EXPLORING DR. JASON SCHEFFLER'S IMPACT ON THE UF DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL SCIENCES

BY: AUBREY PEARCE

Dr. Jason Scheffler, a University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) faculty member, has served in the Department of Animal Sciences since 2014. Scheffler has instilled the land-grant institution's mission of prioritizing research, teaching, and extension into his work.

Raised on a dairy farm in Minnesota, Scheffler's early exposure to agriculture laid the groundwork for his future endeavors as an animal sciences faculty member. He pursued his undergraduate studies in Biotechnology at Wisconsin River Falls, with minors in biology, chemistry, and food science. He then pursued graduate degrees from Michigan State University and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Scheffler's move to UF led to a significant shift in focus toward food safety, a field he had not extensively explored quite yet. Scheffler's willingness to adapt to the needs of his new environment led him down unexpected yet rewarding paths.

Research

At UF, Scheffler's appointment focuses on teaching and extension, but he does not neglect research. Scheffler ensures his research ties in with his teaching and extension programs.

> "The goal is for my research to really complement my extension work," Scheffler said.

His expertise in Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) systems has been instrumental in guiding meat processors toward ensuring food safety standards. HACCP is the systematic approach to food safety that helps identify, evaluate, and control potential hazards in the food production process.

A significant aspect of Scheffler's research involves implementing preventative controls for animal feed mills through written food safety plans, an area where regulations and oversight have historically been minimal. Recognizing the lack of guidance in this field, he provides consultation to help mills develop food safety plans and navigate compliance issues.

In his research, Scheffler searches for solutions to practical challenges the food industry faces. For instance, his work on biltong, a dried meat product, demonstrates innovative approaches to food safety. By utilizing acidic marinades and non-heat drying methods, Scheffler ensures the necessary control of bacteria for food safety while simultaneously meeting consumer preferences of tenderness and taste.

Scheffler also studies Sous Vide cookery, which is a cooking technique that heats food with water in a vacuum-sealed bag, offering insights into time-temperature combinations crucial for both safety and quality. His research provides valuable guidance to food service operations, enhancing efficiency and consistency in mass food preparation.

Teaching

Scheffler's commitment to maintaining industry relevance is evident in his teaching philosophy. He emphasizes practical skills and hands-on experiences, providing students with the tools necessary succeed in the field of meat science and food safety.

Scheffler teaches multiple undergraduate courses, including Intro to Animal Science, Senior Seminar, and HACCP Systems. From freshmen to seniors, students benefit from his expertise and guidance. Scheffler's students gain both classroom knowledge and practical skills essential for their future careers in animal science.

> "The career aspect of things in our department has always been important, but it has only become more important," Scheffler said.

However, Scheffler's impact on students extends beyond the classroom. As an advisor for the UF Block and Bridle Club, a student organization dedicated to promoting interest and scholarship of animal agriculture, he mentors members in their respective professional development journeys. Because of his teaching rationale, mentorship, and genuine care for his students' success and well-being, the UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences recently announced him as the college's **2024 Undergraduate Teacher of the Year.**

Extension

Scheffler's extension program's primary focus is to improve the production, utilization, value, and sustainability of muscle foods. He is an instructor at various meat short courses and directs the HACCP training program for industry certification.

Scheffler's educational initiative, Gator Grill Master's, helps further engage with the community, bridging the gap between academia and industry. By engaging with the community through educational events, he not only imparts knowledge but also fosters trust and understanding in food science.

Through his research, teaching, and extension work, Scheffler shows his passion for the meat industry and animal sciences.

As he continues to navigate the landscape of food safety and innovation, Scheffler's passion for his work remains unwavering. Through his multifaceted approach, he leaves an indelible mark on both his students and the broader food industry, ensuring a safer and more sustainable future.

To learn more about Scheffler and his work, visit his faculty page at ***https://animal.ifas.ufl.edu/people/jason-m-scheffler/***