FOCUS

Teaching, Research and Outreach in the Division of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine

New Employees Find Good Reasons to Work at MSU

When deciding whether or not to accept a job offer, people consider many factors, including salary, location and work environment.

Sometimes, however, there are less obvious reasons for wanting to work somewhere. The employer's reputation, past associations, the people the job candidate met during the interview process and other factors often come into play.

Those are all reasons some of the individuals who came to work at MSU's Division of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine during the past year gave when asked what attracted them to the university.

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Tom Thompson

People Drew Animal Scientist to MSU

Carolyn Buff, an animal scientist, said it was the people she met during her late-2006 interview at Mississippi State that made her want to join the Department of Animal and Dairy Science faculty.

"The people here, faculty and administrators, impressed me with their desire that their students succeed," said Buff, who teaches, serves as the department's undergraduate coordinator and advises early-entry pre-veterinary medicine students. "At some larger schools, there is more of a sink-or-swim attitude about students."

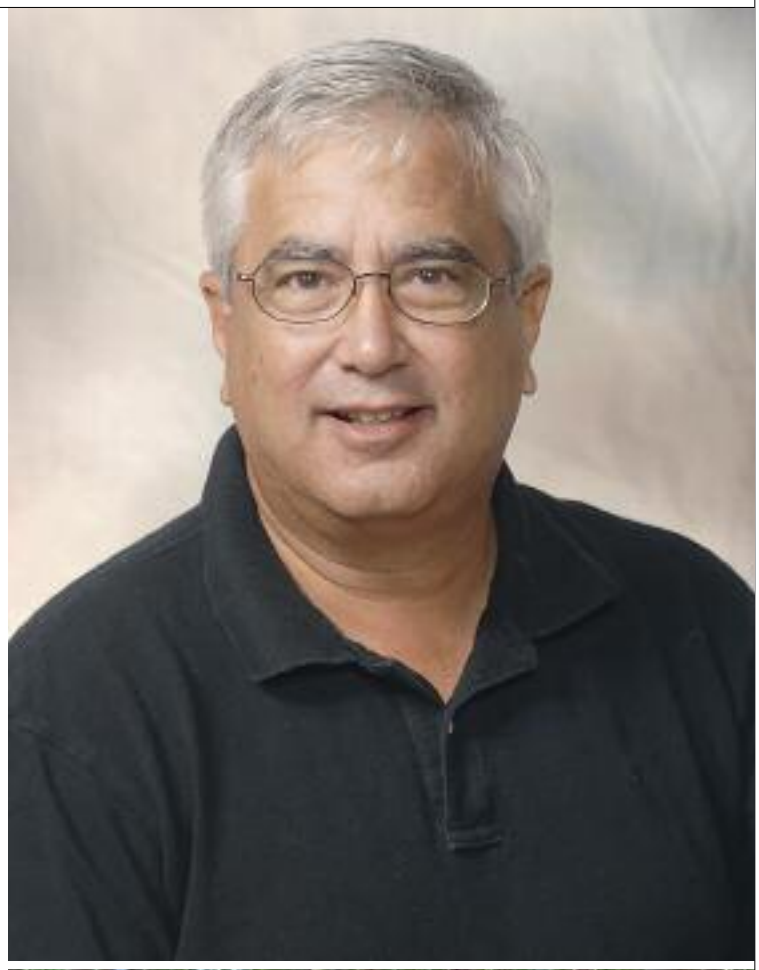
Buff grew up in the suburbs of St. Louis, Mo., and earned her bachelor's degree in animal science and her master's degree in nutritional science at the University of Illinois-Urbana. Her doctorate is in animal science from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

She began teaching undergraduate students for the first time during the spring 2007 semester.

"Undergraduates come from different educational backgrounds and have different levels of preparation, so you have to find a good balance in your teaching so you don't bore some and leave others lost," she said. "It is gratifying, though, when you see your students have an 'ah ha,' that time when you make a connection and they comprehend something they didn't see before."

