

# My How, My Why, My Work: Southwest

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, outreach, extension agents, center, safety, role, agriculture, projects, program director, ifas, vietnamese, texas, reach, research, work, populations, groups, research projects, region, meeting

## SPEAKERS

Sarah Fish, Whitney Pennington, Phillip Stokes, Lisa Lundy, Ricky Telg, Amanda Wickman

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**R** Ricky Telg 00:04  
This is Science by the Slice, a podcast from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Center for Public Issues Education. In this podcast, experts discuss the science of issues affecting our daily lives, reveal the motivations behind the decisions people make, and ultimately provide insight to solutions for our lives.

**P** Phillip Stokes 00:31  
Hello, I'm Phillip Stokes. Thanks for joining us in our series, The Essential Worker. This is a subset within that series titled, My How, My Why, My Work, including conversations with individuals working to make the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sector safer for all of those within it. Promoting health and safety in agriculture is a long term mission. And I believe you can find amazing stories and impacts from the people working toward this goal. All you have to do is ask.

**W** Whitney Pennington 01:05  
Yeah, so I'll actually take you like way back, not way back, but...

**S** Sarah Fish 01:09  
My story is really about how a visual artist became a science communicator.

**A** Amanda Wickman 01:15  
My roles changed a lot over the years, but I feel like I'm one of the products of the center.

P

**Phillip Stokes 01:22**

These conversations were led by Dr. Lisa Lundy, Agricultural Communication Professor at the University of Florida. And today's episode comes to you from the Southwest.

L

**Lisa Lundy 01:37**

Today's interview is with Amanda Wickman. Amanda is the program director for the NIOSH funded Southwest Center for Agricultural Health, Injury Prevention and Education based at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler. She has been with the Southwest Ag Center since 2006, serving in an outreach capacity prior to moving into the program director role. In her outreach role, she delivered presentations and created educational resources for agricultural, commercial fishing, and forestry workers across Public Health Region 6. As the program director, Amanda is engaged in strategic planning, administration, and evaluation. She works closely with the other NIOSH ag centers to conduct joint promotional events, outreach endeavors, and evaluation. Amanda holds a bachelor's degree in communication and a master's degree in business administration, from the University of Texas at Tyler. If you would, just start off by telling me a little bit about yourself and your background and how you got involved with your center.

A

**Amanda Wickman 02:45**

My name is Amanda Wickman. And I'm currently the program director for the Southwest Center for Agricultural Health, Injury Prevention and Education. And I've been with the Center for 16 years now. So this is my first real job out of my undergraduate degree, and I'm still here. My roles changed a lot over the years but I feel like I'm one of the products of the center and have several other people products that have grown up in the center and expanded skill sets and grown in experience over the course of their careers, and over the course of doing work with the eye centers and NIOSH. You know, I started right after I finished my communications degree. And I was able to get to work right away doing special projects. And it was really the groundwork for what later became our outreach program. A few years later, my role had expanded enough and I was promoted to outreach education coordinator. And we continued to grow that program. And then at some point, there was changes in staffing and leadership, and I transitioned into the program manager role, and then eventually the program director role just based on expansion of duties and responsibilities and decision making. But we've been really fortunate to work with a lot of very talented, dedicated people over the years. We have a great team now. And, as with all the ag centers, the teams, the team is small. And we're based at a hospital. We are actually currently in the process of merging with the local university. So we are a UT Health Science Center. And there's also a UT Tyler, University of Texas, in the same city. So over the last 12 months, those two entities have been merging. So very soon we will have access to a student population which we've never had before, which is exciting and opens up all new kinds of opportunities for different kinds of involvement and student projects. But that has made us a little different than some of the other ag centers in the past because we didn't have students. So it was just, you know, a center director, you know, one or two other people in administration, an outreach coordinator, and then our PI. So a small group of people trying to cover five states. Our center covers Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and New Mexico.

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Lisa Lundy 05:11

That's fantastic. I appreciate what you said about, because I know every center is a little different in terms of how it's set up and where it's based, and so that impacts the center and makes the center unique. What else about your center would you say is unique in terms of maybe the research focus or the clientele or just anything that you have observed?

