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June 4, 2012

UNH Officials Reaffirm Commitment to Agriculture and Open Space

DURHAM, N.H. – In response to a recent proposal to convert core space on the University of New Hampshire campus from open agricultural lands to retail development that generated broad-based concern on campus, in the surrounding community, and at the state level, the University of New Hampshire’s leadership has reaffirmed the institution’s commitment to agricultural and environmental teaching and research, and the conservation of open lands. The proposal was one of many put forward as part of a campus master planning process that allows the university to test alternate visions of its future.

That commitment is consistent with a number of recent university initiatives. The College of Life Sciences and Agriculture (COLSA) recently hired several new faculty in the area of sustainable agriculture and ecosystems, and also established the first organic dairy research farm in the country at a land grant university. A new major in Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems is growing rapidly, and a nationally unique program in Ecogastronomy, which combines courses in agriculture, nutrition and hospitality management, has been very successful.

“The response of the community, both on and off campus, has made it clear once again that the agricultural mission and a strong environmental ethic are core values of the institution,” said UNH President Mark Huddleston. “Any planning process is an opportunity to test ideas and search for new approaches. While the process and timing of some of the proposals might have been improved, the value of the process is reaffirmed in the outcome.” The master plan will include language specifying that changes to near-campus agricultural fields will be limited to those that sustain, and when possible enhance, the educational, agricultural and aesthetic value of the land.

Provost John Aber highlighted the development and growth of new facilities and academic programs. “Our new agricultural programs and facilities have attracted increased student interest, major federal grants, and significant private support. We see this as a growth area for UNH in response to the rapidly expanding local and sustainable food economies throughout New England, as evident in the growth of farmers’ markets, local food-based restaurants and local value-added processing.”

Jon Wraith, dean of COLSA and director of the N.H. Agricultural Experiment Station, pointed out the importance of close-in research and teaching facilities to delivering a quality educational experience. “UNH is unique among regional land grant institutions in terms of the amount of agricultural land within walking distance of the core campus. These lands, along with the recently rededicated College Woods area, provide important teaching and research resources in support of student success. We know that these lands are an important asset in student recruitment, as well as state and alumnus pride in the university.”

State Commissioner of Agriculture, Markets & Food Lorraine Merrill has welcomed the expanding opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students interested in agriculture and food and agriculture-related fields of study. “Students and alumni tell us that having agricultural teaching and research facilities and the beauty of farmlands and woodlands all within walking distance of campus makes UNH a very special institution. I look forward to seeing how the next revision to the campus master plan update further articulates UNH’s commitment to agricultural and environmental teaching and research, and the conservation of the open lands that are a signature feature of this land, sea and space grant university.”




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