

# An Interdisciplinary Approach to Increase Tropical Tree Crop Farmer Income: Lessons and Opportunities from the Field

**Dr. Michael Wilcox**

Assistant Professor

Department of Agricultural Economics

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**Friday March 27**

**12:10 p.m.**

**212A Morgan Hall**



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DEPARTMENT  
SEMINAR

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Cocoa is a vital source of income for thousands of smallholder farmers in Liberia. Since 2006, the University of Tennessee has been engaged in a project seeking to increase smallholder incomes in Liberia through a partnership with the Sustainable Tree Crop Program (STCP) and the Liberian Ministry of Agriculture. During this time, an objective examination of the current marketing chain has been conducted and policy prescriptions devised to address the institutional and market oriented issues that significantly affect farmgate prices.

This seminar will explore the interaction between quality control and market signals which have a direct effect on farmer income and Liberia's ability to trade on international markets. Food scientists have developed technologies to enable cocoa processors and chocolate manufacturers to overcome some cocoa quality issues but premiums still exist. Liberian cocoa is currently discounted heavily on international markets, thereby exacerbating a difficult situation that pits farmers against agents downstream in an institutional environment that continues to evolve after a fourteen year long civil crisis.

As part of the Department of Food Science and Technology Graduate Seminar Series, international opportunities in academic fields related to agriculture will also be discussed.

## About Dr. Wilcox...

Dr. Wilcox is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural Economics at the University of Tennessee. He is engaged in applied research and extension education programming in rural economic development. He is currently working with the Sustainable Tree Crop Program in Liberia on agricultural marketing issues. Closer to home, Dr. Wilcox is involved in a wide range of projects in the areas of biofuels, workforce development, entrepreneurship and migration.

Dr. Wilcox received his PhD in Agricultural Economics from Purdue University in 2006. He served as a US Peace Corps volunteer in Cameroon from 1993-1995 after graduating with a BS in Biological Sciences from Cornell University in 1992. He received his MS in Fisheries from Auburn University in 1998. He taught for three years at the Harris AgriScience and Technology Center in Bloomfield, Connecticut.