College of Forest Resources

Forestry Specialist Brings Experience Back to Alma Mater



Only oaks stand taller than **Randy Rousseau**, hardwood specialist in the College of Forest Resources.

At more than 6 feet tall, Rousseau joined the faculty in September, bringing 25 years of experience in hardwood and genetic research.

"I have always had a special place in my heart for MSU," Rousseau said.

Rousseau attended MSU as a doctoral student, working with forestry professors Sam Land and George Switzer.

"These guys influenced me greatly during my time at State, as well as John Hodges and Dick Porterfield," Rousseau added. "When the MSU opportunity became available, I jumped at the chance to work at my alma mater."

A native of Baton Rouge, La., Rousseau worked for Westvaco and MeadWestvaco for the past 25 years. He received bachelor's and master's degrees in forestry from Louisiana State University.

After attending LSU, Rousseau attended MSU for an interdisciplinary doctorate in genetics, which he received in 1980.

"My area of research includes a wide variety of topics but focuses primarily on hardwoods," Rousseau said.

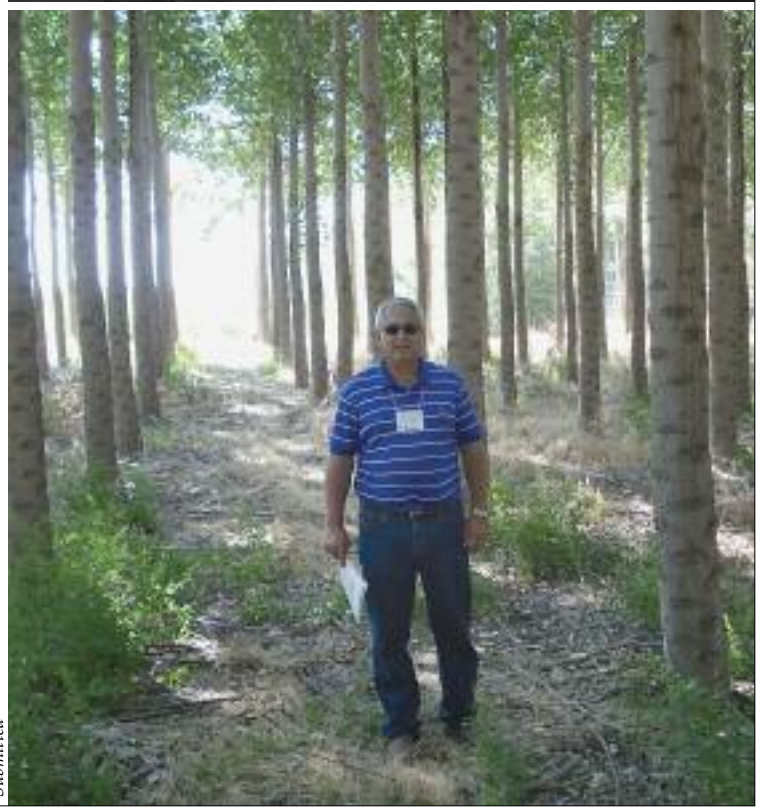
His current position is 80 percent extension and 20 percent research. Though he teaches no classes, he is responsible for numerous presentations on hardwood management in a variety of settings.

Including hardwood research, Rousseau also is working on topics such as carbon trading, biomass/bioenergy production, hardwood genetic conservation, stand dynamics of oak plantings, testing loblolly pine for selection of the best genotypes, optimal spacing for specific pine varieties, and combining wildlife and bioeneergy plantings with pine varieties.

"I have always enjoyed spending time in outdoor activities, so forestry has been a passion and a natural fit," Rousseau added.

The associate extension/research professor understands the responsibility of preserving and conserving Mississippi's hardwood forests, which represent 69 percent of the forest in the state.

