

Seaman A. Knapp Lecture

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Visionary Leadership: Our Heritage, Our Future

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It is a distinct honor to have the opportunity to present the Seaman A. Knapp Memorial lecture as part of this great gathering of higher education leaders from across our nation. I sincerely appreciate the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, USDA, and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges for inviting me to make this presentation. I am very happy to see so many friends and colleagues here whom I've had the privilege of knowing, but whom I have rarely seen in the last few years. I am truly blessed to have had the opportunity to associate with our Land Grant System for the past 41 years, beginning as a student worker at a university livestock farm and continuing today as a consultant. My 35 years in Extension were undoubtedly the most memorable and rewarding professional years of my life, and I commend each of you for assuming leadership roles in an education system that impacts the lives of people around the world. The greatest asset in our Land Grant System is not the buildings or the lands, but the people who have dedicated their lives to helping others through education, research and extension.

It is also my honor to welcome you to the great state of Texas and to Houston, the fourth largest city in our nation. In fact, the Houston metro population of 4.8 million is more than 20% of the total state population. As a native Texan, I can attest to several wonderful features of Houston: it serves as the home of NASA, houses some of the best medical facilities in the world, is the hub of the world's oil and petrochemical industry and also boasts the largest livestock show and rodeo in the world. Houston is a city grounded in diversity, opportunity and friendly Texas culture.

Today I am going to focus my presentation on visionary leadership. I believe that the courageous actions of visionary leaders in our country's history have ensured that we, as Americans, enjoy tremendous freedoms in a democratic society, benefit from rich

economic and social developments, and claim the greatest food and fiber production system in the world. Leaders of the past who excelled despite a primitive communication structure and limited knowledge about science and the world they lived in. They were able to conceptualize and implement legislation, governments, structures and organizations that shaped our contemporary society and the heritage of our Land Grant System. Now, our destiny and future legacy rest in the hands of this era's visionary leaders. Like their predecessors, modern Land Grant leaders must anticipate how change will impact our society and prepare us and the universities and organizations we represent to build on our heritage with new innovations and successes into the 21st century and beyond.

In further tribute to visionary leaders of the past, I invite you to think what life might be like today without their bold thinking and actions. In a special report, US News and World Report identified "100 Documents that Shaped America," and the tenacious leaders who achieved enactment of the documents. Consider how different our nation would be without the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the US Constitution in 1787, the Bill of Rights in 1791, the Homestead Act in 1862, the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the Social Security Act in 1935, the GI Bill or Servicemen's Readjustment Act in 1944, the National Interstate and Defense Highway Act in 1956, and the Civil Rights Act in 1964, just to name a few of the 100 documents identified in the report.

Visionary leaders are those individuals who have an incredible vision for the future, coupled with the ability and drive to direct the strength of the people so that their dream for an improved tomorrow can be realized. Our history is replete with visionaries who observed imperfections in their societies and imagined greater possibilities for the future that would significantly enhance their local environments and perhaps the rest of the world as well. A true visionary leader is not one who passively conceives a solution to a problem, but is rather an instigator of action, inspiring people around them to take up the proposed mission, and guiding their collective efforts to make the dream a reality. Joel Baden, futurist and scholar, said, "Vision without action is a dream. Action without vision is simply passing time. Action with vision is making a positive difference." It is only when these elements are combined in a capable and determined visionary that true and lasting change is enacted.

Another of the “100 Documents that Shaped America” is accredited to Vermont Representative Justin Smith Morrill. Morrill first introduced the Land Grant bill in 1857, only to have it vetoed by President Buchanan. However, Morrill continued to pursue his vision of establishing public colleges in every state that would teach agriculture, mechanical arts and military science. His diligence was finally rewarded on July 2, 1862, when President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act, enabling the building of seventy Land Grant colleges. In 1890, the Second Morrill Act was ratified, which expanded the first bill to include black institutions within the existing system of grants. Several years later, in 1994, the acts were further extended to provide grants for the establishment of American Indian institutions. This single bill, and its 1890 and 1994 expansions, virtually created the current public higher education system in America. Millions of individuals have enjoyed an affordable education from these Land Grant colleges, and billions more have benefited as a result of students applying their educational and science skills.

The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 created an opportunity for other visionary leaders to take their place in history. One such individual was Dr. Seaman A. Knapp, a native of rural New York, who was educated in the liberal arts. Due to an accident, Dr. Knapp relocated to Iowa, where he learned about agriculture from practical experience on a farm. Interestingly, it was not just his knowledge of agriculture that prepared him to be a visionary leader, but also his unique educational philosophy. His personalized method focused on bringing an education to those who could benefit from it in a tangible way, and showing agricultural producers how to apply that knowledge to their specific situation. Dr. Knapp’s work resulted in the establishment of agricultural demonstrations across the South, in the birth of the Extension concept, and ultimately in the passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914, which created the Cooperative Extension System. This revolutionary agency took the science, knowledge and methodology of the universities directly into the homes and farms of people across America. Today, the unique and functional educational concept of the Cooperative Extension System is one of the most valued in existence, and is the envy of many countries.

