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Kansas State University's College of Agriculture remains on U.S. Top 10 list

A leading organization for ranking America's best colleges and universities has named the Kansas State University College of Agriculture in the top 10 of the United States' best 140 agricultural schools.

Niche.com released its rankings in late August, taking into account volumes of data provided through the U.S. Department of Education, the National Science Foundation and millions of reviews from college students and alumni across the nation.

"This is something we are very proud of, particularly because it represents the quality of education we provide to students as well as the quality of agricultural research being conducted at Kansas State University," said Ernie Minton, dean of the College of Agriculture and director of K-State Research and Extension.

The newest rankings are available online. To be included, a college must confer at least five bachelor's degrees in agriculture or represent at least 20% of all bachelor's degrees conferred by the university.

According to information from Niche.com, the ranking is based on rigorous analysis of academic, admissions, financial and student life data from the U.S. Department of Education, and research expenditures gathered by the National Science Foundation.

The organization also surveys current students and alumni to analyze their overall experience while attending classes in the university's program. For this year's ranking, 3,283 current or former K-State students replied to Niche.com's request for feedback on their educational experience.

"Every university wants to think that they are providing a good experience for students," Minton said. "When you consider the rigorous methodology that Niche.com uses to evaluate universities in the United States, it is clear that we are on the right track in the College of Agriculture and at K-State. The categories that pull us into the top 10 are student-focused, reflecting the commitment our faculty have to student success. That's gratifying to me."

According to Niche.com:

- 93% of students said K-State professors are passionate about the topics they teach.
- 90% of students said K-State professors are approachable and helpful.
- 89% of students said K-State professors care about student success.

One student interviewed for the ranking noted: "Kansas State University has a comforting, welcoming, high quality campus and environment. The people were so kind and helpful when needed."

Niche.com assigned a grade of A to K-State's College of Agriculture based on faculty accomplishments, salary, student reviews and similar factors. It was noted that

94% of K-State graduates are employed or furthering their education within two years of graduation.

"It's important to note the contributions of our faculty and staff in the success we have experienced over time," Minton said. "It's evident to me that throughout the College, we have employees at every level who understand the importance of creating the best possible environment for learning. Being recognized for that is gratifying."

K-State among Top 10 best employers in Kansas

When it comes to the best employers in Kansas, an annual survey by Forbes magazine finds Kansas State University rates among the Top 10 in the state and is the best university employer in the Sunflower State.

K-State comes in at No. 9 on Forbes' "America's Best Employers by State List" for Kansas. Moreover, K-State is the only university to be ranked among the state's Top 25 best employers.

The university's greatest resource is its faculty and staff, who make K-State a great place to work, said Jay Stephens, vice president for Human Capital Services. As an employer, Stephens said the university's mission is to provide progressive, responsive and innovative solutions to attract, retain, develop and reward a highly talented, diverse and inclusive K-State community that cultivates an environment where students and employees flourish.

"K-State strives to provide excellence in recruiting, developing and retaining a diverse, highly qualified workforce," Stephens said. "Along with an unmatched sense of community and inclusiveness, K-State provides employees with a variety of benefits, including health care, retirement options, discounted event tickets and much more."

For the list, Forbes and Statista, a marketing research company, surveyed 80,000 workers from businesses with at least 500 employees. The rolling survey was conducted from October 2019 to May 2020 and in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In the anonymous surveys, employees rated their employers on a variety of criteria, including safety of work environment, competitiveness of compensation, opportunities for advancement and openness to telecommuting. Workers also were asked if they would recommend their employers to others.

Read more at forbes.com/best-employers-by-state/#17ce21b5487a.

Grant supports research to mitigate COVID-19 in meat and poultry processing facilities

A team of Kansas State University researchers is using a $1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture — and an additional grant from the state of Kansas — to study how to effectively control the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in the nation's meat and poultry processing facilities.

