11th Annual Alaska Sustainable Agriculture Conference
March 3-5, 2015, at the Westmark Fairbanks Hotel & Conference Center

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Keynote Speakers

Phil Metzger is a farm and natural resources development consultant, having retired from a 31-year career as a conservationist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. He has extensive experience working with an array of farms, business and organizations of all types and sizes. Phil instructs and consults on farm, personal and organizational goal setting, improved decision making, financial, land/infrastructure and grazing planning, biological monitoring and land health. He has been a certified educator in holistic management for more than 12 years. Currently, Phil is an instructor for Holistic Management International’s Western SARE Whole Farm Planning Distance Learning program, Northeast Beginning Women Farmer program, Cornell University Beginning Farmer Holistic Financial Planning on-line course and he consults with private clients.

Gina Greenway is an assistant professor of business and accounting at the College of Idaho. Greenway received her bachelor of science, master’s and doctoral degrees from the University of Idaho where she also taught agricultural economics courses and worked as a research associate. Her focus is on applied research and extension in the areas of potato industry economics and marketing, price forecasting and farm management.

State Speakers

George Aguiar grew up on a large dairy farm in Central California. His work experience while going to school there included raising goats and cattle while working in the veal and dairy industry. In 2002, George came to Fairbanks as a transfer student to the School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences. He began working for the Reindeer Research Program (RRP) in the summer of 2003 as a student hire and by 2005 was hired as a research technician. In 2009, George purchased six reindeer from Canada and began Archipelago Farms. He is currently a researcher for RRP and is working towards a master’s degree in food science through the program. At night and on the weekends, he manages his reindeer herd and works towards expanding the operation.

Arth Brown III has been instrumental in the area of career and technical education in the state of Alaska. Through partnership with the Copper Valley Development Association and Copper River School District, Arth served as project manager and SkillsUSA advisor, teaching containerized agriculture to the students and community members of the Copper River Valley. Currently, Arth is working to create a district wide agricultural program for the North Slope Borough School District and is writing a locally place-based curriculum for Alaskan students.
Matt Bowser serves the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge as an entomologist. He has interests in biotic inventories and monitoring, insect ecology, exotic earthworms, DNA barcoding as an identification tool, faunistics of Alaskan terrestrial arthropods, management of natural history collections and botany. Matt is currently the president of the Alaska Entomological Society. He and his wife grow subsistence crops for their family in high tunnels at their Kasilof home.

Erin Carr is the animal caretaker for the UAF Reindeer Research Program. Prior to working with the reindeer program, Erin was a research technician with the USDA Agricultural Research Service for five years. Her presentation, “Cover Crop and Tillage System Impacts on Weed Seed Banks,” was a research project during her time with ARS.

Janice Chumley has worked as an agriculture/horticulture/IPM tech with the Cooperative Extension Service on the Kenai Peninsula for the past 15 years. She is a Master Gardener and is active in assisting growers throughout her community and the state in using IPM tools for pest detection and control options.

Paul Finch is a lifelong farm dabbler, primarily raising meat goats for the last 15 years (and Quarter horses). He has resided in Alaska since 1980 and was among the first to import Boer goats from Texas in 1999. He was the Alaska State USBGA representative from 2000 to 2006. Paul spread herd genetics statewide through the Loan to Own program while he was gone to Mongolia 2006-2010. He established his current Boer herd in 2011 with the goal to realize meat goats as a valid commercial product for state of Alaska and to multiply numbers of meat goats and meat goat breeders in the state.

Rusty Foreaker works for the Alaska Division of Agriculture at the Plant Materials Center in Palmer. He has worked in the horticulture evaluations program for three years, which focuses on evaluating varieties and growing techniques for agriculture and horticulture crops in Alaska. He has more than 12 years of experience in the horticulture industry, with an emphasis on controlled environments and hydroponics.