"I want to help landowners understand the importance and heritage of our state's bottomland and upland hardwood forests. Today's mighty oak is just yesterday's nut that held its ground, just like me," Rousseau added.



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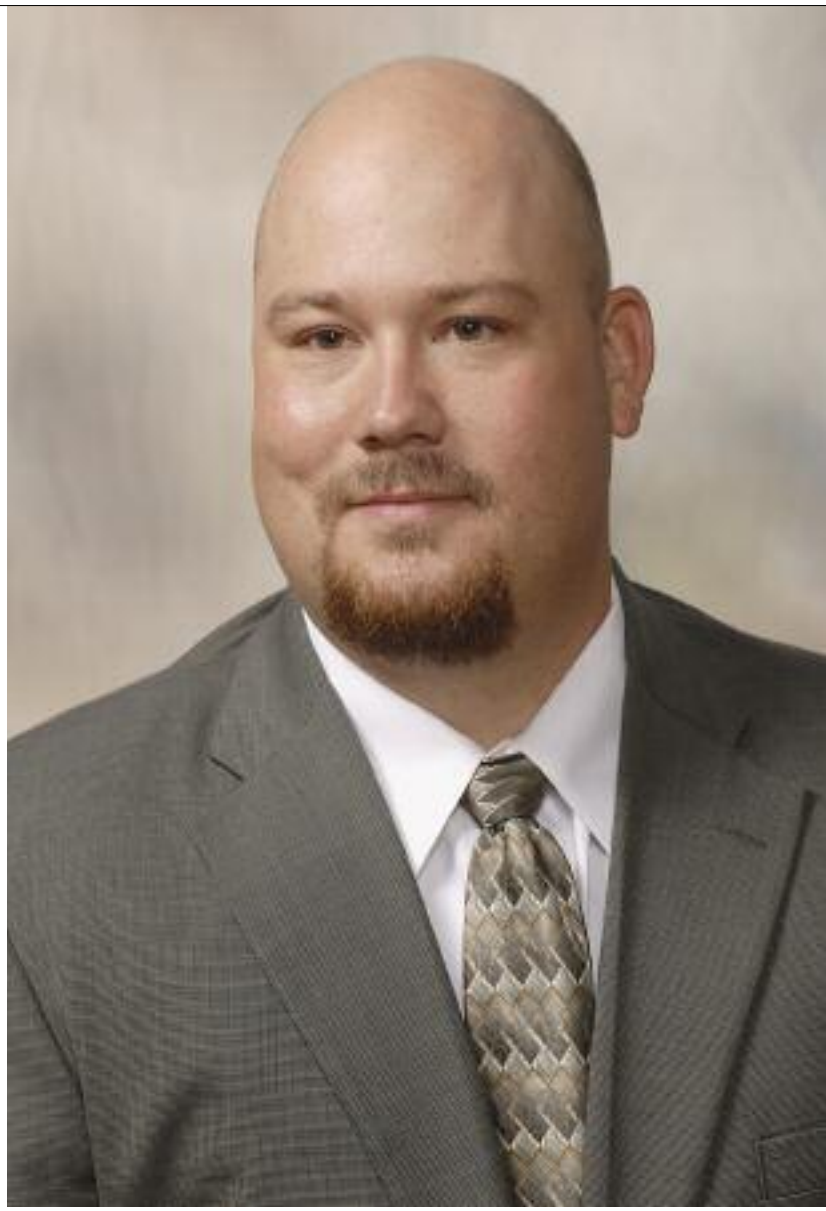
Mississippi State University Extension Service

Illinois Native Finds Career in Cotton



After growing up amid corn fields in the Land of Lincoln, **Darrin Dodds** is pursuing a career in the most southern of crops—cotton.

It was the reputation of MSU's weed science program that brought the Illinois native to Mississippi.

