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**Shew expands spatial technologies focus to Fulbright, Bumpers, Division of Agriculture**

By Mary Hightower

U of A System Division of Agriculture

**Fast facts**

* Shew named associate director of Center for Advanced Spatial Technologies
* Shew has joint appointments in two colleges plus U of A System Division of Agriculture

(810 words)

(Newsrooms – with photo: <https://flic.kr/p/2kPWQqt> )

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. — Aaron Shew, the incoming associate director of the Center for Advanced Spatial Technologies, will be taking on tasks as broad as his background.

Shew will be joining the faculty at Fayetteville as an assistant professor in the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences in the department of agricultural economics and agribusiness. He will also have an appointment in J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences for his role as associate director for CAST and research and extension appointments within the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, an entity within the U of A System.

He will be a faculty member within the department of Geosciences as well as the department of agricultural economics and agribusiness in Bumpers College and the Division of Agriculture.

The Center for Advanced Spatial Technologies, or CAST, focuses on applying geospatial technologies in research, teaching and service. Its 16 full-time faculty and research associates cut across departmental lines, spilling into civil, industrial and computer engineering, landscape architecture, geosciences, archeology, anthropology and now, agricultural economics.

Jack Cothren, CAST director, used “eclectic” to describe both the center’s wide-ranging work as well as Shew’s set of skills and experience. Some of CAST’s projects include the purely theoretical, but most are research and development oriented, Cothren said.

“Aaron has experience in all of those things,” Cothren said, noting Shew’s experience in agriculture and the environmental sciences, as well as his spatial skills and work in applied economics. “In so many ways, he’s a perfect fit.”

Shew, a Murfreesboro, Tennessee, native holds five degrees, three of them from the University of Arkansas: master’s degrees in agricultural economics and geography. His third Arkansas degree is a doctorate in environmental dynamics. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in international relations and a Bachelor of Arts degree in global studies with a minor in agriculture, all from Middle Tennessee State University.

John Anderson, head of the agricultural economics and agribusiness department for the Division of Agriculture and the Bumpers College said Shew “is uniquely equipped to help assess the value of emerging agricultural technologies in terms of their impacts on production costs and the efficiency of resource use.

“Aaron’s experience in the management and analysis of big data sets in spatial analysis adds another valuable component to the research, teaching and outreach capabilities of our department,” Anderson said. “It is rewarding to see one of our own graduates having such a significant impact in the profession, and we look forward to seeing that impact continue to grow.”

Cothren said, “my goal is to allow him to build his own programs within CAST and pursue his own proposals and work with the Cooperative Extension Service and Agricultural Experiment Station and Bumpers College to develop a stronger bond between Fulbright, Bumpers and CAST. It’s a lot, but if anyone can do it, Aaron can.”

Cothren said the addition of Shew builds in an economics component that’s important as spatial observation is increasingly incorporated into analysis of a nation’s, state’s or even city’s economic activity.

Shew’s research focuses on the economics of precision agriculture, irrigation and groundwater resources, crop residue burning and management, and agricultural conservation in Arkansas and the Lower Mississippi River Basin.

“We hope to be a valuable resource for scientists, agricultural stakeholders and the public in areas where spatial technologies are important tools for decision-making in the agriculture and food industries,” Shew said. “Over the next few years, my efforts will focus on building collaborative opportunities for research, education and outreach via the creation of an Agricultural Technology and Environmental Informatics hub within CAST.”

Shew comes to Fayetteville from Arkansas State University where he was the R.E.L. Wilson Endowed Chair of Agricultural Economics. He received the Young Scholars Award from the International Rice Research Institute in 2018 and the Young Alumni Award from Middle Tennessee State University in 2019. Among the skills he picked up along the way were Hindi and Urdu proficiency through the American Institute of Indian Studies fellowships in India.

He brings a host of international experience as well with USAID, Engineers without Borders and other organizations in Mozambique, Bangladesh, Uganda, Rwanda, India, Iraq, Afghanistan and Thailand.

“I became interested in remote sensing and spatial technologies because they provide powerful tools for identifying agricultural and environmental problems as well as creating solutions,” Shew said. “Using ‘big data’ and spatially explicit agricultural and environmental information provides important opportunities for improving on-farm agricultural decision-making as well as policy. I'm still learning, always, and very keen to continue and expand my research in these areas.”

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**About the Division of Agriculture**

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture’s mission is to strengthen agriculture, communities, and families by connecting trusted research to the adoption of best practices. Through the Agricultural Experiment Station and the Cooperative Extension Service, the Division of Agriculture conducts research and extension work within the nation’s historic land grant education system.

The Division of Agriculture is one of 20 entities within the University of Arkansas System. It has offices in all 75 counties in Arkansas and faculty on five system campuses.

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture offers all its Extension and Research programs and services without regard to race, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital or veteran status, genetic information, or any other legally protected status, and is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.

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