

# 2025

## YEAR IN REVIEW

**T** HERBERT  
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE



# About the UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE

*Established in 1968, the statewide UT Institute of Agriculture is one of the few land-grant university institutes of its kind in the country. We are proud to improve life for Tennesseans and beyond—one discovery, one community, one classroom, one home, and one farm at a time. Through our Real. Life. Solutions. we create outstanding opportunities in agriculture, natural resources, and life sciences. We strive to be the model of how a land-grant university can positively impact the world, now and into the future.*

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- UT AgResearch and Education Centers
- UT Gardens
- UT College of Veterinary Medicine
- Smith Center for International Sustainable Agriculture
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## OUR IMPACTS

The Herbert College of Agriculture boasts **record enrollment**

The Smith Center for International Sustainable Agriculture has almost **doubled the student global experience**

**Strong partnerships** with the Tennessee Farm Bureau, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, producers and commodity organizations across the state and world

UT Extension offices in **all ninety-five counties**

UT AgResearch saw a **60 percent increase** in sponsored research expenditures over the past six years

**Largest in-school 4-H program** in the country

The College of Veterinary Medicine—home to the state's **only academic veterinary medical center**—is experiencing high enrollment as well

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2025



## RECORD ENROLLMENT

The Herbert College of Agriculture hit several milestones for fall 2025 due to the recruitment team's efforts during the 2024-2025 admissions cycle.

## SUPPORT FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Herbert's various signature programs provided unparalleled experiential learning opportunities via internships, research, study abroad, and more.



## FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

The college invested in programming to develop faculty teaching skills to give students the best experience in and out of the classroom.



## A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

Dear Friends of the Herbert College of Agriculture,

It has been an incredible year for Herbert!

One of my priorities as dean is to elevate the visibility of the college and share our story with a wider audience. Our programs, people, and partnerships are transforming lives and industries, and it's important to recognize and share these successes. In doing so, we inspire new collaborations, recruit outstanding students, and strengthen our role as a land-grant leader in agriculture, natural resources, and construction sciences.

We have so much to be proud of from 2025—record enrollment through robust recruitment, new and innovative programming, unmatched experiential learning, and exciting community partnerships. Our achievements go beyond reaching strategic goals and checking off metrics. We are sculpting a future where Herbert becomes a hub for excellence in innovative teaching, cutting-edge curriculum, student success, and alumni engagement.

As you review highlights from 2025, I hope you feel the same pride and enthusiasm I have for what we have accomplished and for what's to come.

It Takes a Volunteer!

David White  
Dean, Herbert College of Agriculture



# RECRUITMENT ON A ROLL

## FALL 2025 MILESTONES

1,852 undergraduate student population—the largest ever

1,690 applications—over a **20 percent increase** from 2024 at 1,397

**Nearly 50 percent** of students admitted to the college officially made Herbert home



Herbert Ambassadors at their booth during the 2024 Ag Day event in the Brehm Animal Science Building Arena. Photo courtesy of UTIA.

As of fall 2025, the largest majors across the Herbert College of Agriculture include animal science (489), construction science and management (400), wildlife and fisheries science (207), and plant sciences (128). Food and agricultural business (127) and construction science and management are our fastest growing majors, **doubling in the past four years.**

## OUR APPROACH



Herbert's recruitment team: (left to right) Annie Carter, Middle/West Tennessee recruitment coordinator, Cassie Johnson, director of enrollment services, and Mackenzie Furches, East Tennessee recruitment coordinator.

Under the leadership of Director of Enrollment Services Cassie Johnson, the recruitment team consists of two recruitment coordinators and fifty student ambassadors. The Middle/West Tennessee recruitment coordinator has helped the college gain momentum across the entire state, in addition to a strong presence in East Tennessee.

The team's efforts led to record numbers for tours and events during the 2024-2025 cycle, including **509 individual tours, forty-six group tours, and 151 high school student outreach events** (college fairs, classroom visits, etc.). The result? Incredible milestones for the college, including **the largest application increase of all academic colleges at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.**



Group photo of the 2024-2025 Herbert Ambassadors during their spring 2025 retreat. Photo by Celina Menard.

Numbers aside, the Herbert College of Agriculture adopts a holistic approach to recruitment by treating prospective students as individuals and helping them pursue their passions.

**The recruitment team strives to build bridges, prioritizing people over presence.** It's an approach proven to be successful as more students choose to make Herbert home.

# MAKING HERBERT **HOME**



The Herbert College of Agriculture fosters student belonging through thirty-plus student organizations, personalized advising, and student-faculty connections. The college goes the extra mile in helping students experience a strong sense of community through an average of thirty student life events and celebrations per semester, planned and executed by Student Life Coordinator Maddy Walker.

