquet

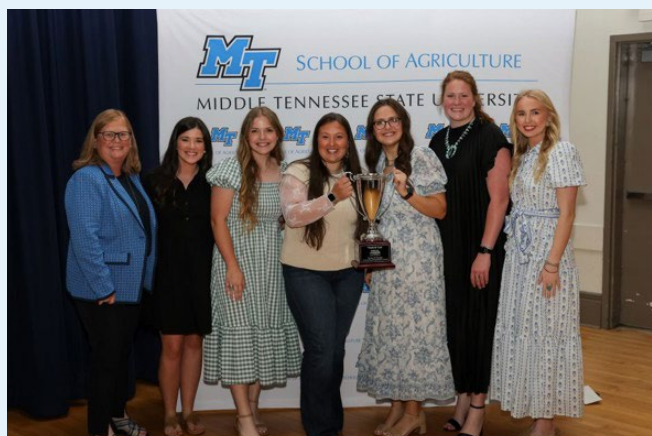
The 2026 MTSU School of Agriculture Banquet was held on April 28, and it was a wonderful evening of celebration, gratitude, and pride as we recognized the accomplishments and dedication of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and supporters. From awards and scholarships to shared laughter and meaningful moments, these photos capture the heart of our ag community and the traditions that make our school special. Thank you to everyone who helped make

this night memorable and who continues to support the future of agriculture. The 2025–2026 Agriculture Ambassadors team organized this year's banquet and was recognized for their hard work throughout the academic year. The 2026 Foutch Cup was awarded to the Block & Bridle Club for their progress in the department and being the most outstanding club in the School of Agriculture.



Agriculture Ambassadors 2025–26 team being recognized at the banquet

L–R: Vice President Makala Blythe, President Calle Shwani, Freshman Class Representative Bella Jost, Senior Class Representative Zoe Ramey, Sophomore Class Representative Matthew Sanchez, Treasurer Evan Aguillard, Secretary Cristina Bartolini, and Reporter Callie Pearson



Block and Bridle members with the Foutch Cup

Left to right: Advisor Jessica Carter, Abbie Bowker, Isabelle Harville, Gracey Bonner, Zoe Ramey, Alli Lawson, and Lexie Powell

Scholarship Awards:

Adams Family

Emily Garrison, Alexis Powell, Kaitlyn Robichaud, Alana Stansbury, Catalina Valdivia

Agriculture Endowment

Faith Kellerhals, Rebecca Leavy, Isabella Lumley, Summer Miller

Belle Mede Spirits Fermentation Science

Nate Hicks

Billie & Burton Towry Endowment

Kyla Richards

Boxwood Farms

Evan Aguillard, Megan Loreto, Ben Shults, Maggie Parks

Campbell Family Endowment

Abigail Whicker

Carolyn Gill Endowment

Cristine Bartolini

Catherine Ellington

Joseph Johns

Dr. Harley W. Foutch Endowment

Eli Dunn, Dakota Simpson

Heritage Farm

Macie Rhinehart

Fowler and Ruth Nickle

Emily Farris, Geraldine Molina, Alyssa Sparr

Hayden Memorial Agribusiness

Matthew Sanchez

Hugh Burrum

Samantha Calvetti, Alexandria Cilenti, Isabella Jost

(Continued)

Jerry Williams Endowment

Marci Leath, Haley Maro

Joe Jack & Jerry Dement

Emma Rae Glenn, Alli Lawson

Molson Coors

Isaac Trobough

Robert Alexander

Dorique Insisienmay

Robert Kelly Jarrell Memorial

Sydnee Sommers

Tennessee Council of Cooperatives

Joseph Johns

Theodore Bigger

Kirsten Pigg

Thomas Franklin Rowlett Jr. Memorial

Case Wright

Dr. Robert Garrigus Endowment

Abbie Bowker, Isabelle Harville, Leina Howell, Callie Pearson

William P. Hayes Sr. Scholarship

Katie Brindley

Freshman Scholarship Awards:

