Table of Contents and Introduction

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Amber waves

Bread wheat thrives before harvest in a Kansas field. Kansas State University crop breeders have produced several new varieties of wheat and other crops in the last two years. Learn more about them on pages 36-37.
Contents

Features

10 | Feeding a hungry world
How Kansas State University is improving global agricultural production

16 | Communicating science for everyday use
21st-century communication takes 19th-century research mission from beaker to tractor and beyond

20 | The curiosity of collections
A behind-the-scenes look at what’s in the drawers, cabinets and refrigerators of K-State collections and why it’s important

30 | Vantage point
The sky’s the limit for aerial-obtained data

3 | Letter

38 | Engagement

4 | Shorts

40 | Explain It

34 | Faculty Focus

41 | The Past

36 | Patent Focus

Donor and photo credits for “The curiosity of collections,” pages 20-29:
Historic Costume and Textile Museum donor credits: child’s boots, Pauline Miller Greenhaw; linen fragment, Arthur M. Sackler Foundation; dress, Richard D. Rees in memory of wife Janet and parents Leonard and Beatrice Rees; scarf, Noel Schulz; western shirt, William and Laura Varney; roundel, Frank Harris.

Nuerospora crassa photo on Page 25 by O. Gavric and on Page 29 by Tony Griffiths, University of British Columbia.

A national conversation about the value of higher education and research has intensified in the last few months. This issue of Seek clearly demonstrates the value that Kansas State University research adds to the state of Kansas, our region and the nation. K-Staters aren’t the only ones who notice, either: This summer, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities named K-State an Innovation and Economic Prosperity University. The designation honors 60 public institutions in the U.S. for their economic engagement.

The self-assessment process that we completed to apply for the Innovation and Economic Prosperity designation highlighted several strengths along with growth areas we will continue to target. Our internal and external stakeholders identified strengths in talent, place and innovation, and you’ll find those strengths reflected in the pages of this magazine.

Talent is clearly on display in “Communicating science for everyday use,” Page 16, which highlights the efforts of a few K-State Research and Extension personnel who excel at transferring research-based knowledge to small business owners, agricultural producers and citizens with food safety questions. These researchers help different audiences cut through the noise to find out how to improve their lives and businesses, and they use a range of platforms — from social media to face-to-face meetings — to deliver their messages.

K-State talent — and innovation — also attracted four of the nation’s 25 U.S. Agency for International Development Feed the Future innovation labs. These labs are helping the world address the need to feed nearly 10 billion people by 2050 with the investment of more than $100 million in federal funding to support projects in many countries. All of this research benefits U.S. and Kansas agriculture. Read about it in “Feeding a hungry world” on Page 10.

Place is vital to the research and creative activities of K-State, too, as evidenced by the piece on our institution’s collections, Page 20. Great Plains plants and insects, historical textiles and cookbooks, Kansas and regional artwork, and fungi — yes, fungi — are examples of the collections K-State curators maintain to facilitate better understanding of our natural and social environments and their history. Artist Erin Wiersma also helps us understand place in new ways with her work that uses the freshly charred grass of the Konza Prairie Biological Station as charcoal to create large-scale drawings that capture the scope and patterns of the prairie, Page 34. Such art-science interfaces provide vital social, cultural and community development resources to the state.

Innovation is never in short supply here. Unmanned aircraft systems, Page 30, and new crop varieties that generate millions of dollars in revenue for Kansas agriculture, Page 36, are two examples of K-State innovation. These stories show that our innovators are both high-flying and well grounded. I know more accomplishments are to come.

One of the best examples of K-State’s economic engagement, Project 17, is profiled in this issue on Page 38. Project 17 brings together all of our resources in talent, place and innovation in an effort to provide tools and resources to improve economic vitality and quality of life for those who live in 17 counties in southeast Kansas. K-State is harnessing talent, place and innovation to fight poverty, invest in infrastructure, and build personal and business capacities with the goal of improving people’s lives in Kansas.

That’s just a glimpse of the full value that Kansas State University adds.

Peter K. Dorhout, Vice President for Research