

\$45 Million Golden LEAF Grant Boosts NC State's Plant Sciences Initiative

By Administrator

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The Golden LEAF Foundation gave North Carolina State University a tremendous boost forward, awarding a \$45 million grant that will help support a new research facility for the North Carolina Plant Sciences Initiative in efforts to make North Carolina the global hub for plant sciences innovation. The initiative is a partnership of NC State University and the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Its centerpiece is a \$160.2 million Plant Sciences Research Complex planned for NC State's Centennial Campus in Raleigh. University scientists will work together with government and industry to solve some of agriculture's most pressing challenges. NC State Chancellor Randy Woodson said that the new grant is the largest single contribution ever made to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and among the largest in the history of the university.

"This investment further establishes North Carolina and NC State as international leaders in agricultural research and innovation, which will yield significant economic opportunities for our rural communities while providing food solutions to people around the globe," Woodson said.

Dan Gerlach, president of Golden LEAF, said the investment is consistent with the nonprofit organization's mission of transforming the economy of rural, tobacco-dependent and economically-distressed communities in North Carolina. In accordance with terms of the consent decree, the N.C. General Assembly established the foundation in 1999 to administer one half of the state's Master Settlement Agreement with cigarette manufacturers.

"It is our hope, and indeed our expectation, that the Plant Sciences Initiative will catalyze transformational advances in North Carolina agriculture that will benefit the rural economy," Gerlach said. He called Golden LEAF's grant "an investment in North Carolina agriculture that will help improve crop yields, introduce new crop and plant varieties, and reduce feed costs for animal agriculture."

"Our board members recognize that growing agriculture grows rural communities," Gerlach continued. "It is North Carolina's top industry at \$84 billion annually, with well over 80 percent of total farm gate receipts grown in the state's 80 rural counties. Our farmers recognize the importance of innovation to the future of agriculture."

With the Golden LEAF's grant, more than \$9 million additionally contributed to the project by 42 agricultural groups across the state, and \$85 million approved by voters through the Connect NC Bond, the project can now move forward.

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"More importantly," Gerlach said, "it gives rural North Carolina a competitive market advantage in feeding, fueling and clothing a growing global population."

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Dean Richard Linton agreed, noting that "Golden LEAF's generous investment takes us to \$140.2 million of the \$160.2 million needed for the complex, with the goal of having world-class plant research facilities complete by 2021."

Already, he said, "NC State University agricultural research and extension has an annual economic impact of more than \$1 billion in rural North Carolina. Our college helps rural N.C. farmers grow more than 90 different commodities across varying climates and soil types, making North Carolina the third most agriculturally diverse state in the nation. Building out the N.C. Plant Sciences Initiative will also position our college and our state among the premier plant science programs in the world â€” establishing us as a powerhouse for agricultural innovation and education."

Linton shared that most importantly, "with this grant we have the green light to move forward. We can now make the dream a reality starting today."

Farmers and other members of the public are invited to attend an upcoming series of information and listening sessions about the Plant Sciences Initiative to be held across the state in August and September. For details and to register, visit <http://go.ncsu.edu/psipublic> or call Celeste Brogdon at 919-515-7857.