

New U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center Director

Charting a Powerful Vision

by Beth Nelson & Jon Dockter, NAFA



NAFA has been instrumental in working with ARS to fill the U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center (USDFRC) Director position which had been vacant since Neil Martin's retirement in January 2013. We are pleased ARS has announced Dr. Mark Boggess as the new Director. Previously, he served as the ARS National Program Leader of Pasture, Forage, and Rangeland Systems and Food Animal Production in Beltsville, MD.

Boggess earned a PhD in Animal Breeding from Iowa State University, an MS in Animal Breeding from Cornell University, and a BS in Animal Science from Iowa State.

He grew up on a typical Iowa farm with pigs, cattle, and sheep where he learned to "put up" hay early and spent many days running hay crews, stacking, and moving hay bales. He became interested in animal production systems and management. His early interests and career focused on improving animal performance and efficiency. He has always been around cows and has practical experience in the forage arena.

In his role as National Program Leader, he worked closely with the Office of National Programs in ARS where he developed strong relationships across USDA Agencies and with scientists and leaders in forage and dairy research. He had the opportunity to engage key industry stakeholders, including NAFA and Dairy Management. This experience provided Boggess with firsthand knowledge of ways the USDFRC can collaborate across ARS locations to increase problem-

solving impact. He views stakeholder relationships as a priority.

Boggess brings unique strengths from his animal science and animal husbandry experience. He relates well with farmers, ranchers, and industry stakeholders and has the ability to connect their issues with science.

Boggess will focus on the big picture of food systems to chart a powerful vision and direction for the USDFRC. The USDFRC creates scientific value by integrating soil and plant sciences, microbiology, engineering, and dairy science, all focused on forage utilization for dairy production to improve nutrient management, production, and efficiency. Few other labs in the world have this level of focused integration. Boggess plans to encourage the growth of the USDFRC as a world leader in forage and dairy research.



Top Priorities

Address stakeholder priorities. Boggess' top priority is to address stakeholder priorities through interdisciplinary research for the forage and dairy industries. The USDFRC has honored this mission well since its inception, but there is another level with regard to scientific accomplishment and national and international relevance. It is his priority to empower that growth in the USDFRC through scientific achievement.

USDFRC gaining recognition as a world class research institution. The USDFRC will be challenged to assume a larger leadership role in ARS and in the dairy and forage industries through collaboration across ARS, with land grant universities, stakeholders, and

international partners. Boggess said, "We will need to do a better job of marketing, creating more visibility, demonstrating more impact for stakeholders, and becoming more widely recognized as a world class research institution. We have an extraordinary team and they are ready to step up to the challenge."

Promising Forage Research

According to Boggess, the USDFRC is poised for remarkable improvements in yield, stress and drought tolerance, nutritional value, and in integrated production system efficiencies. Additional focuses will be protein value and utility in forages and to reduce protein losses during storage.

Achieving Parity with Major Crops

Boggess believes the forage industry is challenged to tell the story of how it is improving rural economic viability, addressing food security, and promoting environmental sustainability. Stakeholders must continue to advocate for the forage industry's unique value. Federal budgets are tight, so the industry needs to stay focused with a consistent message and work closely with agency administrations to convey that message. Specific arguments must be made by demonstrating forages' value, impact, and productivity.

Boggess said, "Without question, I consider research funding a primary challenge for the forage industry. We need to enhance funding and improve the impact of existing dollars through focused prioritization and enhanced industry collaboration with academia and stakeholders."



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