Walker taught **the largest class of the Herbert Life Living and Learning Community ever at seventy students** and implemented the **Graduate Student Advisory Council** in addition to the Undergraduate Student Advisory Council.



Students, faculty, and staff at the annual Herbert Pumpkin Patch. Photo by Celina Menard.

# WORLD-RENOWNED **RESEARCH**

## **BRINGING TURFGRASS RESEARCH TO THE WORLD STAGE**



The turfgrass research team, led by Distinguished Professor of Turfgrass Science and Management John Sorochan, continued its momentum in perfecting the pitches for both the FIFA Club World Cup 2025 and FIFA World Cup 26.

The project continues to build **global recognition for the University of Tennessee**, as dozens of major league sports venue managers traveled to Knoxville during the spring 2025 semester to learn how to grow, install, and manage pitches for these tournaments. In fact, the sport's global leader, **FIFA President Gianni Infantino**, also paid a visit to campus and toured the university's

turfgrass research and development facility at the East Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center-Plant Sciences Unit.

The turfgrass research team's hard work came to fruition during the inaugural FIFA Club World Cup 2025, which took place in the United States from June 14 to July 13. In 2026, **over five billion people** will witness the combined efforts of UT and Michigan State University, as FIFA World Cup 26 matches are played at 16 venues across Canada, Mexico, and the United States—the largest FIFA World Cup ever.



## **OUT-OF-THIS-WORLD PLANT RESEARCH**

In spring 2025, the Herbert College of Agriculture participated in the Student Spaceflight Experiments Program through PLSC 493 "Space Research." In this class, students joined the continued effort to explore long-term human presence beyond low-Earth orbit as our planet's environmental and agricultural issues continue to increase.

Taught by Assistant Professor of Plant Sciences Kellie Walters, students in the class learned how to design space experiments. They joined teams based on their area of interest and submitted short proposals to carry out the research project. A professional review board selected the best proposal with the winning project launching to the International Space Station. The winning proposal was Effects of Space Travel on Seed Germination and Plant Stress Responses by Nathan Tucker and Devin Vitello.

The fall 2025 launch was postponed with the hope of taking off in 2026. Herbert looks forward to seeing our students' research take flight.

