

## USDA presents rice research grant to Southeast

By Kayla Gaffney

The Southeast Missouri State University Department of Agriculture was awarded a \$40,000 Rural Business Development Grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture that will go toward new technologically-advanced equipment for rice research.

Typically when you think of the crops being grown and researched in Missouri, rice isn't the first thing that comes to mind. But Missouri is one of only six states in the U.S. that produces rice. The other states include California, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Arkansas.

Dr. Michael Aide, chair of the Department of Agriculture, wrote the grant to the USDA requesting funding. Aide said the grant was awarded to Southeast, but the equipment that will be purchased through this grant also will be used by researchers outside of the university.

"This was a grant shepherded by Southeast, but our partners included the University of Missouri, Missouri Rice Research Council and the rice farmers of Missouri," Aide said. "I wrote it for the benefit of all these people."

Aide said the equipment that will be purchased is more technologically advanced than other equipment Southeast has used in the past because it operates using GPS technology.

"It's a vehicle that travels through mud and water, it maintains contact with a satellite ... it changes agrichemical placement so it sprays agricultural chemicals for controlling diseases, for controlling weeds," Aide said. "It will change the amount of chemical or the type of chemical as it drives across the field to spray exactly the proper amount."

Dr. Chris McGowan, dean of the College of Science, Technology and Agriculture, said this equipment will make it easier for researchers to perform experiments.

"We're growing small plots of rice to do experiments with so that we can test pesticides, herbicides or fertilizer," McGowan said.

This equipment makes the process of spraying chemicals more efficient, which will help save money and preserve the environment.

"It helps farmers in two ways," Aide said. "One -- it saves costs, you spray only what you need. Two -- we use a lot less agrichemical, so therefore it promotes the environment."

Using this new equipment also will open the door for jobs on the technology side of the agriculture field.

"Every time there is an advancement in technology there is an advance in support for that technology, so someone has to be out there to fix that GPS unit when it breaks," McGowan said. "There are more jobs associated with technological advances in terms of support for the technology."

One benefit in acquiring this equipment is for students in the agriculture department to have experience with the most up-to-date technology in the field.

"Students will be able to use this technology, and this technology will be coming out in the workforce pretty soon," Aide said. "Agriculture is in a massive revolution -- it's a genetic revolution, but it's also a technology revolution."