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To: All Extension Employees

From: Joe Zublena 
Associate Dean for Extension, and Director, NC Cooperative Extension Service

Date: September 25, 2013

Subject: NC Cooperative Extension Service Program Prioritization and Staffing Process

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CAL S) at NC State University recently completed its strategic planning process. Earlier this year, the plan was released outlining the College's Vision and Goals. Many of those identified were directly tied to the great work being done by our NC Cooperative Extension Service (NCCES) professionals here at NC State.

While we continue to be encouraged by these exciting opportunities, we also know that we have faced significant budget cuts, particularly in the last several state budgets and the federal budget sequestration. These cuts have significantly impacted numerous NC State campus and county-based positions and programs.

To meet the opportunities that lie before us as we start our next century, we must review our programs and develop a prioritization plan that will align our financial, human and research resources with our highest priority programs. Today I am writing to announce the launch of an extensive NC Cooperative Extension Service program prioritization process that will take place over the next several months.

In this first correspondence, my goal is to inform you of where we currently are in the process and preview what will happen in the course of this endeavor. I have also shared this information with Dean Randle at NC A&T State University. While we are One Extension, the impact of these economic times has affected our separate institutions differently, and as such, we realize that NC State has specific needs to address that NC A&T does not have at this time. So, while this will primarily be an NCSU endeavor, our NCA&T partners will be involved in the process.

NCCES Visioning Committee – This process will gather input from a variety of resources, including reviewing other Universities that have undergone similar processes, analyzing current resources and gaps within our organization, and holding stakeholder and employee listening sessions. A team of Cooperative Extension professionals from campus and county positions will be named within the next week for a kick-off meeting to be held in October. Their charge will be to help formulate the prioritization plan, which will include a review of data from a variety of sources, analysis of our current situation (resources, people and programs), and help devise a recommended action plan to meet our needs going into the future.

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County Partner and Stakeholder Input – This process would be inadequate if we did not the input of our stakeholders, our County partners, and our employees. With the broad network of parties who are involved with and who support Extension, we will need to implement a variety of tools to gather information from them. This will certainly include listening sessions to be held across the state within the next few months, as well as other potential methods such as surveys and targeted interviews. We will work with our standing NCACC Partnership Committee, which includes County Managers from each district, and our partners at NCACC for a close look at the county perspective. Employees will be engaged in this process as well, including holding a facilitated discussion with our EPA field faculty, CEDs, and campus faculty at State Conference on November 6, 2013, and additional listening sessions with those not attending Conference at other scheduled times in the near future.

Communications and Leadership – As with any major initiative such as this, having a point person to lead the effort is important, as is communication about the timeline, process and outcomes. Sheri Schwab, Associate Director of NCCES and Director of County Operations, will provide overall leadership to this effort. She will, of course, be working closely with me and Drs. Stewart and Melton throughout the process. We will also engage the services of a consulting firm to assist us with this intensive process. Having an external consultant brings us valuable guidance and an objective eye to this work.

We will launch a website with information in the next few weeks that will serve as a place to post up-to-date information. Sheri is primary point person for questions and suggestions; her contact information is sheri_schwab@ncsu.edu, 919-515-1381 (office).

This is truly one of the most important endeavors we will undertake in our time. I cannot think of a better time than our centennial to be embarking on this. Now, because of our strong history and our intense desire for a positive and strong future, and because of the talented and dedicated employees we have, NC Cooperative Extension Service is poised to make this the successful turning point of our organization. We can harness this opportunity for that change we need to be the most relevant, responsive and reliable source of trusted information to North Carolinians. I ask each of you to join us as we move forward together.

- c: Richard Linton, Dean, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, NCSU
- William Randle, Dean, School of Agriculture & Environmental Sciences, NCA&T
- Randy Woodson, Chancellor, NCSU
- Warrick Arden, Provost, NCSU
- Mary Watzin, Dean, College of Natural Resources, NCSU
- Marvin Malecha, Dean, College of Design, NCSU
- Kevin Howell, Assistant to the Chancellor for External Affairs, NCSU
- CALS Extension Dept. Heads