2010 Early Career Achievement Awards: Recognizing achievement of young scholars working to foster the discovery, sharing, and application of knowledge concerning the responsible use of animals to enhance human life and well-being

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The American Society of Animal Science (ASAS) introduced the Early Career Achievement Awards in 2007 to recognize the achievement of outstanding young scholars working toward the mission of ASAS, namely to “foster the discovery, sharing, and application of scientific knowledge concerning the responsible use of animals to enhance human life and well-being.” In this, its fourth year, 2 outstanding recipients were selected from a competitive field of 18 candidates nominated by current ASAS members. Candidates are not required to be ASAS members, and there are no restrictions on country of residence, but candidates must have completed their most recent degree within 10 yr of the time of nomination. Nominations consist of a brief biography, summary of scholarly work, and letters of support from at least 2 ASAS members. Collectively, this material must demonstrate that the achievements of the nominee serve the mission of ASAS.

Successful recipients are required to contribute a presentation at the Joint Annual Meeting, submit an abstract for that presentation, and submit a manuscript highlighting the presented material. In return, they receive a travel allowance, complimentary registration at the meeting, and 2-yr membership in ASAS, sponsored by the ASAS Foundation. Finally, recipients become members of the award committee the following year and participate in the challenging task of identifying their successors.

The nominees represented the diversity enjoyed by the ASAS membership in terms of countries of origin; discipline or species interests; public or private sector employment; job responsibilities in terms of teaching, research and extension; and sex. There was much less diversity in the level of achievement of these nominees; all the candidates were worthy of recognition for performance beyond the level of their average peers, whether in terms of research grants and peer-reviewed publications, leadership in their disciplines, graduate and undergraduate teaching, or extension activities. Most candidates did many of these activities, regardless of the nature of their employment. Two candidates, Min Du and Terry Engle, were particularly outstanding and were selected to be the 2010 recipients of ASAS Early Career Achievement Awards.

Min Du received a BS degree from Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China, an MS degree from China Agricultural University, Beijing, and a PhD degree from Iowa State University, Ames. Du then served as a post-doctoral fellow in cell signaling and growth biology in the Department of Biochemistry, Faculty of Medicine, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, before joining the faculty in the Department of Animal Science at the University of Wyoming as a muscle biologist. Du’s research is focused on the developmental biology of skeletal muscle. Specifically, he is interested in exploring mechanisms regulating the differentiation of mesenchymal stem cells into myocytes and adipocytes, and the impact of maternal physiological conditions on the development of fetal skeletal muscle. His laboratory uses cell and tissue culture, transgenic mice, and livestock as experimental models. In the past 10 yr, Du has authored or co-authored 96 peer-reviewed manuscripts in top-tier biomedical and animal agriculture journals and had presented more than 15 national and international invited talks. In addition, he has acquired nearly $3.5 million in extramural support for his research. His invited presentation and corresponding paper focused on fetal programming and its impact on carcass composition, followed by a discussion of mechanisms regulating mesenchymal multipotent cell differentiation and their potential roles in adipogenesis (Du et al., 2011).