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DURHAM, N.H. -- The Thompson School of Applied Science at the University of New Hampshire has been named one of 18 lead schools in a national alliance to enhance the education of new generations of agricultural scientists and technicians.

The alliance of colleges, under the leadership of Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, will work with a $3 million grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to establish this program, called "AgKnowledge." The schools will work together on new methods, materials and classroom knowledge for the future.

Regina Smick Attisano, director of UNH's Thompson School, will lead the New Hampshire effort in program development.

"We commend the National Science Foundation and Kirkwood Community College for the vision they have shown in initiating this important national center," Smick-Attisano said. "We look forward to working with our community college, university and secondary school partners nationwide to better prepare the instructors and students who will take U.S. agriculture to new levels of productivity and efficiency in a world economy."

A core effort of the agriscience technology center will be to identify crucial educational needs of students preparing to enter advanced technological careers in agriculture. Each college in the network will develop new courses and methods of teaching and integrating new technologies in high school and college
classrooms. Efforts will focus on agribusiness, production, advanced agriculture technologies and related service fields.

"The importance of computer, satellite and other technologies in today's agriculture is amazing," said Smick-Attisano. "It has transformed the way agriculture functions, and it will continue to do so. The national AgKnowledge Center will be a hub for sharing those methods and skills with educators, who will then share them with students nationwide."

Career education is another major component of the national center's planned efforts. National trends reveal that some of the "hottest" career fields have not had enrollment levels to meet industry needs, Smick-Attisano added. "We will get the message out to students that promising technology careers are waiting for them in a new century of agriculture in America."

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