PENNSYVANIA FARM BUREAU 65TH ANNUAL MEETING

“LIVING THE LAND-GRANT MISSION IN THE 21ST CENTURY
AND SUPPORTING FARM FAMILIES THROUGH COOPERATIVE EXTENSION”

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2015, 6:30-9 P.M.

HERSHEY LODGE – HERSHEY, PA
Good evening! I’m thrilled to be here for the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau 65th Annual Meeting. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak for a few minutes during this banquet.

I’d first like to acknowledge and thank Russ Redding, who serves not only as Secretary of Pennsylvania’s Department of Agriculture, but also as a member of Penn State’s Board of Trustees. Recently, he was named an Alumni Fellow—a much-deserved and prestigious honor. I’d also like to thank Penn State Board Chairman Keith Masser, as well as all current and former Board members and state legislators who took the time to be here this evening.

I hail from a small town in New Zealand named Matamata—a small farming community a long way from Pennsylvania, but still quite similar to many of the towns I see across our Commonwealth. The significance of agriculture was not lost on me when I was growing up, and it’s not something I’ve forgotten. Among other things, this fundamental knowledge and awareness have served me well in my role at Penn State, in appreciating the vital role that agriculture plays in our communities.

Penn State has a tripartite mission of research in the public good, teaching future generations of leaders, and service to our constituencies, and nowhere is that more evident than in our longtime, steadfast commitment to agriculture through our College of Agricultural Sciences. In fact, the College is a model for others at Penn State as we move to implement our new University-wide strategic plan, which is focused on having a positive impact on the many constituencies we serve. Our commitment to Penn State’s original land-grant mission is exemplified in our commitment to agriculture.
Tonight I’d like to talk a bit about how Penn State is living its original land-grant mission through agriculture in the 21st century, as well as continuing to support Pennsylvania farm families through Cooperative Extension. The land-grant mission and Cooperative Extension are steeped in history, but both still have extraordinary relevance and impact today, to all of you.

Having spent about two years at Penn State, one of my biggest surprises thus far has been the extent to which people—from faculty and staff to current students and alumni—truly believe in our land-grant mission. They fundamentally understand what it is and why it matters, and it’s a source of great pride. I’ve even had job candidates mention it as a reason they wanted to work at Penn State!

Put simply, a land-grant college or university is an institution that has been designated by its state legislature or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890. The original missions of these institutions were to teach agriculture, military tactics, and the mechanic arts, as well as classical studies, so that members of the working classes could obtain a liberal, practical education.

Over time, land-grant status has implied several types of federal support. The first Morrill Act provided grants in the form of federal lands to each state for the establishment of a public institution to fulfill the act’s provisions. At various times, money was appropriated through legislation such as the second Morrill Act, although that act’s funding provision is no longer in effect.
A key component of the land-grant system is the agricultural experiment station program created by the Hatch Act of 1887. That act authorized payment of federal grant funds to each state to establish an agricultural experiment station in connection with the land-grant institution there. The amount of this appropriation varies annually, and a large portion of the federal funds must be matched by the state.

To disseminate information gleaned from research at the experiment stations, the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 created a Cooperative Extension Service associated with each land-grant institution. This act authorized ongoing federal support for extension services and requires states to provide matching money in order to receive the federal funds.

Passage of the first Morrill Act reflected a growing demand for agricultural and technical education in the United States. While several institutions had begun to expand upon the traditional classical curriculum, higher education was still widely unavailable to many agricultural and industrial workers. The first act was intended to provide a broad segment of the population with a practical education that had direct relevance to their daily lives. In turn, the second Morrill Act sought to extend access to higher education by providing additional endowments for all land-grants.

The Commonwealth chartered Penn State 160 years ago to bring modern science to bear in making agriculture more productive and efficient. Penn State admitted its first class in 1859, and the General Assembly three years later designated Penn State the Commonwealth’s only land-grant institution. As we perhaps should remind our current crop of learners, in those early years, Penn State students attended school from February to December without a break, performed three hours of manual
labor every day, and ate in a building that students described as “a shanty behind Old Main.” Sounds great, right?

