

STAYING CON**NE**CTED **ALUMNI NEWSLETTER**

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VOLUME 1



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If you would like to be on our email distribution list, please send us your contact info at foodsci@unl.edu

LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD



Dear Alumni,

We are excited to resume our annual newsletter and share the wonderful things happening in our department. Even better, we are planning to publish updates more frequently—several times a year—so that you can follow our progress closely.

This year has brought exciting changes, challenges, and opportunities. Our department continues to grow and have a meaningful impact across Nebraska and beyond. **We are incredibly proud of the accomplishments of our faculty, staff, and students.**

We also want to hear from you more often! If you are close to Lincoln, NE, please stop by and say, “Hi”! We’d love to hear what you are up to and how we can help support your professional journey. Our students especially enjoy connecting with Alumni, so if you are interested in engaging with us, we’d be thrilled to welcome you back.

Despite the ongoing funding challenges, we are fortunate to have a strong dedicated team of faculty, staff, post-docs, and students who make it possible for us to continue delivering high-quality training and research. Our students benefit from learning alongside extraordinary researchers and peers from diverse backgrounds, enriching their academic experience. We are committed to providing instruction not only in the classroom but also through hands-on, experiential learning—starting as early as their undergraduate years.

None of this could be possible without the passion and hard work of our faculty and staff. **Thank you for being part of our community!**

Sidenote: I am still collecting information about your experience as a student at UNL so that we can tailor our curriculum to the needs in the industry. If you already filled out the survey, THANK YOU! If you still didn’t take the survey, you can do so by visiting go.unl.edu/fst_survey_2025 or scanning the QR code at the bottom of this page.

I would appreciate it if you could fill out the survey by August 15th since I am planning to share the results with the faculty during our Annual Retreat on August 22nd.

We appreciate your continued engagement. See you in the next edition!

As always, we are grateful for your time and attention.

Gratefully,

Silvana Martini

Silvana Martini, Ph.D
Professor, Department Head
Food Science and Technology



**Take our quick survey
by August 15! Visit
go.unl.edu/fst_survey_2025
or scan the QR code.**



CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES!

We're proud to celebrate the newest graduates of the Department of Food Science and Technology. **Their achievements reflect the same drive and passion that connect our alumni community.** Join us in congratulating them as they take their next steps into the field!

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Rachana Police, MS (project)
advised by Rossana Villa Rojas

Daniela Segura, MS (project)
advised by Rossana Villa Rojas

Ellenor Sell, MS (thesis)
advised by Philip Johnson

Yafan Yu, PhD (BIOC)
advised by Kurt Piepenbrink

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Adam Lierz

Mary Morran

Janine Merkle

Maya Tanikawa-Brown

3+1 PROGRAM GRADUATES

Ruoyao Bi

Yueyan Dai

Yuyang Dai

Yanchu Du

Jingqi Feng

Yufei Fu

Boyang Gao

Yimeng Gao

Qiaoning Guo

Jiaqi He

Junyi He

Sirong Hong

Chunyan Hu

Yixin Hu

Hanyin Kou

Jinheng Lei

Jiaming Li

Ju Li

Tianyi Li

Yuyang Li

Jiachang Liu

Jinghao Liu

Qi Liu

Xiaoyue Liu

Yufei Liu

Lin Lou

Yuzhang Pan

Anpei Song

Jiayin Song

Wenquiao Su

Chenfengjia Wang

Chunze Wang

Fengshi Wang

Zhaoting Wang

Junyi Wei

Qidi Wu

Ziqin Xu

Ruolan Yang

Yaxian Yang

Heyang Yuan

Guiyu Zhang

Qinyu Zhang

Yishu Zhang

Zhen Zhang

Qinwen Zheng

Yingjie Zhou

ALUMNI DONOR SPOTLIGHT



Honoring Oak B. Smith: A Legacy of Innovation and Impact in Extrusion Technology

Oak B. Smith (1919–1995), a proud alumnus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, left an indelible mark on the global food and feed industries through his pioneering work in extrusion technology. Graduating in 1940 with a degree in agricultural economics, Oak dedicated his career to addressing one of humanity's most pressing challenges: delivering protein efficiently to those in need.