Dr. Robert Gerlach works for the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation as the state veterinarian. He is responsible for animal health regulations and animal disease surveillance, and manages the state's fish monitoring program. He graduated from Pennsylvania State University with a bachelor of science degree in veterinary science and received his veterinary degree (VMD) from the University of Pennsylvania. From 1984 to 1987, he attended veterinarian and post doctoral fellow at the Lovelace Respiratory Research Institute in Albuquerque, N.M. In 1987, he moved to Alaska and worked in private practice until 2001 when he started working for the State of Alaska.

Franci Havemeister was appointed director of the Alaska Division of Agriculture on Aug. 1, 2007. The family has been farming in Alaska since 1935. Franci and her husband Bob have four children and are lifetime Alaskans. Franci has made it a priority to meet, gather ideas and work with industry in all areas of the state to facilitate better communication and ensure long-term success of the agriculture industry in the state. She
continues to work with state agencies, federal partners and the university to improve collaboration and provide more Alaska Grown products in schools, etc.

**Johanna Herron** is the Farm to School program coordinator for the Alaska Division of Agriculture. She serves as the state lead for the National Farm to School Network and the USDA Farm to School team. Johanna also serves on the board of the National Farm to School Network, Alaska School Nutrition Association and Alaska Future Farmers of America. Johanna holds a master’s degree in community nutrition, completing a project that looked at school food service perspectives about Farm to School in Alaska and using Farm to School as a health promotion strategy.

**Jason Hoke** serves as executive director of the Copper Valley Development Association, Inc. (CVDA). CVDA is the regional ARDOR (Alaska Regional Development Organization) with the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development. CVDA’s mission is essentially to serve as liaison between public and private partnership and to address natural resources and economic development opportunities throughout the Copper Valley region. A champion for agricultural development in Alaska, Jason is a member of the Alaska Food Policy Council and Kenny Lake Water and Soil District, and started the Triple H Farm.

**Dr. Pat Holloway** is professor of horticulture at the UAF Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station. For 29 years, she has taught horticulture classes and conducted research on a wide variety of projects including annual and perennial ornamental trials, wildflower propagation, wild and cultivated berry production, and cultivation of peonies for cut flower production.

**Phil Kaspari** is the agricultural extension faculty with the UAF Cooperative Extension Service (CES) in Delta Junction and has been with CES since 1998. He works primarily with the local agricultural community, but also assists in various capacities on local as well as statewide noxious and invasive weed control efforts. He is the lead for the Pesticide Safety Education Program for Alaska. A 30-year resident of Delta Junction, Phil and his family live and farm east of Delta on Sawmill Creek Road raising hay and yaks. Phil sees these as exciting times for the Alaskan agricultural industry.

**Dr. Rosemarie T.G. Lombardi** works for the USDA APHIS Veterinary Services as the federal veterinarian (veterinary medical officer) for Alaska. Rosemarie received her bachelor of arts and master of arts degrees in biology and physiological ecology from Boston University. She received her doctorate of veterinary medicine from the University of Pennsylvania. Previous to working for USDA, she worked for Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation in the pesticide program. Her focus is on One Health; USDA Animal Disease Surveillance, Preparedness and Response Services (SPRS); Animal Disease Traceability; and USDA Animal Import Export Services.

**Rachel Lord** and her husband Ben own and operate Alaska Stems, a small cut flower farm in Homer. Rachel holds a master of science degree in wildlife biology from UAF. When not farming and designing with flowers, she works for Cook Inletkeeper, a
regional community-based nonprofit dedicated to protecting clean water and healthy salmon habitat throughout Cook Inlet. In 2010, they received NRCS funding for a high tunnel, which set them on the path to market farming and floral design! It also inspired Rachel to try and learn more about how these high tunnels vary in their season extension capabilities around the area.

Dr. Lisa Lunn is an associate professor of veterinary medicine at UAF and an extension livestock veterinary specialist with CES. Dr. Lunn specializes in large animal internal medicine with an emphasis on food animal health and welfare. Promoting the One Health Initiative, as it relates to ruminant disease and public health, is a focus of her activities within the state of Alaska.

