

CAFES History Project  
Food Science Program (DRAFT October 2006)

The Department of Animal Science and the College of Agriculture of the Wisconsin State University –River Falls prepared a request for a major in Food Science and Technology in 1966-67 in response to a need to make the college agribusiness offerings more comprehensive and to meet regional needs for skilled personnel in the food processing industry. The request was approved by the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents on March 14, 1968.

Dr. Lee Blakely was hired in the fall of 1969. Blakely and Dr. Dean Henderson, a professor in the Animal Science Department specializing in meat science, began offering courses that same year. Limited teaching laboratories and equipment, especially for meat processing, were available in the Agricultural Science Building, which had been completed in 1966. From the very beginning, however, faculty members associated with the Food Science program began planning for a more suitable alternative. The campus submitted a request for a Physical Science –Food Science building in 1971. Although planning funds were received from the state, the state Building Commission did not approve plans for the Food Science portion.

Beginning in 1972 the unused food service facilities in May Hall were allocated to the program to temporarily meet the needs for food processing. Space for other laboratory courses was retained in the Ag Science Building. These facilities were upgraded in 1975-76, and served the needs of the program until the current Food Science Addition to the Ag Science Building was completed in 1982.

Many tales can be told about the “May Hall days”. The portion of the building assigned to Food Science included the west end basement area, which had previously served the campus dining service (then Ace Foods) as a food preparation area with offices and storage space, including walk-in coolers. Just prior to occupancy by the new Food Science tenants, the southwest corner of the basement housed a campus discoteche and bar known as “The West End”. The upper level was used by the wrestling team under legendary coach Byron James for practices and matches. The team shared the locker room with Food Science. There was a distinct locker-room odor present throughout the facility for the first part of each day. The sole lecture room, also located in the basement was difficult to find by all but the most astute students. Instructors were never certain about the class rosters until the beginning of the third week of class.

Food Science Faculty

NAME	GRADUATING INSTITUTION	SPECIALITY	DATES OF SERVICE
Dean W. Henderson	Iowa State University	Meat Science and Livestock Evaluation	1968 - 2001
Lee Blakley	Michigan State University	Food Microbiology and Dairy Processing	1969 -1971
Otto Hampton	Texas A and M	Food Microbiology	1971-72
Stanley H. Richert	University of Wisconsin – Madison	Food Processing and engineering	1972-74
James V. Chambers	Ohio State University	Food Microbiology	1972-74
Stephen C. Ridley	University of Maine	Food Microbiology and Food Chemistry	1974-2006
Henry Leung	University of Illinois	Food engineering and processing	1974-1975
Walter Wood	University of Idaho	Food processing	1975-1976
Purnendu C. Vasavada	University of Georgia	Food and Dairy Processing and Food Microbiology	1977 to present
Jeff Culbertson	Oregon State University	Food Processing	1981-82
Patricia Curtis	Texas A and M	Food Processing	1986-1991
Ranee May	University of Nebraska	Dairy Plant Manager	1982 – present
Steven H. Watters	University of Wisconsin – River Falls	Meat Plant Manager	1982 - present
Fred Murdock	University of Missouri	Food Chemistry and Analysis	1988 –1992
Anand Rao	Iowa State University	Food and Dairy Processing	1988 – 1990 1995 – 1998?
Bonnie Walters	University of Wisconsin – Madison	Poultry Science and Food Chemistry	1992 - present

The Food Science program was approved by the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) in 1973. As such students enrolled in Food Science were eligible to receive IFT scholarships. The first recipient was Sherri (Stephens) Schellhaass, a 1975 graduate who went on to obtain a PhD degree from the University of Minnesota and to complete a distinguished career with General Mills. The program's first graduate was Jerel Steckling in 1971. Jerel is currently in a management position with one of the largest cheese producers in the U.S. David Aggen, another graduate from the early 1970's is currently a Vice President with Lakeside Foods, one of the largest vegetable processors in Wisconsin.

In 1984 the River Falls Food Science program was approved for Warrant Officers of the U.S. Army Veterinary Service to complete their degrees. John Scott and Mike Acheson were the first of approximately 12 participants over the years.

A student organization, the Food Science Club, has been in existence since the earliest days of the program. Over the years this group has become known for its sales of smoked turkeys at Thanksgiving and Christmas. The group has also been active in the regional Food Science College Bowl competition and in Minnesota and national IFT activities. Club member Catherine Gryniwicz took first place in the IFT undergraduate research competition in Anaheim, CA in 1984. An excerpt from the Winter 1991 Food Science and Technology Club Newsletter, written by club President Pamela Ruck, sheds additional light on student activities.

*“November’s highlight was our trip to the College Bowl. We left on Friday November 9 and toured Henri’s Salad Dressing, Ambrosia Chocolate and Miller Brewing in Milwaukee. On Saturday we toured the state capitol and Madison. Also we attended the regional IFT meeting on Saturday night. On Sunday our team consisting of Ned Schumacher, Pam Ruck, Kristi Pechacek and Joyce Gabbert defeated Ohio State, Purdue and the University of Wisconsin – Madison (25-10) to win the Regional title and earn a trip to Dallas, Texas for the National College Bowl in June.*

Food Science students have reported learning many things during their four or more years at UW-River Falls. A club newsletter from 1998 contains the following information:

*“General Rule of Thumb  
Most Food cannot be kept longer than the average life of a hamster.  
Keep a hamster in your refrigerator to gauge this.”*

They didn't learn this from me.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Ridley  
Professor Emeritus and Dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental  
Science