In 1955, Oak joined Wenger Manufacturing in Sabetha, Kansas, as General Sales Manager. Over the years, he rose through the ranks to become Director of Market Research and eventually President. Under his leadership, Wenger became a global force in extrusion cooking—a process that transforms plant proteins into nutritious, shelf-stable foods. Oak and his colleagues installed hundreds of extruders across both developed and developing nations, helping to combat hunger through innovation.

Wenger Manufacturing, founded in the 1930s by Joseph Wenger, originally focused on feed milling before pivoting to extrusion in the 1950s. The company remains the only U.S.-based manufacturer of extrusion equipment, with most competitors located in Europe. Oak's curiosity and drive were instrumental in advancing the technology. Notably, in 1959, he authored a seminal article on the expansion pelleting process for dog food production, and by 1960, Wenger had applied for a patent that would revolutionize cereal product digestibility.



Lou Wenger and Oak Smith visit in Lou's office during a Wenger Open House in 1955.



A gift with impact. Oak B. Smith's donation of a twin screw extruder supports education, research, and processing capabilities.

Oak's contributions were recognized in 1976 when he received the Nebraska Alumni Association Alumni Achievement Award. His connection to the University of Nebraska remained strong, culminating in a generous bequest to the Department of Food Science and Technology (FST).

This bequest was likely inspired by a fruitful partnership between Wenger and the university's Food Processing Center (FPC), established in 1985 to enhance value-added agricultural processing in Nebraska. By the early 1990s, Wenger had donated a twin-screw extruder to the FPC, transforming the center into "Wenger-North." This collaboration enabled product and process development for international clients, with key contributions from faculty and staff such as Prof. Milford Hanna, Dan Neumeister, and Prof. David Jackson.

Oak B. Smith's legacy lives on through the continued work of the FPC and FST, where innovation, education, and industry collaboration remain at the heart of their mission—just as Oak envisioned.

Follow in Oak B. Smith's footsteps and invest in the future of food science. Your gift helps advance research, innovation, and real-world impact.



ALUMNI OF THE MONTH

MIKE DONOGHUE CLASS OF 2017

Mike Donoghue, a proud alumnus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, has carved an impressive path in the food science industry since graduating with a B.S. in Food Science in 2017.

Starting as a Lab Technician at the Food Allergy Research and Resource Program (FARRP) at UNL, Mike honed skills in assay development and laboratory management. This foundational experience paved the way for a role as a Quality Assurance Intern at Monogram Foods, where Mike developed enhanced digital programs and supported microbiology lab operations.

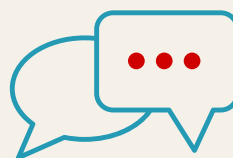
In 2017, Mike joined Conagra Brands, a leading Food CPG Manufacturer, as a Product Development Intern. Demonstrating exceptional technical expertise and leadership, he quickly progressed through various roles, including Associate Food Scientist, Food Scientist, and ultimately Senior Food Scientist. At Conagra, Mike has been instrumental in driving cost savings, streamlining processes, and leading significant product development initiatives.

Notable accomplishments include conceptualizing and executing millions in reformulation-driven savings, leading technical teams for supply chain improvements, and managing substantial capital investments for production consolidation. Mike's dedication to continuing education and mentoring new food scientists has also been a cornerstone of their career.

Beyond professional achievements, Mike is actively involved in several professional organizations, including the Conagra Young Professionals Employee Resource Network and the Chicago Young Professionals Network. As a member of the Conagra D&I Taskforce and Pi Kappa Phi Men's Fraternity Alumni Organization, Mike continues to advocate for diversity and inclusion within the industry.

Today, Mike works out of the Chicago R&D Conagra Brands location and supports the Meat Snacks Team. He balances his time between Fatty and Duke's Brands supporting Innovation and Network Optimization, while also managing a small team of Food Scientists.