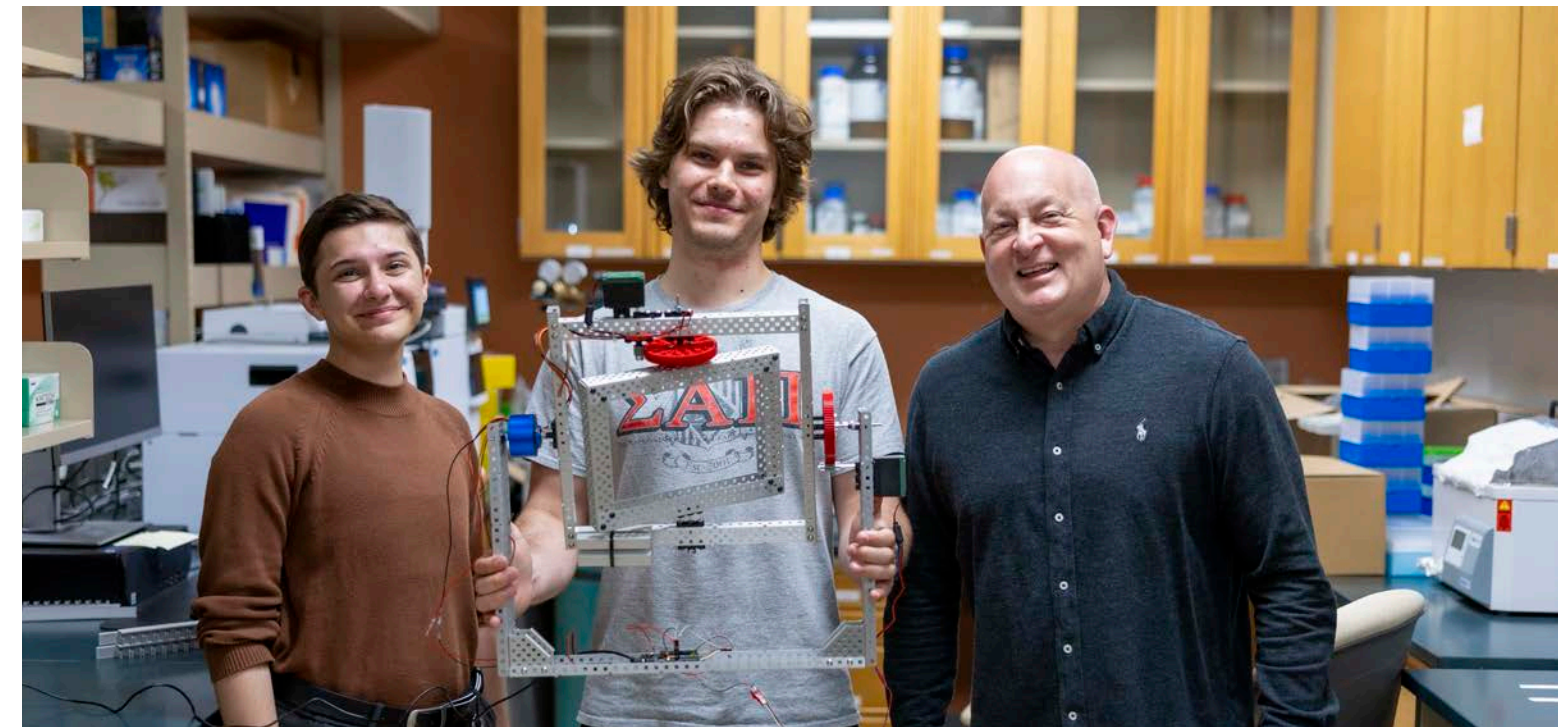


Photo by Raffae Lazarian.

# UNMATCHED EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING GOALS

100 percent of the student population **completes at least one internship**

50 percent of the student population **joins undergraduate research**

50 percent of the student population **participates in study abroad**

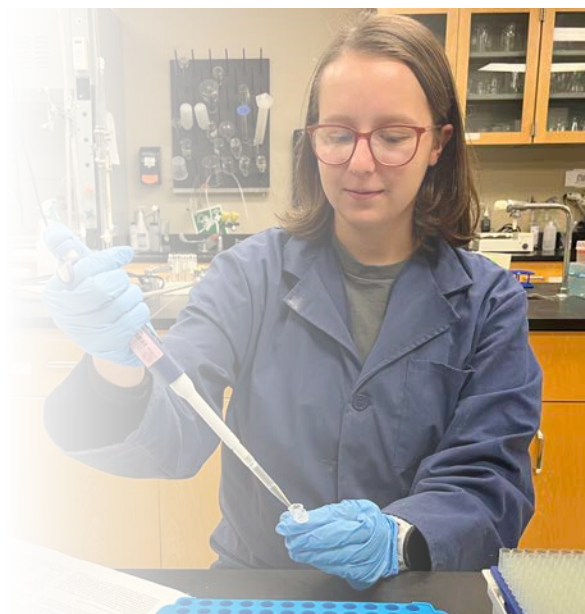
## CAREER FAIRS

Herbert College of Agriculture students took advantage of four career fairs in fall 2025, which focused on the areas of agriculture, construction, natural resources, and turfgrass and landscape. **Nearly two hundred employers engaged with several hundred students** at these events, eager to hire them for internships and full-time job opportunities.



## HERBERT EXPERIENTIAL RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The Herbert Experiential Research Opportunities (HERO) program supports undergraduate research initiatives by training and sponsoring Herbert students in the scientific process. Faculty receive \$2,000 for undergraduate stipends and \$500 in research or travel expenditures for the student. Since launching in fall 2024, **the college has invested \$100,000 in undergraduate research support, with twenty-four students supported in 2025 totaling \$60,000.**



Food science student and HERO recipient Elizabeth Cathey working on a research project. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Cathey.

## HERBERT SCHOLARS

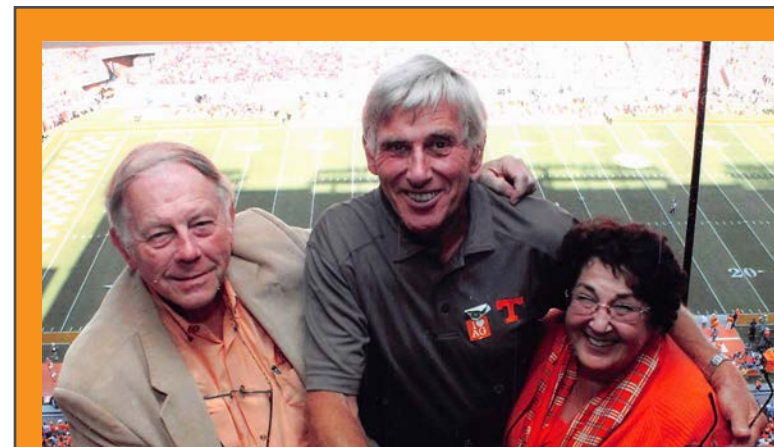
Thanks to the generosity of Jim and Judi Herbert, the Herbert Scholars program financially supports students pursuing paid experiential learning opportunities during the summer. For summer 2025, **the college awarded sixty-seven student scholarships, totaling \$220,000 and averaging more than \$3,200 per student.** Recipients used their scholarships to relieve costs related to housing, transportation, equipment, and more.