The study "Translating SARS-CoV-2 Research Into Practical Solutions For The Meat And Poultry Processing Industry" seeks to protect meat plant workers and their surrounding communities from the spread of COVID-19. It involves researchers from K-State's College of Veterinary Medicine and College of

K-State and Stormont Vail announce strategic partnership

Stormont Vail has signed an agreement with Kansas State University to form an academic partnership in the College of Health and Human Sciences' Physician Assistant Program. Stormont Vail will also develop the Cotton O'Neil Manhattan Medical Campus. A 55,000-square-foot medical office building to be completed fall 2022 in the K-State Research Park will increase public access to medical professionals in the Manhattan region.

Kansas State University's Physician Assistant Program, with its inaugural class starting Spring 2021, will graduate health care providers who provide excellence in medical care and serve the local

Agriculture.

As part of the study, $330,000 from the State of Kansas National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility Transition Fund will be used for research in K-State's Biosecurity Research Institute, or BRI, at Pat Roberts Hall. The BRI is a high-containment research facility.

A key objective of the project will be verifying the effectiveness of many of the approved cleaners and sanitizers for inactivating SARS-CoV-2 during plant processing and sanitation operations.

"Nationally and internationally, many facilities that produce meat and poultry products have been temporarily closed because of COVID-19 outbreaks," said A. Sally Davis, an assistant professor of experimental pathology in the College of Veterinary Medicine and project director of the K-State grant. "This has put a major strain on food production, limiting the amount of meat and poultry on grocery store shelves and disrupting food and feed supply chains across the globe. Research is necessary to understand why SARS-CoV-2 is such a problem in meat and poultry processing environments and how we can mitigate the problem."

Davis said infections with SARS-CoV-2 are primarily thought to occur by exposure to infectious micro-droplets in the air and contaminated surfaces.

"We are investigating the conditions within meat and poultry processing environments, such as low temperatures, relative humidity, increased air movement and workers being in close proximity to one another, to help identify areas and surfaces that are at high risk for contamination and spread of infectious SARS-CoV-2," Davis said.

The team will evaluate potential sources of exposure and determine the amount and the longevity of infectious virus that is present during and after meat processing and packaging activities. The team seeks to identify, develop, validate and deliver practical cleaning and disinfection strategies, plus develop mathematical models to predict and reduce the risk of SARS-CoV-2 exposure in meat and poultry processing facilities.

Joining Davis on the research team are food safety faculty from K-State's Food Science Institute, including Randall Phebus, co-project director and professor of animal sciences and industry, and Jeanette Thurston, director of the Food Science Institute and co-investigator on the project. The project also will rely on input from an industry advisory board.

"Our advisory board will be regularly updated on research progress," Thurston said. "We will communicate with them in real time to make sure we are on the right track with our research and recommendations, and ensure that our findings are rapidly deployed across the processing sector."

The industry advisory board is composed of senior-level directors of food safety and plant operations at Hormel Foods, Smithfield Foods, National Beef Packing Company, Cargill Protein North America, JBS USA, Wayne Farms, Jennie-O Turkey Store, Tyson Fresh Meats and Costco Wholesale.

Bonnie Rush, dean of K-State's College of Veterinary Medicine, said K-State, known as the "Silicon Valley of biodefense," is the ideal place to conduct this vital

communities and beyond with uncompromising commitment and compassion.

Stormont Vail relies on the expertise of physician assistants as advanced practicing professionals. Through this partnership with K-State, the organization will be able to provide input on the curriculum using real-world examples and skills. Students of the program, as well as Stormont Vail and Cotton O'Neil physician assistants, will have access to the Stormont Vail Health Simulation Lab located in the adjacent Mary and Carl Ice Hall. This lab will have adult, pediatric, infant and trauma simulators.

"The partnership between Stormont Vail Health and K-State's new Physician Assistant Program is innovative and significant in addressing a critical demand for health care professionals not only in our Kansas communities but around the country," said K-State President Richard Myers. "This collaborative effort within K-State's Research Park supports the university's mission to foster excellent teaching, research and service to develop highly skilled and educated citizens to advance the well-being of Kansas, the nation and international communities."

The new medical campus will be located just across the street from the Simulation Lab on seven acres at the K-State Research Park in the university's Edge Collaboration District — a partnership between Kansas State University, the KSU Foundation, the City of Manhattan and the State of Kansas to attract industry and research to the northern edge of K-State's Manhattan campus.