"After completing a master's degree in weed science at Purdue, I wanted to pursue a doctorate in the same field, and the program here stacks up with the best in the nation," he said. "While working on the degree, I began working with weed scientist Dan Reynolds in the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences. That experience and seeing where the graduates of the program went following graduation confirmed that Mississippi State was the right place for anyone interested in a career in weed science."

During the final stages of his doctorate, Dodds began pursuing his own job search and had some attractive offers. Then, however, there was an opportunity close to his adopted home.

"Tom Barber, the MSU Extension cotton specialist, left for a job in his home state of Arkansas, so there was an opportunity here," he said. "I was interested because of my experience with the university and the hospitality my wife, Erin, and I received at MSU and from people across the state."

Dodds was the successful candidate for the job and went to work just in time for one of the most trying cotton seasons for Mississippi producers in recent history.

"Extended bouts of dry weather during the growing season, plant bugs and high fertilizer prices were just a few of the challenges Mississippi cotton growers faced this year," he said. "At the end of the season, however, yields were generally better than most people were expecting."

Mississippi's Extension cotton specialist has a history of being a major source of information and advice for the state's producers. The specialist serves as the primary contact for Extension educational material, technology transfer and programming regarding cotton production.

"The specialists, including Tom Barber and Will McCarty and George Mullendore before him, have all been individuals cotton producers knew they could call on for help with their crop," he said. "I'm working hard to continue that tradition."

The Dodds became the proud parents of a daughter, Rose, in September.

College of Veterinary Medicine

CVM Scientist Studies Mississippi Pests

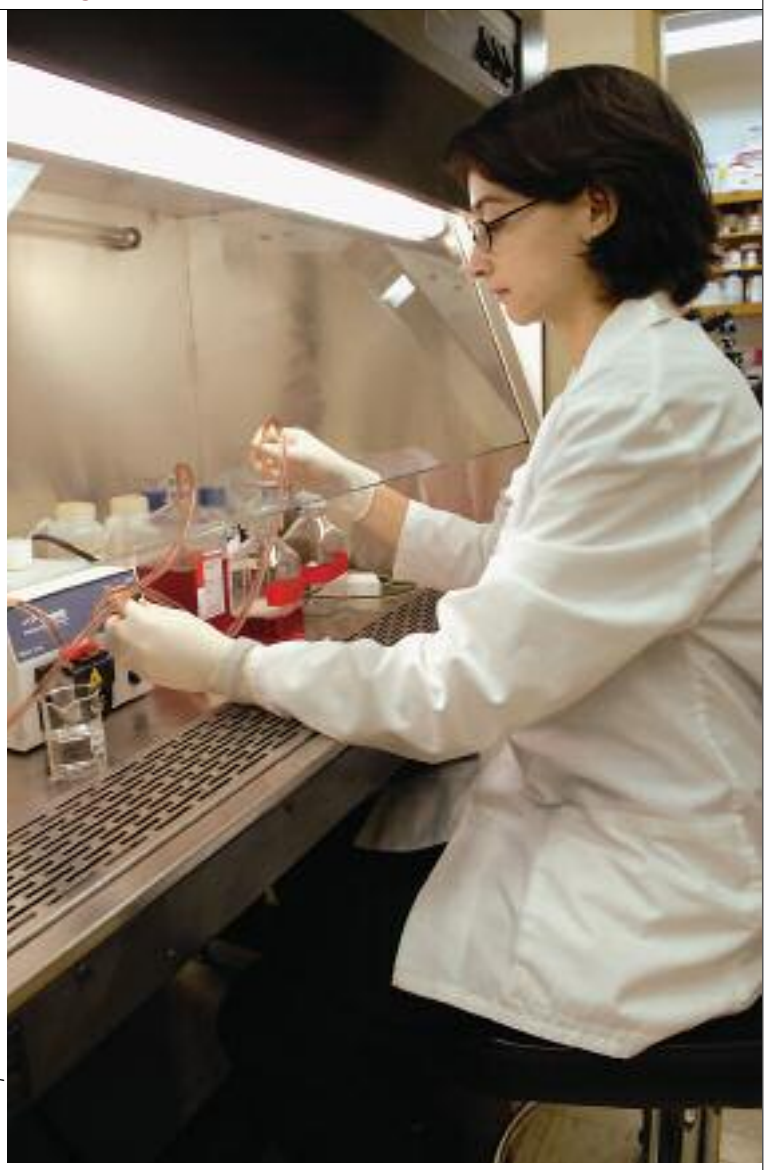
For a veterinary parasitologist, Mississippi is a land of opportunity. Veterinary parasitology is the study of animal parasites and their relationships and interactions with their animal hosts.

