on the move


SAES poised for Millennial growth

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This plan will be easily read and understood by all North Carolinians. It will clearly define who we are in the SAES, who we want to be and how we will get there. As we continue this work, we will share pieces with you. We want, need and desire your input in this process. Be on the lookout for my calls, e-mails, letters and pleas for help. After all, this isn’t just a plan for A&T. It’s a plan for all of us.

Dr. T’s Moment

Agriculture is a significant part of the heritage — and future — of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. As such, the SAES has to be poised to develop the University’s preferred future in the food, agricultural and environmental sciences.

We could choose to do this haphazardly or we would do this in a strategic manner. We have selected the latter. Representatives from across the school have been meeting regularly to develop a new Strategic Plan and revamped Mission and Vision statements.

Our work will be completed by late summer 2004.

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— Dr. Alton Thompson
Dean, SAES


Seen the new entrance at the A&T farm on McConnell Road?
The whole neighborhood will soon have a new look — many of the construction projects at the farm are just around the corner from the forthcoming Millennial Campus.

Instead of growing crops, a 75-acre tract at the University Farm could be growing new patents, products and industries in about three to five years from now, as the new Joint Millennial Campus takes shape.

The campus, to be named the “Greensboro Center for Innovative Development,” was recently announced by the chancellors at N.C. A&T and The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. It will have two locations — one at the University Farm and the other at the former School for the Deaf in Greensboro. It was established to provide an infrastructure for private and public funding of research and training that will be tied directly to the needs of the region.

The 75 acres of University Farm bordering Lee Street and I-40/85 will form the south millennial campus, where the research focus will be on the life sciences, biotechnology and engineering. The north campus in the former school site also encompasses approximately 75 acres. Its focus will be on services and training related to the social sciences that serve the needs of schools, health care industries, government and industry. Both campuses will serve both universities.

SAES Dean Alton Thompson sees the project as one of the brightest spots in the future of SAES and the university as a whole.

“The university’s intellectual capital still remains largely untapped in terms of applied research,” he said. “The millennial campus will give us more opportunities to make a difference and improve the lives of limited-resource farmers, small businesses and individuals.

“Food biotechnology as it applies to food safety and functional foods is likely to be one of the first areas pursued by SAES for the south campus. Thompson indicated that several factors come into play to make that a wise starting place: First, “biotechnology and biodiversi- ty,” as well as “agro-medicine, nutrition and food safety” comprise two of the six major research initiatives in SAES.

Secondly, many researchers in those areas already have very strong research programs and relationships with industry. Then there is the fact that USDA and the Department of Homeland Security are intensely interested in funding food safety research, while many food industries are identifying functional foods as a hot new growth area.

(Functional foods include yogurt and other foods or supplements that are bio-engineered to improve health or fight disease through the addition of living microorganisms, enzymes, vitamins or other compounds.)

“According to all I’ve been reading, the medical profession now believes that five of the 10 leading causes of death in the U.S. are diet and nutrition related diseases, such as certain types of cancer, heart disease and diabetes,” Thompson said. “As a result, there is a burgeoning interest in functional foods, nutriceuticals and processes related to these products. The SAES is already making important contributions in this area, as well as into the area of food safety, and the millennial campus will enable us to do more.”
The School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences is the recipient of three capacity building grants from USDA that should produce important research findings, while also improving the research skills of students seeking careers in biotechnology or social sciences. Close to $700,000 was awarded to the school in the three grants. Here is how the funds will be put to use over the next three years:

“Promoting Collaboration Among CBOs, 1890 Institutions, Business and Government Agencies in the Black Belt”

People in government and the 1890 land-grant universities who are working to put an end to persistent poverty in the Southern Black Belt may one day be able to tap the collective power of the region’s Community Based Organizations (CBOs), thanks to this project, led by Dr. Terrence Thomas, associate director of the Applied Survey Research Laboratory in SAES. Community-based organizations share a common desire to improve human and social capital in their respective regions, but coordination with these grassroots organizations has been impeded by a lack of information about what they are doing and where they are located — as well as by a lack of knowledge on the part of CBOs as to how to connect with universities and government.

Dr. Terrence Thomas, a research economist, will be leading a USDA-funded effort to tie together grassroots organizations in the Southern “Black Belt.”

SAES researchers hope to fill the information gap by conducting surveys and listening sessions in each of the 11 states of the Southern Black Belt. They will also create a database and a model for collaboration. Through the grant the SAES has received new technology: GroupSystems and Option Finder, which make it easier for groups to have fruitful discussions. New teaching modules and lab manuals will be developed to train students, faculty and extension personnel in the use of these technologies, and in other techniques of social science research.

