

Hiram Larew's Remarks at the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) 10th
International Conference

Conference Theme: "Creating Global-minded Environments on our Campuses"

Plenary Session Theme: Advancing Graduate Education in the Agricultural and Environmental
Sciences

9:00 – 10:30 am
Friday, March 1, 2013

Grand Hyatt San Antonio Hotel
San Antonio, TX

Thank you. I especially want to thank Dr. Miley Gonzalez and Dr. Antonio Flores for making this opportunity to visit with you possible. I also wish to thank Dr. Michael Flores for moderating today's session. And I'm especially pleased to participate on this panel with my colleague from CATIE, Dr. Dormody and with Dr. Nilsa Bosque-Perez from the University of Idaho. Lastly, I want to acknowledge the presence of Daniel Lapidus in the audience from USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service.

I'm also really gratified to learn that the focus of this year's conference is "Creating Global-minded Environments on our Campuses." This is a timely topic, and the fact that you're exploring it while here in San Antonio with senior officials from the Department of Education, State Department and the Embassy of Spain is very appropriate. You'll also be hearing at lunch today from the office of USDA's Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics and later, from an IADB official.

The theme for this morning's panel is Advancing Graduate Education in the Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

During my time with you,

- I'd like to (re-) introduce you to USDA NIFA
- then make three points,
- and then close with an observation.

First, NIFA. USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (pls see handouts that describe NIFA/CIP and some of the internationally-focused projects we support at HACU institutions)

- NIFA is the part of the Department that provides about \$1.5 billion/year to the US university system, especially the system of Land-Grant Universities,
- NIFA's support is used to tackle problems facing American agriculture.
- We provide that funding through competitive and non-competitive means
- Funding provided in ways that support the teaching, outreach/extension and research capabilities of those higher education institutions.

Many of you may assume that our work is primarily focused on increasing productivity of agriculture. We certainly invest in that realm. But the breadth of our work is actually much larger.

- Sustainable production of crops and livestock.
- Food safety.
- Family financial health.
- Environmental stewardship through careful management of soil, water and air resources.
- Classroom enrichment.
- Precision ag.
- Nanotech.
- Human and social sciences.
- Youth development.
- Nutrition education.
- Disaster preparedness.
- And of course, global engagement.

The point here is that NIFA is the part of the USDA that works very closely with the higher ed system in the US to promote, backstop, develop and maintain the competitiveness of a very broad U.S. agricultural system through science and education.

I direct NIFA's Center for International Programs, so my team works closely with staff at U.S. universities and colleges - especially with those working in agricultural programs who promote global engagement.

So with that as backdrop, let me make three points that I believe are shaping and will continue to shape graduate education in the agricultural and environmental domain.

The Importance of Mutual Benefit.

- Our U.S. Govt overseas foreign assistance programs are often considered separate and distinct from USG domestic programs here at home. The needs and conditions are thought to be distinct and separate.
- Surely, yes, there are important distinctions between the cultural, political, economic, and agricultural concerns in Cameroon or Chile and those in Connecticut or Colorado.
- But, increasingly, those differences are being matched in scope and importance by similarities - by shared, common issues. Said differently, we all have a stake in climate change, conflicts over water use, concerns over under and over nutrition and chronic health issues arising worldwide, in youth development, in worldwide pest outbreaks, and in urbanization and other shifting demographics in the global food system along with the attendant food safety issues.
- We in the US share a number of concerns with countries everywhere, even developing countries.

- And we increasingly look to other countries for innovations, ideas and approaches that may help us address those challenges.
- More and more, we look for mutual benefit in the international work that we do.
- All to say, as we move ahead, graduates who are able to bring what they learn internationally to bear on American agriculture and environmental challenges will be sitting pretty. Those who are adept at promoting mutual benefits will be in demand.

Second Point - The Importance of the Human Sciences.

- For years if not decades, we've invested heavily in agricultural technologies and carefully engineered tools to help us address agricultural and environmental issues. Clearly, we will need to continue and re-double those investments if we are to meet the food and fiber needs of a growing world.
- But, slowly and surely, we are also realizing that unless we understand people as farmers, parents, web-surfers, members of cultures and communities, herders, consumers, voters, zealots, entrepreneurs, elders, and the like – unless we understand what makes people tick and why they change behaviors, many of the interventions we develop won't be real effective.
- And, our approach to promoting change needs to be grounded in listening, not just telling. We're learning that we need to be ever mindful of the cultural and traditional groundings of our partners and stakeholders.
- Our relatively meager investments as a system in the human and behavioral sciences don't reflect the importance of that dimension.
- The point here is this: Those graduates who are sensitive to the human dimension of development will be increasingly valued in the future.

Third and Last Point: The unique value of HACU institutions.

- HACU institutions are well positioned to bridge between cultures that live within the U.S. borders, as well as between cultures in the US and those overseas. And not just Hispanic and anglo cultures.
- Here at home, the skills, experience, approach, and abilities that your students, faculty and staff have especially in outreach and extension are very relevant these days. With the diversification of the U.S. population, our extension programs, education programs and research programs are being called upon to serve a broad array of needs and interests. HACU institutions are on the front lines of that response.

- And international partnerships with all world regions – including Latin America and the Caribbean, but also Africa, Asia, Europe and elsewhere – require the kinds of cross cultural insights that HACU universities offer.

In closing, I'd make one last observation. You are in what I call the business of looking ahead, preparing us for the future. More than just about any other sector of society, higher education prepares society for the future through education and innovations.

- And HACU institutions are especially well positioned to anticipate needs of the U.S. in coming years. By responding to the fastest growing segment of our population, you are in synch with the U.S.'s future.
- And, as I've said, you're also very relevant internationally – in Latin America, Africa, Asia and elsewhere.
- As a community of institutions, your agenda should reflect those special capabilities and strengths. And all of us – the HACU community and academia at large as well as the government and non-government sectors – should fully recognize that very valuable role.
- Thank you.