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Applied Economics at the University of Minnesota



@ApEcMN



# Notes from the Department Head

BY FRANCES HOMANS



At this year's Borealis Night of Excellence, we celebrated the many students, faculty, alumni and friends who make the College such a wonderful place to work and learn. At that event, **Paul Hugunin** (B.S. 1989) was named this year's Distinguished Alumnus. Paul's career has had a single-minded focus on helping Minnesota farmers; he has nurtured programs

and garnered support over the years to provide real help to producers who know how to grow food but have less experience in marketing their products. One of the things that really sets Paul apart is how interested he is in helping other people excel. He's served as a mentor for scores of U of M students interested in exploring agriculture, marketing, or public service. As a supervisor and division director, he invests a great deal of focus and energy in coaching individual staff members to expand and enhance what they're capable of professionally. He spoke a few words upon receiving the award:

It's really the people that make this place a world-class institution. I think back on the professors in the Applied Econ department, people like **Doctor Eidman** and **Doctor Houck**, and of course **Reese Dahl**, and those are the kinds of people that inspire me to remain active in the Alumni Society, especially the Mentor Program. I want to thank everyone who has signed up to be a mentor. For those of you who haven't, sign up for next year. It makes a huge difference in the lives of students here on campus.

Those who have gone before set the stage for our current faculty who continue to make this place a world-class institution. To single out a few, we celebrate the promotions of **Joleen Hadrich**, to Full Professor, and **Curtis Mahnken**, to Full Extension Professor. **Jason Kerwin** was named a McKnight Land-Grant Professor. **Marc Bellemare** was named a Distinguished McKnight University Professor and received the University of Minnesota's Award for Outstanding Contributions to Graduate and Professional Education. **Laura Kalambokidis** was recognized by the University as a Community-Engaged Scholar.

**Donald Liu** has done his part to enrich the lives of thousands of students on campus. Donald earned his PhD in our department in 1985 and returned to us as a faculty member in agricultural marketing. As a non-native English speaker, he said that he had to work harder to teach well—and work hard he did. Donald received many well-deserved awards for his innovative teaching and gave his time to mentor others through the Academy of Distinguished Teaching. Donald cultivated such a sense of kindness in his class while inspiring his students to really learn economics. Donald led the Minnesota Council on Economic Education and mentored high school teachers in the College in the Schools Program. Donald is now transitioning to Emeritus status, and I look forward to his continued friendship in the years ahead.



*Frances Homans*

DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED ECONOMICS

# Center for Farm Financial Management

## OUTREACH WITH HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED PRODUCERS

**The Center for Farm Financial Management** (CFFM) has a long history of working with historically underserved producers. In the early 2000s, staff had projects teaching financial management with both the Navajo and several 1890s historically black land grant universities. These sessions put the adult learners in the role of lenders to make a decision on a proposed loan, learning what creditors are looking for in the financials along the way.

In 2015, CFFM was awarded the USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program Clearinghouse. In the clearinghouse role, CFFM works with all USDA funded beginning farmer projects to foster communication and cooperation. Many of these projects work with underserved audiences.

FarmAnswers.org is one of the activities that extends this information directly to beginning farmers. It includes a library with over 5,500 videos, apps, publications, and online courses; a programs section that includes links to over 370 educational programs; toolboxes that give producers a curated set of tools on specific topics; and a summary of projects funded by The National Institute of Food and Agriculture Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (NIFA BFRDP).

As one of the five Extension Risk Management Education centers, CFFM is partnering with the Intertribal Ag Council and the University of Arkansas's Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative to develop a crop insurance training program for native farmers and ranchers. Native