Reflecting on their journey, Mike attributes his success to the solid educational foundation provided by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the invaluable experiences gained through various roles in the food science sector. Mike remains committed to innovation and excellence, driving forward the future of Food Science.



Would you like to be our next Alumni of the Month?

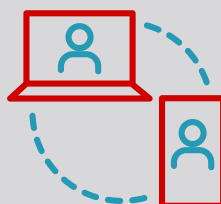
Contact Susie Fauble at sfauble2@unl.edu to ask how!

GIVE BACK



Support the next generation of food scientists. Your gift helps fund student experiences, innovative research, and hands-on learning that drive real-world solutions in food, health, and technology.

STAY CONNECTED

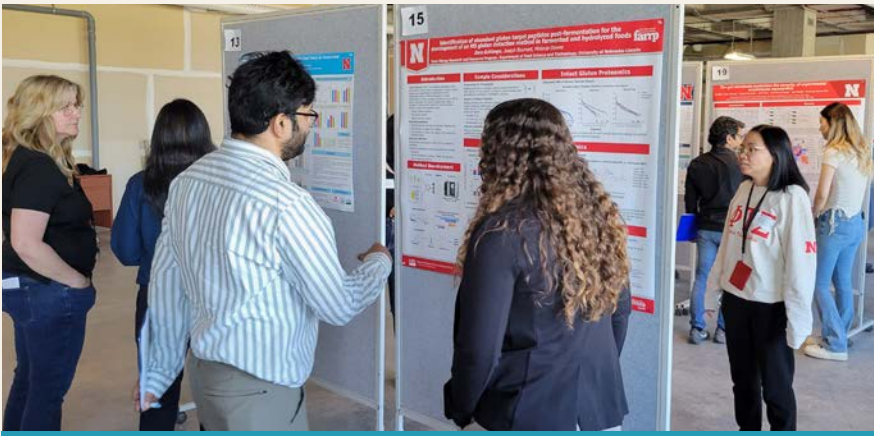


Let's keep in touch! Update your contact info so you never miss department news, events, and opportunities to reconnect with fellow alumni and faculty.

MAKE AN IMPACT



Whether you volunteer your time, share your story, or offer support, there are countless ways to make a meaningful impact. Your involvement helps inspire future success.



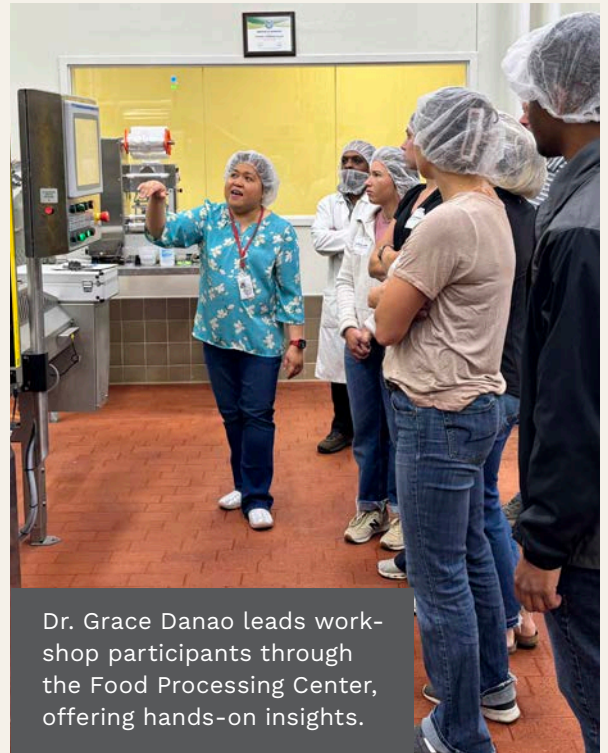
This year's Research Symposium provided the perfect opportunity for researchers, students, and faculty to network, learn, and inspire one another. Here's a look at the connections being made and knowledge being shared.

“ The thing I am most thankful for as an Alumni from UNL FST is the diversity of experienced professors that have **impacted my life for the better.** ”

- Brandon Nguyen - Alumni



Dr. Amanda Ramer-Tait speaks about the FST centers and programs at University of Nebraska Omaha.



