

AG RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT



Kiersten Wise

“When farmers have questions, and we don’t have the answers, I know it’s time to set up a research trial.”

– Kiersten Wise, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist for Agronomic Field Crop Diseases

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 2014 underscores two themes: “building a sustainable and secure food production system”; and “facilitating informed decision making to improve economic and social well-being.”

THE RESEARCHER: Plant pathologist Kiersten Wise says her upbringing in the small farming community of State Center, Iowa, “absolutely” influenced her academic choices. Her early plans to become a medical doctor were diverted by a brief visit to a medical laboratory during high school where, she says, “I realized I really disliked being indoors.” Her determination to find a profession that would allow her to work outside led her to Iowa State University, where she majored in plant health and protection, and to the University of Georgia for a master’s degree in plant pathology. She connected with Purdue while completing her doctoral degree at North Dakota State University, and joined the Botany and Plant Pathology faculty in 2008.

THE RESEARCH: Wise’s research and Extension programs focus on the epidemiology and management of diseases of corn, soybean, and wheat. The research she conducts in the field includes evaluating new disease management approaches, including preventive techniques. She is also examining the impact

of wider use of fungicides on the economics and sustainability of crop production. Questions from farmers often determine where Wise concentrates her resources, she says: “A lot of great research ideas have come from talking with growers.”

ASSETS: Strong Extension programs are just part of what makes the College of Agriculture a good fit for Wise’s research. “There’s a lot of farmer and stakeholder buy-in to this work—they want the information,” she adds. “Purdue’s regional farms around the state allow us to provide area-specific information to our growers. And there are so many great colleagues to work with on multidisciplinary studies—people with diverse interests who want to work together to solve problems.”

OUTREACH: Wise says her Extension work informs and motivates her team’s research—“the fact that our research is something we can provide to farmers to improve the productivity of their farming operations,” she explains. “This is work with a purpose.” She wants to instill this pragmatism in the graduate students who comprise her lab and field crews. “It’s not enough to do good quality research,” she says. “The research is part of a continuum in which somebody is going to use those results in some way that will make something better.”