Strong Story Ideas (as pitched)

**Subject/Slug:** Agriculture Studies

Based on our research so far, the headline for this story might read:
Students Studying Agriculture Almost Double in Five Years

Based on our research so far, the lead sentence of this story is: Over the past five years, enrollment in MU's College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Natural Resources has increased 45 percent.

In other words, this story is about: This trend is also true at colleges in Iowa, according to research, and many students do not come from families with farming or agricultural backgrounds. We want to look at why the number of students in agriculturally related majors is increasing and what jobs they are looking for as they graduate.

The college is seeing high retention rate, very high rates of job placement within the major. Students in CAFNR are working with a more demanding curriculum than they were five or ten years ago. CAFNR is seeing a relatively low rate of students switching to other majors.

This increase over the past five years has been seen at other colleges across the country, including Penn State, Iowa State and the University of Connecticut.

**Why this story at this time: What makes your story timely?** The research was recently published and the numbers have been increasing for the past five years.

**People should care because:** The future jobscape is changing, but not always in the way people think. Jobs in the agriculture majors are different than they were five or ten years ago and they may be jobs that will be in higher demand in the near future.

The increase in students studying agriculture is not what some people expected in a future that is becoming increasingly more technologically-focused.

Agriculture studies can frequently find jobs outside farming, sometimes with sustainable energy and conservation groups.
The potential sources/stakeholders in this story are: High school students and parents of high school students, Administration of universities and colleges, College students, Job seekers

We have ALREADY CONTACTED the following sources for this story:

Randy Mertens, Coordinator Media Relations, College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (CAFNR)

Phone: 573-882-3237

Bryan Garton, CAFNR Associate Dean

Phone: 573-882-0089

Email: gartonb@missouri.edu

AgCareers.com

Phone: 800.672.8552

Which multimedia techniques do you envision will best tell the story? Radio

Describe at least one potential secondary (or tertiary) component. Photos, text story, infographic depicting the increase of students in agriculture majors, infographic depicting different jobs frequently given to graduates with agriculture majors

Which newsroom would you suggest as the best to run this story? KBIA

How we came up with this idea: Searching for news around Missouri

Insert links to or summaries of relevant previous stories on this topic:


http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/industries/food/story/2012-08-01/agriculture-industry-studies-surge/56809406/1
Subject/Slug: Palm Trees

Based on our research so far, the headline for this story might read:
Mid-missouri residents test palm trees during the winter

Based on our research so far, the lead sentence of this story is:
Palm trees aren’t just for the sub-tropics anymore. Eric Plott, 22, has been growing and selling palm trees that can withstand Midwest winters at his Millersburg, Mo. home since 2010.

In other words, this story is about:
Eric Plott, the owner of Plott Palm Trees, decided four years ago to bring palm trees to Missouri. He researched the varieties and growing methods to make them withstand Midwest winters. Through research and collaboration with palm tree growers in Canada, Switzerland and Illinois, Plott now sells three palm tree varieties that he guarantees can withstand winters in Missouri. Growing methods include choosing locations with more sunlight and protection from northern winds—typically the southern side of a building—and wrapping the trunks over the winter for the first 3-5 years after the tree has been planted. Plott has 15 different banana and palm trees that he grows at his home. Fifty percent survived through last winter, their first winter in Missouri. Plott has sold nearly 30 trees to Mid-Missouri residents. Miller says he was inspired to sell Palm Trees by a revelation from God, and the desire to bring the “relaxation of the tropics to Missouri.”

Plott says he has proven that palm trees can survive in zone 5 (palm trees usually live in zones 7-9), but horticulturalists are skeptical. Owner of Hidden Treasures Botanical Tours and former Master Gardener Mary Kroening says that tropical plants are a growing trend for Missouri gardeners, because they can withstand hot summers, but she says that very few would be able sustained temperatures below freezing. I called several nurseries in the area, asking if they carried hardy palms. All said that palm trees were not hardy in Missouri’s climate.

Plott gets the palm trees he sells from Texas, Florida and California. Because palm trees are not native to this area, nor are some of the insects that infest them. Red Palm Weevils, an invasive insect that can decimate palm populations in Asia and South America, was discovered in Laguna, Calif. for the first time in August 2010. There have been increasing reports of this bug, the most recent being from San Diego in late August 2011.