K-State Polytechnic professor's research project recently awarded $1.1 million from NSF

Siny Joseph, economics professor at K-State Polytechnic, is part of a research project that recently received a major boost from the National Science Foundation.

The project, aimed at improving location-based services for people with disabilities, was awarded a more than $1.1 million grant. Joseph is a co-principal investigator on the project and joins professors from Texas A&M University and Wichita State University, as well as researchers from the Envision Research Institute and the city of Wichita.

The grant, which was awarded for three years by the NSF's Smart and Connected Communities program, allows the team to design, develop, test and evaluate a system accessed through a smartphone app called CityGuide. The concept of CityGuide builds upon GPS services, providing important way-finding capabilities for people with disabilities that currently do not exist. The three main areas the team plans on exploring are emergency evacuation from indoor environments, remote assistance from a caregiver or family member, and navigation of transit systems.

"My background in engineering and economics has helped me appreciate the potential impact of assistive and accessible technologies on people with disabilities," Joseph said. "I am truly honored to be a part of a team that is addressing societal issues and has the potential to make a change for communities."

research.

"This is an advantageous collaboration between the College of Veterinary Medicine and College of Agriculture," Rush said. "It combines our expertise in the study of viruses, our high-containment research facility in the BRI and our national experts in food safety."

Ernie Minton, dean of the College of Agriculture and director of K-State Research and Extension, said COVID-19 has hit the agricultural industry and its workers hard.

"We certainly felt the impact when COVID-19 hit our meat processing plants in Kansas and across the nation this spring," Minton said. "In April, nearly 5,000 workers in U.S. processing plants became infected, causing plant closures, a backlog of animals waiting to go to market, higher feed costs, lower market prices, and a scarcity of meat and poultry in some areas. It's a tremendous privilege to receive USDA support and work with a team of top academic and industry leaders to find solutions to help us avoid this type of problem in the future."

Collaborating with the K-State team are co-project directors from the University of Georgia poultry science department, Harsha Thippareddi and Manpreet Singh, who will provide extensive poultry experience and industry connections and lead the grant's industry outreach efforts. Valentina Trinetta and Sara Gragg, food safety faculty from the Food Science Institute, are co-project directors. Co-investigator Anke Richter, a public health-focused operation research specialist at the Naval Postgraduate School, will lead the risk assessment driven by mathematical modeling. Co-investigators Yunjeong Kim and Erin Schirtzinger in the K-State College of Veterinary Medicine and the Food Science Institute's Daniel Vega round out the project team.

DID YOU KNOW?

Kansas State University Polytechnic Campus' unmanned aircraft systems' flight and operations program has been selected for the Federal Aviation Administration's Unmanned Aircraft Systems-Collegiate Training Initiative.

Joseph's role in the research project will be focused on conducting an economic analysis of the way-finding system with sustainability implications for communities as well as an assessment of the economic impacts of the system. She also will include a K-State Polytechnic undergraduate student on the project who will assist in collecting data for economic analysis.

Former Kansas Forest Service leader honored by Arbor Day Foundation

Larry Biles, the longtime state forester for the Kansas Forest Service who retired late last year, has received the Lifetime Stewardship Award from the Arbor Day Foundation.

According to a release from the foundation, the award honors an individual's lifelong commitment to tree planting and conservation.

Biles served as state forester from 2008 to 2019, culminating a 52-year that spanned a military career and appointments with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Southern Forestry Research Partnership in Athens, Georgia.

As state forester in Kansas, his key accomplishments include overseeing the Conservation Tree Planting program, which planted more than 2.5 million trees across the state; and securing a $13 million Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant for the Kansas Forest Service – the largest grant ever received by the organization.

"The State of Kansas greatly benefitted from Larry's career-long commitment to forestry," said Dan Lambe, president of the Arbor Day Foundation. "His leadership resulted in the conservation of millions of trees, the improvement of water quality throughout the state, and the improvement of industry-wide best practices."

Biles is one of five individuals honored during September for their contributions to tree planting, conservation and stewardship. More information on the honorees is available online.

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