Jim and Judi Herbert, benefactors of the Herbert College of Agriculture. Photo courtesy of the Herbert College of Agriculture.

## PETER HOWARD WINE AND AG TOURISM SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Established in honor of the Herbert family's life-long friend, Peter Howard, the Peter Howard Wine and Ag Tourism Scholarship Program supports UT students gaining professional experience in wine, viticulture, and agricultural tourism. **The program supported thirteen students during 2025, totaling \$53,000 in scholarship funding, with just over \$4,000 per student.** Since its inception in fall 2024, \$62,000 in scholarship funding has been distributed.



Jim, Judi, and Peter

Jim Herbert (left) with Judi Herbert (right) and their life-long friend, Peter Howard (middle) at a UT football game. Photo courtesy of the Herbert family.



# EDUCATION ACROSS BORDERS

During the 2024-2025 academic year, **sixty-six Herbert College of Agriculture students participated in seven Herbert faculty-led study-abroad programs**—most of which received financial support through the college’s study-abroad scholarship in the amount of \$99,840.

Herbert has increased study-abroad opportunities for 2025-2026, **working with the Smith International Center to offer eleven faculty-led programs with student numbers expected to exceed the previous academic year.** The college values international experience tremendously, setting a goal of at least half of our student population studying abroad before they graduate.



## FIRST-YEAR STUDY ABROAD IN COSTA RICA

In January 2025, the Herbert College of Agriculture piloted a first-year study abroad experience in Costa Rica. **Fifteen first-year students joined the program**, led by Ryan Sharp, associate professor in the School of Natural Resources; Denita Hadziabdic Guerry, associate professor in the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology; and Herbert study abroad coordinator Kyra Barrier. In its inaugural year, the program was a huge success, encouraging global mindsets from the get-go.

# DEPARTMENT **HIGHLIGHTS**

## **AGRICULTURAL AND RESOURCE ECONOMICS**

The Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics launched a new one-year, industry-focused master's concentration in agribusiness, designed to provide students from varied backgrounds with a direct pathway to advanced agribusiness training. Through a generous gift from the Borthick family, the department established a new award to recognize excellence in teaching and student mentorship, with Gabriela Perez-Quesada honored as the inaugural recipient of the 2025 Daniel and Billie Caren Borthick AREC Teaching Award.

## **AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATIONS**

The Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications reported strong undergraduate and graduate enrollments this year. In collaboration with the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences, it introduced an online agricultural education concentration within the teacher education specialist (EdS) degree program. The department also hosted its first FFA Prep Day to support Tennessee FFA students advancing to the national competition in Indianapolis. Additionally, several faculty members received national recognition through the 2025 AAEE Awards, including Taylor Ruth, Carrie Stephens, and Jennifer Richards.

## **ANIMAL SCIENCE**

Frank Masincupp, professor emeritus of animal science, donated two extensive barbed wire displays he began collecting in the 1950's. The displays are carefully documented with historical and patent information and now installed outside the Honors Room for students to study. Animal science competitive teams excelled in 2025, with strong placements across the animal welfare, livestock, horse judging, dairy challenge, and dairy judging teams at regional and national events. In faculty achievements, Troy Rowan received the Walter "Mac" Pate Endowed Fellowship in Livestock Genetics for his innovative work integrating sensors and genomics to advance beef cattle sustainability. Yang Zhao was named the UT AgResearch Guthrie Endowed Professor in Precision Livestock Farming for his leadership in poultry welfare and disease prevention, in addition to receiving the Southern Region 2025 Agricultural Research Innovation Award of Excellence.

## **BIOSYSTEMS ENGINEERING AND SOIL SCIENCE**

The bachelor of science in environmental science officially launched this year, expanding academic opportunities for students interested in environmental study. The Soil Vols continued their impressive streak by qualifying for the National Soil Judging Contest for the fourteenth consecutive year, winning third place. A biosystems engineering senior design team also achieved distinction, placing third in an international design competition. Additionally, enrollment for construction science and management surpassed four hundred undergraduates, reflecting strong and growing interest in the field.