People should care because:
Palm Trees in Missouri are uncommon (possibly not practical), but interesting nonetheless. However, bringing in non-native species to a new area could have unintended consequences. California is very concerned about how the red palm weevil will affect their palm trees. For Missourians, the concern should be if the insect could be transported to Missouri and then have adverse affects to plant life here, both agriculture and native plants.

The story impacts (who?):
Those with an interest in horticulture and gardening. It has the potential to impact farmers, those who are affiliated with conservation organization and researchers.

Which multimedia tools do you envision will best convey this material? Video, audio, photos, graphics, text

Video, photos, anything visual

Describe at least one potential sidebar element. Map, list, info box, timeline, glossary, video, audio, photos, text, reporter's notebook, extended raw interviews (video or audio), etc.

An image and short description of the tropical plants that can grow in Mid-Missouri.

Is there an innovative way to tell this story?

Because there is a limited number of people to talk to about this story, because there is only one guy selling hardy palm trees in Missouri, we understand the need to ensure this does not turn into a PR story for Plott. We believe that this story could focus on the feasibility of growing tropical plants in Missouri and the potential dangers that non-native species impose, using Plott as a case study for the story, rather than the whole story.

Who is the audience for your story? Which newsroom do you see running this story?

I see this being a KOMU story. It has a central compelling character, a “Could this happen here?!!?” line to be said in a slightly frightened voice and interesting visuals.

How we came up with this idea:

Eric Plott added the Missouri Press Association as a friend on Facebook (I am their social media intern), so I facebook stalked him and was intrigued by his profile and website.

We have already contacted the following sources for this story:

Eric Plott, Owner, PlottPalmTrees.com, 573-289-9544
Mary Kroening, Owner, Hidden Treasures Botanical Tours, L.L.C., 573-881-6316
http://cisr.ucr.edu/red_palm_weevil.html
http://www.nctimes.com/blogsnew/business/morning/article_837d24fa-c826-11e0-a606-001cc4c03286.html
http://www.plottpalmtrees.com

Pitch #1: 1940 Census

Based on our research so far, the headline for this story might read: After 72 years, census opens treasure chest to past

Based on our research so far, the lead sentence of this story is: 21 million Americans can find their names in the rolls of the 1940 U.S. Census records released to the public on Tuesday.

In other words, this story is about: Some Columbia and Boone County residents are among the group of people who can find their names in the census.
They have seen Columbia and the world change around them. The census provides a snapshot of life as it was in the 1930s and 1940, a time that sets between the Great Depression and the U.S’s entry into WWII just one year later. In 1940, Columbia was home to roughly 21,000 people.

**People should care because:** After 72 years, the records have been opened to the public. According to the Census Bureau, 87% of Americans have a direct link to someone listed in the 1940 census. There is a race to index the names so people can have a better understanding of the lives of their relatives in a time between the Great Depression and World War II.

This story is less about the release of the records. While that is indeed the news peg for this story, talking to these people allows us to let viewers and listeners understand how culture, ideas and the physical spaces around them have changed since 1940.

**Who are the stakeholders? The story impacts (who?):** Researchers, Historians, General members of the community who have a relative who is listed in the Census, the people listed in the Census.

**We have already contacted the following sources for this story:**

Sabre Tull Meyer  
Columbia Resident  
(573) 443-1492  
Mrs. Meyer was 13 years old in 1940. She lived in a home at 408 Hitt Street. That site is now a parking lot for the University. She’s lived in Columbia all of her life. She is an excellent source that could talk about how things in Columbia have changed in 72 years.

Tim Dollens  
President, Genealogical Society of Central Missouri  
timdollens@gmail.com  
Mr. Dollens will be able to speak with us on Saturday about the efforts of his organization along with other state organizations to index U.S. Census records from Missouri. In the past few days, he’s also helped people find themselves in the census. As he has been poring over the list, he can provide us with more names of people still alive from 1940. This would help us link the fact that 21 million people from the census are still alive in the U.S. to the individual stories we wish to tell. He can also speak about the process that a person can go through to find their relatives in the Census (for a secondary/sidebar piece).

Charlie Digges, Sr.  
Columbia Resident  
Born, raised and lived in Columbia. Only left Columbia for World War II and the Korean War.
Frank Connely  
Columbia Resident and Former Judge  
He was seven years old in 1940.

Raymond Nunnely  
Columbia Resident  
(Was told to call back Friday afternoon, but his wife says he would likely be interested in talking to us.)