“Development of a hands-on laboratory experiment for characterization of biodegradation of agriculturally-derived plastics”

Under this project, SAES will join forces with the College of Engineering and three plastics industries in developing new laboratory classes in biodegradable polymers. Dr. Salam Ibrahim, a food scientist, is leading the study. The project will enable collaborators to create a program for teaching agricultural and chemical engineering students about biodegradable plastics — a topic of increasing interest to plastics and agricultural industries. Collaborators will develop new lab units on the effects of composting on plastics created from agricultural byproducts. Some of the labs will be placed on line to be shared with students at remote sites. A Web-based lab and manual will be developed for dissemination to students at other universities.

“Strengthening the Interdisciplinary Biotechnology and Biodiversity Program,”

This project will fund merit-based scholarships to biotechnology students, as well as special seminars, new equipment, library resources, and professional development opportunities for faculty.

Dr. Salam Ibrahim

Dr. Guochen Yang

It will be led by Dr. Guochen Yang, a plant biotechnologist. Biotechnology is one of the fastest growing industries in the United States. The field makes use of advancements in genetic engineering and molecular sciences to produce new or improved medicines, crops and foods, and industrial processes.

“Much of the science is food and agriculture related,” Yang says. “This project addresses the need for graduates in food and agricultural sciences who will be trained for successful careers in the current and emerging field of biotechnology. As a result, we will be able to contribute to filling the high demand for well-trained professionals.”
2501 Funds Target Farmers Under 25

Amy Locklear-Cummings of Robeson County teamed up with her brother Ellery to win the 2003 G. L. & Clara Y. Dudley Small Farmer of the Year Award. The Locklears and other young farmers in N.C. will be benefitting from Extension’s new programs for younger farmers.

In an increasingly competitive arena in which land-grant universities, non-land-grant universities and nongovernmental organizations all vie for government funding, the Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T has again prevailed in getting a federal grant that helps minority and socially-disadvantaged farmers.

The $200,000, two-year grant, commonly known as “2501 funding,” is administered by USDA’s Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service and is part of the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers program.

A&T is one of 34 organizations, 20 of which are also land-grant colleges and universities, to get the grants.

“This is another opportunity to help N.C. A&T help all the agencies we work with help our audience of small and limited-resource farmers in the state,” says Dan Lyons, director of county programs. “I feel great about this.”

A&T traditionally uses the grants to help pay for farm-management programs, and computer training-and-lending programs.

Those practices will continue, but Lyons and his staff plan to break new ground in the next two years.

Attracting young adults to farming careers will be a leading issue in the 2501 program in the coming biennium.

“There are very few persons under 25 engaged in farming full time and we hope to increase those numbers,” Lyons says.

Collaborating with organizations that have activities and programs similar or conducive to those fostered through Cooperative Extension programs, will also be a major thrust of 2501 planning.

An on-campus luncheon to announce both new goals — collaboration and young farmers — has been set for mid-December.

“Many times we may find that one agent may be doing the same thing or something similar to another agent, when they could work together,” Lyons says. “That also helps with non-governmental agencies and organizations like ours. So we want to join hands and work on mutual accomplishments so that everybody can come out winners. Collaboration could also help us reduce duplication and realize cost savings in the long run.”

In all, the continued 2501 funding helps keep what Lyons calls the bell ringers, going.

“The reason being is that if those people, the farmers, are not in those communities, the cash register bells stop,” Lyons says. “The school bells stop because there are no children to ring them for; and when people move out of the communities, in many instances, those church bells cease as well.

“We’re working to keep the bells ringing.”

The Greensboro Public Library’s READING RAILROAD came to the SAES child development lab for its first tour of duty a few weeks ago. With Web-connected computers, videos and audio tapes in addition to 6,000 books, the READING RAILROAD is touted as a “full service rolling branch library.”

Thirty-seven children between 2 1/2 and 5 are currently enrolled at the SAES child development lab, which is under the direction of HEFS adjunct instructor Yolanda Williams and has five full-time teachers. In addition to serving as a top-quality facility for child care (the lab has a five-star rating, which is the state licensing board’s highest), the lab is also an integral training and research facility for HEFS students studying child behavior and development.

Dr. Sheryl Scrimsher has joined the Department of Human Environment and Family Sciences as an assistant professor of Child Development. Dr. Scrimsher comes to A&T from Merideth College in Raleigh, and in addition to an M.Ed./Ph.D. degree in Human Development and Family Studies granted by UNCG, she also holds an M.Div. degree from Duke Divinity School. Dr. Scrimsher’s academic specialty is multicultural education for young children and their teachers.

Although technically new to the SAES faculty because she accepted a tenure-track position with the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Design this semester, Sherold Hollingsworth is a familiar face around Carver Hall. She has been a faculty adjunct for several semesters since 1996. Hollingsworth has an MA in Landscape Architecture from NCSU and she has been operating her own landscaping firm for 18 years. One of her specialties is historic landscape restoration. Hollingsworth has worked extensively with Old Salem and Reynolda Gardens in Winston-Salem.
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Had a look at the new SAES Web site (www.ag.ncat.edu)?

The top three levels of the Web site have received a complete face lift, and the new look will be incorporated into the rest of the SAES Web pages in the months to come.