## ENTOMOLOGY AND PLANT PATHOLOGY

Entomology and Plant Pathology Professor Becky Trout Fryxell secured a \$600,000 USDA grant to launch a summer experiential program (REEVES) designed to train undergraduates in veterinary entomology. Associate Professor Denita Hadziabdic Guerry was appointed a Fulbright Faculty Advisor to support UT faculty, staff, and postdoctoral fellows pursuing Fulbright awards. Jerome Grant was honored at the UT Honors Banquet with both the Excellence in Teaching Award and the L. R. Hesler Award for Excellence in Teaching and Service. EPP 123, Chocolate: Bean to Bar, taught by Aaron Onufrak, remains the department's largest-enrolled course and continues to attract strong student interest each year.



## FOOD SCIENCE

Food science courses continue to reach students across campus through popular offerings such as FDSC 101: The Science of Food Ingredients, FDSC 110: Fermented Foods of the World, FDSC 150: History and Culture of Food, and FDSC 210: Science of Brewing. The department also expanded its curriculum with new responsive courses featuring specialized topics on fruits and vegetables; coffee; and chocolate, fats, and fads. Students achieved notable national success in 2025, earning top placements in competitions hosted by the Institute of Food Technologists and the American Egg Board, as well as recognition through several prestigious awards. Faculty excellence was also highlighted, with David Golden named an Athletics Professor of Excellence and Vermont Dia selected as an Anderson Center ACEI Fellow.



## SCHOOL OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The new outdoor recreation and park management concentration launched in 2025, and enrollment continues to grow. The program features twelve new, largely field-based courses, several of which offer students professional certifications in skills such as Wilderness First Aid and Leave No Trace, taught by faculty members Charles Chancellor, Matt Hudson, Ryan Sharp, and Adam Willcox. Additionally, the School of Natural Resources continues to coordinate extensive internship opportunities with state and federal agencies, providing more than forty positions for students at UT and other Tennessee institutions.



## PLANT SCIENCES

In addition to PLSC 493: Space Research and the world-renowned turfgrass research, the Department of Plant Sciences saw many accomplishments from faculty. In collaboration with UT Digital Learning, Amanda Spangler's online instructional module received three Telly Awards. Andy Pulte was recognized as part of the inaugural class of the Herbert College of Agriculture Faculty Teaching Fellows program, and Kellie Walters represented the college at the Provost's Mic Nite with a presentation on controlled environment agriculture.

# NEW FACULTY AND STAFF

## DYNAMIC STAFF

The Herbert College of Agriculture welcomed several new staff to accommodate various needs for a growing college. The college boasts twenty-six dean's office staff members with several roles dedicated to various areas of student success like recruitment, communications, advising, and more.

**Christopher Stripling joined the college's executive administrative staff as the new associate dean of academic innovation and student success.** He provides innovative leadership and strategic administration in connecting retention and advising initiatives, data analysis on student success, effective teaching methodologies, online curriculum development, and program assessments. Stripling previously served as head of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications.



**Herbert hired Timmy Carter as the college's first employer engagement and career development coordinator.** Goals for the role include ensuring 100 percent of undergraduate students complete an internship, increasing starting salaries by \$10,000, and connecting with the top 300 employers in agriculture, natural resources, and construction science industries to hire our students. In addition to helping Herbert students make meaningful connections with employers, Carter collaborates with the Center for Career Development and Academic Exploration, faculty, and administrators to ensure our college programs are relevant to industry demands and our students possess the skills needed for success.

The college welcomed four new advisors and two more administrative assistants to the dean's office staff in 2025 to satisfy the needs of an increasing student population. A growing team reflects a college on the rise.

## EXPERT FACULTY

Herbert hired sixteen new faculty members during the 2024-2025 academic year to lead innovation in new and existing programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Several were hired to develop new areas of education, Extension, and research.

**The college secured its first viticulturist in the Department of Plant Sciences, Pierre Davadant.** His position resulted from Tennessee's expanding interest in grapes and wines and Herbert's desire to prepare students for careers in this industry. Davadant's research focuses on identifying grape varieties adapted to Tennessee's climate and developing vineyard practices that reduce frost risk, control fungal diseases, manage vine vigor, and improve fruit and wine quality. Now, students with an interest in viticulture can take courses related to grape production.



**Aaron Onufrak joined the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology as a teaching assistant professor with the intention of leading the department's first undergraduate major, bioinformatics.** An alumnus of UT, Onufrak completed his doctoral training under Denita Hadziabdic Guerry in the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology. He currently teaches graduate courses related to plant pathology, microbial ecology, and bioinformatics techniques.