Julianne McGuinness, originally from New Jersey, has resided in Alaska for 25 years and has served as executive director for the Alaska Botanical Garden for the past seven years prior to starting her own writing and consulting business, Aisling Mhor Consulting, in November 2014. A lifelong avid organic Master Gardener and farmer, Julianne loves to cook, farm, garden, forage and travel. She has a bachelor of arts degree in psychology, studied for a doctorate in clinical psychology in Wyoming, then worked as a social worker in New York’s Hell’s Kitchen. She managed KTNA radio in Talkeetna for 11 years, and has worked as a caterer and camp cook. Her recipes have been featured on the Food Network. Julianne has recently embarked on a journey, leaving Alaska to focus on new opportunities in botany and agriculture on the East Coast.

Jon Oestreich spent summers on his grandparents’ dairy farm in Central Texas where he developed a love for agriculture. Combined with an interest in protecting natural resources, a job with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service is a perfect fit. He earned degrees in environmental studies in Western New York and forestry in Western Montana. The first four years of his career with NRCS were split between Idaho and Texas, and he has worked in the Fairbanks office for four years.

Heidi Rader has served as the tribes extension agent for the Tanana Chiefs Conference region since 2007. She has also directed the Alaska Growers School since 2010. The Alaska Growers School, a webinar course, has helped educate hundreds of aspiring gardeners, farmers, ranchers and growers across Alaska. Heidi is originally from Interior Alaska and is a longtime gardener and small farmer.

Stephen Petersen has been in Alaska since 1962 and has kept bees since 1984. His only regret is he didn’t discover beekeeping 20 years earlier as it is his passion. For 18 of the last 31 years, he’s traveled to more than 20 countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East participating in beekeeping development programs in rural areas and working with eight other honeybee species. In 1989, Stephen received a grant from the Alaska Science and Technology Foundation to study overwintering. He’s been attempting to overwinter colonies almost every year since, albeit with a low success rate. (As with many agriculture endeavors, “there’s always next year.”) Although his background is in the geological sciences, Stephen considers himself a self-taught naturalist at heart. His worldwide sojourns have stimulated interest in biogeography, botany, ethnobotany,
ecology, history, archeology, anthropology and a taste for bizarre foods. His mantra is “No forest, no bees; no bees, no forest,” reflecting the importance of pollinators in our natural as well as agricultural landscape.

Amy Pettit graduated from Oregon State University with a bachelor’s degree in agricultural business management in 2003. In 2005, Amy was imported to Alaska by her husband and began working at the Alaska Division of Agriculture as a summer intern. Since 2010, Amy has been managing the marketing team, which oversees the Alaska Grown program, Farm to School program, Farmers Market Quest program, Specialty Crop Block Grant program as well as a number of other efforts. Amy serves as the first vice president of the North American Agricultural Marketing Officials and has been a member of the Alaska Food Policy Council Governing Board since its inception.

Russ Pinkelman’s roots began on his family farm in the Northeast corner of Nebraska where he was one of 12 children. In 1977, Russ ventured to Alaska with friends for something adventurous and to seek employment in the Great Land. He worked for 10 years in Fairbanks constructing hotels, warehouses and apartment complexes for Denis Wise. There, he met and married his wife Jeannie. In 1987, they moved to Delta Junction where Russ worked for his father-in-law Doug McCollum at Delta Concrete and together they now raise cattle and hogs and sell commercial hay for Northwest Land and Livestock. They also own Delta Meat and Sausage Company in Delta Junction.

Jacquelyn Schade was raised in Eagle River and received her bachelor’s degree in animal science from Montana State University – Bozeman in 2011. Jacquelyn has worked for the Alaska Division of Agriculture since 2013 and has learned a lot about the current state of affairs in Alaska’s agriculture. After attending a conference on agritourism in the Lower 48, she started researching the possibilities of agritourism for Alaska and is excited to share what she has learned with you today.