Adams Family

Jordan Davis, Allison Fiala, Joen Jack, Damian Way, Christal McFall

Agriculture Department

Abby DeBerry

Agriculture Endowment

Trinity Lemons, Nandry Taylor

Cliff Ricketts Endowment

Sophia Stutts

Joe Jack & Jerry Dement

Grayci Collard, Bethany Lancaster

Tennessee Rehabilitation Corporation

Delainee Driver, Marlo McMillan, Julianna Pruitt, Arielle Trujillo

Horse Science Scholarship Awards:

J.W. Cross

Shelby Ford

Kitty Adams Endowment

Opal Faith Dady, Ruby Randolph, Keira Wagner

Mark Moskovitz

Danika Ewton

Tennessee Horse Council

Isabella Lumley

Seve Scholarship

Samantha Harrell

2025–26 Outstanding Senior Awards:

Outstanding Senior in Agricultural Education

Xander Caywood

Robert A. Alexander Outstanding Agribusiness Senior

Zoe Ramey

Outstanding Animal Science Senior

Naomi Cornett

Outstanding Fermentation Science Senior

Patrick Langford

Sam Paschal Award for Outstanding Horse Science Senior

Rebecca Leavy

Theodore C. Bigger Outstanding Plant and Soil Science Senior

Ainsley Debler

B.B. Gracy Jr. Outstanding Agriculture Senior

Gracey Bonner

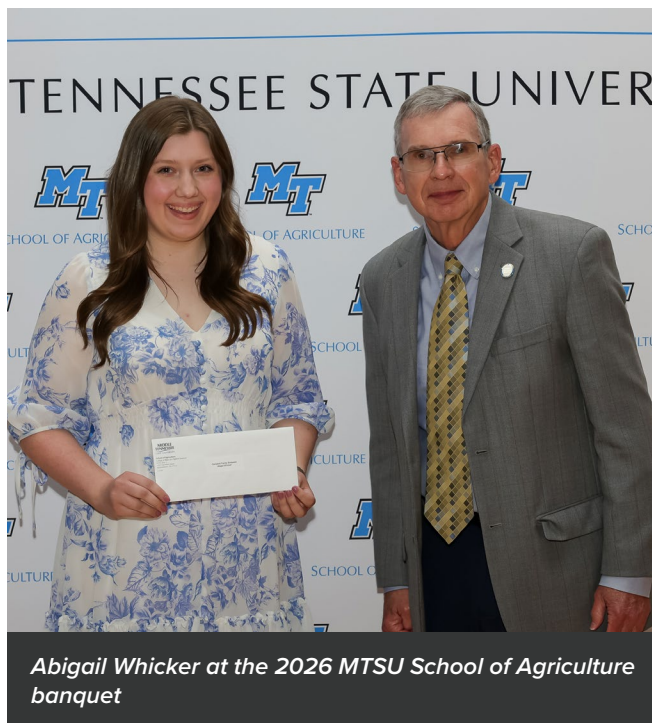
MTSU School of Agriculture student selected for National Farm Credit Mid-America Scholars Program

<https://www.wgnsradio.com/article/99105/mtsu-student-abigail-whicker-earns-5000-farm-credit-mid-america-scholarship>

One student from MTSU will get a little extra boost to help fund the college degree she is working to earn. Abigail Whicker is set to receive \$5,000 over a two-year period, while also benefiting from leadership opportunities and more.

Farm Credit Mid-America reports Whicker is one of 25 college students from seven states (Delaware, Iowa, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio, and Tennessee) to participate in its 2026 Scholars Program, an initiative designed to support and develop the next generation of leaders in agriculture and rural communities.

Now in its tenth year, the Farm Credit Mid-America Scholars Program provides rising college sophomores and juniors with \$5,000 in financial support over a set two-year period. In addition to receiving scholarship funds, scholars participate in immersive, weeklong learning and travel experiences that emphasize leadership development, financial education, and community impact.



Abigail Whicker at the 2026 MTSU School of Agriculture banquet



Jessica Whicker

Horse Science senior Honors Thesis defense

Congratulations Horse Science senior Jessica Whicker on the successful defense of her MTSU Honors College thesis!