A

Amanda Wickman 05:31

I do think that we're pretty unique in that where we're located, we have industries or we have workers involved in agriculture, forestry, logging, and commercial fishing, and everything that goes into that. I mean, with agriculture, we have feedlots, and beef cattle operations and dairy operations and poultry operations and swine operations. And when you look at row crops, we have fruits and vegetables, and also corn and wheat and Milo and grains, we have everything. We even have orchards. In some of the other centers, they might be landlocked, so they don't have commercial fishing, that's just not something that makes sense for them to focus on because they don't have those industries in there. But where we are located, we have all of them. And, like the Florida Center, we have proximity to other countries. So we border Mexico, we have a lot of workers who are either coming up to work in Texas, or coming through Texas and Oklahoma, traveling along with the migrant stream. Our commercial fishing industry is largely Asian, Vietnamese. So all of these things have to be taken into consideration when we're formulating research projects and outreach projects. Because we don't just have one thing. I know that some of the other centers, in the past more than right now, do focus on something, and they focus on migrant workers or they focus on dairy. And I think what's unique about our center is that we've always tried to be regionally representative. So in every application we have ever put in, there was a project that has activities going on in all five states in our region. We also always have projects that go with that focus on agriculture, forestry, fishing, and usually something to do with livestock, recognizing that that's very different than row crops or any kind of crop or grain that you can grow. And then we have historically had a focus on special populations and it remains true that there are just a lot of groups that are at particular risk because of language barriers, or employment status, citizenship status. And so we usually have some research projects that are focusing on those groups. And we certainly take that into consideration when we are building outreach projects.

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Lisa Lundy 08:18

And when you come in to work or you approach a new effort and you're thinking about the audience that you want to reach, how do you want to impact them? What do you, what do you hope to give to them, I guess,

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Amanda Wickman 08:29

We're a small group of people trying to reach a large region. Texas itself is larger than some people's entire region. And so it's always been my strategy to really think about the intermediaries, the middle people. So that might be the extension agents, it might be folks who work for the trade associations that are in charge of mandatory annual safety training, it might be ag teachers who are preparing the next generation of extension agents and ag educators

and other people who are going to serve in those intermediary and leadership roles for communities. I think it's somewhat unrealistic to think that four or five people in a staff, and then the administrative center role, and you know, five to seven PI's can really blanket a five state region. That doesn't make sense. But if we work with the extension agents who were located in every county of that five state region and find out, Okay, what are you seeing? What is it that you need? Okay, well, let's work together to build the things that you need to fill the gaps that you see. And so I think that's always where I saw our role. Especially because, you know, many years ago, the safety section of extension was kind of phased out. There's only one state in our region that has someone who's hired specifically for safety. That's Oklahoma, and everybody else, they don't have the resources or the time to focus on that. They recognize that it's important. I don't think that they're blind to that. But they're just stretched too thin and don't have the money or the time to put things together. But if we put it together for them, they're happy to use that. And I think now we're thinking, you know, okay, we have connected with extension to have an extension advisory team that was formed in the last cycle. And that brings in extension agents from every state in the region, we meet twice a year, we gather information from them about what it is they're seeing, what do they need. And then we're able to lead the priorities that inform the outreach priorities, either what we are going to be tackling, or what we're calling for an outreach mini grant or a feasibility study. So those people really help guide where we should go next, based on what they're seeing at the local level. But we're also looking into formalizing partnerships with other groups. We have a project with the Texas Department of Agriculture. And we learned that, you know, they have publication, happy to republish our Monthly Safety Blast. Well, that just helps reinforce safety messages from another organization. The Farm Bureau, we've reached out to them, they're also interested in publishing some of our safety messages. It's information, they don't have to recreate, it gets out to a new population, and it comes from a source that is trusted. And it puts our logo in front of more people so that we become more familiar to those audiences. Because eventually, you know, what you hope is that you become a familiar name, a trusted source of information. And then if you have to go to them to design new outreach, or to conduct research, they already know, Okay, these these people are okay, I've seen, I've seen the things that they put out in the Farm Bureau publication.

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Lisa Lundy 11:55

That's really helpful thinking about developing things for those publications. And I loved hearing about the extension group. And we've kind of tried to use that same model of, Tell us what you need, and will generate these things and the intermediary audiences. What are some other tools or strategies that have worked well with that audience to get them the information that they need?

A

Amanda Wickman 12:13

You know, we're about two years into this extension advisory team. And we've learned a lot along the way, you know, we can't put them on the phone every month, that's too much. Even every quarter, seemed like it was asking too much. So we get together twice a year. And what we've started doing instead of talking at them, and telling them all the things that we're doing and asking for feedback, we started asking them at the beginning of every call to tell us what they're doing, you know, we don't put a limit on it or parameters on it, like, tell us what you're doing that's safety focused? Well, if we really thought you were doing safety things, you

wouldn't need to be here. So just tell us what you're doing. Period. And the last meeting was a transformation. Everyone participated. Everybody talked. And not only that, you know, one of your questions asked about, What does a win look like? I already have three letters of intent for next year's outreach mini grants from extension agent. That looks like a win to me, because they're not the extension agents on our extension advisory team. They are their colleagues. And so by them telling us what they're doing, and then we tie that together with, Well, how could we be helpful to you? You're doing a series for new landowners. Well, that's great. Could we provide some resources for you to do a machinery 101. You don't call machinery safety, just say machinery 101. We can provide that information to you. We have a master trainer that can travel and show them how to do a walk around, show them all the safety features explained why it's important to bypass those, you know, help them understand what is important, and how they can protect their safety and the safety of those working on their operation. And that was wildly successful. So making them talk first was wonderful. And then figuring out how we fit in afterwards totally worked. And not only that, they talked to their colleagues and it came back to the form of applications. Because you know, the outreach mini grants are another way that we're trying to spread the center's, expand the center's reach. We cannot reach to all five states, but we can provide money to this organization and that extension agent and this organization, and then they can do work in their their local areas to improve safety and health.