Dr. Andrea Varela-Stokes teaches parasitology and conducts research in the field as a member of the College of Veterinary Medicine's Department of Basic Sciences. She came to MSU in June from the University of Georgia, where her duties included teaching and directing the small animal parasitology course.

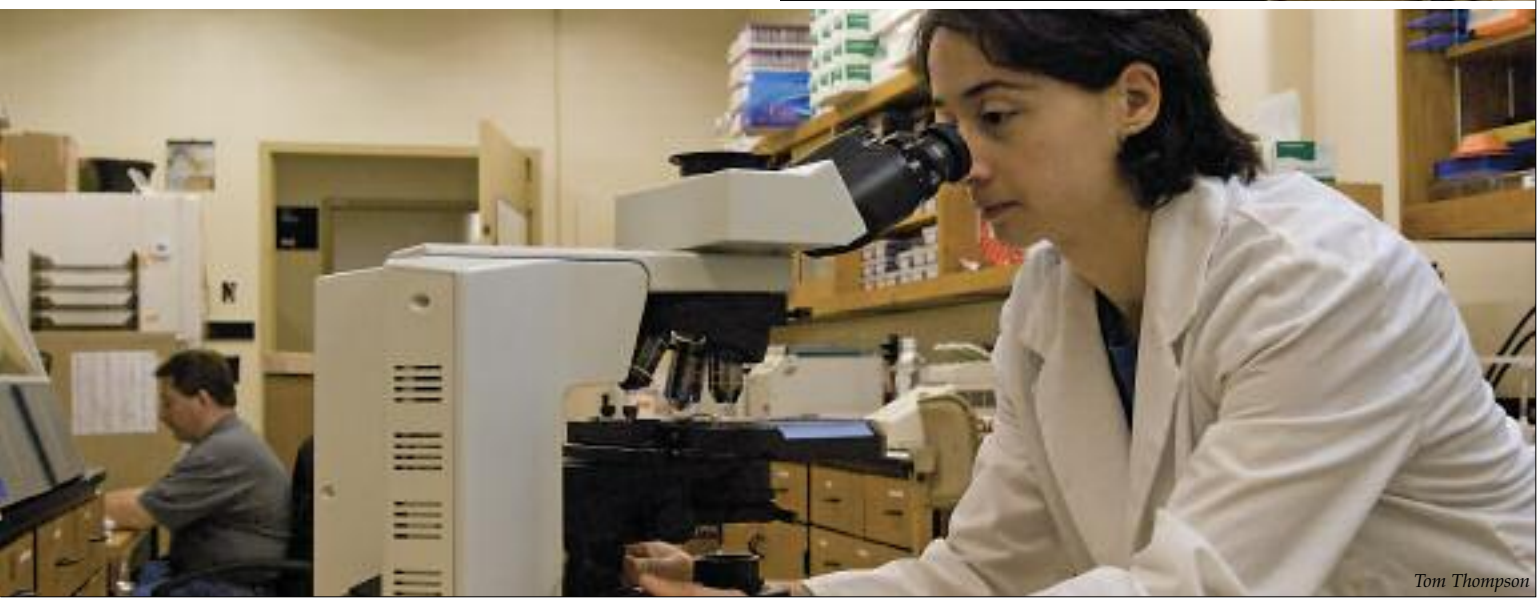
"I'm interested in research on tick-borne diseases, including some that are rarely looked at by researchers," she said. "Mississippi's tick population makes this a good area to conduct that type of research."