Thesis title: "Evaluation of Collegiate Equestrian Non-Riding Fitness Activities"



Associate Professor of Soil Science Samuel Haruna, associate dean for academic programs in the College of Basic and Applied Sciences, accepts the 2026 John Pleas Faculty Award from MTSU Department of Psychology Professor Emeritus John Pleas at a ceremony held Tuesday, March 31, in the James Union Building on campus in Murfreesboro. (MTSU photo by James Cessna)

Samuel Haruna awarded the 2026 John Pleas Faculty Award

<https://mtsunews.com/2026/04/03/2026-john-pleas-faculty-award-samuel-haruna/>

Since joining MTSU, Samuel Haruna has earned multiple teaching honors, including the 2022 CBAS Teaching Excellence Award and the 2025 MTSU Outstanding Teaching Award, and his research portfolio includes more than 30 peer-reviewed publications with more than \$6 million in external funding. He continues to impact the local community by assisting numerous middle Tennessee farmers.

Jessica Carter, director of the MTSU School of Agriculture in the College of Basic and Applied Sciences (CBAS), praised her colleague's impact on the academic community as well as the agriculture industry with "impactful research." Beyond the classroom and lab, Haruna has served as associate dean for academic programs in CBAS for the past two years and plays a key role in strengthening curriculum and supporting academic initiatives.

Although Haruna was honored to be named recipient of the award, he was adamant about naming those who were crucial in helping him achieve academic and personal success—foremost being his wife, Gloria, as well as professional colleagues like Carter, who was instrumental in his becoming a faculty member, and CBAS Dean Greg Van Patten, who elevated Haruna to an additional role as associate dean, among several others. Awards are deceptive, Haruna said, assuming that accolades motivate the recipient and the accomplishments are made in a silo. "It's a good reminder of why we do what we do, which is for the students. . . . I'm just one ordinary individual who's standing on the shoulders of giants who are often unrecognized," Haruna said.



Andrea Rego

Andrea Rego recognized as Emerging Leader by the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA)

The MTSU School of Agriculture is proud to celebrate Andrea Rego on receiving the prestigious AQHA Emerging Leader Award! Presented by AQHA and Farnam, this award recognizes young professionals (ages 21–35) for their outstanding leadership, early career success, and contributions to the equine industry. Rego's dedication and impact in the field make her truly deserving of this honor! She was recognized at the 2025 AQHA Convention. We are also proud to point out that Ariel Higgins, another valued member of our team, received this same award in 2024! Having two recipients from MTSU back-to-back is a testament to the incredible talent and leadership within our program.

MTSU School of Agriculture co-sponsors the Tennessee Beekeepers Association's Fall Conference

<https://mtsusidelines.com/2025/10/11/student-union-buzzes-during-beekeepers-conference/>

MTSU's School of Agriculture co-sponsored the Tennessee Beekeepers Association's Fall Conference on Oct. 10, 2025, at the Student Union. The conference engaged students, local gardeners, and the broader community in supporting the fuzzy pollinators, while vendors sold bee-related merchandise, offered honey-tasting sessions, and provided opportunities and information for both new and experienced beekeepers.

Speakers focused on the challenges faced by the world's primary pollinators and how beekeepers and bee enthusiasts can contribute to their support. Speakers from the beekeeping association addressed key threats during the event, like parasites, habitat loss, pesticide exposure and climate stress. One of the headline speakers, Tammy Horn Potter, hosted a presentation on Varroa mites, presented on behalf of Project Apis m, a program that funds research and helps promote the health of honeybees.

Varroa mites pose as one of the most potent threats

to honeybee survival. The mite was identified as the most destructive problem affecting honeybees in Tennessee due to its ability to weaken individual bees and spread disease within colonies, according to the USDA. Experts demonstrated that monitoring and mitigation practices can help beekeepers avoid infestations. Summer Miller, a senior at MTSU and secretary of MTSU's Bee Club, emphasized the importance of pollinators in our daily lives.

“If we don’t have bees, we don’t have a lot of crops, and those crops play a big part of our lives,” Miller said.

Agribusiness and Secondary Education student presents research in Washington, D.C.

Matthew Sanchez, a sophomore studying Agribusiness and Secondary Education, took his undergraduate research to Washington, D.C., for National Ag Day and ACTE's National Policy Seminar, where he advocated for career and technical education (CTE) with policymakers. He presented a policy brief highlighting the decline of males pursuing careers in agricultural education and engaged with national leaders, including representatives from the National FFA Organization, American Farm Bureau Federation, U.S. Botanic Garden, and members of Tennessee's congressional delegation.