Jeff Smeenk wears a number of hats. He is here to report on the progress of an Alaska Division of Agriculture Specialty Crop Grant involving rhubarb juice. He is currently working with the Alaska Rhubarb Company and the Alaska DEC staff to develop an approved rhubarb juicing and processing protocol for wholesale and retail sales.

Darren Snyder graduated with a bachelor of science degree in agriculture from the University of Hawaii Hilo in 1993. Having lived in Southeast Alaska since 1995 and earning a master of art in teaching from UAS, he has developed a strong understanding of coastal Alaska growing conditions, community cultures and the Alaska food system. A member of the Alaska Food Policy Council’s Governing Board, he works to strengthen Alaska's food system through his work with food production, youth development and emergency preparedness programs as a cooperative extension agent based in Juneau.

Ben Soiseth holds a bachelor of science degree in wildlife biology from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Ben has worked for the USACE Regulatory Division for more than 11 years, and has spent most of his career evaluating wetland permits in the Fairbanks area. Ben has also worked for the USACE Regulatory Division in Wasilla and Anchorage. In
2011, Ben moved back to Fairbanks to his current position as the Fairbanks field office supervisor.

Laura Starr is a M.S. candidate with the Department of High Latitude Agriculture, UAF School of Natural Resources Management and Agricultural Sciences, and works as a research assistant for Dr. Jan Rowell, where her focus is working with muskox and muskox farming at the Large Animal Research Facility. Laura was a warrant officer in the U.S. Army where she worked in Electronic Warfare and Tactical Operations. She has two little girls, ages 8 and 10, and her husband is a warrant officer at Fort Wainwright.

Todd Steinlage is the plant pathologist for the Alaska Plant Materials Center (PMC). He works with all crops grown at the PMC, as well as producers of horticultural and agronomic crops statewide. His primary duties include diagnosis and management of plant diseases. He has worked with bacterial, fungal and viral pathogens in diverse plant systems for the past 17 years. Todd has been at the PMC for three years, following work with USDA-ARS, USDA-APHIS, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Iowa State University.

Heather Stewart began invasive plant species work with the Plant Materials Center in 2013 as a field tech for the Canada thistle control project in Anchorage. She has since become the invasive plant and agricultural pest coordinator for the Alaska Division of Agriculture and most recently the CNIPM (Community of Noxious and Invasive Plant Management) board chair. Heather received her bachelor of science degree from the University of Dayton and her master of science degree from the University at Buffalo. When she’s not getting rid of invasive plants, she’s fishing for kings and silvers on the Deshka and Kenai, climbing Alaska’s peaks or looking at rocks and minerals.

Michael Williams is a 20-year U.S. Army veteran. In 1994, he and his family moved to Mt. Susitna and founded EagleSong Lodge. After salmon fishing was banned in 2009 due to predation by northern pike, they closed their lodge and created EagleSong Family Peony Farm. Today, EagleSong is one of the largest and most remote peony farms in Alaska. Last August, Mike’s family was named Alaska’s 2014 Farm Family of the Year. He is also a founding partner of Alaska Peony Distributors, LLC, a commercial peony pack house located in Wasilla.

Dr. Mingchu Zhang graduated from the Department of Soil Science, University of Alberta, in 1993, then worked as a research associate at the University of Alberta from 1993 to 1997 in a R&D project funded by a multinational fertilizer company. From 1997 to 1998, he served as a visiting scientist at Tohuko University of Japan. After returning from Japan, he worked in Alberta Agriculture as a research agronomist from 1998 to 2003. In August 2003, Dr. Zhang started to work as an assistant professor for the UAF School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences. Dr. Zhang’s primary expertise is in soil and plant nutrients. He has worked closely with farmers in Alaska in compost development and soil nutrient management.