Varela-Stokes earned a bachelor's degree in animal science from Cook College, Rutgers University and the DVM degree from Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine. At Georgia, she earned a doctoral degree in infectious diseases and completed a National Institutes of Health-funded postdoctoral fellowship.

"I was content at the University of Georgia, but the job here offers more opportunities for teaching and research experience," she said. "I was also impressed with the people I met when I interviewed here and with the equipment and other resources available for research."



Tom Thompson



Tom Thompson

Forest and Wildlife Research Center

Wang Brings International Perspective to Wildlife

Guiming Wang has spanned the globe in a quest to understand the impacts of climate changes on domestic cattle and wildlife.

Wang, a native of Hauian in the Jiangsu Province of China, brought his expertise in wildlife population and community ecology to MSU's Forest and Wildlife Research Center last year. The opportunity to apply what he has learned at a school with a strong wildlife and fisheries program, he said, was a deciding factor in coming to MSU.

"My research interests revolve around models," Wang said. "These include wildlife population models, community models and ecological modeling."

Although Wang has worked in locations around the world, his findings can benefit Mississippi's 20,000 cattle producers.

"For instance, I use modeling to assess the impacts of elevated carbon dioxide and global warming on livestock, grasslands and rangelands," Wang said. "I also study long-term data sets with new analytical tools, which enhances the state's ability to manage important game animals such as deer."

Modeling and computational statistics help researchers discover why and when populations become threatened, why certain species are successful invaders, and how large-scale trends in climate change will alter species ranges and community composition, Wang added.

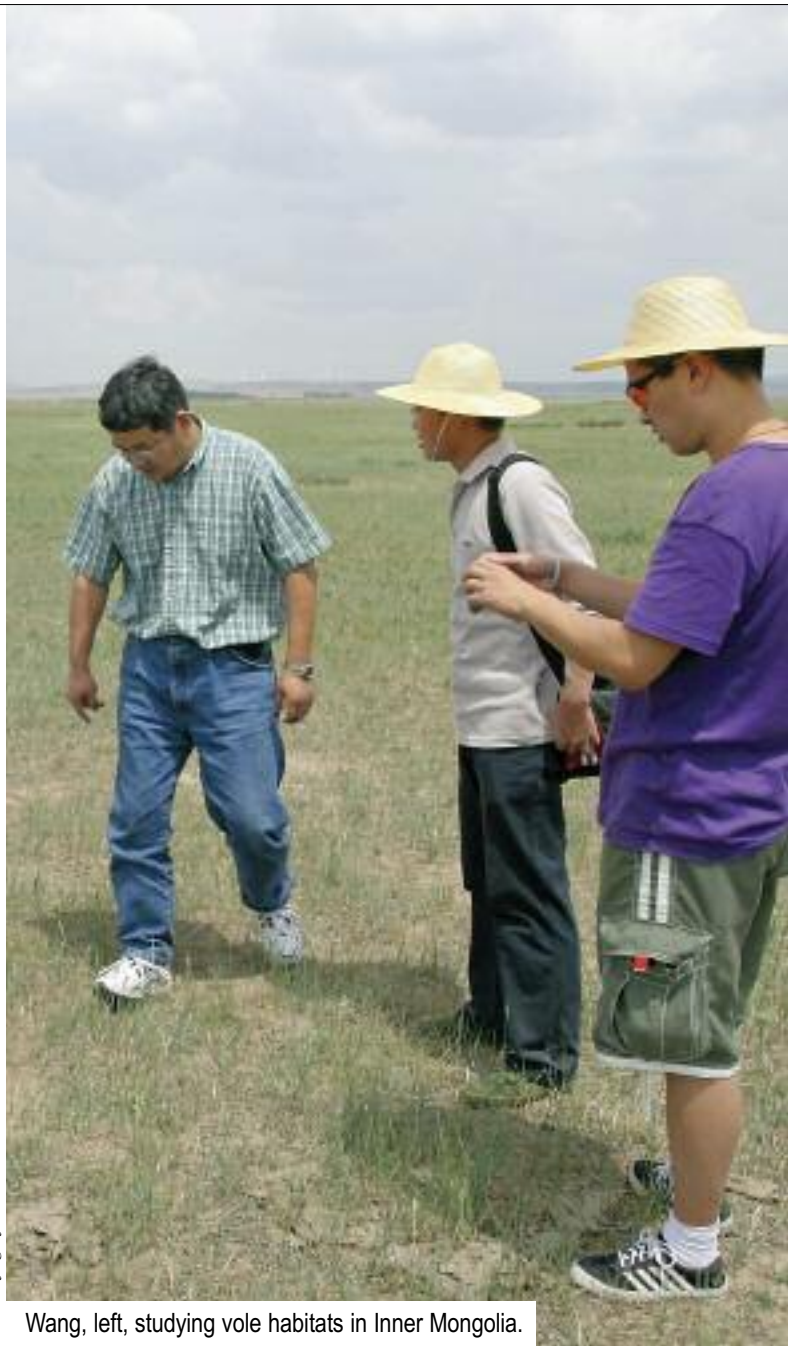
In addition to research, Wang shares his knowledge with graduate and undergraduate students, teaching wildlife and fisheries biometrics and applied wildlife population ecology.

