



NORTH CAROLINA GROWERS ASSOCIATION INC.

May 5, 2008

Re: Research Station Evaluation

To Whom It May Concern:

The North Carolina Growers Association and its members are strongly opposed to the recommendations of the General Assembly's Program Evaluation Division to transfer ownership and management of all North Carolina's Research Stations away from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture; and to sell entire research stations as well as parcels of land at other research stations. The North Carolina Growers Association is a non-profit growers cooperative, which consists of more than 750 members from the mountains to the coast. North Carolina has a world-class grower base due, in part, to the high-quality agricultural research that is done each year at these NCDA-operated agricultural research farms.

Transfer of Research Stations is Not Good for Farmers or the Future:

Farmers in many other states will tell you - the North Carolina agricultural research program is the envy of the rest of the nation - and we believe our state's advantage is due, in large part, to the cooperative relationship between the department and the land grant universities. We believe the existing partnership between the NC Department of Agriculture and NC A&T State University and NC State University has worked well for many years. We have confidence that, collectively, all three organizations best meet our farmers' research needs; however, we do not believe this transfer is in the best interest of NC farmers or our state. The transfer recommendation does not make sense to our members especially since the report does not demonstrate how the state stands to gain any real "efficiency savings" from the transfer.

Selling of Identified Research Stations is a Bad Idea: Our farmers grow a diverse array of crops across North Carolina largely because of the unique physical attributes of our state - specifically, widely varying climates, topography and soil types. Because North Carolina varies from one region to another, we believe the locations of the research stations are vital to the success of the research program. As a result of our state's bountiful blessings and unique qualities, North Carolina ranks third in the nation in agricultural diversity and production behind California and Florida. While members of the PED group might not be sophisticated enough to realize the importance of the locations of the research stations - our farmers do. Every commodity does not grow everywhere in North Carolina - and these research stations have been strategically located throughout the state to enable researchers to capture specific data and conduct applied research. Just about any bureaucrat can farm on paper or in a laboratory.

Research Stations are not research laboratories. Research stations are, by their very nature, designed to replicate as closely as possible "real-world" farming scenarios – which in turn provides realistic information for farmers so they can make informed decisions about the financial investment associated with trying new crops, new varieties, new techniques, etc, and make improvements on old ones. It is as simple as this: Research equals successful farmers', which equals sustainable production, which equals full stomachs and a happy electorate.

Farmland Preservation is a Solid Investment in the Future for the State:

Many experts believe North Carolina is well positioned to be first in the nation in terms of agriculture diversity and production by 2050 given the significant challenges growers face in California and Florida; states with many and varied land use issues. And, with the enormous population growth anticipated for North Carolina, we believe the PED recommendations are reckless and ill advised. With every acre of farmland that disappears, agricultural production potential is lost forever. Not only does this potentially jeopardize food production in our state but it also has the potential to do irreparable harm to the critical environmental landscape of our state. Additionally, this recommendation directly contradicts the highly lauded efforts of the General Assembly last year to appropriate \$8 million for the preservation of private farmland across the state. If the state isn't going to preserve farmland, then why should private citizens? Furthermore, this misguided initiative will have a significant chilling effect on future gifts of farmland from the estates of citizens who cherish and value the precious blessings of fruitful farmland and wholesome commodities.

In closing, I would like to remind you that when a farmer quits producing they rarely come back. The result will be the same with transferring and selling off NCDA research farms. Once farmland is gone, you cannot get it back. As more of our population and elected officials come from urban and sub-urban communities, those of us in rural agricultural producing areas know that we will have to work constantly to educate and remind everyone that North Carolina farmers feed and clothe our state, our nation and our world. Our farmers are resolute in their conviction that it will never be a good idea to transfer management of the research stations away from NCDA. The sell of state-owned research stations and farmland will always be a bad idea. Please do not make the mistake of underestimating the significant impact and contribution of NCDA research stations and never, never take for granted the value and importance of North Carolina's farms', farmers and farm workers. If you do, you may live to hear your stomach growl about it.

On behalf of 750 of the best farmers in the world, thank you for considering our views on this important issue.

Sincerely,


Lee Wicket, Deputy Director
North Carolina Growers Association