Sanchez also connected with agriculture teachers and industry professionals during National Ag Week events on Capitol Hill. His research was supported by a URECA grant from the Undergraduate Research Center at MTSU and a USDA-NIFA grant focused on developing the next generation of agricultural professionals. Sanchez was joined by his research mentor, Chaney Mosley.



Matthew Sanchez at the American Farm Bureau Federation office in Washington, D.C.

Agriculture Education students present research at regional conference



Agriculture education students attend the American Association for Agricultural Education Southern Region Conference.

Left to right: Karlee Dunn, Matthew Sanchez, Dorique Insisienmay, Chaney Mosley, Kaitlyn Robichaud

Four students from the MTSU School of Agriculture recently attended American Association for Agricultural Education Southern Region Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, where they presented undergraduate research alongside Associate Professor Chaney Mosley. Their research explored topics including the growing gender gap among agriculture teachers (supported by Undergraduate Research Center at MTSU) and the use of virtual reality for career exploration in agriculture (in partnership with Tennessee State University College of Agriculture faculty Dr. John Ricketts and Dr. Lana Petrie). Congratulations to Matthew Sanchez, Dorique Insisienmay, Karlee Dunn, and Kaitlyn Robichaud on having their work accepted for presentation. We are proud of the scholarship and professionalism these students demonstrated while representing MTSU and agricultural education.

National Block & Bridle Convention

The MTSU Block & Bridle Chapter hosted the 105th National Block & Bridle Convention in conjunction with CattleCon2026 in Nashville on February 3–5, 2026. Our duties as convention host included fundraising, hosting agricultural industry tours, and hosting the awards banquet. Twelve MTSU students attended and helped host this convention along with their advisor, Jessica Carter. Other faculty/staff who helped on tour day included Kevin Downs and Rhiannon Overcast, and alumni member Lindsey Parsley. CattleCon2026 was a wonderful opportunity for B&B students as well as beef cattle enthusiasts from across the country to learn from industry leaders during the Cattlemen's College sessions and the NCBA trade show. Students spent a day on tours, learning about agricultural industries in Tennessee and southern Kentucky. There were 340 B&B students in attendance representing 30 chapters from across the United States. We would like to thank our sponsors and tour hosts:



MTSU Block and Bridle members at National Block and Bridle Convention

Left to right: X, Harley Sanders, Kevin Arzuaga, Alli Lawson, Abbie Bowker, Callie Pearson, Gracey Bonner, Kate Tomlinson, Zoe Ramey, Isabelle Harville, and Lexie Powell

Sponsors, Block & Bridle Convention:

Tennessee Department of Agriculture
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
Aviagen Inc.
Tennessee Beef Industry Council
Tennessee Cattlemen's Association
Tennessee Pork Producers Association
Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation
Tennessee Farmer's Cooperative
Protrition
MTSU School of Agriculture
Rutherford County Farm Bureau and Women's Leadership Committee
Davidson County Farm Bureau
American Angus Association
Bonnie's Barnyard
Cobb Vantress
Norbrook Inc.
Ringside Live
Tucker Milling LLC
Witt Sign Co.

Tour Hosts, Block & Bridle Convention:

Allan Callaway Stables
Arrington Vineyards
Big Machine Distillery
Catesa Farms
Chaney's Dairy Barn
Cooper Steel Arena
Hatcher Family Dairy
Ingram Angus
Lazy G Bison Ranch
MTSU Horse Science Center
Nash Family Dairy and Creamery
Pleasant Hill Farms
Shop Springs Creamery
Stonewall Farm
Tennessee Farmers Cooperative
University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture – Middle Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center
Western Kentucky University Smart Holstein Lab



Agritourism club members with their advisor, Alanna Vaught, at Middle Tennessee Christian Academy

Ag Literacy Week celebrated by Agritourism Club

Some of our Agritourism club students went to Middle Tennessee Christian School and read to over 300 students in 16 classes in honor of Tennessee Ag Literacy week in November.