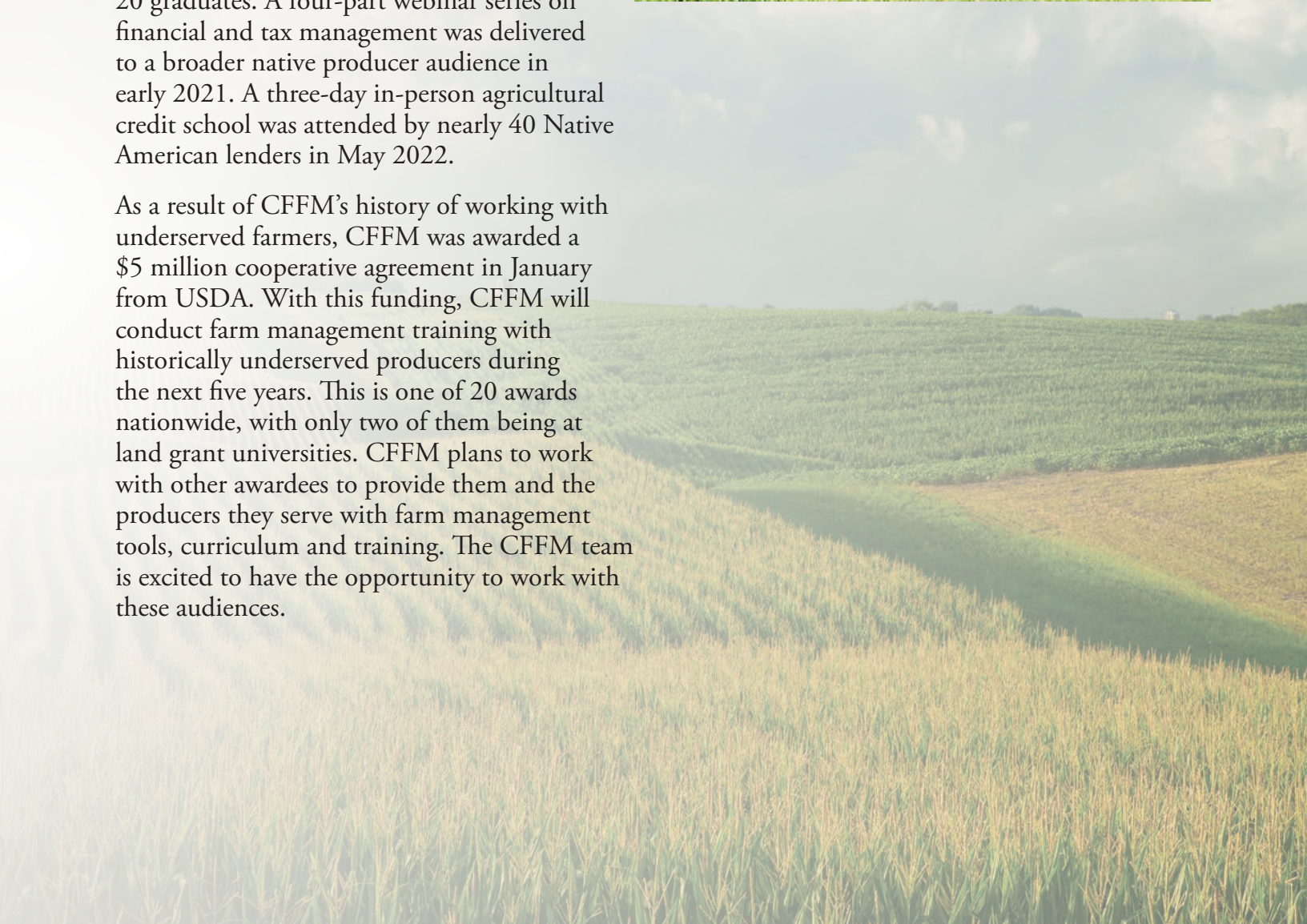
Americans are historically underserved by crop insurance, even though they operate farms and ranches on 59 million acres (6.5 percent of U.S. total). Another partnership is with National Crop Insurance Services (NCIS). They work with the 1890s to offer intensive farm financial management training to black producers in six states. Another CFFM subaward is with The Good Acre, a St. Paul based community food hub that works with 20 black, indigenous, other people of color (BIPOC) producers to improve their financial management skills.



BY ROBERT CRAVEN

In 2019, CFFM partnered with the Native American Agricultural Fund (NAAF) to conduct credit analysis training for Native Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) and other native lenders. This launched in the spring of 2020 with a five-part webinar series describing the farm financial tools available from CFFM. That fall, CFFM offered a 12-part webinar series on credit analysis to Native American CDFIs, a first ever virtual native ag lender underwriting school that had over 20 graduates. A four-part webinar series on financial and tax management was delivered to a broader native producer audience in early 2021. A three-day in-person agricultural credit school was attended by nearly 40 Native American lenders in May 2022.

As a result of CFFM's history of working with underserved farmers, CFFM was awarded a \$5 million cooperative agreement in January from USDA. With this funding, CFFM will conduct farm management training with historically underserved producers during the next five years. This is one of 20 awards nationwide, with only two of them being at land grant universities. CFFM plans to work with other awardees to provide them and the producers they serve with farm management tools, curriculum and training. The CFFM team is excited to have the opportunity to work with these audiences.



# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

## Interview with Misty Heggeness

### What is your current position and how did your degree from the University help prepare you for that?

**MH** I am a principal economist and senior advisor to the U.S. Census Bureau. I have a bachelor's degree in Family Social Science and Spanish, a master's degree in Public Policy and Social Work, and a Ph.D. in Applied Economics—all from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. My preparation at the University of Minnesota positioned me to have the necessary tools and knowledge for a research economist job within the federal government because I was trained in the best methods for program evaluation, economic theory and principles, and the dynamics of how families and households interact with the economy. Advisors like Paul Glewwe, Ragui Assaad, Deborah Levison, Terry Hurley, and Steve Ruggles made my journal manageable and worth all the effort.

### Describe your research and how it relates to the current economic climate.

**MH** Most recently, I have been studying the effect of the pandemic school closures and insecurities on mothers labor supply—focusing on economic outcomes like exiting the labor force and taking up leave, as well as examining the effects separately by telework-compatibility of one's job. My research has garnered national and local attention in media outlets like the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Bloomberg, Yahoo! Finance, among others. Perhaps the crown jewel of media exposure, however, was an interview I did with Cathy Wurzer on Minnesota Now (Minnesota Public Radio). I grew up in Fargo, North Dakota and lived almost twenty years in Minneapolis, so almost nothing can top a nostalgic interview with the queen of Minnesota journalism.