In November 2003, we celebrated the 100th anniversary of one of Dr. Knapp’s most famous demonstrations, which took place at the Walter C. Porter farm in Terrell, Texas, about 230 miles north of here just outside Dallas. The farm is still being managed by the Porter family, and is proudly carrying forward the vision of Walter C. Porter, who,

with Dr. Knapp, implemented the methods that remain the foundation for Extension education. Descendants of both Knapp and Porter were present at the century celebration. One such attendee, Leonard Knapp, great-grandson of Dr. Knapp and resident of Lake Charles, Louisiana, said, “It was not just bringing the science to the Porter Family Farm; it was innovatively applying that science that ultimately gained the local support for the demonstration concept.” Another of his great-grandsons, Dr. Roger Knapp, lives in Fort Worth and frequently makes presentations about the vision and leadership of Dr. Seaman Knapp’s career.

But there are many other visionary leaders who shaped the heritage of the Land Grant System in America. People like Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee University, who implemented rural outreach education to the poor. Others like George Washington Carver who revolutionized the southern agricultural economy through many inventions as well as innovative agricultural discoveries and practices.

And what about those early adopters who boldly stepped forward to implement the models of Knapp and Porter? This week we will celebrate one such pioneer at a special event in Tyler, Texas, which will honor a man who was the forerunner to the creation of Extension and the County Extension Agent. W. C. Stallings was the first county agent to serve a single county funded partially by local funds. Half of his salary came from Smith County community leaders, and the other half from USDA. He was hired on November 12, 1906, exactly 100 years ago, and Dr. Seaman Knapp was his supervisor.

Interestingly, on the same day that Stallings was employed, a young man named Thomas M. Campbell was hired as the first Extension agent to serve the Cooperative Extension program through Tuskegee University. He was appointed in Macon County, Alabama, and his salary was funded jointly by Tuskegee and USDA. The practice of having “agents” educate local people is unique to Extension, and serves to distinguish the Land Grant Colleges from other universities. Of all of these institutions, Extension remains the only agency with outreach university educators serving every county in the nation.

The rich heritage of the Land Grant System has been passed down through generations of visionary leaders who have helped it grow into the most successful educational, economic and social phenomenon in history. Today, the world benefits from the

creative innovations, futuristic attitudes and 'never give up' philosophies of contemporary visionaries. One day, history will reflect the significant impact of the visionary leaders of the last 40 years as they worked to solve tomorrow's problems. Only time will reveal the true impact of human genome mapping, transgenic food product development, bio-fuels, health and disease discoveries, and efforts to meet the unyielding demand for food and fiber in a growing world.

Those of us at Texas A&M University have had the privilege of working with one such visionary leader. He is credited with saving more human lives than anyone else in history. He is known as the 'Father of the Green Revolution,' the dramatic increase in agricultural productivity that swept the globe in the 1960s. This man was a Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1970, and today, at the age of 92, Dr. Norman Borlaug still actively serves society as a Distinguished Professor of Soil and Crop Sciences at Texas A&M University.

In the 1960s, while most experts were speaking of imminent global famines in which billions would perish, Dr. Borlaug had both the vision and leadership capacity to develop and ship dwarf wheat varieties that were more disease and insect resistant, and that produced two to three times more grain to Pakistan and India. Even though India's population doubled as predicted from 1958 to 1980, its wheat production tripled and its economy grew nine-fold. Dr. Borlaug's work continues today as he directs thousands of scientists in our research fields and extension efforts around the world, all to achieve his vision of feeding the world.

Today, the responsibility of maintaining the integrity of the Land Grant System heritage that Justin Morrill, Seaman Knapp and others established rests upon those of us who follow in their footsteps. Leadership is unquestionably the key factor in determining whether our Land Grant System with its Research and Extension components will be capable developing a clear and specific vision for the future. This future success will be based on our ability to synthesize the impacts of genomics, environmental programs and other great scientific discoveries with changes in demographics, technology, world issues and human needs. Futurist John Sharr says, "The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not found, but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination." And you, the leaders, scientists and Extension professionals in the Land Grant System, are the ones

who can, and must, create the future for the next generations just as our forefathers did for us.

A positive future for our Research, Extension and Teaching programs depends upon having visionary leaders at all levels of our Land Grant System. If we are to be the next generation of visionaries who build upon this tremendous legacy of our ancestors, we must become students of our heritage, knowledgeable about the past, but envisioning the future and being dynamic leaders of action.

