

CRACKING THE FUTURE *of the* PISTACHIO INDUSTRY

Private support brings specialized researcher to Fresno State

by Kathleen Schock

When Dr. Timothy Spann arrives on campus this summer, his goals will extend far beyond the walls of his classroom in the Department of Plant Science. As the first to hold the Rodger B. Jensen Endowed Professorship in Pistachio Physiology and Pomology, Spann is tasked with a deceptively simple goal — help farmers do more with less.

This professorship was made possible by a \$1.5 million pledge last year from the California Pistachio Research Board to the Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology. This gift paves the way to bring Spann to campus to conduct advanced research and education for the pistachio industry.



Cary Edmondson

As the first to hold the endowed professorship, Spann will bring his expertise to help solve industry challenges while training the next generation of agricultural professionals. The position will focus on applied research in pistachio physiology and teaching courses in pomology, the science and practice of growing fruit.

Currently, Spann works as a research project manager for the California Avocado Commission. He holds a doctorate in plant biology from UC Davis and master's and bachelor's degrees in horticulture from University of Florida.

The pistachio industry has long been Spann's passion. His doctoral research was focused on the architectural development of the pistachio tree canopy. And when he relocates to Fresno, Spann will find himself at the heart of the industry. According to American Pistachio Growers, California produces 99 percent of the nation's pistachios, and of California's production, 97 percent comes from the Central Valley.

Spann starts on campus in August 2014 and will work closely with the pistachio board to prioritize his research.

“My approach to research is to do things that help make the growers more productive and able to do more with the resources they have available,” Spann says.



When the gift establishing the endowed chair was announced last year, board chair and pistachio grower Tom Coleman said it comes at a pivotal time for the industry. “During the past 20 years the California pistachio industry experienced rapid growth, and we have relied on researchers from across the state. Unfortunately many of these academic researchers recently retired or will retire soon.

“Fresno State is the ideal location with respect to our growers. It is one of the top agricultural universities in the country and is deeply committed to supporting the agricultural community,” Coleman said.

The California Pistachio Research Board comprises pistachio producers dedicated to researching pistachio propagation, production, harvesting, handling and preparation for market. The board also provides educational opportunities and material for pistachio growers. They named the endowed professorship after industry leader Rodger B. Jensen, the first president of the Pistachio Association and owner of S&J Ranch.

While this research will be vital to the industry, it is just one component of Spann's mission at Fresno State. As a teacher and adviser his focus also will be to connect students to leaders in the agricultural industry. “I'm very much looking forward to getting to work with students,” he says.

Spann says he jumped at the opportunity to come to the Jordan College and work with students as they train at the 1,000-acre farm laboratory, of which 25 acres are dedicated to pistachios. “This position is something I've waited a long time for, and I can't wait to get started.”

– Kathleen Schock is the director of media and development communications at Fresno State.