As a federal research economist, I engage in lots of interesting research projects that are focused on helping the federal government make informed policy and programmatic decisions. For example, I worked on the research team that led the analysis to identify whether adding a citizenship question to the 2020 Census would impact response rates. Our paper was published in *Demography* and used by both sides (and the Supreme Court justices) in arguing and deciding the *New York v. United States Department of Commerce* case in April 2019, which did not allow the addition of a citizenship question on the 2020 Census. I have also conducted a fair amount of research on the U.S. biomedical workforce as a senior labor economist at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), helping inform NIH policy with data and research, and I have led impact evaluations and participated in field work in Bolivia and Ghana for the U.S. Department of Labor.

### Why did you/do you want to study these areas?

**MH** I am an applied economist, which means that I find the most value in the field of economics by applying theory and econometric tools to study real-life problems. I believe this is the best way for me to have an impact in the world and create meaning from my work. I did not start out in economics (as shown above), so my interest in the field of economics came late in the game. Early on I knew I wanted to help people and understand family dynamics. I dipped my toe in social work but quickly realized I wanted to focus on macro change (e.g., via policies and data analysis) rather than micro changes (e.g., via therapy or individual-client work). I eventually stumbled upon economics. It has treated me very kindly and



every day I appreciate the tools and knowledge I have garnished in this field and my ability to apply it to meaningful moments—like the struggles working parents have had during the pandemic.

**If you could give a piece of advice to current students, what would it be?**

**MH** Follow your heart and be true to yourself. The road may not always be easy, and there will always be bumps along the way—be kind to yourself. Always remember that your degree will not attend your funeral, so do not forget to develop relationships with those around you and make sure you create and maintain meaningful relationships with the interesting people you meet along the way.

**Do you have any special memories from your time in the department?**

**MH** I had so many kind and interesting classmates from all around the world. The international dinners were always a time for students and faculty to shine and show their best non-economic talents—both culinary and creative. I was also lucky enough to work as a research assistant at the Minnesota Population Center throughout my PhD. That experience is perhaps linked to every post-PhD job I have ever had, and I cannot be grateful enough for the tools and skills I learned (and the friends I made) there. These “outside-the-department” opportunities along with opportunities to interact with nationally renowned scholars through departmental seminars like the Trade & Development Seminar really made the experience in the applied economics program all the more meaningful.

## TAKE A TRIP TO SPAIN WITH UNDERGRADUATE ANNA MAYER

**Anna Mayer** is a junior studying Applied Economics and Sustainability here at the University who spent her Spring 2022 semester studying abroad in Barcelona, Spain. Anna is a born-and-raised Minnesotan, growing up just outside St. Paul in Mendota Heights. She has had an interest in all things earth and environment since she was just a little kid, and even completed the junior master gardener program for Dakota County. This interest in the natural world is a main reason why she chose Barcelona, as the city is bookended by the beach on one side and mountains on the other. Anna has spent countless hours hiking the Montserrat Mountains, completing the surreal experience of an 8-mile hike with a few of her roommates.



Despite having personal motivations for picking Barcelona, some were also academic, as the program also allows her to intern while abroad. She has spent time researching the connection between economics and homelessness, which she feels has given her a deeper insight into the Spanish culture and economy that most study abroad programs don't offer. There are so many important perceptions and tradeoffs discussed while looking at macroeconomic issues like housing and unemployment, especially since the unemployment rate in Spain is significantly higher than it is in Minnesota.

With Anna's career aspirations being to stimulate developing economies, experiencing a greater global perspective, and widening her economic lens have been invaluable.





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## CHECKING IN WITH COLETTE SALEMI

**Colette Salemi** is a development and natural resource economist who graduated from our department in 2022. In the Fall of 2022, Colette will begin her career as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Economics at the University of Victoria.

Colette's research focuses on the nexus of conflict, displacement, and food and natural resources. Her work draws heavily on remotely sensed geographic information systems (GIS) data, as well as household microdata. She uses quasi-experimental approaches to evaluate the impacts of forced displacement on the landscape and to better understand the relationship between food and resource security.

Colette holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Williams College, an MA in Middle Eastern Studies and a MA in Public Policy, both from the University of Chicago.



*"The best empirical work nowadays combines geo-referenced data with socio-economic data. Early on in her graduate studies, Colette wisely invested in learning the methods that would allow to come up with such combinations of data to study novel research questions using state-of-the-art methods. That investment has paid off handsomely, both in terms of publications and on the job market. Over the past few years, I have come to consider Colette a colleague more than a student."*

—Professor Marc Bellemare

*"Colette's enthusiasm for research was evident on day one of her helping me as a research assistant when she launched into a brand-new project on firewood collection in Tanzania. On day two, she had already synthesized the major thinking in the field and raised many good points I hadn't thought of in several years! Her quality research and scholarship will serve her well at University of Victoria."*

—Assistant Professor Justin Johnson