In the 1880s, under President George Atherton, the institution expanded its curriculum, and programs in engineering, the sciences, and the liberal arts were developed. Penn State was clearly growing in stature and impact.

Then, in the early 1900s, we introduced Cooperative Extension and other forms of outreach programming. Penn State Extension has served the Commonwealth for more than a century, and the impact has improved the lives of countless Pennsylvanians. This is a credit to the thousands of Penn State Extension educators and volunteers, as well as to the township supervisors, municipal officials, and local agencies whose combined efforts help to make the work possible.

Extension plays a critical role in Penn State’s mission of teaching, research, and service. By working collaboratively with research partners, particularly the Pennsylvania Agricultural Experiment Station system, Extension educators bring research-based knowledge to Pennsylvania communities and citizens where they live and work.

The roots of Penn State Extension date to the transformative work with farmers and ranchers that helped establish the United States among the world’s leading agricultural-producing nations. It since has evolved, however, to provide a community-based rapid response network for disasters and emergencies. Today’s Extension engages rural and urban learners and leaders through practical, community-based and
online educational offerings, and provides education in leadership, innovation, technology, and science.

Penn State Extension ultimately serves as the premier educational network that gives people in Pennsylvania's 67 counties access to the University's resources and expertise. It helps individuals, families, businesses, and communities throughout Pennsylvania with information and educational programs designed to support productive, profitable, and competitive businesses, and a strong agriculture and food system. Cooperative Extension and research also strengthen families; sustain caring, safe, and healthy communities; and ensure the long-term vitality of Pennsylvania's natural resources.

As we look to the future, Extension will continue to evolve as we respond to the changing needs of the Commonwealth. Already, our agents have built a customer relationship management system and incorporated e-commerce as appropriate. We've also been hard at work building Atlas—an outstanding example of the types of innovative thinking that the University continues to bring to Extension. Atlas reinforces Extension’s role as the definitive resource for practical, how-to education and problem-solving assistance and technologies based on University research. It also expands access to this information—how, when, and where it is most valuable to the customer—so individuals can make informed decisions to better their businesses, communities, and lives. Technology helps to drive such innovation, but our people are making it happen, extending Extension’s relevance and effectiveness for decades to come.
So, clearly, we’ve come a long way since the days of the “shanty behind Old Main.” Yet, in late 2015, it’s worth noting that Penn State remains the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s only land-grant institution. What does that actually mean today—for our faculty, students, staff, and any resident of the Commonwealth—and in particular for those with farming- and agriculture-related interests?

The world is a much more complex place than it was in the 1860s. The land-grant mission and the perceived need for it emerged during a time of widely different social contexts, financial and intellectual resources, and national priorities. Now, Penn State is charged with adhering to that mission in a more contemporary, global context.

Ultimately, though, the land-grant mission itself has not changed with time, but its intended impact has. The land-grant legacy emphasizing educational access, research, and outreach remains. But given societal shifts, demographic changes, enhanced technologies, and global connections, the mission today is also about having simultaneous local, national, and global impact in many areas. With the addition of more online courses, how-to videos, and a variety of other digital products to the Extension educational portfolio, we’re significantly expanding convenience and reach to those who need support.

In January 2015, Penn State’s submitted to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education its self-study, titled “Living the Land-Grant Mission in a Global Context.” In it we reflected on our land-grant past and envisioned a strong land-grant-driven future. In June, Middle States responded to that self-study and other key areas of analysis and reaffirmed our accreditation.
At its core, as Middle States validated, our University has incredible depth, breadth, and diversity of talent, along with tremendous resolve and energy. With all key stakeholders working together, the elements are in place for the University to extend its reach and impact through teaching, research, and service.

Continued hard work, creativity, and dedication—through Penn State Extension and other impactful programs and initiatives—will enable Penn State to live its original land-grant mission as an extraordinary, modern university.

We’re thrilled to be having a positive impact on farm families and businesses. It’s something special, and a cherished privilege.

Thank you for your attention, and enjoy your evening.