As we become well-grounded in the 21st century, obviously one of the most exciting yet challenging times in our history, I, as someone who was inside the System for many years but today only observes from the outside, would like to offer these observations as you continue the task of creating this future for our society and world through the work of the Land Grant System:

First, visionary leadership is essential to the future success of our Extension, Research and Teaching programs. Understanding how our organizations can meet the needs of the dynamic society we live in today and anticipating the future needs must be our goal. Meeting these needs will require creative leadership to continually think about programs, structure, partnerships and funding. Visionary leaders must realize that Research and Extension each have very different requirements in these areas to be successful, and thus we must proceed with any changes in full consideration of these differences. Any proposals that help one while hurting the other are neither visionary nor a reflection of good leadership. I would recommend that any sweeping changes such as the Create 21 proposal clearly pass the test of positive benefit for all components and for both current and future needs. In his endeavor to get the Morrill Act passed in 1862, Justin Morrill learned that it was imperative to satisfy the needs of all the players.

Second, the strengths and uniqueness of the Land Grants System are centered on the tri-partite partnership of Research, Extension and Teaching. The truly successful Land Grant institution is characterized by outstanding programs in each of these three areas that successfully fulfill their unique mission within our System. Efforts to diminish or weaken any of the three components serve only to weaken the entire System. Visionary leaders must recognize the value that each component contributes to the

whole System, as well as the unique missions of each, and work to strengthen each component to its maximum capability. The same can be said for the 1862, 1890 and 1994 institutions working to fulfill their individual missions, but even better, working together to multiply the impacts of these programs for our clientele. Working together, our programs complement one another and reach a broader, more diverse society, which benefit both the Land Grant System and the people. Working in competition with one another will only destroy this great System and worse yet, the hope for the future for the people around the world who are counting on us.

Third, visionary leadership requires that we not only be innovative and creative in meeting the needs of our clientele, but we must also responsibly support major initiatives, and market our programs and impacts to key leaders and the general public. eXtension represents one of the most innovative, futuristic programs that Extension has implemented in years. But to be successful, it must have the full support of all our Land Grant System leadership, and the “world” needs to know what it is, where it is and how “it can help me.” The eXtension effort could very well define the Extension of tomorrow, be a primary outlet for research information and bring worldwide visibility to our Land Grant System.

Another example of our System not being in sync on a program and not adequately marketing our efforts is evidenced by the fact that after more than 20 years of many states working aggressively to develop Extension, Research and Teaching programs specifically to address the needs of urban audiences in America, the urban-serving universities have requested an “Urban Land Grant Act” to provide funding in their institutions for similar programs. This indicates that we have done a poor job of marketing urban programs and the impacts that these programs have had on our urban audiences. Certainly, there are many reasons why we do not adequately market these programs, and early on, I believe it was partially because we didn’t want to offend our traditional agricultural partners. It also has worked to our disadvantage that some states have been slow to develop comprehensive urban-focused programs and that additional funding for these programs has been almost nonexistent. We probably deserve the challenge by the urban-serving universities, but to duplicate what is already successfully in place is not practical nor in the best interest of our urban constituents. I hope it is a wake-up call to Land Grant leadership that we must either visibly and effectively serve the need of urban American or that opportunity will be taken away.

And fourth, as visionary leaders, we must recognize the fact that the future existence of all our programs depends upon our accountability to those who fund our programs and those who are users of our programs. Both the levels and the types of accountability required for Teaching, Research and Extension have changed over the years and will almost certainly continue to change. Accountability is generally expressed through a series of measures that represent commonly accepted standards of excellence, and this accountability is demanded both locally and nationally for individual institutions and our whole Land Grant System. These measures of accountability have traditionally been well defined for Teaching and Research programs, but not for Extension. In Extension, most institutions have self-identified metrics, but these are not commonly accepted national metrics, and certainly have not been reviewed or accepted collectively by higher education. Because of that, there are no common visions or common measures of excellence that support accountability for the state institutions or the Cooperative Extension System, and we must have them, for three reasons. First, if Extension is truly a national system made up of some 74 institutions in our Land Grant System, we must have common visions, goals and measures that define excellence within that System. Second, if we are to remain a viable component in the higher education system, we must define metrics that truly reflect educational excellence and are accepted by our Presidents, Chancellors and Provosts as measures that contribute to the overall success and prestige of the university. And third, Extension programs and faculty must be driven and guided at least in part by the common goals and measures defined by excellence. This creates the same continuity of program standards that we have in academic and research programs that allows the higher education system to accept student grades and research discoveries among institutions. We must decide if Extension is going to remain a vital outreach component of the higher education system or operate as 74 separate, unrelated programs. I believe our leaders of today will miss a great opportunity to ensure the future of Extension if they do not actively and aggressively pursue measures of excellence.

In closing, I would like to reiterate a statement I made many times as Extension Director and Associate Vice Chancellor for Agriculture. I believe that there has never been a time in history when the Land Grant institution and its Extension, Research and Teaching programs have ever been more relevant and more vital to the future prosperity of this world than they are today and will be throughout the 21st century. But

our value and our success will only be realized if our leaders of today step up to the challenge of visionary leadership with a commitment to continue the success of the greatest education, research and extension system in the world.

John Maxwell said, “Where there is no hope in the future, there is no power in the present.” My challenge to you is to create both hope for the future and power in the present through your vision and leadership, and carry forward that great heritage that the visionary leaders of the past have created in this great Land Grant System.