

AG RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT



BEN GRAMIG

“Unlike the vast majority of faculty in the College of Agriculture, most economists don’t have field plots or conduct controlled experiments. I tell people that my lab is my computer.”

—Ben Gramig, Assistant Professor of Natural Resource and Environmental Economics

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 March 2013 underscores the theme, “Facilitating informed decision making to improve economic and social well-being.”

THE RESEARCHER: Earlier in his life, Ben Gramig owed the sum and total of his knowledge of agriculture to the Kentucky State Fair. Then his interest in studying natural resource conservation and management took the Louisville native into the College of Agriculture at the University of Kentucky. After earning a bachelor’s degree, he spent two years in the Governor’s Office of Agricultural Policy before returning to UK to pursue a master’s degree in agricultural economics. He completed his doctoral degree in the same subject area at Michigan State University in 2008.

THE RESEARCH: Gramig is a natural resource and environmental economist whose applied research investigates human-environmental interaction. “I focus on better understanding the trade-offs between environmental and economic decisions,” he explains. “For example, a decision by a government or an individual may come at the cost of increased consumption of a scarce resource or a reduction in environmental quality. As an economist, my focus is on accounting for all the costs of public and private decisions.” The tool of

Gramig’s trade is data, and key to his analysis is its source: collaboration.

COLLABORATION IS CRUCIAL: “What continues to keep me excited about Purdue is that there’s an entrepreneurial spirit within the College of Agriculture that allows for interdisciplinary collaboration,” he says. Gramig works with colleagues in agricultural and biological engineering, agronomy, entomology, and forestry and natural resources. He works across colleges with faculty in political science and earth, atmospheric, and planetary sciences.

ABOUT THE DATA: Many environmental and natural resource economists rely on previously published studies. Gramig’s approach allows him to analyze current data straight from the field. “In truly collaborative research, I actually have some opportunity to help design those experiments,” he adds. That can translate to research with more immediate impact.

CHALLENGE: Social scientists working on the environment are in extremely short supply at Purdue, and Gramig fields multiple requests for his time and service. Too often, he says, he has to say no. “There are many, many problems that I’d love to get involved in,” he says, as he looks ahead to future collaborations. “The reason I do this is that I hope to have some impact beyond Purdue, West Lafayette and my life.”