



**University of California**  
**Agriculture and Natural Resources**

Kearney Agricultural Research and Extension Center

May 26, 2015

To future Kearney Ag Center folks

This is a letter to the future folks at the Kearney Agricultural Research and Extension Center. It might be interesting for future readers to know how people in 2015 “ended up” at Parlier, California. That’s why I thought I could jot down a glimpse of “my story.”

My time here at Kearney seems very brief now, because I only started in this role as extension nematologist in the middle of January of this year. I moved here with my wife, who I had met in Germany. After getting the first degrees of my education in my home country Germany, I had been a student at the University of California, Riverside, many years ago when I first learned about this center. My predecessor, Mike McKenry, actually was one of my teachers during graduate school (1994-1998). Having first learned about this area while taking classes with Mike, I started to appreciate the fertility and productivity of the Central Valley of California. My research interest is on plant-parasitic nematodes, pests that can be best studied here where the problems associated with them are huge. I assume that they still will be around when you read this letter. At least this is something that I tell my students: “nematode problems will outlive us.”

After graduate school, I wondered around in places like Texas, the Midwest, and also back to my birth country Germany. Just before I came here, I worked in Germany for a number of years. But I never forgot how California made me feel right at home and like I belong. Academically, this was because nematodes are a REAL problem here in this highly productive valley. So, when the call came to come back to California, and specifically the Kearney REC, it was very enticing. I took all the risks associated with moving halfway around the world from Germany to California, and leaving a secure permanent job, my folks and friends in Germany behind. And yes, those little soil-dwelling parasites are very big problems for our generation of scientists. We attempt to manage them with host plant resistance, chemical means, and biological strategies.

Today, one of the greatest challenges for people in California is how to maintain a steady water supply that ensures incredible productivity and wealth for the valley. As California is going through yet another drought, a lot of discussions and challenges are on people’s minds. As I read through a book of the history of California, I understand that the Central Valley, in particular, has seen a lot of changes. I am curious how this current challenge will be dealt with, and if there even is an agricultural research community unveiling this collection of letters to the future. I hope there will be, but the chance of me being there will be slim at best because the average age expectancy of our generation is far less than the nearly 100 years old I would be in 2065. I do not give up hope though. And if I do make it, I hope you buy me a coffee or beer or whatever people drink when socializing.

The way life goes, it will feel like it’s gone by quickly. So: see you in the future!

Best wishes to you from the past. I hope that your life treats you kindly, and that you have a chance to enjoy the Central Valley of California to its fullest.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Andreas Westphal'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andreas Westphal, Ph.D.