



CHAMPION

among champions

Texas Tech University has in some instances been referred to as “the home of champions.” In the Department of Animal and Food Sciences, national championship banners decorate the livestock arena, and trophies fill the hallways. The displays of success fill the buildings with a sense of pride and accomplishment. But it is not the trophies and banners that make Texas Tech the home of champions; it is students like Henry Ruiz.

It is almost impossible to sit down in the atrium of the Animal and Food Sciences building at Texas Tech and talk to Ruiz without numerous people stopping by to say hi to him. With a friendly smile, a handshake, and a warm “hey, how are you?” he greets them as if each person was one of his closest friends.

Ruiz graduated in December 2010 with a bachelor’s degree in animal science, with a meat science option, and is now a graduate student in animal science with a meat science option. Ruiz is one of those people that is hard not to like, but beyond his contagious personality, he is not only a student; he is a researcher, a translator, a coach, a former meat and livestock judge, a national champion and an aspiring professor.

For Ruiz, it all began at Clarendon College. He went to Clarendon with the intentions of judging livestock. Ruiz judged livestock in high school and came from a background of showing sheep and goats, so it made sense.

Then he was introduced to a different type of judging – meats – and it quickly became his passion.

“Since then I have been on the meat scientist fast track,” says Ruiz with a soft chuckle.

Following Clarendon, Ruiz transferred to Texas Tech to continue his education and judging career. He was a member of the 2009 National Champion meats judging team, and the 2009 National Champion meat animal evaluation team.

In December 2009, Ruiz began to work for both the Animal/Food science lab, and the Experimental lab. He worked alongside Mark Miller and Mindy Brashears, professors in animal and food sciences. They invited him to travel with their research to team to Mexico.

“Henry was selected to be involved with several research projects not only because of his intellectual capabilities, but also because of his enthusiasm, dependability and his ability to work cooperatively with our team,” Brashears said.

The trips to Mexico involved attainment of baseline samples of E. coli and Salmonella in various plants, stores and wet markets in order to reduce food borne pathogens on meat products.

In total, Ruiz traveled with Texas Tech researchers three times to Mexico as an undergraduate; with two trips to Veracruz, and one to Merida, Yucatan. On these trips,

he helped collect data and samples, and played a key role in communication with local people. Because he is bilingual, Ruiz was able to help the research team communicate with the locals they worked with, and assisted in the travel to and from different places.

“His involvement with the Mexico research team was critical because of his ability to communicate in Spanish, but also because of his interest in the research and developing the pathogen baselines in Mexico,” Brashears said.

Prior to his first trip to Mexico, Ruiz interned for the Cargill Beef Solutions plant in Plainview, Texas. This internship helped him become proficient in food safety protocols and proved especially helpful during his first trip in Veracruz. The research team was working with a local beef processing plant that wanted to improve food safety and processing procedures. Researchers collected samples from various steps in the harvesting process to get an idea of the baseline microbial’s location. They also took fecal samples and hide swab samples; samples from areas that are

them to not give anyone any more reason to beat you, by beating yourself.”

Coaching for his former junior college has paved the way to another coaching opportunity for Ruiz. Starting this fall, he will help coach the Texas Tech meats judging team along with friend, and former teammate, Collin Corbin.

“I’m looking forward to working with Henry and Collin as coaches,” Mark Miller, meats judging coach, said. “I think they will be great. I’m the one who is really blessed out of that deal.

Ruiz is really looking forward to coaching at Texas Tech and hopes to continue the winning tradition.

“Henry’s just an awesome young man. He’s a big asset to our program and you can always depend on him to do things very well,” Miller said.

Beyond traveling to contests and enriching the minds of aspiring meat judges, Ruiz is also excited to get started on his research project and do more teaching.

“I can see myself as a professor down the road,” he said.



known to be more contaminated. Ruiz said that when he went into the Veracruz plant for the first time, managers of the plant were eager to learn from him.

“They asked how they could improve and what I thought about the food safety protocols they had in place,” he said. “To have three plant managers be so interested in what I had to say and just how much they wanted to learn was awesome.”

Through his involvement in these projects Ruiz said he has learned just how much work goes into an individual research project, as well as the time, people and money that are involved. Ruiz said that he enjoyed the interactions with the people in Mexico and being able to help.

“I must have done well because they keep taking me,” Ruiz said.

He will continue to travel to Mexico to help collect samples and serve as an interpreter while in graduate school.

Ruiz also says that through his involvement in judging and research, he has learned the ability to work with diverse people and deal with different situations. He also says he learned how to manage team relationships, which was especially beneficial when he started coaching the 2010-2011 Clarendon College meats judging team, alongside former teammate, Tate Corliss.

“I can apply what I learned in judging toward coaching,” he said. “I don’t like when the students get discouraged and beat themselves up. I try to teach


“I really enjoy teaching.”

After he earns his master’s degree, Ruiz plans to continue his education by working toward a doctorate degree, and then eventually teach at the university level. However, he says he won’t just transition into the role of a professor after he receives his doctorate.

“I think you cheat your students if you don’t go into the industry for a while and get that real world experience,” Ruiz said. “It makes you a better teacher.”

For now, Miller says that Ruiz is a wonderful graduate student who will benefit the program. After all, if his success as an undergraduate is any indication of how he may be as graduate student, Ruiz is certainly going to make a difference.

“If you’re going to do something, you may as well give it all you got,” Ruiz said.

Spoken like a true champion. 

Kirby Carpenter | Kiowa, Colorado

