

New dean named for WSU's agricultural college

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Washington State University has announced the new dean of the College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences.

André-Denis Wright, currently director of the School of Animal and Comparative Biomedical Sciences at the University of Arizona, will begin his duties at WSU on June 1.



André-Denis Wright

"I am incredibly honored to be joining Washington State University," Wright said in a WSU release. "WSU is a distinguished and innovative public land-grant university, and CAHNRS has a long history of excellence in research, education, extension, outreach and societal impact. I look forward to getting around this beautiful state to meet our outstanding faculty, staff, students and alumni. I am keen to establish new relationships throughout Washington, and to build upon existing relations with our devoted stakeholders and supporters."

Wright will take over for Ron Mittelhammer, who was appointed interim dean in 2013 and dean for a two-year term in 2014. He replaced Dan Bernardo, who left CAHNRS to become the university provost in 2013.

Wright stood out as an "outstanding scholar," Bernardo told the Capital Press.

"He's an extremely bright person who has an excellent academic record," Bernardo said. "And then you combine that with a dynamic personality and outstanding leadership qualities. I think he is a really dynamic leader who can bring the college together and craft a vision for the future, and then work to deliver on that."

Faculty, staff and administrators who have worked with Wright speak very highly of him, Bernardo said.

Bernardo expects Wright to work well with stakeholders.

"He just has that very engaging personality; I think they'll really enjoy working with him," Bernardo said.

Wright has a good knowledge of science, research and development, Bernardo said.

"WSU has a very serious role being the research and development arm for much of the food and agriculture industry of Washington state," he said. "The leader of that has to be an excellent scientist who really understands the relationship between research and the problems and challenges we face in the food industry and natural resource management, et cetera."

Wright brings "a great deal of scientific depth and breadth" to the position, Bernardo said.

Bernardo said he appreciated the industry members who participated in the search to fill the position. WSU collected input from every group involved in interviews, including students, stakeholders, faculty, staff and other administrators. Wright was received well by all groups, he said.

"Washington State University is the envy of most land-grant university colleges of agriculture in terms of having an industry that brings real resources to the table," Bernardo said. "André will continue to build upon that."

Several members of the CAHNRS faculty recently expressed concern over the role industry plays in funding research, alleging that the college has overemphasized stakeholder interests.

Bernardo said such conversations are common at every university and college that works with stakeholders, including the medical and engineering fields.

"Managing those relationships is an important part of any dean's job," he said. "We would anticipate that will be an important part of André's work. It certainly was an important part of mine and Ron's."

The industry's relationship with WSU was a topic of discussion during the search, Bernardo said.

André-Denis Wright

Wright earned his doctorate and master's degree in zoology at the University of Guelph in Guelph, Canada, and completed a bachelor's degree in biology at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Canada. He was a faculty member at the University of Guelph and the University of Queensland and Murdoch University in Australia. He was a research scientist for the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation in Australia.

Before joining the University of Arizona in 2014, he was professor and chair of the Department of Animal Science at the University of Vermont and director of the Vermont Dairy Center of Excellence.

For nearly two decades, he's worked to increase the efficiency of nutrient utilization in livestock and to increase food production in an ecologically sustainable way. Much of his effort has focused on reducing the enteric methane produced by cattle during the digestive process. He uses next-generation sequencing and bioinformatics to examine the gut microbiome of animals, including humans, to better understand the interactions between host genetics and immune responses with gut microbiota.

Wright has published 104 peer-reviewed papers, contributed 18 book chapters, presented 98 conference papers and delivered 34 plenary lectures in 10 countries. He serves on several national boards and has served on review panels for the National Science Foundation, USDA and NASA. He has also served as an external scientific reviewer for the governments of Canada, Russia, Kazakhstan, Scotland and Switzerland.

In 2008, a new species of ciliated protozoa, *Apokeronopsis wrighti*, was named after Wright in recognition of his contributions to microbiology.

— Washington State University

"Serious candidates for deans' jobs of this nature recognize the importance of a positive and productive relationship with industry," he said. "We look forward to André continuing to build that and make sure any alleged conflicts of interest don't exist."

Wright has a reputation for working with industry and sees the relationship as a "very positive component" of the job, Bernardo said.



Capital Press File

Workers sort onions in a southwest Idaho packing plant. Farm expenses in Idaho rose an estimated 2 percent in 2017 but overall revenue rose 5 percent.

Idaho total net farm income increased 15 percent in 2017

By **SEAN ELLIS**
Capital Press

BOISE — Total net farm income in Idaho rose an estimated 15 percent in 2017, far faster than USDA's projected 3 percent increase for U.S. agriculture overall.

Net farm income, which is revenues minus expenses, represents the farmer's bottom line.

Farm expenses in Idaho rose an estimated 2 percent in 2017 but overall revenue rose 5 percent, according to the University of Idaho's "Financial Condition of Idaho Agriculture" report.

That resulted in \$1.9 billion in total net farm income for Idaho farmers last year.

Idaho net farm income had dropped three straight years — 3 percent in 2014, 9 percent in 2015 and 8 percent in 2016.

Low commodity prices

still pose challenges in farm country, "But after the past three years, we'll take it," UI Agricultural Economist Garth Taylor, one of the report's authors, said about last year's increase in net farm income.

Taylor said the stark contrast in the state's and nation's net farm income percentage increases stands out. A separate report compiled by Taylor shows that Idaho's net farm income has grown 100 percent more than the U.S. since 1997.

"We are on a different track in Idaho than the nation is. Far different," he said.

The report's authors and private economists attributed Idaho's increase in net farm income largely to gains in the state's dairy, beef and potato industries.

Dairy, cattle and potatoes are the state's main

commodities, respectively, in terms of cash receipts.

"The 2017 year will show solid improvement over 2016, in terms of both cash receipts and net farm income," Doug Robison, Northwest Farm Credit Services' senior vice president for agriculture in Western Idaho, told Capital Press in an email. "The improvement has been led by potatoes and dairy, with cattle providing strong support as well."

But, he added, "while the dairy industry in Idaho will generate positive profits in 2017, net earnings within the industry remain below historical averages."

Despite the state's 15 percent increase in net farm income, low commodity prices, especially for grains, are resulting in many farmers struggling to turn a profit, said UI Agricultural Economist Ben Eborn, a re-

port author.

Shelley farmer Stan Searle said that while most Idaho farmers fared better in 2017 than they did in 2016, "We still have battles ahead. The biggest issue is there are some commodities still below the cost of production."

The UI report shows total Idaho farm expenses reached \$6.24 billion in 2017, up 2 percent over the \$6.14 billion total in 2016.

A 1 percent decrease in costs for farm origin inputs and capital consumption were offset by a 1 percent increase in contract labor costs, a 7 percent increase in property taxes and fees and a 5 percent increase in payments to stakeholders.

Total farm revenues, which include cash receipts and government payments, totaled \$8.16 billion, up 5 percent over 2016.

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