All other faculty hires include: **Kendall Griffin**, lecturer for natural resource and environmental economics; **Stephan Sommer**, professor of fermentation science; **Charles Chancellor**, professor of outdoor recreation and park management; **Mackenzie Gill**, assistant professor of food economics; **Tyler Gifford**, assistant professor of forest biometry; **Zihao Zhang**, assistant professor of carbon circular bioeconomy; **Jensen Hayter**, assistant professor of specialty crop pathology; **Annie Vogel**, assistant professor of commercial fruit production; **Sathishkumar Samiappan**, associate professor of precision agriculture; **Yanqiu Yang**, assistant professor of precision livestock; **Xiang Li**, assistant professor of precision animal health; **Kelly Vierck**, assistant professor of meat science; **Damla Dag Ertop**, Extension assistant professor of food science.

# AWARDS & RECOGNITION

Herbert College of Agriculture faculty, staff, students, and alumni received a variety of awards and recognition throughout 2025. The following list is not exhaustive but merely a representation of the college's pursuit of excellence.

- After serving as interim dean for two years, **David White** was named the official dean of the Herbert College of Agriculture in January 2025.
- Three Herbert alumni were named to the Volunteer 40 Under 40 Class of 2025: **Ashley Golden**, BS in food science ('06), MS in food science ('08), PhD in comparative and experimental medicine ('11); **Hunter Isbell**, MS in agricultural leadership, education, and communications ('18); and **Makenzie Read**, BS in natural resources and environmental economics ('15)
- **Genesis Nolan** received the 2025 Torchbearer Award—the highest honor for a UT student.
- **John Sorochan** was named one of the 2025 UT President's Award winners—the highest honor a UT employee can receive.
- **Tate Kerns** won the Tennessee Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers 2025 Collegiate Discussion Meet—the third consecutive year for Herbert.
- Seven Herbert students earned spring 2025 Graduate Student Research Awards with twenty-six distributed across the university in total.



In spring 2025, the Herbert College of Agriculture awarded **275 bachelor's degrees, fifty-two master's degrees, and eleven doctoral degrees.**

*A spring 2025 UT Herbert College of Agriculture graduate during the commencement ceremony after receiving a diploma. Photo by Raffae Lazarian.*

**Callie Robinson** won the American Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers 2025 Collegiate Discussion Meet—the second consecutive year that a Herbert student won.



*American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall presents Herbert College of Agriculture student Callie Robinson with an award for winning the 2025 American Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Collegiate Discussion Meet. Photo courtesy of American Farm Bureau.*

**Caroline Garrell** was one of four students at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, to receive the 2025 Peyton Manning Scholarship.



*Caroline Garrell (center) pictured with Peyton Manning and Chancellor Donde Plowman upon receiving the highly competitive Peyton Manning Scholarship.*

Animal science and journalism student **Laurel Cox** received a \$30,000 scholarship from Durango Boots for the National Day of the Cowgirl Award.



*Laurel Cox, an animal science student, has been recognized with Durango Boots' second annual National Day of the Cowgirl Award. Photo courtesy of Durango® Boots.*

# IN OTHER NEWS

The Herbert College of Agriculture launched the **agricultural leadership, education and communication PhD program** in fall 2025, filling every available spot. This fully online program equips students with the skills and knowledge necessary to address contemporary challenges in agriculture through leadership, education, and communication.

Select faculty members across our seven departments and the School of Natural Resources joined the college's inaugural **Faculty Teaching Fellowship Program**. The cohort kicked off in fall 2025, helping teaching faculty to develop the knowledge and skills to provide quality learning experiences for students.



The college awarded a **record amount of scholarship funding of more than \$1.2 million** to deserving undergraduate and graduate students. It is because of the generosity of our donors that we can provide unparalleled opportunities for our students and set them up for a lifetime of success.

*Herbert College of Agriculture students gathered with donors during the 2025 Herbert Scholarship Banquet. Photo by Celina Menard.*



*The first cohort of Faculty Teaching Fellows for the Herbert College of Agriculture gather on campus: (top row, from left) Jamie Greig, Andy Pulte, Carlos Trejo-Pech and Jiajia Chen; (bottom row) Denita Hadziabdic Guerry, Sathishkumar Samiappan, Alejandro Molina Moctezuma, and Lacey Johnston. Photo by Celina Menard.*



The **environmental and soil science major** officially changed to **environmental science**, offering two optional concentrations in soil science or conservation agriculture and environmental sustainability. The name change will help prospective students better understand how their high school environmental science class connects with agriculture and natural resources, ultimately growing the state's workforce to meet needs for soil and environmental scientists.