2025 Southern Regional Dairy Challenge

At the Southern Regional Dairy Challenge, students work as a team with students from other universities to apply theory and learning to a real world dairy. They visit dairies to analyze all aspects of the operation and receive data from an actual dairy, including production, herd management, and financial records. From that information, they develop comprehensive recommendations to maximize herd profit through nutrition, production, milking procedures, animal health, facilities, and cow comfort. Finally, they present recommendations to a panel of judges—dairy producers, veterinarians, and other industry experts. This year's competition was co-hosted by Middle Tennessee State University and the University of Tennessee and was held in Knoxville. MTSU students who competed were Josie Atwood, Cameron Duncan, Youssef Samir, Stefany Gonzalez, Calle Shwani, and Alondra Leon Santes, coached by Caitlin Foley.



Dairy Challenge competitors, left to right: Youssef Samir, Josie Atwood, Caitlin Foley, Calle Shwani, Alondra Leon Santes (sitting), Stefany Gonzalez, and Cameron Duncan

Students compete in Agribusiness Management Challenge

Students in the agribusiness program recently put their skills to the test in the Agribusiness Management Challenge, a hands-on simulation designed to mirror the complexities of running a farm supply business. Throughout the competition, student teams managed simulated operations where they were responsible for forecasting sales, managing inventory and labor, and making strategic pricing decisions in a competitive market environment.

Taking first place was **PZM Supply**, managed by Melinda Beel, Payne Marshall, and Zoe Ramey. The team not only achieved the highest net worth by the end of the simulation but also generated the greatest overall profit, demonstrating strong decision-making across all aspects of the business.

Second place honors went to **Mkk Ag. Co.**, led by Molly Alsip, Kathryn Minchew, and Katie Brindly.

Their low-price, high-volume strategy proved highly effective, allowing them to capture the largest market share among all teams.

Several additional teams earned recognition for outstanding performance in specific areas. Sports Feed, managed by Jacob Newton, JT Thompson, and Haley Hightsue, recorded the largest year-over-year gains in both sales and profitability. Meanwhile, Middle Tennessee Farm Supply, managed by Emily Garrison, Jack Cashion, and Chloe Hill, received honorable mention for their disciplined financial management—successfully paying down significant debt and finishing the simulation with the lowest liabilities.

The Agribusiness Management Challenge provided students with valuable experiential learning, reinforcing key concepts in business strategy, financial management, and decision-making under uncertainty.



Left to right: Zoe Ramey, Payne Marshall, and Melinda Beel



Left to right: Molly Alsip, Kathryn Minchew, and Katie Brindley



Left to right: Emily Garrison, Jack Cashion, and Chloe Hill



Left to right: Jacob Newton, JT Thompson, and Haley Hightsue



L–R back row: Caroline Burkhart, Hannah Hyer, Samantha Brown, Regan Black, Keira Wagner, Kelsey Beaty, Sam Kawa, Andrea Rego (coach)

L–R front row: Shelby Ford, Katie Meade, Kaylee Rocha, Jessica Whicker, Marci Leath, Michaela Winslow

MTSU Stock Horse Team earns fourth-place national finish in Amarillo

The Middle Tennessee State University Stock Horse Team traveled more than 1,900 miles round trip to compete at the 2026 National Intercollegiate Ranch and Stock Horse Association (NIRSHA) National Championship, held April 12–15 in Amarillo, Texas. The team hauled six horses and was represented by 12 students, with six riders competing and five additional students serving in volunteer roles throughout the show. The team was coached by graduate assistant coaches Michaela Winslow and Caroline Burkhart under the direction of head coach Andrea Rego.

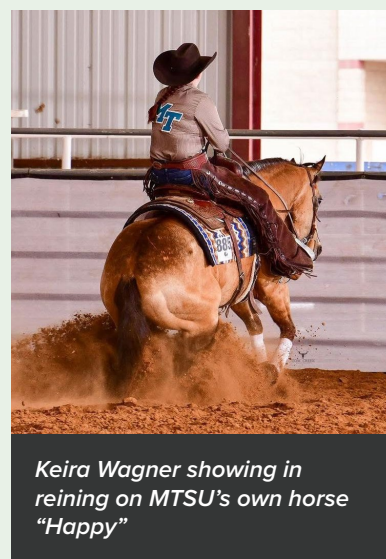
Students competed in ranch reining, ranch riding, ranch trail, and cow work events, including boxing and box drive. After two complete go-rounds of competition against collegiate programs from across the country, MTSU earned a fourth-place overall finish in the highly competitive Division II—the largest division at the national championship.

