

THE DEAN'S LETTER FOR TUFTS NUTRITION



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MERRIGAN TAPPED AS DEPUTY SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

President Barack Obama announced that he intends to nominate Assistant Professor **Kathleen Merrigan**, Ph.D., for the second highest position in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The deputy secretary of agriculture typically oversees day-to-day operations of the USDA, including development of a \$95 billion budget for 26 agencies representing 300 programs and more than 100,000

employees. A formal nomination is expected in the coming weeks, with a confirmation hearing to follow.

Merrigan, the director of the Friedman School's Agriculture, Food and Environment Program, was head of the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service from 1999 to 2001, when she helped develop U.S. organic food-labeling standards. As a Senate aide, she worked on the 1990 law that recognized organic farming. Ferd Hoefner of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition told Reuters that "sustainable and organic farmers are excited ... that someone who has been associated with these issues her whole career is going to be at that level in the department."

Hoefner encouraged the Senate to confirm Merrigan for the post, which would see her working with Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, who was confirmed on January 20.

Merrigan worked at the Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture and as a consultant for the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization from 1994 to 1999. She worked on the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee from 1987 to 1992. She has a doctoral degree in environmental planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

RESEARCH UPDATES

According to a study in the American Journal of Agricultural Economics, participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp Program, purchase more groceries and eat out less often than non-participants with the same low income level. "Participation in SNAP appears to play an integral role in where food is purchased," says Associate Professor **Parke Wilde**, Ph.D., who conducted the research with

colleagues **Lisa Troy**, Ph.D., and Professor **Beatrice Rogers**, Ph.D. Past research has shown that restaurant food tends on average to have more of the nutrients that Americans over-consume, and less of the nutrients that Americans under-consume. "The nutrition impact of federal anti-hunger programs depends in part on where participants get their food," Wilde said. "The federal government is pursuing research to measure the impact of SNAP on dietary quality. Our results suggest that influence over food sourcing—from grocery stores and restaurants—is one way the program can make a difference."

As scientists warn that climate change will bring an increase in the frequency and intensity of droughts, hurricanes and tidal waves, a new report from the Feinstein International Center uses statistical models to project the associated need for humanitarian spending over the next 20 years. Spending could increase by 32 percent, based on changes in the frequency of disasters, or 1,600 percent when other criteria, such as disaster-intensity, are also taken into account. But overall, the report finds that the current data collected by humanitarian agencies is insufficient for predicting future needs. The future is inherently unpredictable, and aid agencies have to let go of their "old comfortable linear models of change" and become "adaptive, flexible and open to acting upon feedback," **Peter Walker**, Ph.D., the report's co-author and the Rosenberg Professor at the Friedman School, told IRIN, the humanitarian news and analysis service of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Read the report at the Feinstein's web site: <http://fic.tufts.edu>

HERE & THERE

Professor **Jeffrey Blumberg**, Ph.D., has been invited to deliver the annual Denham Harman Distinguished Lectureship in Biomedical Gerontology at the University of Nebraska Medical Center on April 10 in Omaha. Harman is noted for his seminal work in the 1950s and 1960s on the free radical hypothesis of aging. He also established the first section of geriatrics/gerontology in the U.S. and, at 93 years old, continues to serve on the Nebraska faculty.

Assistant Professor **Diane McKay**, Ph.D., and **Heather McMorrow**, distance learning specialist, spoke at the sixth annual Health Sciences Mini-Symposium for Teaching and Learning, titled "Innovative Teaching with Technology at Tufts." The mini-symposium was organized by University Information Technology. They were panelists for the workshop called "Using Course Sites Effectively." They demonstrated and discussed the online course in general nutrition they developed for the Friedman School's distance-learning program with Ras Al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates.

Adjunct Professor **David Hastings** has come up with his own mini-stimulus package. As part of his management consulting company, Managing Excellence, he has taken on a number of pro-bono projects for five nonprofit organizations. The projects range from board development to financial sustainability to strategic planning. He is donating 80 hours of pro-bono work to each, and says he is gaining a lot by being able to help out in these tough economic times.

Adjunct Professor **Judy Ribaya-Mercado**, Sc.D., was asked by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Division of the Human Health, Nutritional and Health-Related Environmental Studies Section (Vienna, Austria) to serve as a reviewer of an FAO-IAEA

eLearning distance learning module on “Stable Isotope Methodology to Assess Vitamin A Status.” Institute for Family Welfare on the application of small area estimation to ‘hunger mapping,’ or the estimation of national malnutrition prevalence at geographically disaggregated levels. The workshop was conducted jointly with James Wirth, who was a research associate at the

FRIEDMAN FACULTY IN THE NEWS

The debate over vitamins shows no sign of coming to a close. Professor **Jeffrey Blumberg**, Ph.D., reacted to the findings of two large, recent studies of multivitamins and disease prevention. “If you walk away from these studies saying you don’t need to take vitamins, you’re taking away the wrong message,” he told the Huffington Post online. “You shouldn’t be taking vitamins to prevent cancer. You take them because you’re not eating well. That’s why they’re called dietary supplements. They’re for people who aren’t getting the recommended dietary allowance from their diet.” At the same time, Stanley N. Gershoff Professor **Alice Lichtenstein**, D.Sc., warned in the *Boston Globe* that eating fortified foods should be done in moderation. “It’s an area we don’t have a good handle on,” she said. “There’s no overall monitoring of all the different types of food and what’s fortified and who’s choosing them. We may be getting to the point where we may be consuming more than we actually should.”

