Meat Foundation Awards $110,000 in Scholarships.

The Meat Foundation announced the recipients of its 2025-2026 scholarship awards. Twenty-one deserving undergraduate and graduate students received a total of $110,000 to pursue degrees in animal, meat and food sciences at their respective universities. Congratulations to the following winners:

Undergraduate

Barry Carpenter Scholarship
Cason Frisby, University of Arkansas, Food Science

Rosemary Mucklow Scholarship
Emma Shepard, Iowa State University, Food Science

Al Piccetti Scholarship
Matthew Stinebaker, Texas A&M University, Food Science and Technology

Merit Scholarships
Nathan Kerth, Texas A&M University, Animal Science
Spencer Walahoski, West Texas A&M University, Animal Science
Jack Habjan, Texas Tech University, Animal Science
Abigail Sleep, Texas Tech University, Animal Science Production
Hayden Lott, Kansas State University, Animal Science
Gemma Dotts, The Ohio State University, Animal Science
Kylie Beard, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Animal Science
Shayla Mader, Texas Tech University, Animal Science

Graduate

Ron Gustafson Scholarship
Megan E. Eckhardt, West Texas A&M University, Agriculture & Meat Science

John Duyn Scholarship
Vianca Tashiguano, Auburn University, Food Science – Poultry Science

Florence Powers Scholarship
Rishav Kumar, Auburn University, Poultry Science – Focus on Meat Science

Frank DeBenedetti Scholarship
Boluwatife Esther Ajayi, Texas A&M University, Food Safety Microbiology

Merit Scholarships
Lauren Lee, Texas A&M University, Animal Science – Meat Science & Food Safety
Erasmo Alexander Flores Granados, Auburn University, Poultry Science
Clint Lee, University of Georgia, Animal Science
Kadie Graves, Texas A&M University, Animal Science – Meat Science
Katherine S Sierra, Auburn University, Poultry – Food Science
Lindsey Decker, Texas Tech University, Animal Science

For additional information about the Meat Foundation scholarship program and to view the complete list of winners, visit our website.

Meat Foundation, Meat Institute Launch Free Training Course on *Listeria* Control.

The Meat Foundation and the Meat Institute earlier this month announced the launch of "Foundations of *Listeria* Control," a free online training course that will train meat and poultry company employees with no prior background on the basics of *Listeria* control. The following are details of the Foundations of *Listeria* Control:

- Nine modules averaging 15 minutes in length.
- The course is free and accessible to anyone. There is an optional fee if the participant wishes to purchase a certificate of completion.
- Participants do not need any prior knowledge.
- While designed to address *Listeria* in ready-to-eat operations, many foundational concepts are covered that apply broadly. Employees in raw operations or non-meat facilities may find the instruction helpful.

This course is sponsored by:

In addition to the Meat Foundation and Meat Institute member companies, the American Meat Science Association (AMSA) contributed to the creation of content and provided financial support for the project as a Technical Assistance Provider (TAP) through the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Meat & Poultry Processing Technical Assistance Program.

Access the Foundations of *Listeria* Training

Foundation Secures FY 26 Beef Checkoff Funding.

The Meat Foundation received $650,000 in FY26 to conduct research on behalf of the Beef Checkoff. Research will address post-harvest beef safety.

"The Foundation is thrilled to continue to administer research on behalf of the Beef Checkoff," said Meat Foundation President Susan Backus. "The Checkoff investment in post-harvest beef safety research is critical to expanding the knowledge base; ensuring consumer and customer trust in beef products; and providing value to beef producers by demonstrating that beef products are safe and nutritious."

Research funding will be used toward projects addressing current knowledge gaps; facilitating the dissemination of research data and knowledge sharing through meetings, or other events targeted to appropriate stakeholders; assessing research impact over time by cataloging citations for research funded by the Beef Checkoff and administered by the Foundation; developing tools that share post-harvest research results or summarizing research to provide guidance and information for beef processing facilities of all sizes.

Post-harvest beef safety research could address any appropriate research priorities identified by the Foundation's Research Advisory Committee, which may include but are not limited to:

- Evaluating the efficacy of natural interventions and processing aids to control pathogens on beef or in further processed beef products;
- Exploring the risk of potential environmental contaminants in beef products;
- Identifying and validate critical control points targeting *Salmonella*, *E. coli* O157:H7 and non-O157:H7 STECs in further processed beef items including dry fermented beef sausage; and
- Exploring the role and potential human health concerns associated with ingredients that make beef products safe.

The Meat Foundation will issue a request for proposals on these topics in FY26.

Meat Foundation Webinar Wrap Up.

The Meat Foundation, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff, hosted a webinar on September 24 providing an in-depth look at groundbreaking Beef Baseline research funded by the Beef Checkoff.

This webinar featured Dr. Mindy Brashears of Texas Tech University, leading a nationwide study on *Salmonella* prevalence in ground beef. Also presenting was Dr. Prashant Singh of Florida State University, who showcased innovative molecular detection tools for *Salmonella* and STEC that can improve testing accuracy and reduce costly false positives.