MTSU proudly represented the eastern United States while competing against many agriculture-focused universities, particularly those from Texas, where ranch horse events are deeply rooted.

Representing MTSU in the show pen were Regan Black, Marci Leath, Samantha Brown, Jessica Whicker,

Kelsey Beaty, and Keira Wagner. Black, Whicker, and Beaty each finished among the top 20 novice riders out of a field of more than 70 competitors. “I’m always impressed with our team’s ability to represent Tennessee every year,” said head coach Rego.

“Our students have a reputation for being hard workers. Whether they’re competing or volunteering to work a gate or announce in an arena, they’re known for helping make events flow—and that’s a reputation I want us to always have.” The national championship marked another successful year for the MTSU Stock Horse Team, showcasing not only competitive excellence, but also the work ethic that has become a hallmark of the program.



Keira Wagner showing in reining on MTSU’s own horse “Happy”



L–R: Caroline Tywater, Ariel Higgins, Happy, Kaylyn Huber, Molly Herbert, Katie-Lynn Meade, Keira Wagner, Marci Leath, Andrea Rego, Haley Maro

MTSU Equestrian Team competes at IHSA Nationals



Keira Wagner aboard Honey placing first in Individual Level 1 Horsemanship.

The MTSU Equestrian Team delivered an outstanding performance at the Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association (IHSA) Western Nationals in Tryon, North Carolina, earning a fifth-place overall team finish against the nation's top collegiate western riding programs. The Blue Raiders were led by two national champions: Keira Wagner, who captured the title in Individual Level 1 Horsemanship, and Faith Dady, who

won Individual Ranch Riding aboard MTSU's own horse, Happy. The team also celebrated a strong showing from Marci Leath, who earned Reserve National Champion in Team Open Horsemanship and was recognized as the third High Point Rider overall. Dady continued her successful weekend by placing ninth in Individual Level 2 Horsemanship and earning the YEDA Alumni High Point Award.

MTSU riders added several more top 10 national finishes throughout the competition. In team events, Keira Wagner placed fifth in Team Ranch Riding and 10th in Team Level 2, while Kaylyn Huber earned fifth in Team Beginner Horsemanship, Katie Meade seventh in Team Level 1, and Marci Leath sixth in Team Reining. Individually, Sam Kawa earned 10th in Rookie Horsemanship, and Bella Lumley secured eighth in Beginner Horsemanship. These accomplishments reflect the talent, dedication, and hard work of MTSU's riders and coaches, capping off an exceptional season with individual honors and a top five team finish on the national stage.

MTSU Horse Judging Team results from the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture (NACTA) Judging Contest



MTSU Horse Judging Team with their NACTA awards

Left to right: Graduate Assistant Coach Emily Jolley, Danika Ewton, Willow Stanfield, Jessica Whicker, Emily Farris, Coach Alyssa Logan

The MTSU Horse Judging Team represented MTSU at the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture (NACTA) Judging Contest hosted by Illinois State University, earning top honors in both the Horse Judging and Hippology competitions. In Horse Judging, MTSU captured the Overall Team Championship, led by Willow Stanfield, who was

named First Overall Individual, followed by Emily Farris in second and Jessica Whicker in third. The Horse Judging Team consisted of Whicker, Stanfield, Farris, and Danika Ewton, with guidance from NACTA graduate assistant coach Emily Jolley. The Hippology team of Shelby Ford, Kelsey Beaty, Isabella Lumley, and Stanfield placed Second Overall Team, while Ford and Beaty earned Second and Third Overall Individual, respectively.

The team's success extended across all contest divisions, where MTSU earned First Place Team honors in Horse Judging Overall, Halter, Performance, and Reasons. Individually, Emily Farris claimed First Place in Halter, Willow Stanfield earned First Place in Performance, and Jessica Whicker secured First Place in Reasons. These outstanding results reflect the hard work, preparation, and expertise of MTSU's Horse Judging Team members and coaches, showcasing the program's strength and commitment to excellence on a national stage.