An article about the benefits of exercise in the *St. Petersburg Times* quoted Associate Professor **Miriam Nelson**, Ph.D., vice chair of the committee that provided recommendations for the federal government’s new physical activity guidelines. “It was so thorough, and there was so much evidence of the benefits of physical activity,” she said. “It’s hard to believe more people don’t realize this. People have to wake up.”

In an article on diet trends in Forbes magazine online, Professor **Susan Roberts**, Ph.D., acknowledges that dieters battle constant challenges from the outside world. “We’re in this culture where people are supposed to be good and mindful, but our food brain isn’t sensible,” she explains. “We are machines designed to respond to our environment.”

In an Associated Press article, Professor **Allen Taylor**, Ph.D., commented on a study by Brigham and Women’s/Harvard researchers which found that B vitamins appear to be able prevent macular degeneration (AMD) in older women. He said the study was strong because patients were assigned at random and followed for a long time. But because the findings were teased out of a larger experiment for heart disease, there wasn’t strict categorization of the type and severity of the eye disease.

ALUMNI NEWS

That Perfect Job

On Thursday, February 5, the Friedman Alumni Association hosted a career panel focusing on “Managing Your Career: Tips on Interviewing, Salary Negotiation and Promotions.” Panelists included **Tom Hughes**, Ph.D., N87, A10P, the chief executive at Zafgen Inc.; **Melinda Downie-Maryniuk**, G79, the director of clinical education programs at the Joslin Diabetes Center; and **Tessa W. Cooper**, N83, senior vice president of human resources for

Indevus Pharmaceuticals. Did you miss it? Visit alumni.nutrition.tufts.edu to view the video.

The Power of Giving

What impact does my gift have on the Friedman School? Why do people give? Visit alumni.nutrition.tufts.edu to read stories from the students who benefit from annual fund gifts and also hear from alumni volunteers about why they choose to support the school. We want to hear from all our donors about their reasons for giving. Please email Lindsay Schoonmaker, Lindsay.Schoonmaker@tufts.edu, to share your story.

Alumni Association Award Winners

Congratulations to the 2009 Alumni Association award winners, who will be honored during reunion in April. **Marguerite Evans Klein**, N84, the health science administrator for the National Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements, will receive the Expertise/Innovation Award. The Leadership Award will go to Professor **Aviva Must**, Ph.D., N87, N92, J01P, A03P, the Morton A. Madoff Chair and professor of public health at Tufts School of Medicine.

COMING RIGHT UP

Mark your calendars for the seventh annual **Friedman School All-Alumni Reunion on April 4–6**. The reunion committee has planned a fantastic weekend that will feature the 2009 Alumni Association Awards, a group service project at the Greater Boston Food Bank, discussions of critical issues in nutrition and the opportunity to reconnect with old friends and mentors. The keynote speaker will be Lorelei DiSogra, vice president of nutrition and health for the United Fresh Produce Association. There will also be a special one-hour reception for Friedman School graduates from the last five years (2004 to 2008) and an all-alumni cocktail party at Vlora Restaurant in Boston.

More information is posted at <http://nutrition.tufts.edu/reunion>. Questions? Please email Sean Devendorf at sean.devendorf@tufts.edu.

The Friedman School Alumni Association will host a **Washington, D.C., networking cocktail reception** for alumni, current students and friends of the school at the Hotel Tabbard Inn on Thursday, March 19, from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Prior to the reception, a group of 12 students will be traveling around D.C. meeting with alumni at their workplaces. The second annual Washington, D.C., alumni/student networking event is run by the Alumni Association's Executive Council and is intended to introduce current students to D.C. career opportunities. Participating alumni include **Andrew Shao**, N00, from the Council for Responsible Nutrition; **Sarah Murphy**, N08, from FoodMinds; **Tom Schaetzel**, N06, from the Manoff Group; **Britt Lundgren**, N06, from the Environmental Defense Fund; **Nicole Ferring**, N07, from the Institute of Medicine Food and Nutrition Board; **Aimee Witteman**, N06, from the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition; **Chris Hillbruner**, N07, from Few's Net Chemonics; **Gabrielle Serra**, N05, **Sara Wilson**, N06, and **Shannon Nally**, N04, from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service; **Sandra Remancus**, N96, from the Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance Project; and **Nina Schlossman**, J75, N86, from Global Food & Nutrition Inc.

On April 20, Dean Eileen Kennedy, D.Sc., and the Friedman School Alumni Association will host a Friedman School cocktail reception during the 2009 Experimental Biology Conference in New Orleans.

The deadline for the next issue of the *Dean's Letter for Tufts Nutrition* is Wednesday, April 1, 2009. Please send your submissions to Julie Flaherty at julie.flaherty@tufts.edu.