

Vice President's Letter



"If we don't try new things, others will own the land."

General Stephen D. Lee,
first president of Mississippi A&M

President Lee wrote the above statement more than 100 years ago. He was referring to research, and his words are as true today as they were then.

"Trying new things" means taking research results and putting them to work. By adopting new technology, the American farmer

has become the most efficient producer of food and fiber in the world, and Mississippi's farmers are among the best.

When Mississippi's Legislature established the land-grant school in Starkville, nine out of 10 jobs in the U.S. were on the farm. Today, just 3 percent of the population works on the farm, but that 3 percent feeds all 300 million Americans and 10 percent of the rest of the world.

The success of technology in making our farms more productive caused a shift in the state's workforce, and research and educational outreach at Mississippi State University is responsive to that shift.

The future of agriculture depends on the ability to produce the items consumers want. Leaner beef is an important part of our livestock research. Consumer demand for organic vegetables has led to increased work in that area at our research units throughout the state.

New industries have developed out of the changes in the agricultural sector. Enterprising Delta farmers have taken land once devoted to row crops and put it into ponds where they produce farm-raised catfish. Their marketing efforts and devotion to quality assurance have created nationwide demand for farm-raised catfish, and Mississippi is the number-one producer.

MSU Extension personnel and research scientists work with the catfish industry to address management, nutrition, marketing and other production issues. Especially important to producers is their access to expertise in the College of Veterinary Medicine for diagnosis and treatment when they encounter fish health problems.

In all areas of research, the university is looked to as an independent, unbiased source of information.

Land-grant schools have always been a partnership—first and foremost with the people they serve. Important to the success of the mission to serve Mississippi are producer organizations such as Farm Bureau, Delta Council and the Mississippi Cattlemen's Association, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other federal agencies, county boards of supervisors and the Mississippi Legislature, private industries and the individuals who help fund scholarships and provide other resources. Cooperation with other universities also helps us make the best use of resources.

The students who enroll in the academic programs in the division are one of Mississippi's most valuable resources. The young men and women will leave the university prepared to assume important roles in virtually every industry. We pride ourselves with being a university that gets a lot of first generation students. These young people will go back into their communities and make huge contributions. That's what being a land-grant institution is all about—giving back to the communities we serve.

Vance H. Watson

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