



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES
AGRICULTURAL AND
APPLIED ECONOMICS
VIRGINIA TECH.

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Dear AAEC Faculty, Staff, Students, and Friends:

June 4, 2020

As we have all observed, this past week has been one of unending sadness, grief, and justified anger for many in our country, and especially for those who identify as members of groups that have repeatedly been the targets of sustained and institutional bias, historical discrimination, bigotry, and racism. We agree that the deaths of Eric Garner, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd defy reason, reflecting instead a deeper level of racial animus and hatred that all too often has surfaced in recent times with deadly consequences. While our campus community has also suffered a senseless tragedy, we appreciate that this moment is different. As such, it is incumbent upon us all to reflect on our individual and collective commitment to such important and enduring ideals as equality, diversity, inclusion, equal access, human dignity, and social justice. Progress will be made not when we pay lip service to these and similar principles but, rather, when we fully embrace and incorporate them into our daily lives and our individual and collective actions. We believe that now is the time to reaffirm our commitment to making our AAEC Department an ever more welcoming, inclusive, and genuinely diverse community of scholars – faculty, students, and staff.

We believe that one founding principle, in particular, should continue to guide us in our thinking regarding issues of diversity and inclusion: our shared Land-Grant Mission, set forth originally in the Morrill Act of 1862. Universities like ours have their roots in the vision of 19th-century leaders who voted to expand educational opportunities and extend the results of practical scientific inquiry to a broader audience than had previously been served. While there were practical considerations, the Land-Grant Mission was, to put it succinctly, our nation's earliest attempt at expanding educational opportunity and access. Even so, in our Commonwealth, Virginia Tech's Land-Grant Mission was initially pursued under the guise of Jim Crow segregation, which barred African Americans access until civil rights advocacy, and the resultant legal challenges brought about needed change. Today, the Land-Grant Mission remains at the core of all that we do and, more importantly, is interpreted as one that expands opportunities to all regardless of race, gender, orientation, or creed. It is in this spirit, the spirit of our shared Land-Grant Mission, that we challenge ourselves and you to reaffirm our commitment to this Mission in our practical, daily work, actions, and deeds.

As the Department prepares in coming months to create an updated strategic plan, and as we consider ways to align our efforts with the overarching themes identified by the University and College, we will need to think how diversity, inclusion, access, and social justice are tied to all aspects of what we are and what we want our Department to be. While we cannot erase any of the senseless tragedies that have happened, it is our responsibility to work together to build a better AAEC Department, a better future for us all.

Thank you!

Matthew T. Holt
Professor and Head

Mike Ellerbrock
Professor and Chair of AAEC's Committee on
Diversity and Inclusion