January 9, 2007

MEMORANDUM:

TO: SAES Faculty and Staff
FR: Alton Thompson, Dean
RE: A New Year’s Message

Greetings and Happy New Year! I hope that your vacation was rewarding, relaxing and rejuvenating. I spent some time during the holidays at mama’s house reflecting on the progress that we made this year and also examining the work and progress made over the past six years. But, I did not dwell too much on the past; I spent more time trying to plot a future in light of the SAES Strategic Plan and to see where we need to be.

Now that 2006 has ended, I would like to reflect back briefly on where SAES has gone and consider the opportunities and challenges for 2007. Like other years, 2006 presented its share of challenges. Similar to other academic units, SAES and the University faced significant funding challenges. However, the appropriation of our matching funds at the 100% level for both research and Cooperative Extension was a major victory. This victory was due in large measure to the wide base of support we continue to enjoy from both sides of the legislative aisle and some key champions that always take the lead and support our financial requests. To them, we say thanks. Without the support of the General Assembly as a whole and our standard bearers in particular, we would have to curtail our efforts and make some hard and difficult choices with limited resources.

The year 2006 was a particularly outstanding year for the School with respect to academic, research and Cooperative Extension accomplishments. We took a real risk in developing some of our products that are now being duplicated across the country. Our faculty members continue to be entrepreneurial and continue to do excellent work both here and abroad to address agriculture, life sciences, environmental and educational challenges. Examples include implementation of our strategic plan; the procurement of approximately $4.3 million in competitive funds to complement the SAES base and formula funding of $16.8 million; SAES faculty published four books, six book chapters, 39 refereed articles, and 54 other articles; SAES faculty, staff and students were highly visible in that they made more than 291 presentations at professional meetings and 255 appearances at public fairs/exhibits, and the accreditations in Family and Consumer Sciences, Dietetics, and Landscape Architecture were reaffirmed.
As we consider 2007 and our future direction, the SAES recognizes that more challenges lie ahead and that we must strengthen our commitment to conceptually and operationally defining the SAES major interdisciplinary program initiatives while concurrently promoting a collaborative culture of partnerships among academic, research and Extension programs, across disciplines, across the University and with communities, businesses and governmental agencies. We will continue to have budget challenges in the year ahead, and our priority will be to protect faculty and staff, making strategic adjustments as vacancies occur. We must continue to expand and increase the support from the private sector. One of our priorities for 2007 is to identify new partners to support our programs and our students. Already, we have identified a number of prospective investors and we are busy cultivating those relationships and getting them to see and understand the value in supporting the SAES.

Other priority goals for 2007 include centralizing recruitment, improving retention and graduation rates, creating a responsive learning environment that fosters high quality programs, participating in two generational opportunities at the North Carolina Research Campus in Kannapolis, NC and at the Gateway University Research Park, and strengthening our internal control and accountability measures.

I am grateful for the support that so many of you have given since I became dean in 2000, and I hope you will continue to share with me your concerns and hopes for the future. We must continue to push the envelope, continue to tread where others dare not and continue to do so with the highest integrity, ethics and moral standards. I’ll take nothing less. Now, let’s get back to our hard work as we remain on the move.