Passing of Seve

We are saddened to announce the loss of Seve, 1995 Tennessee Walking Horse stallion (Pride's Generator out of Doctor's Lady) owned by Dr. Barbara Utermark (Martinez, Georgia). Seve passed quietly on May 2 and was laid to rest at the Whitaker farm next to his barn mate, MTSU's foundation stallion, Hey Dare. Seve was trained by Allen Forman to become a two-time Reserve World Champion Aged Stallion. Seve sired multiple World and World Grand Champions, and many Tennessee Walking Horses in the MTSU herd carry his bloodlines. Seve stood at the MTSU Horse Barn for over 18 years under the care of Jeremy Carlton, with whom Seve had strongly bonded during his time standing at Saddlecrest Farms. Our deepest condolences to Barbara Utermark, Allen Forman, and Jeremy Carlton over the loss of a truly great horse.



Seve



Alpha Gamma Rho

Fifty years for Alpha Gamma Rho

In March, the Beta Theta chapter of Alpha Gamma Rho had the privilege of celebrating 50 years on MTSU's campus. In those 50 years the chapter has prioritized making better men, bettering their community, and strengthening agriculture.

Thank you to the alumni who paved the way for our active chapter. Special thanks to Alumni Bradley Vaughn and the Alumni Board for pulling off such a successful event!

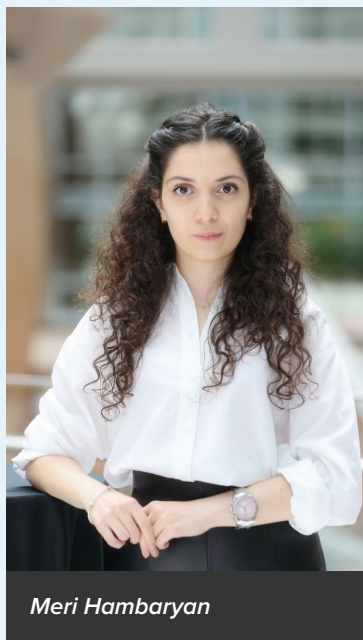


Faculty and Staff News



Lori Reynolds with daughter, Delaney, and husband, Jeff

Lori Reynolds joined the Horse Science Program as the new administrative assistant in January 2026. She brings 30 years of experience and a welcoming presence in the front office. “Mrs. Lori” previously served the School of Agriculture as the MTSU Farm Laboratories administrative assistant.



Meri Hambaryan

Meri Hambaryan is an assistant professor of Agribusiness in the School of Agriculture at Middle Tennessee State University. She earned her M.S. in Agricultural Economics (2021) from the University of Wyoming and her Ph.D. in Food and Resource Economics (2025) from the University of Florida. Her research focuses on understanding consumer behavior

in food markets by using experimental and survey-based methods. By examining the economic drivers underpinning consumer decisions, her research provides insights to assist producers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders.

Erin Frantz joined the MTSU School of Agriculture in April 2026 as the executive assistant for the Farm Laboratories, where she manages financials for the Farm Labs and Creamery. She also sells MTSU chocolate milk at the farmers market during the Saturday market season. A Murfreesboro native, Frantz graduated from Siegel High School, where she wrapped up 13 years of playing soccer, and then earned her bachelor’s degree from MTSU in 2022. She has experience in business development, office management, and animal care, and her interest in agriculture and animals made the role a natural fit. Outside of work, Frantz enjoys spending time outdoors and with her family. She and her husband married in 2023 and welcomed their daughter, Emery, in February 2026. They also have three pups, Bear, Banjo, and Georgia.