Strengthening Beef Safety:
Beef Checkoff & Meat Foundation Collaborate on Baseline Research Findings

SEPTEMBER 24 AT 2:00 PM ET

Key Takeaways from the webinar are:

- *Salmonella* enterica was detected in 3.67% of ground beef samples over 14 months, with seasonal spikes in Spring and Fall, highlighting the importance of time-based surveillance.
- High-throughput molecular assays now offer precise detection of pathogenic *E. coli* strains (stx and eae) and quantification of *Salmonella*, improving diagnostic accuracy.
- These tools help distinguish virulent from avirulent strains, reducing false positives and preventing unnecessary product losses and financial impact.

Together, these experts shared how Beef Checkoff-funded research administered by the Meat Foundation is providing critical data and technology to strengthen the safety of the U.S. beef supply.

You may view the webinar here.

Meat Foundation Board of Directors Elected.

The new class of Meat Foundation Board of Directors was elected on October 10 during the Meat Institute's membership meeting. The directors are:

- **Al Almanza,** JBS Foods USA
- **Edwin Botero,** Viz Cattle Corp. dba SUKARNE
- **Jennifer Dibbern,** American Food Group
- **Meredith Healan**, FPL Food LLC
- **Suzanne Strassburger Reidy,** Strassburger Meats/Suzy Sirloin Inc.

Terms are for three years and begin on January 1, 2026.

Recently Published Research

Findings from "Summarizing the Current knowledge and Existing Knowledge Gaps for Preharvest and Postharvest *Salmonella* Contamination in Pork," a project funded in part by the Meat Foundation and Pork Checkoff, were recently published in the *Journal of Food Protection*. The abstract follows and the complete publication is available here.

> "Pork production is one of the most important industries in the world, and ensuring safety in the production chain is crucial for public health. *Salmonella* presence in pigs and pork products is a significant challenge within the pork industry. *Salmonella* can contaminate the production chain at any stage, from the farm sites to harvest and final product processing. Different strategies can be used to mitigate *Salmonella* on the farm and during transportation, lairage, and postharvest; however, despite ongoing improvement of these interventions, many knowledge gaps remain and must be addressed. This review summarizes what is currently published in the literature regarding *Salmonella* contamination in pigs and pork, including the efficacy of common interventions, and highlights critical knowledge gaps at each production stage. Research recommendations to control *Salmonella* and enhance food safety and public health are also described herein."

Abrego, A., Wiseman, B., & Gragg, S. E. (2025). Summarizing the current knowledge and existing knowledge gaps for pre-harvest and post-harvest *Salmonella* contamination in pork. Journal of Food Protection, 100609.

Current Foundation Research Projects

Understanding *Salmonella* ecology and internal colonization in market hogs, University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Arkansas

This study will use barcoded *Salmonella* to inoculated market hogs orally, intranasally, and at various locations intradermally to explore *Salmonella* ecology and internal colonization in market hogs. The findings are intended to address the following research questions: How quickly does *Salmonella* contaminate lymph nodes, tonsils, liver, spleen, cecal contents, and feces of market hogs?; and Does inoculation method (oral vs. intradermal) impact frequency and concentration of *Salmonella* recovered from inoculated market hogs?
Funded in part by the Pork Checkoff.

Survival of African swine fever in pork and processed pork products, Canadian Food Inspection Service, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

African Swine Fever (ASF) is a contagious, haemorrhagic viral disease of pigs that is currently spreading westwards throughout Europe and eastwards into China, with significant economic losses along its path. While strict regulatory guidelines are in place to prevent the spread of this virus, little is known about the effectiveness of current meat processing methods in inactivating ASF. In addition, the matrix effect of individual meat products and ingredients on ASF survival is not well documented. This project aims to explore the survival of ASF in different meat products from ASF infected pigs as well as investigate the effect of different ingredients, cooking temperature, storage time and high pressure processing on ASFinactivation in different meat model systems.
Funded in part by the National Pork Checkoff under an ASF Partnership and administered by the Foundation.

Carbon Accounting for Genetic Progress in Pork, Kearney (formerly Context Network)

The project intends to demonstrate the market readiness for value creation to occur utilizing credible accounting for genetic progress within pork systems. The demonstration will advance the infrastructure and market research needs that inform future scalability for the industry to use this approach. Findings will enable pork packers/processors to leverage these innovations to manage their environmental footprint and business goals by incentivizing productivity and efficiency.
Funded in part by PIC.

Current Foundation Research Projects, *continued*

Salmonella deep serotyping and microbial community profiling though swine production and processing, USDA-ARS-MARC, University of Georgia, Texas Tech University
This study will investigate the implementation of effective interventions at the most appropriate points in swine production, as well as deepen the understanding of *Salmonella* serotype diversity and complexity at all stages of production. This study will use archived samples of swine finishing barns as well samples collected under currently funded work, for CRISPR-SeroSeq and microbiome analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the microbiome and *Salmonella* serotype ecology from farm to fork.
Funded in part by the Pork Checkoff.