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Lisa Lundy 14:54

That definitely sounds like a win. That's really exciting. Well, you have talked about some wonderful things that you all have been doing and have done in the past. I'm curious to know, what do you want to try in the future? What are you looking forward to maybe as some new approaches?

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Amanda Wickman 15:10

So I think, we've been very deliberate in the application and even building up to this new cycle, to try and connect our research to outreach more deliberately. Every time we have a meeting, we start off with a discussion of emerging issues. Everyone in attendance talks about what they've seen, what's new, what is a persistent issue that really hasn't been addressed appropriately. And we do use that to guide what we're doing, and help us to identify opportunities to the researchers. But even starting 18 months ago, our outreach person who's actually a content strategist by title, she's connecting with them by phone, or Zoom, or a Teams meeting, and making a plan based on those research results to produce products. And then to disseminate those products, whether it's through our normal e-newsletter, through a Monthly Blast, through the production of brochures, or pamphlets, or online trainings. She also produces research reports, which are short videos that just highlight what that research project is doing so that we communicate that to other people and identify potential partners. So that relationship is going to be tighter, there will be scheduled meetings between PIs and staff throughout the whole next cycle, and the products developed for every single project to make sure that we make it all the way to the other side of the logic model. Usually the funding is enough to do the research, but there isn't enough resources at the end to put a product in place and give it back to the community. And we want to make sure that we close the loop. Whatever we figure out, it all needs to funnel back to the community that put the information together. And it needs to be disseminated broadly to anyone who can benefit from it. So that's one way that we're going to be better about connecting those two. So the really, the research

to practice piece, and then I will say another way that we're going to be more deliberate is through diversity. As we build the board and fill seats for folks who have retired, we are being much more deliberate about bringing people in from different cultures, different races, and ethnicities. And we're going to see that in our promotion of our internships, our outreach mini grants, our feasibility studies. Our feasibility studies are the pipeline, or how we develop the next group of researchers who would go in the next application. In all of our capacity building projects, the internship, we're going to be reaching out to the historically black universities, we have Bible groups in Oklahoma and New Mexico that we have worked with in the past that we really need to reconnect with and connect with in a formal kind of way so they're aware of any opportunities coming up. So I really see a greater emphasis in broadening the reach but doing that in a way that honors diversity.

**L** Lisa Lundy 19:01

Well, thank you so much for your time today. Is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you think those listening would be interested to know about your work?

**A** Amanda Wickman 19:10

For what it's worth, I would say that something I took away from the last ISASH conference is we can no longer just translate things. You know, we have to trans-create things. And so I think that's going to be important as we continue to diversify the populations that we work with and the populations that we serve, is that we're going to have to be more engaged in how we take a product that we're using for an English speaker working in agriculture to a Vietnamese shrimp boat captain in the Gulf. And I think that requires stronger relationships with the partners who know, what are the colloquialisms, what does that word really mean in Vietnamese? You know, when you translate boat or vessel, it's not the same. So really putting more time and effort into that, and making sure that what we do reaches people, and it's something that they need and want and, well maybe not even, sometimes they don't want it, but something that they can relate to. And the other thing that I've been thinking a lot about lately is people can't care about role bars and guarding and, you know, all these things that we want them to invest in until their basic needs are met. So we have a PI in Galveston who set out to do research with commercial fisherman. So that PI has started offering health clinics once a month at the docks, through a collaboration with her hospital. And then there's a huge health clinic, it just happened last Friday, every July. But they're getting antibiotics and footcare and occupational therapy, and COVID shots and flu shots. And you know, local organizations are coming together and they're bringing toiletries and socks and clothes. And so I think that we have to be good public health practitioners and good community-based participatory researchers because if their basic needs aren't met, we cannot in good faith, ask them to fill out a survey or do a focus group. We have to be really cognizant that they have much bigger things to worry about. So I think all of that together just being more conscious of who we're working with and how we deliver information and being respectful. Like we're asking them to give us information. Well, okay, what is it that they actually need today that we can help them with? That's what we're talking about internally, and how we're going to adjust how we communicate externally, I think is where that comes in.

**R** Ricky Telg 22:23

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