"I love statistics, which are necessary for the courses I teach, but sometimes it is hard to arouse a student's interest in statistics," Wang said.

This is an obstacle he overcomes by bringing his international flair and experience in varied wildlife populations into the classroom and sometimes beyond.

This summer, he took graduate students to China to investigate the socioecology of Brandt's Voles in Inner Mongolia.

"I offer something for everyone in my class, no matter what their interests," Wang said. "This keeps the students engaged in the principles of statistics."



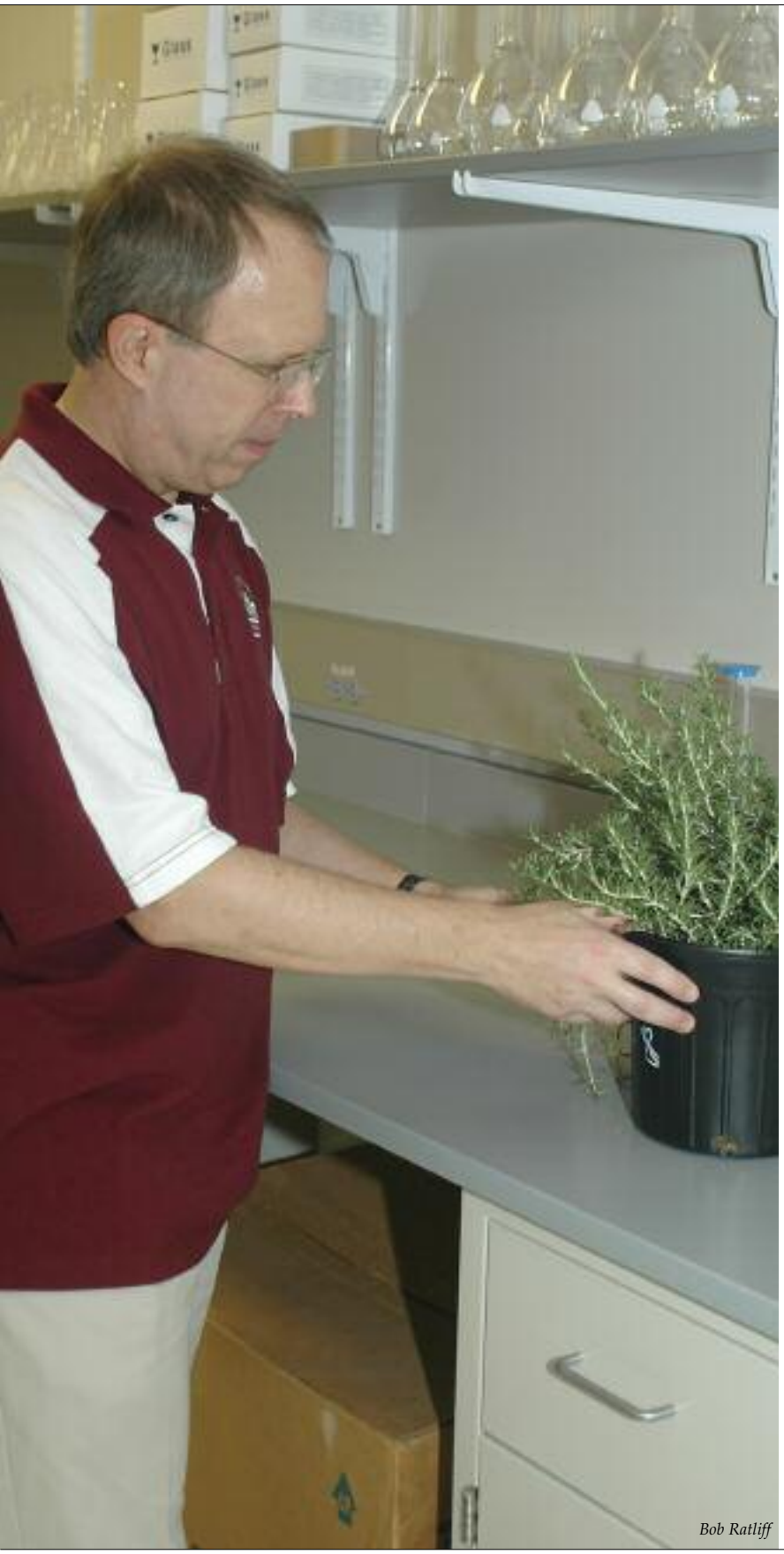
Ray Iglay

Wang, left, studying vole habitats in Inner Mongolia.

Wang and his family moved to Mississippi from Colorado, where he was a research scientist at Colorado State University. His wife is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences at MSU.

Wang received his bachelor's degree in biology at Nanjing Normal University in China, a master's in animal ecology from the Institute of Zoology in the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing, and a doctoral degree in wildlife science from Oregon State University.

Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station



Bob Ratliff

Variety of Research Opportunities Draws Horticulturist to Poplarville

Gene Blythe came to MSU's South Mississippi Branch Experiment Station in Poplarville from California by way of Alabama's Auburn University.

A California native, Blythe earned an MBA and two bachelor's degrees (business administration and ornamental horticulture) at California State Polytechnic University. He left sunny California for Auburn, where he completed a master's degree in probability and statistics and a doctorate in horticulture.

In 2005, he returned to California to conduct horticultural research at the University of California, Riverside. An opportunity to work in Poplarville brought him back to the South in early 2007.

"There is such a wide variety of plants to work with here that there are almost unlimited research opportunities," he said. "Another nice thing about Poplarville is the variety of expertise among the USDA scientists, giving lots of opportunities for collaboration on research projects here."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Research Service's Thad Cochran Southern Horticultural Laboratory is located at the South Mississippi Branch.

All of Blythe's research is focused on supporting the expanding ornamental horticulture industry in Mississippi and other Gulf Coast states. He is collaborating with other scientists from California to Florida.

"My research interests include commercial plant propagation, nursery production systems and evaluation of ornamental plants for performance in specific regions," he said. "One of the things I'm researching is new plants for the Gulf Coast. The climate here is good for so many types of plants that it is possible plants not traditionally grown here can be successfully introduced to our landscapes."