Tamara Kitchen  
University student who is leading a group of student indexers  
(573) 442-6594

Amy Waters  
Reference Specialist, State Historical Society of Missouri  
(573) 882-7083  
waltersa@umsystem.edu

Kristian has contacted multiple retirement homes in the Columbia area. He can provide details on the information he has received from administrators. All have been receptive to the idea of helping finding sources.

**Which multimedia tools do you envision will best convey this material?**  
Audio and Photos

**Is there an innovative way to tell this story?**

Using portraits of individuals who live in Columbia and mid-Missouri, paired with audio stories or photos from that period of time, a dynamic story of the differences between life in 1940 and 2012 can be told. Ideally, this would be presented in the form of an interactive graphic.

Using photos from the Missouri State Historical Society and from other sources, we could provide viewers with a “Then” and “Now” shot of the places these residents live. A great example is Sabre Tull Meyer’s home that is now university property.

**Describe at least one potential sidebar element.**

A table comparing the population of Columbia from the 1940 and 2010 censuses. Could also include 1980 in order to show a population trend.

A copy of the actual 1940 census form and explain why it is different from other years’ census questionnaires.
Have you checked other news organizations to see if this story has already been done?

This story is being covered nationally since the records were just released to the public on Tuesday. No outlets have really taken the time to look into records and begin to find people from the 1940 Census.

Which newsroom would you suggest as the best to run this story? KBIA

How we came up with this idea & Interesting & Relevant Links:

The release of the records has been talked about for the past few weeks on many websites devoted to history and genealogy. Instead of telling a story that says “Hey, look, these records were released,” the story is about the people and their lives in the 1930s and 1940s.

Census Records online at http://1940census.archives.gov

http://www.npr.org/2012/04/02/149575704/the-1940-census-72-year-old-secrets-revealed


Some information on why this census is different than ones in the past:
https://www.familysearch.org/1940census/?cid=fsHomeT1940Text

Pitch #2: Exploding Poop

Based on our research so far, the headline for this story might read:
Exploding manure a danger to pigs, farm workers.

Based on our research so far, the lead sentence of this story is:
An unexplained mixture of gases and waste are creating potentially explosive situations at pig farms throughout the Midwest.

In other words, this story is about:
Researchers are not able to explain why a foamy substance is forming in manure pits of hog farms in the Midwest. The foam consists of a mixture of waste and methane that can explode violently if it comes in contact with a spark or flame.
People should care because:
There is a potential danger to pig farmers and pigs if this foam is present and makes contact with a flame or spark. Large farming operations could lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in profit if a barn explodes as a result of the foam catching fire.

Who are the stakeholders? The story impacts (who?):
Pig farmers, public health and safety officials, scientists and researchers, consumers.

We have already contacted the following sources for this story:

Charles Clanton [He’s the professor quoted in the Wired Magazine story. While he’s not aware personally of any cases in Missouri, he said there may be isolated cases. He did describe to me the magnitude of the situation that is taking place across the Midwest. He added that researchers at Minnesota have been in close contact with researchers in Illinois and Iowa, but not Missouri, which could explain his lack of awareness of any problems in Missouri. Clanton did suggest people to speak with here at Mizzou.]
Professor, University of Minnesota
(612) 625-9218

Joe Zulovich [E-mail and voicemail left]
Agricultural Extension Engineer, University of Missouri
(573) 882-0868

Missouri Pork Association [Secretary said no one was in office today. Hope to call Wednesday and attempt to locate some pig farmers in the area.]

Teresa Rogers [We’ve requested any records related to fire or explosion incidents at pig farms in Missouri.]
Missouri Department of Natural Resources

Which multimedia tools do you envision will best convey this material?
Video (or audio)

Describe at least one potential sidebar element.
A map of the Midwest showing where there have been previous fires and explosions related to this mysterious goop. A graphic showing the process of how the substance forms (to the best knowledge of researchers.)

Have you checked other news organizations to see if this story has already been done?
It has not been done locally.

Which newsroom would you suggest as the best to run this story?
KOMU

How we came up with this idea & Interesting & Relevant Links:

http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2012/03/hog-manure-foam/


http://extension.missouri.edu/p/EQ350

http://www.extension.umn.edu/swine/components/pdfs/safety_measure_to_prevent_pit_gas_explodo ns.pdf