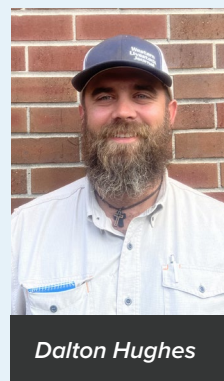


Erin Frantz with her daughter, Emery

(Continued)



Anto Charles is an assistant professor of Fermentation Science at the School of Agriculture, which he joined in August 2025. Charles has received his Ph.D. in Cereal Science from North Dakota State University and worked as a postdoctoral research associate at the University of Nebraska. His research involves the development of sustainable alternative proteins, nutraceuticals, taste peptides, and micro/nano-engineered delivery systems using colloids, fermentation technology, ingredient chemistry, and computational chemistry. Charles brings a wealth of industrial fermentation skills with his previous roles as a production manager and fermentation specialist in food-biotechnology industries. He has received over 20 professional awards recognizing his research excellence and leadership from prestigious organizations, including the Institute of Food Technologists and the American Oil Chemists' Society.



The **Farm Laboratories** hired three new staff members, **Justin Weaver**, **Dalton Hughes**, and **Abigail Buchanan**. Weaver serves as the assistant manager for beef and swine operations. Hughes serves as the assistant farm director for dairy operations, and Buchanan serves as the assistant manager for dairy and milk operations. All three are graduates of the MTSU School of Agriculture.



Obituary

Renee Dunn
(Sept. 23, 1963–
Aug. 24, 2025)

We are heartbroken to share the passing of Renee Dunn, administrative assistant to the Horse Science program, wonderful colleague, and beloved friend, after a brief battle with cancer. Our thoughts and

prayers are with her family and the multitudes of students, staff, and faculty who knew and loved her. She was the face of the Horse Science main office for 20 years, the one behind the scenes who helped keep events running smoothly, and there is no end to the list of students and guests that she welcomed and helped, providing tours, pens, pencils, bandages, ice packs for those who tumbled from a horse, and an ear to listen to student troubles. She was absolutely amazing, and we will be eternally grateful for the years she spent with us.

Current Research

Building Foundations for Perennial Grain Agriculture in the Southeast funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) - Co-PI is Samuel Haruna

Researchers in Kentucky and Tennessee are exploring the potential of **Kernza®**, a perennial grain derived from intermediate wheatgrass, to improve agricultural sustainability and create new market opportunities. Because Kernza has been largely untested in the Southeast, the project will evaluate its performance across diverse farming systems and identify management practices that support successful production. Researchers will also begin breeding

efforts to develop varieties adapted to the region's soils, climate, and end-use needs. In addition, the team will measure soil health benefits, assess grain quality, and examine opportunities for integrating Kernza into local food and agricultural systems. Through on-farm trials, research, education, and industry partnerships, the project aims to build the foundation for a regional perennial grain value chain that benefits farmers, consumers, and the environment.

Organic Perennial Grain System: a Research, Education, and Extension Imperative for the Climate Transition Zone funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) - PI is Song Cui and Co-PIs are Samuel Haruna, Ying Gao, and Justin Gardner

Tennessee farmers boast a proud history of employing conservation methods to reduce the erosion of topsoil across the state. That's one of many reasons the nonprofit Land Institute, based in Salina, Kansas, has its eye on Tennessee. A partnership between the institute and MTSU Agriculture professor and

researcher Dr. Song Cui, perennial plants like grain, sorghum, and sunflowers are being tested in Tennessee soil. Kernza, sorghum, and silflower are the three crops currently associated with the MTSU grant. In addition to his research, all crops are used for teaching purposes.

USDA: Reducing Enteric Methane Production in Livestock through Herbal Feed Supplements in the Southeast U.S. funding by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) - PI is Ying Gao and Co-PIs are Jessica Carter and Song Cui

Several studies have explored ways to reduce these methane emissions, and a major culprit is diet. By supplementing livestock with certain herbs, methane emissions can decrease dramatically. This study explores which Tennessee-native herbs and supplemental plants have the largest impact on

Tennessee livestock. By reviewing the growing amount of data on specific herbs, cross referencing them with plants native to or that have been acclimatized to Tennessee, and ensuring that they are safe for cows, we can contribute to methane reduction studies and decrease the rate of climate change.

Structural and functional properties of hemp protein isolates from industrial hemp waste after cannabidiol extraction

Dr. Anto Charles, a fermentation science professor, completed research with Tennessee State University and explored the valorization of industrial hemp waste into functional protein isolates. After extracting

cannabidiol from industrial hemp, the leftover biomass is often discarded. They showed the potential to upcycle biomass waste into a high-protein ingredient for food and beverage applications.



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