

# AG RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT



## Ian Kaplan

*"We're pretty diverse in terms of the type of research my lab conducts. Purdue has been an easy place for me to do this kind of work."*

*Ian Kaplan, Associate Professor of Entomology*

The Ag Research Spotlight shines each month on an individual whose work reflects our commitment to the six strategic themes that guide Agricultural Research at Purdue. Our spotlight for January 2015 underscores the theme, "Strengthening ecological and environmental integrity in agricultural landscapes."

**THE RESEARCHER:** Insects were not on Ian Kaplan's radar as an undergraduate biology major at Davidson College. "I was interested in ecology and evolution and environmental sciences, and so worked on various projects that involved plants, birds, snakes, and lizards," he says. Entomology didn't capture his attention until he spent a summer surveying native North Carolina insects for a Charlotte natural history museum. In the master's program at Auburn University, he studied insect biocontrol by fire ants in cotton fields. "That was my introduction to agriculture," says the Long Island native. "I'd never seen cotton before." Drawn to entomology's varied applications in agriculture, human epidemiology and urban pest management, he completed a doctorate at the University of Maryland. While doing postdoctoral research at Cornell University on the interactions of insects and agricultural systems, Kaplan saw a job posting for a specialty crop entomologist at Purdue. He joined the faculty in 2009.

**THE RESEARCH:** Kaplan's lab works at the interface of ecology and agriculture. Current projects span the full spectrum from basic to applied research, with a mix of topics related to biological control, plant-insect interactions, and chemical ecology. "We work a lot in

the area of sustainable agriculture and understanding the ecology of agricultural systems," he adds.

**RANGE OF INTERESTS:** Some of Kaplan's research contributes to basic, fundamental knowledge; other projects have immediate applicability. "I maybe find too many things interesting," he says, "Because no single question drives this work, we get spread too thin sometimes because our projects are pulled across so many areas." Being granted tenure last summer has prompted Kaplan to think about narrowing his focus—but he's still making up his mind on what that might entail.

**SECURITY CHECK:** Kaplan nearly (inadvertently) turned down the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers that he won in 2011. When he received a call asking for his social security number and other personal information—recipients undergo extensive background checks—Kaplan suspected a hoax and relented only when the request was instead emailed from a .gov address. He's says now that he's glad he didn't miss the enjoyable awards weekend in Washington, D.C., the highlight of which was meeting the president.

**MIDWEST TRANSPLANT:** When he came to Indiana, "I was more concerned about the job description than I was the location," Kaplan says. "The Midwest was one place I had skirted; I'd missed the middle part of the country." Despite the cliché, he has found it a great place to raise a family. Outside of work, his three daughters, ages 9, 6 and 3, "keep life very busy and interesting," he says. "This is a good place to live if you have kids of that age."