

WISCONSIN'S RECENT HIRES OFFER ABUNDANCE OF FORAGE EXPERTISE

Two key university forage positions in Wisconsin were filled this past year by adventuresome people who have shown a passion for forages throughout their careers.

Valentin Picasso joined University of Wisconsin-Madison's Department of Agronomy in August. He's a research forage agronomist and assistant professor, working to develop sustainable forage and grazing systems that will build resilience to climate change. **Yoana Newman** is the new University of Wisconsin-River Falls assistant professor and Extension forage specialist. Taking the position left open with Dennis Cosgrove's death, she started last March with a 30% Extension and 70% teaching position during the school year and mostly Extension during much of the summer.



Valentin Picasso

Picasso is now working to develop forage systems using dual-purpose perennial crops, such as intermediate wheatgrass, that can be grazed for forage and produce grain for human consumption. Perennial crops, which are deep-rooted and can reduce nutrient leaching and soil erosion, he says, are well-suited to withstand potential stresses from climate change.

"We're facing a situation of climate change where we're going to have more extreme events in the future – more droughts or more heavy storms ... we need to have systems more adapted to those conditions and that can withstand the climate crisis better," says Picasso, who is from Uruguay. "If we have perennial systems with perennial cover in more area, we will be able to, at the same time, reduce environmental impacts and adapt to scenarios of climate change."

He believes implementing dual-purpose perennial crops, potentially on marginal land in buffers or strips normally planted to annual crops, can increase soil health in the region while providing forage for grazing and grain. The perennial will likely be paired with legumes to increase forage quality and offer nitrogen fixation. Picasso is collaborating with the University of Minnesota, the Land Institute in Salina, KS, and other universities across the country.

"I want my research to be connected to what farmers need and want," says Picasso. "I realize there is a lot of need for grazing and forage research in the Midwest. There is fantastic research going on, but, at the same time, there's very little funding devoted to forage and grazing research. We need much more, and we have to make sure that what we do really addresses what the needs are."

"I'm interested in hearing farmers' questions or problems or even proposals for exploring solutions. I'm open to anyone who wants to get involved in that conversation," he says. Farmers can initially contact Picasso at picassorriso@wisc.edu.

He earned his undergraduate degree in Uruguay and his doctorate degree in sustainable agriculture at Iowa State University. After graduation, Picasso worked for seven years on forages, livestock grazing systems, agro-ecology, and adaptation to climate change at the University of Uruguay.



Yoana Newman

Newman, originally from Venezuela, is currently helping county Extension educators and farmers understand the latest alfalfa technology moving into the marketplace – reduced-lignin alfalfa. She is well-known in [American Forage & Grassland Council](#) circles, having been involved in that organization for many years. She is an active supporter of its annual Forage Bowl Competition, which tests forage knowledge of university students. UW-RF students participated, for the first time, in the annual competition this January, she says.

Having moved to the U.S. 20 years ago, Newman earned her masters' and doctorate degrees in agronomy at the University of Florida and worked there for four years as a research associate. Then she worked with Texas A&M Cooperative Extension for a couple of years, taking part in running trials to evaluate cool-season legumes, including alfalfa and crimson, red, white and berseem clovers. "I have been evaluating these legumes uninterrupted for the last 10 years, so can provide input on legumes, including alfalfa, under different environments."

In 2006, she moved back to the University of Florida, where her 70% Extension-30% research appointment as a forage agronomist led her to develop programs to improve Florida's forage production. She researched the use of warm-season/cool-season forages on forage systems for livestock production and nutrient management, including

grazing management, forage quality, forage physiology and environmental factors affecting forage production.

"I've been working with grazing dairies in Florida," including developing pastures for grazing herds for one of the state's largest dairies, Alliance Dairies, and the Alliance Grazing group, says Newman. After settling in Wisconsin, Newman,

whose first name is pronounced “Joanna,” visited major players in the alfalfa industry. She received alfalfa training and updates, particularly in reduced-lignin alfalfa, so she could educate others on the subject.

“I also spent part of last year catching up with some of the grass species that grow here that we didn’t deal with at all in Florida, like orchardgrass, smooth brome grass and reed canarygrass. We were always aware of them but could not use them,” she says.

She can be reached at yoana.newman@uwrf.edu.