The Sociology of Agriculture and Development is a signature theme in the Department of Sociology that engages in research, teaching, and extension activities to help society understand and solve problems related to agriculture and food, the environment and natural resources, development and social change, and rural and regional issues. The theme is grounded in the disciplinary fields of rural sociology and development sociology, both of which share theory and methods with the larger discipline of sociology. The two focus areas of this signature theme include:

- Sociology of Agriculture and Natural Resources
- Development and Rural Sociology

The Agriculture and Development area is critical in achieving the missions of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) and the College of Liberal Arts and Science (LAS) at Iowa State University. The signature theme addresses the mission of CALS by focusing on the discovery and application of science-based knowledge to bring about socially beneficial, economically successful, and environmentally sound systems for agricultural production, natural resource use, and rural development. The signature theme also addresses the mission of LAS in preparing students to live and work in a diverse and evolving world through the use of a wide array of teaching venues and technologies. It also addresses a key LAS theme of Economic, Environmental and Social Sustainability. Engagement beyond campus is a priority for both colleges, and the Agriculture and Development area encourages student and faculty involvement in addressing the social and economic challenges facing Iowa, the nation, and the world.

**Teaching Programs**

The Agriculture and Development signature theme rigorously trains students in the profession of rural and development sociology for careers in academia, government, and non-governmental organizations in the United States and internationally. Our academic degree programs enable students to meet the following learning objectives: (1) examine linkages among agriculture, food, natural resources, and society; (2) analyze the relationships between social change, technological innovation, and development; (3) understand the social, demographic, and economic dynamics of rural communities; (4) apply quantitative and qualitative methods of social research; and (5) engage in problem-focused research and extension scholarship.

**Undergraduate Education**

The Agricultural and Society undergraduate major (previously titled Public Service and Administration in Agriculture) has transformed the rural sociology major to reflect ongoing changes in the study of food, agriculture, and society. Administered by CALS, major revisions to the curriculum have been approved and will take effect in Fall 2014. Currently the program has approximately 50 majors, but is expected to attract more majors in the future due to name and curriculum revisions. The major requires a core of
sociology courses, as well as courses in economics, political science, mathematical and physical sciences, life sciences, and agricultural sciences.

**Graduate Education**

The graduate program is focused on producing sociologists with strong research skills who help society understand and solve complex problems related to agriculture and development. Master’s and Ph.D. degrees are offered in either rural sociology or sociology, where students complete a program of study including core and elective courses. Core courses include sociological theory, quantitative and qualitative methods, social inequality, and social psychology. Elective courses include sociology of agriculture, environmental sociology, social change and development, and community and development. After completing their coursework, students must then successfully pass preliminary and oral examinations; and successfully write and defend a high quality thesis or dissertation on a topic appropriate to the *Agriculture and Development* area. Currently there are about 30 graduate students in this signature theme, the majority of who are supported by graduate research assistantships. Faculty in the theme mentor graduate students through participating in research projects, presenting at professional meetings, and co-authoring academic papers.

**Integrated Research and Extension Programs**

Consistent with the signature theme’s disciplinary grounding in rural and development sociology, faculty research is problem-focused and highly integrated with extension/outreach programs. The *Agriculture and Development* theme has demonstrated national and international prominence in professional associations, journals, and funding agencies. These journals and associations include the areas of rural sociology, international development, agriculture and food, science and technology, and natural resources. Recent grants have come from the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Energy, and Justice; the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture; U.S. Agency for International Development; and from various stakeholder groups across Iowa. Extension efforts focus on assisting Iowans in addressing the social and human dimensions related to agriculture, environment, and development. Faculty and staff currently deliver extension education programs in demographic and economic change, local food systems, natural resources management, conservation, climate change, and the bio-economy.

In aggregate of the past five years, faculty in the *Agriculture and Development* signature theme have produced or generated ...

- 3.2 peer-reviewed journal publications per year per faculty FTE
- 2.9 research or extension publications per year per faculty FTE
- $1.588 million in grants and contracts per year per faculty FTE ($699,600/yr/FTE excluding the USDA Climate and Corn project)

Faculty center their research and extension scholarship in two the distinct areas within this signature theme: (1) sociology of agriculture and natural resources, and (2) development and rural sociology. In practice, however, faculty members in both areas work in close collaboration with each other, with other sociologists, and with other social and natural scientists.
The Sociology of Agriculture and Natural Resources area is an established and major part of our research and extension programs. Research on human dimensions of agriculture and natural resource management focuses on human-natural systems including climate change, the bioeconomy, hypoxia conditions associated with agricultural nutrient losses, soil erosion and water quality, food system value chains, and diversified agricultural systems. Research questions address human adaptation to social and environmental change, and the roles of social relations, human beliefs, attitudes, and motivations.

During the past five years, faculty have received external funding for integrated research and extension projects totaling over $30 million from federal agencies (USDA, DOE, US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service), state departments (Agriculture, Natural Resources), and a variety of local governmental and non-governmental entities. In 2011, a high profile, multi-state $20 million USDA-NIFA Climate and Corn-based Cropping Systems Coordinated Agricultural Project connecting research and extension was awarded to the Department (http://www.sustainablecorn.org). Six predominantly extension training and demonstration projects are associated with these grants.

Development and Rural Sociology is an emerging research and extension area focusing on agricultural, economic, and rural development in the context of globalization. Research questions address the potential causes and consequences of demographic, economic, and social change over multiple scales such as time, space, culture, and institutions. Demographic change includes trends in population, migration, education, and health both domestically and globally. Economic change includes poverty, inequality, and rural economic development in the Global North and Global South. Social change includes institutions, social capital, culture, and attitudes at home and abroad.

Over the past five years, faculty generated almost $5 million in external grants to support these integrated research and extension efforts, primarily from federal agencies (USDA, USAID, and Justice) and several state agencies (ISU Extension, Corrections). Highlighted projects include $2.7 million agricultural development grants from USAID for work in Rwanda, Uganda, and Mozambique; nearly $1.0 million from USDA to study social and economic change in rural communities change; and $900,000 in other research and extension grants for community and demographic analyses.
Primary Faculty

J. Gordon Arbuckle (CALS), Ph.D. University of Missouri
- Sociology of agriculture and the environment, extension.

Carmen Bain (CALS), Ph.D. Michigan State University
- Global agrifood systems, gender and international development, bioeconomy.

Shawn Dorius (CALS), Ph.D. Pennsylvania State University
- Demography, inequality, international development.

Paul Lasley (CALS), Ph.D. University of Missouri
- Organization of agriculture, rural development, extension, administration.

Robert Mazur (LAS), Ph.D. Brown University
- Rural livelihood strategies, international development, social change.

Lois Wright Morton (CALS), Ph.D. Cornell University
- Natural resource management, farmer decision making, extension.

David Peters (CALS), Ph.D. University of Missouri
- Rural development, population, poverty and inequality, extension.

Stephen Sapp (CALS), Ph.D. Texas A & M University
- Attitudes of food safety and nutrition, acceptance of technology, methods.

Betty Wells (CALS), Ph.D. Iowa State University
- Sustainable agriculture, food systems, extension.

Associated Faculty

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