

MIZZOU

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Around the Columns

Grade A teacher

Michael F. Smith is a professor of reproductive physiology in the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, and he served as interim director of the Animal Science Division from 2001–06. In 30 years of teaching, he’s helped turn thousands of students into graduates, but he prefers to think of them as scientists.

“I’ve tried to design my classes such that students become practitioners of animal science and not passive observers of the field,” Smith says. “I’ve seen students come into my class lacking confidence, and by helping them learn to think like an animal scientist, some of them have gone on to great careers in animal science.”

Smith studies reproductive efficiency in cattle, and his work has taken him as far away as the Babraham Institute in Cambridge, England, and the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh, Scotland. He and his wife, Stephanie, have two grown children, and they raise beef cattle at Windrush Farm, near Columbia.




Like any great teacher, awards are not what drive Smith — though he has won plenty of them since earning his master’s and doctorate from Texas A&M in 1980. On Nov. 14, 2010, his work earned him a USDA Regional Teaching Award in Dallas. It’s the synergy of teaching and research that fuels his fire.

“I’ve never considered teaching and research to be separate career paths,” Smith says. “An academic career is focused on learning. We generate new knowledge through research and we communicate knowledge through teaching and mentoring. It’s very exhilarating when you discover something new, but there is also lots of failure. But with teaching, at least you feel like you’re doing something constructive no matter what.”



Michael F. Smith, professor of reproductive physiology in the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources won a USDA Regional Teaching Award.

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