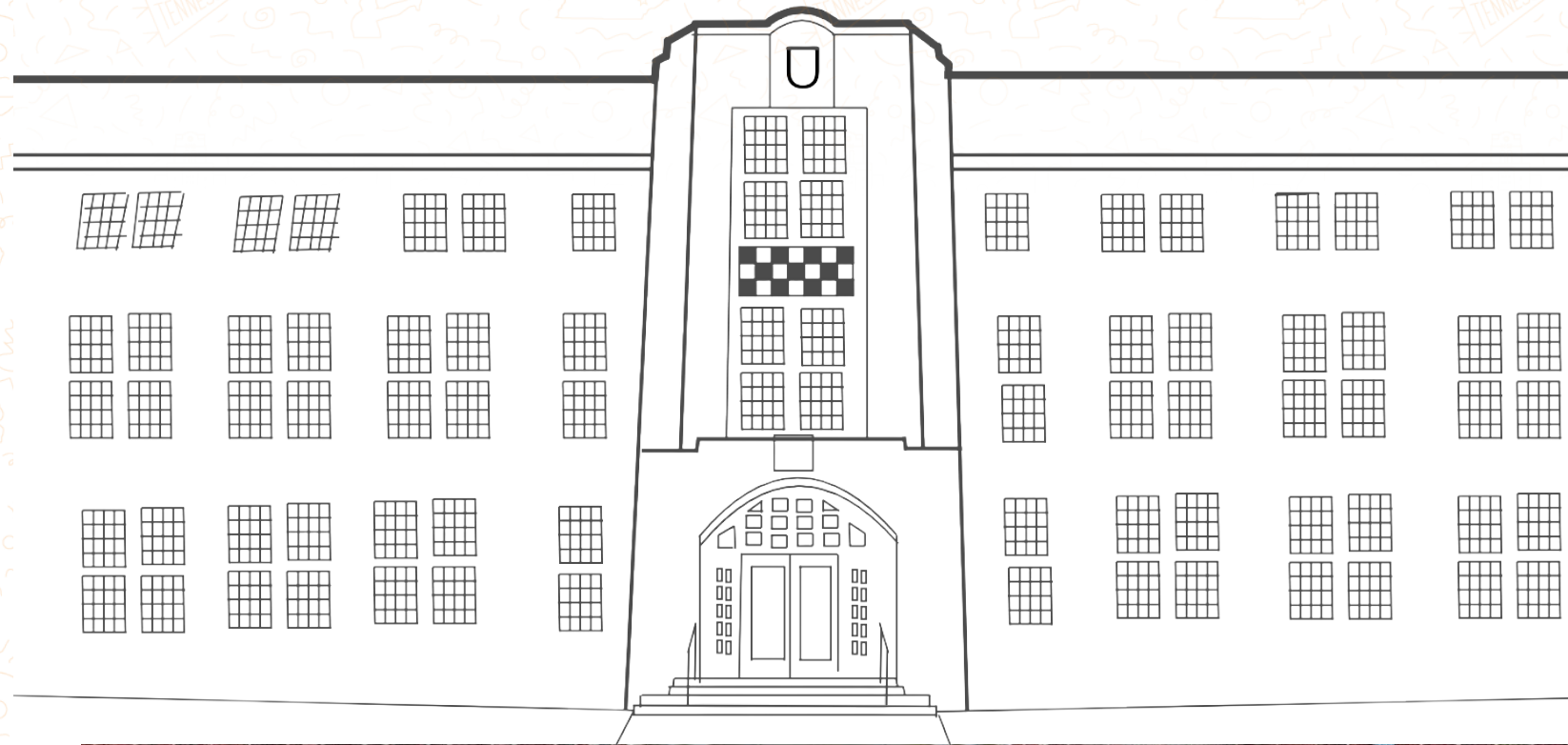
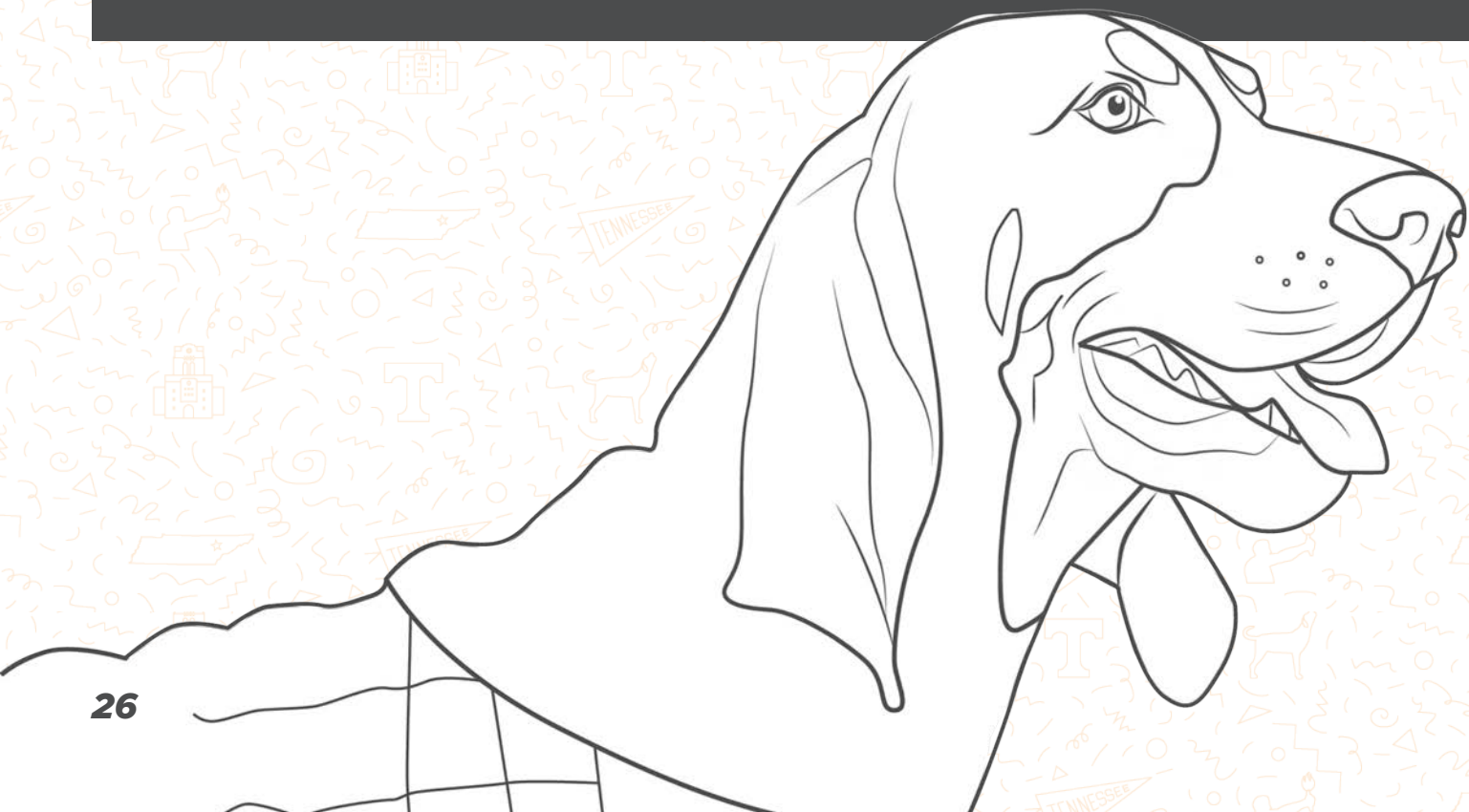
# ON THE HORIZON



