PhD Student Receives Bullitt Foundation Fellowship
*To Launch One Health Dairy Project in Washington State*

A PhD student at the University of Washington plans to tackle issues in sustainable dairy farming with funding from the Bullitt Foundation. Dr. Heather Fowler was selected for the Foundation’s Environmental Fellowship Award, a highly selective prize of $100,000 given to a single graduate student.

“I’m thankful to have the support and the funding as well as the title of the Environmental Fellow,” said Fowler, who is a doctoral student in the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences in the UW School of Public Health and part of the UW’s Center for One Health Research. “Emerging environmental health issues are often multi-factorial and really complex and there is no one easy solution,” she explains, which is why a One Health approach can help, particularly in an industry like dairy agriculture. It brings stakeholders from human, animal, and environmental health to the table.

“We’ve not had anyone before who dealt with this food/agriculture nexus,” said Denis Hayes, president of the Bullitt Foundation. As a licensed veterinarian, Fowler will bring new insights to the environment health field, he adds.

The Bullitt Environmental Fellowship is offered annually in memory of longtime Foundation Chair, Priscilla Bullitt Collins. In her honor, an outstanding graduate student is selected from a community underrepresented in the environmental movement and who has demonstrated exceptional capacity for leadership as well as scholarship.

“It’s trying to identify young people—pretty much at the start of their careers—that have promise and then giving them a boost to hopefully develop that promise,” said Hayes. He shares Fowler’s interest in cows and dairies, having coauthored a book on the subject.

According to the Department of Agriculture, milk is the #2 agricultural commodity in Washington State where there are over 400 dairy farms. These include both small and large scale farming operations. The number of concentrated animal feeding operations—in which large numbers of animals like dairy cows are kept in one location—have grown tremendously across the nation. It makes production cheaper and more efficient, so as to adequately meet demand. But concerns have been raised about the welfare of the animals and the impact large amounts of manure waste have on the environment.

With funding support from the Fellowship, Fowler will assess conventional and organic dairy practices in Washington State and investigate issues affecting human, animal, and environmental health. She plans to interview individuals invested in the future of

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1 Milk is the #2 agricultural commodity in Washington State.  
http://agr.wa.gov/AgInWa/docs/126-CropMap2015-ForCopier.pdf

2 There are over 400 dairy farms in Washington State.  
dairies—from farmers and veterinarians to consumers and environmental conservationists—to understand their concerns and get their ideas for the future of the dairy industry. Her research will also include investigating issues that affect the health and safety of animal care workers.

“This work will ultimately culminate in the creation of a One Health model for sustainable agriculture in Washington State,” said Fowler, “and could be a model for other regions as well.” She believes dairy products can best be produced in ways that are healthy for people, the animals, and the environment; a “One Health” approach. “My hope is that this can help educate consumers about where their food is coming from and what are the health implications of how we produce the food,” she said.

Heather Fowler graduated from Pennsylvania State University with a degree in Animal BioScience, then received her VMD degree from the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. Before moving to Seattle, Fowler earned an MPH from the Yale School of Public Health in Applied Epidemiology and Biostatistics. She was awarded the UW Health Sciences’ Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Award earlier this year for her volunteer veterinary care of pets owned by those who are homeless and low-income. This year she facilitated the Power of 10 Leadership program at the local Veterinary Medical Association in Washington State, which is designed to help recent graduates in veterinary medicine develop skills in leadership, communication, and business.