Creating Alternative Support for Lethality and Stabilization for Heat Treated and Fully Cooked Meat and Poultry Products, University of Wisconsin, HansonTech
Nearly all meat processors in the United States utilize USDA, FSIS Appendices A and B to ensure adequate thermal lethality and stabilization is achieved for partially and fully cooked products. Through the development and release of updated versions in 2017 and 2021, and the realization that a host of potential food safety vulnerabilities exist, the widespread usefulness and in-plant practical application of these guidance documents has become a significant concern and practical challenge to implement. The primary objective of this study is to develop a scientific-based, regulatory-supported, and industry-useful thermal processing and cooling resource (e.g., cooking, and cooling food safety handbook) for validating pathogen destruction and control, and regulatory compliance for partially and fully cooked meat products that can be used in conjunction with or in lieu of USDA, FSIS Appendices A & B.
Funded in part by the Beef Checkoff.

Characterizing *Salmonella* Isolates from Ground Beef in the United States, Texas Tech University, Kansas State University, University of Georgia, USDA-ARS, Meat Animal Research Center, Food Safety Net Services
It is hypothesized that *Salmonella* serotypes and presence of highly pathogenic *Salmonella* (HPS) in ground beef will vary by geographic location and season depending on the facility. Samples obtained from a separate study will be analyzed to determine the *Salmonella* serotype(s) present in each positive sample and the presence of HPS associated with U.S. ground beef.
Funded in part by the Beef Industry Food Safety Council.

Revealing mechanisms for internal *Salmonella* colonization and persistence in porcine lymphoid and fat tissue, USDA-ARS-NADC - Food Safety and Enteric Pathogens Research Unit
Swine can become persistently infected with *Salmonella*, shedding little to no bacteria in the feces, until subjected to a stressful event, which increases fecal shedding. A clear understanding of the mechanisms of *Salmonella* persistence in porcine immune cells is needed to develop targeted intervention strategies to significantly reduce *Salmonella* carriage in swine and the risk of contamination of products and the environment. The overall hypothesis is that *Salmonella* resides in myeloid-lineage cells in porcine lymphoid tissues and fat, and subsequently modulates the cellular state to limit bacterial clearance. The objectives of this project are to identify the cell types harboring *Salmonella* in pig lymphoid and adipose tissue at various stages of colonization; characterize the cellular response; and identify mechanisms of intracellular colonization.
Funded in part by the Pork Checkoff.

Funded by the Beef Checkoff and Administered by the Foundation

From Trim to Table: Tracking *Salmonella* Dynamics, Including Levels and Survival, from Beef Trim to Ground Product, Kansas State University and Cargill
This research will conduct an inoculation study to evaluate the influence of *Salmonella* levels in beef trim (including lymph nodes) on *Salmonella* levels in ground beef, providing valuable insights for managing *Salmonella* in final product. *Salmonella* survival will be assessed during standard industry storage periods to further understand its persistence and potential risks in products intended for commerce.

Improving and validating the THERM model for predicting growth of *Staphylococcus* aureus in raw meat products during temperature abuse and come-up-time (CUT) deviations, University of Wisconsin – Madison
The current Temperature History Evaluation for Raw Meats (THERM) model, originally intended for use by small and very small processors who lacked refrigeration in their raw processing areas and now widely used at all levels of the meat processing industry to estimate pathogen growth in raw materials, may overestimate pathogen growth when following USDA temperature recommendations. This study will refine product categories and determine the growth of *Staphylococcus* aureus in uncured model meat products with varying pH levels and temperatures which represent come-up-time ranges where S. aureus may grow. A validated predictive model will be developed using a variety of different meat products and formulations.

Reliability and repeatability of digital PCR and VAE assays for the enumeration of *Salmonella* in beef samples, Florida State University and U.S. Meat Animal Research Center USDA-ARS
This study intends to optimize digital PCR (dPCR) and varying amplification efficiency (VAE) assay workflows for the detection and quantification of *Salmonella* load in beef samples. The reliability and repeatability of dPCR and VAE assays will be validated and their applicability will be compared with an AOAC performance-tested method. The application of a partition-based digital PCR approach will enable highly reliable and repeatable detection and quantification of *Salmonella* load in contaminated beef samples. The VAE assay will enable simple estimation of *Salmonella* levels in beef samples.

Analysis of beef *Salmonella* outbreaks using the USMARC SNP analysis pipeline, USDA-ARS, Meat Animal Research Center
Using the pipeline developed in a previously funded project (see Enhanced Characterization of Sequence Differences Among *Salmonella* isolates within SNP Clusters Identified by the NCBI Pathogen Detection System), genomes from previous beef *Salmonella* outbreaks will be evaluated to characterize the genomic variation between sequenced isolates related to the outbreak. The findings will detail the reliability of Beef *Salmonella* outbreak traceback.

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As of Oct. 28, 2025
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