4-H Next Chapter program awardees (from left): Isaac Welch, Logan West, and Gabe Harville. Missing from the photo is Katie Lipford. Photo by Celina Menard.

In partnership with Enrollment Management, the Herbert College of Agriculture and Tennessee 4-H relaunched the 4-H Next Chapter Program. Open to youth in all ninety-five counties, Next Chapter is a career readiness program that helps high school students explore future opportunities and prepare for life after graduation.

Coming fall 2026, the college will introduce a new bachelor's degree in bioinformatics—the first undergraduate program of its kind in the Southeastern Conference.



The Tennessee Farm Bureau accepted a proposal by the University of Tennessee Herbert College of Agriculture to host the next three summers of the Tennessee Leadership Summit—a premier program that exposes high school students to agriculture while developing their leadership skills.



From left, UT Institute of Agriculture and Herbert officials Hannah Wright, Cassie Johnson, Christopher Stripling, and David White, along with Tennessee Farm Bureau's Executive Vice President Bryan Wright and Director of Special Programs Dan Strasser. Photo by Celina Menard.



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

As we wrap up a very successful 2025, the Herbert College of Agriculture would like to thank all of its supporters on and off campus. Our alumni are extraordinary, giving back in many ways to ensure students receive the best possible experiences. Support from organizations like the Tennessee Farm Bureau, Farm Credit Mid-America, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, and so many more help us fulfill our mission of developing the next generation of leaders in agriculture, natural resources, and construction sciences. From helping Herbert students earn their degrees to hiring our graduates, our incredible donors impact hundreds of students every year. Additionally, this work wouldn't be possible without the best faculty and staff, who tirelessly live the land-grant ethos every day. Here's to a great year and many more to come.

**STAY IN TOUCH**

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