Dr. Grace Danao leads workshop participants through the Food Processing Center, offering hands-on insights.

What better way to celebrate Lunar New Year than with a dumpling competition? Participants blended tradition with innovation in every bite.



Science and competition came together in the *Battle of the Food Scientists*, where participants demonstrated their skills in culinary innovation.



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NATURAL RESOURCES

Department of Food Science and Technology

The Department of Food Science and Technology shared the science behind snacks at Discovery Days on East Campus, sparking curiosity in visitors of all ages. Join the fun! Volunteer or donate to support interactive outreach like this!

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

Your time and talents can help us bring science to life through interactive outreach and events. Watch for future volunteer opportunities to lend your support.



Volunteers and mentors make experiences like our summer camps for elementary, middle, and high school students possible. Curious about volunteering? Let us know!



CONTINUE YOUR IMPACT

Private support is essential to recruit outstanding undergraduate and graduate students, provide timely and applicable research, and expand our outreach to small businesses and entrepreneurs across the state. In these times of shrinking budgets and decreasing State support, donations from our alumni and friends are critical. We hope you will consider making a gift to assist us in these efforts. You can now donate online to the following funds:

Food Science & Technology Student Scholarship Fund #1359:

This fund provides much needed financial support to our undergraduate students, an invaluable aid to our recruitment and retention efforts.

Food Science & Technology Research Fund #1452:

This fund sponsors research activities with the Department, including undergraduate student research and travel support for graduate students to attend scientific meetings.

Food Science & Technology Development Fund #4312:

This fund provides general support to the Department and is specifically used to enhance undergraduate student recruitment efforts (high school visitations, etc.)

Scan the QR code to learn more and donate online or visit

nufoundation.org



Giving Area: UNL
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Food Science and
Technology

Lookup ID:
01043120

UPCOMING EVENTS



AUG
15

FST Salute To Graduates

Join us to celebrate the hard work and successes of our summer graduates!

AUG
27

Welcome Ice Cream Social

We're serving up ice cream and sharing the inside scoop on our programs, people, and opportunities.

OCT
31

Halloween Potluck

Join us for a spooky potluck. Costumes and creepy dishes encouraged!

NOV
26

Give Thanks Cookie Exchange

Share your favorite fall cookies or desserts and take home a sweet mix!

DEC
12

FST Holiday Event

Food, fun, and holiday cheer to close out the semester!

DEC
19

FST Salute To Graduates

Join us to celebrate the hard work and successes of our upcoming graduates!

FEB
17

Lunar New Year Celebration

Ring in the Lunar New Year with festive flavors and cultural traditions!

MAR
12

Battle of the Food Scientists

Who will win the ultimate food science face-off? Come find out!

APR
20

2026 Research Symposium

Explore cutting-edge research from across the department.

MAY
4

2026 FST Banquet

A special night honoring department achievements.

Follow us on social media!



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/school/nebraskafoodscience



@UNLFoodScience



Let us know where you are now!

We are continuously updating our Alumni Database. Please help us out by sending your updated contact information. This will insure you receive future Alumni Newsletters and other exciting Food Science and Technology Alumni News. Scan the QR code or visit foodscience.unl.edu/alumni_friends



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Review of applications begin September 2, 2025

As an EOE/AA employer, the University of Nebraska considers qualified applicants for employment without regard to race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, marital status, and/or political affiliation. See <https://www.unl.edu/equity/notice-nondiscrimination>

YOUR INPUT, OUR NEXT EDITION

Your feedback helps shape the future of our alumni newsletter and outreach efforts. We want to hear from you!

Take a few minutes to complete our quick survey. Visit go.unl.edu/alumni_news_input or scan the QR code below. Your input will help us create content that's more relevant, engaging, and meaningful to you.

Thank you for helping us stay connected and improve future editions!



Food Science and Technology
Food Innovation Center
1901 N 21 ST
Lincoln, NE 68588-6205
Phone: (402) 472-2831 | Fax: (402) 472-1693

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